

The Secret History



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF DONNA TARTT

Donna Tartt was born and raised in Mississippi, the daughter of a musician and a secretary. Both of Tartt's parents were voracious readers and instilled in her a lifelong love for books and writing. Tartt started writing at the age of five and had already published a poem in *The Mississippi Review* by age 13. In 1981, Tartt began attending the University of Mississippi before transferring to Bennington College in 1982. Tartt's peer group at Bennington is now legendary, as it consisted of fellow authors Johnathan Lethem, Bret Easton Ellis, and Jill Eisenstadt. After college, Tartt split her time between Boston and New York while working on the novel that would eventually become *The Secret History*. *The Secret History* was finally published in 1992 to rave reviews, and it turned Tartt into a literary celebrity. Tartt was hailed as a literary genius and her next book was eagerly awaited. However, the follow-up to *The Secret History* wouldn't come for another 10 years. Eventually, it arrived in 2002 with the title *The Little Friend*. Though it is the least popular and acclaimed of Tartt's novels, *The Little Friend* was still very successful and well-liked. After *The Little Friend's* publication, another decade went by without a new Tartt novel. Then, in 2013, Tartt published *The Goldfinch*, which is now her best-known and most critically acclaimed novel. *The Goldfinch* won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and was eventually adapted into a film in 2019.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In the aftermath of World War II, novels about college campuses, or "campus novels," became an important subgenre in American literature. This is because, for the first time in American history, higher education was not limited to the One Percent. Instead, a college education became attainable to huge portions of the population. By 1990, almost 1 in 5 people had a college degree, many of which were liberal arts degrees. This explains both the popularity of *The Secret History* and the circumstances Richard finds himself in at the beginning of the novel. In addition, although *The Secret History* rarely makes direct allusions to historical events of the 1980s, the attitudes of that era come through in its characters, particularly Bunny. Though the novel does not endorse Bunny's views, his casual misogyny and homophobia wouldn't have seemed exceptionally out of place in the socially conservative 1980s.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

The Secret History is a foundational work for the "dark

academia" aesthetic. Dark academia is a literary subgenre that applies themes and stylings of classical Greek and Gothic arts and architectures to modern college campuses—in some ways, it can be thought of as a contemporary rebranding of Gothic literature. Retroactively, this label has been used to describe Gothic and Romantic works such as Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and the poetry of Lord Byron and Percy Bysshe Shelley. More recent works like M. L. Rio's *If We Were Villains* and Susanna Clarke's *Piranesi* also fall into this subgenre. Like many works that are part of the dark academia canon, *The Secret History* is inspired by, and makes reference to, a number of Greek epics and tragedies. In particular, Aeschylus's *Agamemnon* and Homer's *Odyssey* are important influences on and references for Tartt. In addition to her association with dark academia, Tartt is also connected to the "Literary Brat Pack." The Literary Brat Pack is made up of several writers on the East Coast who became popular in the late 1980s. The primary members of this group are Bret Easton Ellis, Jill Eisenstadt, Jay McInerney, and Tama Janowitz. Many other authors quickly became associated with this group as well, including Tartt, who dedicated *The Secret History* to Bret Easton Ellis.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Secret History
- **When Written:** 1982–1991
- **Where Written:** Bennington College, Vermont; Greenwich Village, New York; Boston, Massachusetts
- **When Published:** 1992
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary Fiction
- **Genre:** Campus Novel
- **Setting:** Hampden College in Vermont in the 1980s; Hampden is a fictional version of Bennington College.
- **Climax:** Charles bursts into Camilla's room with a gun and fires it, shooting Richard in the stomach. Henry then takes the gun from Charles and shoots himself twice in the head.
- **Point of View:** First Person

EXTRA CREDIT

In-Jokes. Friend and fellow author Brett Easton Ellis made references to *The Secret History* in his 1987 novel *The Rules of Attraction*, even though *The Secret History* wouldn't be released for another five years.

Roman à clef? Since the release of *The Secret History*, many people from Tartt's college years have come out and claimed that characters in the book are based on them. Although Tartt

admits that she took inspiration from her real-life experience at Bennington College, she maintains that her characters are not based on specific people.



PLOT SUMMARY

The Secret History begins with Richard Papen revealing that he and his friends have gotten away with killing someone named Bunny. The story he is about to tell promises to reveal how and why this happened.

Richard grows up in Plano, California, the son of working-class parents. After deciding that he cannot stomach the pre-med classes at his local community college, Richard decides to apply to Hampden College, a private liberal arts school in Vermont. Richard is accepted at Hampden, where he decides to study Greek under the tutelage of Julian Morrow. Julian is an enigmatic and charismatic professor with peculiar teaching methods. He insists that he acts as academic advisor to all of his students—of which there are only six, including Richard—and that the vast majority of their classes be with him.

After becoming Julian's pupil, Richard gets to know his fellow Greek students: Henry, Bunny, Francis, and Charles and Camilla (who are twins). Often throughout Richard's first semester, all the Greek students go to Francis's country house on the weekends. Richard has fond memories of these weekends, even though he will later learn that things are not entirely as they seem. Primarily, Richard spends his energy on learning Greek and hiding his background from his new friends. In particular, Henry and Francis are quite wealthy, and Richard is embarrassed about his working-class upbringing.

During winter break, Richard lives for free in a warehouse while working at school. Unfortunately, he is ill-equipped to handle winter in Vermont, and he almost dies from the cold. Luckily, Henry comes back early from a trip to Italy and lets Richard live in his apartment until school starts. While living with Henry, Richard witnesses a number of odd exchanges between Henry, Bunny, and Francis. After some sleuthing, he eventually finds out that Henry has booked four plane tickets to South America, which depart right before the start of the semester. Additionally, he doesn't see or hear from any of the other Greek students leading up to the start of the semester. As such, Richard eagerly awaits the start of classes so that he can figure out what is going on. However, when classes start, everything appears normal. All of the other Greek students show up on time for class and greet him excitedly, albeit with some rather unconvincing excuses.

Not long after classes begin, Henry decides to tell Richard the truth. He knows that Richard found out about the flight to South America and wants to explain what happened. As it turns out, Henry and the other Greek students spent most of the previous semester performing rituals and trying to induce

Dionysian madness, which is a sort of pre-civilized euphoric state associated with the Greek god Dionysus. Because Bunny was not taking their attempts seriously, the other Greek students decided that he could no longer take part in their rituals. Then, once Bunny was out of the group, the Greek students succeeded in inducing Dionysian madness. However, in doing so, they accidentally killed a local man. They got away with the crime, but Bunny eventually learned what they did and is now blackmailing them for money (though in a rather casual, friendly way). Henry is worried that they will run out of money soon, which is why he and the other Greek students considered leaving for South America. He's also worried that Bunny will tell somebody what he knows.

Not knowing what else to do, the Greek students decide to kill Bunny. They hide out in the woods where they know he likes to walk, and when he appears, they crowd around him and Henry pushes him into a ravine. After Bunny's murder, it takes the authorities 10 days to find his body. During that time, Henry and Charles are questioned by the FBI, but ultimately Bunny's death is ruled to be an accident. In the days following the recovery of Bunny's body, the Greek students go to stay at Bunny's parents' house and attend his funeral.

In the weeks following Bunny's funeral, relationships begin to dissolve between the Greek students. Charles begins drinking heavily and one night he crashes Henry's car after the two of them get into a fight. Eventually it is revealed that Charles is jealous of Henry because Henry is in a secret relationship with his sister. Previously, Charles and Camilla were in an incestuous relationship with one another, but Camilla moved out of their shared apartment because Charles became abusive after Bunny's death. In addition, Charles worries that Henry wants to kill him, since Henry seems to think Charles might go to the police.

Around the same time, Julian tells Richard and Francis that he's received a previously lost letter that purports to be from Bunny. The letter talks about the man that the Greek students murdered and Bunny's apparent fear that Henry wants to murder him. Julian dismisses the letter as fake, but Richard and Francis quickly realize that it's genuine and try to get it away from Julian before he figures out the truth. However, they fail to do so, and Henry is forced to explain to Julian everything that has happened over the past several months. In response, Julian gives Henry the letter and then flees from Hampden, never to be seen there again.

After Julian's departure, the situation between Henry and Charles continues to escalate. In an attempt to calm Charles down, Richard and Francis take him to the country house. However, while there, Charles overhears a phone conversation between Richard and Henry that makes him paranoid. In response, he flees the country house, and no one is able to find him. Desperate for help, Richard and Francis go to the inn that Camilla is staying at, where they find Camilla and Henry.

Shortly after their arrival, Charles bursts in with a gun and threatens to shoot Henry. The gun is wrestled away from him, but not before he pulls the trigger, causing Richard to be shot in the stomach. The gunshot creates an uproar at the inn, and the Greek students worry that they will end up in jail after all. However, as the innkeeper opens the door, Henry uses the gun to shoot himself twice in the head. The Greek students then use Henry's death to explain away the situation. They tell the authorities that Richard tried and failed to stop Henry from killing himself, which is how he sustained his gun wound.

After Henry's death, Richard is the only one to return to Hampden the following semester where he eventually graduates with an English degree before returning to California for graduate school. While writing his dissertation, Richard receives a letter from Francis that essentially functions as a suicide note. Concerned, Richard flies to Boston, where he finds Francis recovering in a hospital from an attempted suicide. Camilla also shows up, and the three of them have a brief reunion. Camilla tells Richard and Francis that she no longer speaks to Charles, but she knows that he lives in Texas with a woman he met in rehab (though both of them continue to drink). Before leaving Boston, Richard asks Camilla to marry him, but she declines because she still loves Henry. The novel ends with Richard describing one of his recent dreams featuring Henry. He dreams that he and Henry are in a museum with **an exhibit** that morphs into various marvels of architecture. Henry tells Richard that he is not happy where he is but then says to Richard, "you're not very happy where you are either," before walking away down a "long, gleaming hall."



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Richard Papen – Richard Papen is the narrator of *The Secret History*. Richard attends Hampden College after deciding that he cannot stomach his pre-med classes or the stifling presence of his parents in California, where he's from. During his first semester at Hampden, Richard becomes a Greek student and meets Henry, Bunny, Charles, Camilla, Francis, and Julian. Richard spends much of the semester pretending to be wealthy to fit in with the other Greek students, who quickly become his friends. Richard enjoys the company of the other Greek students, particularly that of Charles and Camilla, though he knows that there is something that they are not telling him. During his second semester at Hampden Richard discovers that the other Greek students, excluding Bunny, accidentally killed someone during a bacchanal. The Greek students are worried that they will be caught because Bunny found out about the murder and is now blackmailing them. In response, the Greek students, along with Richard, murder Bunny by pushing him off a cliff. Once it is discovered that Bunny is missing, a manhunt takes place to find his body. During this

time, Richard is incredibly stressed and racked with guilt. He tries to cope using sex and drugs, but his dreams continue to be filled with nightmarish images that relate to Bunny's death. Ultimately, Richard and his fellow Greek students get away with the murder, but Richard never fully recovers. He ends the novel in a sort of purgatory, unsure of how he can ever move on from the events of the past.

Henry Winter – Henry Winter is the leader of the Greek students, as well as Julian's favorite student. Henry admires Julian, and the two of them are very close. At first, Henry is skeptical of Richard, but he warms to him over the course of the semester. Although Henry is extremely knowledgeable about classical studies, he is completely unaware of contemporary events. He has a desire to live in the past, which leads him to try to induce Dionysian madness in himself. Eventually, he is successful, though he accidentally kills a man in a frenzied state. As the novel unfolds, Henry proves himself to be the most maladjusted of the Greek students. He comes up with and executes the plan to kill Bunny, all while staying relatively calm and collected. In retrospect, Richard wonders how much he was manipulated by Henry. Later, Henry reveals to Richard that he always felt emotionally dead inside until the first time he killed someone. Toward the end of the novel, Henry moves Camilla out of Charles's place, and it is implied that the two of them are dating. This angers Charles, who also worries that Henry is planning to kill him. However, during the climax of the novel, Henry sacrifices himself so that Charles, Camilla, Francis, and Richard can avoid prison. After his death, Henry haunts Richard's dreams, where both of them seem to be stuck in purgatory.

Bunny (Edmund Corcoran) – Bunny is the first Greek student to show an interest in Richard and bring him into the group. Although Bunny has some reprehensible qualities, particularly his misogyny and homophobia, he largely endears himself to Richard. During Richard's first semester at Hampden, Bunny participates in the Dionysian rituals with the other Greek students. However, eventually he is kicked out of the group because he isn't taking the process seriously. Nonetheless, he manages to find out that the other Greek students killed a man. Upon learning this, he begins to blackmail the others into giving him money and taking him on expensive trips. Eventually, the other students decide they can't afford the risk of having him around anymore, so they decide to kill him before he tells someone what they've done. One day, while he is out on his usual hike, Bunny comes across Henry, Richard, Camilla, Francis, and Charles in the woods. When he asks them what's going on, Henry pushes him over a cliff, killing him. After his death, Julian finds a letter from Bunny, which reveals that the other Greek students killed a man. It also makes clear that Bunny is worried that he will be killed next. Although Bunny's intelligence is regularly mocked throughout the novel, Richard realizes in retrospect that his friend could be quite insightful. In

addition, Bunny is the only member of the group who has a social life outside of the other Greek students.

Charles Macauley – Charles Macauley is the twin brother of Camilla Macauley, both of whom are Greek students. Of the Greek students, Charles and Camilla are Richard's favorites, and he often spends time with them during his first semester at Hampden. Like the other Greek students, Charles plays a prominent role in Bunny's death. While the authorities are looking for Bunny, Charles is regularly called in for questioning, a process he finds incredibly taxing. After Bunny's body is found, Charles is racked with guilt and anxiety, which he copes with by drinking heavily. Toward the end of the novel, it is revealed that Charles is in an incestuous relationship with Camilla. After Bunny's death, Camilla tells Richard that Charles regularly abused her, so she moved out of their shared apartment into a place that Henry is paying for. Enraged and paranoid, Charles thinks Henry is out to get him. Hoping to calm him down, Richard and Francis take Charles to Francis's country house. However, while there, Charles overhears a phone conversation between Richard and Henry. He thinks that everyone is planning to murder him, so he runs away. Later, he shows up at Camilla's apartment with a gun to shoot Henry. However, he fails and accidentally shoots Richard instead. After Henry's death, everyone loses contact with Charles, though Camilla tells Richard and Francis that he is living in Texas with a woman he met in rehab and that he still drinks heavily.

Camilla Macauley – Camilla Macauley is the twin sister of Charles Macauley, as well as one of Julian's students. Richard is infatuated with her beauty, although the two of them never end up in a relationship. Like the other Greek students, Camilla plays a role in Bunny's death. However, unlike the other members of the group, she handles herself quite well in the aftermath. Unfortunately for her, Charles begins to lose control of his drinking and his temper, which leads to him physically abusing her. As a result, Camilla moves out of their shared apartment and into a room at an inn, which Henry pays for. Around the same time, Richard discovers that Camilla and Charles were in an incestuous relationship. Now Charles is jealous because he thinks that Henry and Camilla are sleeping together. At the end of the novel, Camilla and Richard meet up one last time after Francis's suicide attempt. During their meeting, Richard asks Camilla to marry him, but she declines, citing her enduring love for Henry as the reason.

Francis Abernathy – Francis Abernathy is one of Julian's students and Richard's friends. Francis is gay and, like Henry, comes from a wealthy background, though he does not like to talk about it much. During Richard's first semester at Hampden, the Greek students spend much of their time at Francis's country house. Like the other Greek students, Francis plays a role in Bunny's death. After the murder, Francis's reactions are similar to Richard's; he copes with sex and drugs, but largely manages to keep himself together. In the second half of the

novel, Francis proves to be a repository of information about the other Greek students. He tells Richard that Charles and Camilla are in an incestuous relationship and that he himself has slept with Charles on numerous occasions. In the years following Henry's death, Francis's grandfather discovers that he's gay and threatens to withhold his inheritance unless Francis marries a woman. In light of this, Francis attempts suicide but ultimately survives, resigning himself to the prospect of entering a loveless marriage.

Julian Morrow – Julian Morrow is the Greek professor at Hampden college. To take classes with Julian, one must ask him personally, and he is highly selective. In addition, Julian insists upon acting as his students' advisor and that the vast majority of the classes they take be with him. Much about Julian's past is shrouded in mystery and legend, although he supposedly knows many of the most important literary figures of the 20th century, including T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound. Julian is an unusual teacher in many ways, but also an effective one. His students all end up highly competent in Greek, with the notable exception of Bunny. However, Julian is also manipulative, and it becomes clear that he cares more about himself than his students. Toward the end of the novel, Julian finds a letter from Bunny, which talks about the bacchanal and Bunny's fear that Henry wants to murder him. Although at first Julian dismisses it as a fake, he eventually learns the truth. Rather than take any sort of moral stand, Julian flees the campus, never to be seen there again. This is heartbreaking to his students, especially Henry, who view him as a father figure.

Judy Poovey – Judy is one of the only non-Greek students with whom Richard spends a significant amount of time. Although Judy's primary activities are gossiping and taking drugs, she is kind to Richard and does what she can to help him. Richard regularly insinuates that Judy is romantically interested in him, but he does not reciprocate her advances.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Marion – Marion is Bunny's girlfriend. She and the Greek students do not like one another, although they do not act antagonistically toward one another. Marion is the first one to raise concern after Bunny's disappearance. After Bunny's death, Marion marries one of Bunny's brothers and has a child named Bunny.

Cloke Rayburn – Cloke Rayburn is Bunny's friend from high school who also attends Hampden. Cloke is paranoid that the authorities will link Bunny's disappearance to Cloke's drug-dealing business. Indeed, the authorities do become skeptical and Cloke does get in legal trouble, though ultimately his actions are deemed unrelated to Bunny's death.

Mr. Corcoran – Mr. Corcoran is Bunny's father. A boisterous man, he spends much of his time after Bunny's death keeping up appearances, but he occasionally breaks into sobbing fits.

Mrs. Corcoran – Mrs. Corcoran is Bunny’s mother. During Bunny’s funeral she seems more concerned with keeping up appearances than she is with the death of her son.

Sophie Dearbold – Sophie Dearbold is a girl Richard dates during his senior year at Hampden. After college, the two of them move to California, but their relationship does not last long because Sophie thinks Richard is too emotionally distant.

Georges Laforgue – Georges Laforgue is a French teacher at Hampden college, as well as Richard’s academic advisor when he first arrives. Georges warns Richard not to study Greek with Julian, but Richard ignores this advice.

Mr. Papen – Mr. Papen is Richard’s father, who runs a gas station. Richard rarely talks to him after leaving for Hampden.

Mrs. Papen – Mrs. Papen is Richard’s mother, who answers phones for a living. Richard rarely talks to her after leaving for Hampden.

Dr. Roland – Dr. Roland is a psychology professor whom Richard works for at Hampden. Though he is not unkind, Richard finds him to be pretentious and oblivious.

Mrs. Winter – Mrs. Winter is Henry’s mother. Little is revealed about her other than that she is very wealthy. At the end of the novel, she visits Richard in the hospital and thanks him for trying to save Henry. She also gifts Richard Henry’s car.

Mr. Winter – Mr. Winter is Henry’s father. Henry keeps quiet about what his father does, though it is clear that he is exorbitantly wealthy.

William Hundy – William Hundy is a Hampden local who makes a name for himself by claiming that he has information relating to Bunny’s disappearance. Eventually, it is revealed that Hundy is a racist whose only information is that he saw a few Middle Eastern men in a van.

Mrs. Abernathy – Mrs. Abernathy is Francis’s mother. She is wealthy and has spent some time in rehab.

Mona Beale – Mona Beale is a Hampden student with whom Richard sleeps after meeting her at a party.

Mona Beale’s boyfriend – Mona Beale’s boyfriend assaults Richard one night when he is walking home because Richard slept with Mona.

Holly Goldsmith – Holly Goldsmith finds Bunny’s body while out on a hike with her dog.



THE HUMAN CAPACITY FOR VIOLENCE

There are two murders at the center of Donna Tartt’s *The Secret History*. The first is a random act of violence perpetrated by four college students while in a crazed state. The second is a premeditated murder carried out by those same students, this time with Richard Papen at their side. On the surface, it seems shocking and unexpected that such violence could be carried out by these students. Several of them are from wealthy backgrounds, they are all exceptional students, and none of them have a criminal record. However, as the novel develops, Tartt interrogates and eventually deconstructs these identity markers. She strips away the assumed link between intelligence, wealth, and morality to reveal a group of people who are surprisingly capable of heinous acts of violence. Perhaps the most shocking revelation of the novel is that Henry, the charismatic leader of the group (who is also from the most prestigious background), borders on psychopathy. In a climactic moment, he tells Richard that he enjoys killing and feels freer than he ever has before. Although the other Greek students are more remorseful than Henry, they are still culpable for committing morally reprehensible acts. What this reveals is that even an average person like Richard is capable of committing violent acts under the right circumstances. Though the thought of personally engaging in acts of extreme violence seems impossible to most people, *The Secret History* sets forth the unsettling idea that we are much more capable of committing such acts than we might realize.



INTELLECTUAL PURSUITS AND REASONABILITY

The Secret History outlines the idea that seemingly important and serious philosophical pursuits can sometimes lead people astray and put them out of touch with rational life. Henry is a primary example of this phenomenon. Though he may be capable of speaking many languages and reciting large sections of poetry, he is completely unaware of the realities of the world around him. He is often cited as the most intelligent member of the Greek students, yet he is surprised to learn that men have walked on the moon. He also relies on ancient texts to teach himself about antidotes, until Richard insists that he check more recent sources—ultimately suggesting that his intelligence is, in many ways, tied to a certain bookish impracticality. Nevertheless, Henry thrives in discussions of all things Greek, making him Julian’s prized student.

On the opposite end of the spectrum is Bunny, who, despite studying Greek, isn’t even that good at writing in English. In one of the novel’s most comical moments, Bunny writes a paper on John Donne, Isaak Walton, and “Metahemeralism.” The paper is completely incomprehensible, largely because “metahemeralism” is a made-up concept that Bunny is



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.

incapable of defining. The world of academia is completely anathema to Bunny's talents and who he is as person. However, unlike the other Greek students, Bunny is actually in touch with contemporary society. He has a girlfriend, often attends parties, and spends time with people who aren't Greek students. In addition, Bunny is the first one to show Richard kindness and invite him into the group. Though the Greek students often treat him like an idiot, the letter Julian finds after Bunny's death reveals that he was much more aware of the reality of his situation than he let on. In retrospect, Richard realizes that Bunny could be quite insightful at times, especially in regard to Julian. Perhaps surprisingly, then, the character in the novel who is the least intellectual ends up being the most rational, thus implying that sometimes an obsession with academia or erudite pursuits can cause people to lose sight of everything but a narrow-minded—albeit intellectual—worldview.



GUILT

The latter half of *The Secret History* is primarily concerned with the repercussions of Bunny's death. Among other consequences, the Greek students are tortured by their guilty consciences, with the notable exception of Henry. Though their guilt is bad enough when lying alone in their rooms, it intensifies when they interact with those who cared for Bunny. Richard almost breaks down and apologizes to Mr. Corcoran, Bunny's father, when they are first introduced, and several of the Greek students attend Bunny's funeral drunk or high in fear that they will break down in front of everyone. Ultimately, their collective guilt leads to the death of Henry, a suicide attempt by Francis, a companionless life for Richard, and the destruction of Charles and Camilla's relationship. At the start of the novel, Richard states, "I suppose at one time in my life I might have had any number of stories, but now there is no other. This is the only story I will ever be able to tell." This statement is, in essence, the novel's thesis on guilt. Guilt is overpowering; it supersedes all other emotions and can be life-defining if powerful enough. It is for this reason that Richard ends the novel exactly where he began: alone and still obsessing over the event that singlehandedly changed the trajectory of his life.



MANIPULATION AND PARANOIA

In the second half of the novel, following Bunny's murder, the other Greek students begin to descend into varying states of paranoia. Only Henry manages to remain calm, largely because he is the one pulling the strings of many other characters in the novel. Meanwhile, Charles is on the opposite end of the spectrum; by the end of the novel, he is convinced that Henry wants to kill him, which may or may not be true. One of the compelling features of *The Secret History* is that it is told entirely from Richard's

perspective and, as a result, there is much about Henry that is never revealed, including whether he plans to harm Charles. Even in retrospect, Richard cannot untangle whether he himself made certain decisions of his own accord or because Henry pushed him in a particular direction. Additionally, much of the behavior exhibited toward the end of the novel is fueled by drugs and alcohol, especially in relation to Charles. Also, Richard admits that many of his memories are foggy, making much of his narration unreliable. By using an unreliable narrator to tell her story, Donna Tartt recreates in the reader a similar condition to the one her characters are experiencing—one of uncertainty, paranoia, and vulnerability. By the end of novel, though certain facts are set in stone, many others are left open to interpretation. Like Henry, then, Tartt knows how to manipulate her readers, and she leaves just enough open-ended questions to create a feverish, paranoid reading experience.



BEAUTY AND TERROR

Early in *The Secret History*, Julian gives a lecture on the relationship between beauty and terror. It is an idea that harkens back to Aristotle who, in *Poetics*, argues that objects that are terrifying in real life—such as a corpse—can be beautiful when elevated to the realm of art. Although this lecture occurs within the context of Richard's Greek class, it is also a commentary on the novel itself. With *The Secret History*, Tartt is interested in creating a work of beauty that it is also terrifying. In many ways, the novel is grotesque; the first murder the students commit is especially brutal, as are the ceremonies they engage in, particularly the one in which they slaughter a piglet and cover themselves in its blood. Though Tartt doesn't usually withhold descriptions from the reader, she often describes violent events briefly or impressionistically. Violence is a central part of *The Secret History*, but it is never overwhelming. What is overwhelming, however, at least for the novel's characters, are the consequences of violence.

To that end, it is in the aftermath of violence that Richard and the other Greek students are confronted with genuine terror. This terror comes in the form of guilt, law enforcement, and unintended consequences. It also comes about because the Greek students have strayed from Aristotle's ideas about beauty and terror. After all, Aristotle only connects beauty and terror as a way to prove a broader argument about how humans naturally take pleasure in artistic representation. It's not that humans find corpses beautiful, then, but that they find *artistic representations* of corpses beautiful. Henry, however, gets hung up on the idea that beauty is terror. Therefore, the problem that arises for the Greek students in *The Secret History* is that they actually kill the farmer (and, later, Bunny). And though someone like Henry might hope to find beauty in this otherwise horrifying experience, such a viewpoint doesn't quite

align with Aristotle's philosophy because it has nothing to do with art or representation—it's real, and thus full of nothing but terror.



CLASS AND IDENTITY

Throughout *The Secret History*, Richard Papen tries to create a new identity for himself. Richard grows up in a working-class family from California. Unlike the other Greek students, he has no wealthy or romantic background to speak of. Richard is embarrassed about this, so he lies about it, even though the others eventually see through his façade of wealth and experience. In an attempt to blend in with his milieu, Richard buys expensive clothes and assumes a condescending attitude toward contemporary art and culture. Eventually, Richard cannot even bring himself to talk to his parents, and he rarely communicates with anyone on campus who isn't a Greek student. However, as the novel progresses, Richard's newfound identity becomes too difficult to maintain. Because he isn't actually wealthy, Richard is forced to live in dangerous conditions during winter break. In addition, his desire to be liked by the Greek students leads to morally dubious behavior and, ultimately, Bunny's death. The cruel irony of Richard's shift in identity is that it proves useless almost immediately. After Henry's death, he rarely communicates with the other Greek students and finds it difficult to connect with others. Unfortunately for Richard, the events of the past make him feel as though a new change in identity is no longer possible. As such, the novel serves as a warning about the mutability of identity. Though we may be able to change who we are, it is important to realize that some of those changes might have lasting consequences and, as a result, be permanent. As such, we should be careful and thoughtful about who we decide to be.



SYMBOLS

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



THE LYCEUM

The Lyceum is the name that Julian gives to his office, and it represents the secretive and performative nature of Greek studies at Hampden. Richard first visits Julian's office early in the novel to ask Julian if he can study Greek with him. During this early visit, Julian only cracks his door and does not allow Richard to see what is inside. However, once Richard becomes a Greek student, he is allowed into the lyceum, which functions as a sort of inner sanctum that only a privileged few have access to.

“Lyceum” is a Greek word that refers to a lecture hall or performance space. Julian's lyceum is a bit of both; though the

Greek students do learn from Julian, his lectures often take the form of performances. In fact, by the end of the novel, it is revealed that Julian is primarily concerned with performing rather than teaching. Though he can be a good teacher, Julian cares much more for his own well-being than that of his students. After Julian leaves Hampden and his possessions are removed from his office, the Greek students see the lyceum for what it always was: a normal college classroom.



THE MUSEUM EXHIBIT

In the epilogue of *The Secret History*, Richard sees an unnamed museum exhibit in his dreams, and this exhibit symbolizes his inability to move on from the past. The exhibit is a machine that repeatedly folds in on itself to create new images. The images are all great feats of architecture built by ancient and medieval cultures, including the Colosseum, the Pyramids, and St. Mark's Basilica. Around the machine are a group of men staring at it in awe. The men, like Julian's students, are transfixed by the wonder and beauty of the past. However, as the novel reveals, this fixation can prove dangerous. Henry's desire to emulate the ways of the past lead to several deaths, including his own. Meanwhile, for Richard, the past morphs into an inescapable terror. Though Richard would like to find pleasure in the manifold beauties of ancient civilizations, his view of the past has narrowed; his past, and his life, now revolves around the murder he committed. Ultimately, then, the museum exhibit is revealed to be a sort of purgatory that Richard and Henry appear unable to escape.




QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Alfred A. Knopf edition of *The Secret History* published in 1992.

Prologue Quotes

“I suppose at one time in my life I might have had any number of stories, but now there is no other. This is the only story I will ever be able to tell.”

Related Characters: Richard Papen (speaker), Bunny (Edmund Corcoran)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 4

Explanation and Analysis



The Secret History begins with a brief prologue that sets up the story Richard is about to tell. This quote comes at the end of the prologue and emphasizes the impact of the story

on Richard's life. Among other things, *The Secret History* is novel about identity formation and Richard's desire to transcend his lower-class background. When he arrives at Hampden college, he has his whole life ahead of him and can take any number of potential paths. However, the path Richard ultimately chooses narrows the trajectory of his life to the point where he can now think of nothing else. His decision to conspire to murder Bunny has changed his life irreparably, and now there is no going back. This is the only story Richard can tell because it is the only one that can explain the outcome of his life. Unfortunately, this knowledge only becomes available to Richard in retrospect.

Chapter 1 Quotes

☞ Plano. The word conjures up drive-ins, tract homes, waves of heat rising from the blacktop. My years there created for me an expendable past, disposable as a plastic cup. Which I suppose was a great gift, in a way. On leaving home I was able to fabricate a new and far more satisfying history, full of striking, simplistic environmental influences; a colorful past, easily accessible to strangers.

Related Characters: Richard Papen (speaker), Bunny (Edmund Corcoran)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 7

Explanation and Analysis

This quote comes from the beginning of Chapter 1, as Richard gives the reader a brief glimpse at his background. Clearly, Richard is unsatisfied with where he grew up. His parents are from the working class, and he feels that his past lacks a certain mystique or romantic quality that he observes in his peers. On the one hand, Richard is a typical college student who wants to make his own way in the world without the baggage given to him by his parents. On the other hand, the glee with which he utterly erases his past, which he finds “disposable as a plastic cup,” is concerning. He shows no love for his parents or the place he grew up. Additionally, this quote establishes Richard as a fabricator, which raises questions about the story he is about to tell. If Richard doesn't mind fabricating his childhood, why should the story he's about to tell about Bunny be any different? As the story progresses, it becomes clear that nearly every character in the novel has an obscured past—a secret history—that is left opaque. This opaqueness is what provides the novel with an air of

mystery and ambiguity. Some of its mysteries get wrapped up by its conclusion, but many others don't.

☞ The Greeks, you know, really weren't very different from us. They were a very formal people, extraordinarily civilized, rather repressed. And yet they were frequently swept away *en masse* by the wildest enthusiasm—dancing, frenzies, slaughter, visions—which for us, I suppose would seem clinical madness, irreversible. Yet the Greeks—some of them, anyway—could go in and out of it as they pleased [. . .] The revelers were apparently hurled back into a non-rational, pre-intellectual state, where the personality was replaced by something completely different – and by ‘different’ I mean something to all appearances not mortal. Inhuman.

Related Characters: Julian Morrow (speaker), Richard Papen

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 40

Explanation and Analysis

This quote comes from Richard's first lesson with Julian. In his lecture, Julian discusses Dionysian madness, and this quote is part of the description he gives for it. Indeed, the description Julian provides is in line with what scholars believe happened in parts of ancient Greece. There were ceremonies performed dedicated to Dionysus that were meant to cast off all social constraints. However, although Julian's lesson is based in fact, he is also playing a dangerous game, much of which isn't revealed until later in the novel. Not only does Julian tell his students that the Greeks “weren't very different from us”—which is a broad and therefore largely meaningless claim—but he also encourages them to try to perform such rituals themselves. Notably, included in his list of what happens when Dionysian madness is induced is “slaughter,” which is exactly what happens when the Greek students succeed in inducing it in themselves. As such, rhetorically gifted though Julian may be, he is also a sinister figure in the novel.

☞ Beauty is terror. Whatever we call beautiful, we quiver before it. And what could be more terrifying and beautiful, to souls like the Greeks or our own, than to lose control completely? To throw off the chains of being for an instant, to shatter the accident of our mortal selves?

Related Characters: Julian Morrow (speaker), Richard Papen , Bunny (Edmund Corcoran)

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 42

Explanation and Analysis

This quote is from Richard’s first lesson with Julian. Here, Julian provides his thesis on beauty, which he takes from Aristotle. Aristotle says that things that are often terrifying or horrific in real life can seem beautiful when experienced as art. However, Julian’s claim—at least in this moment—is that things that are terrifying or horrific in real life can also be beautiful in real life. It is this thesis that leads him to encourage his students to attempt a bacchanal. It is also this idea that allows him to find Bunny’s disappearance more exciting than concerning. Julian treats life as though it is art and casts himself as the central character. In doing so, he relegates those around him to mere playthings, including his students. For instance, it is telling that he does not take part in the bacchanal himself. Instead, he makes it sound appealing to his students, and then he waits to see what happens, as though his students are lab rats.

and he is afraid to do “what is necessary.” Rather than acting responsibly and telling Henry to back down, he urges him to go further. This is a moment that is typical of Julian; he utilizes his rhetorical ability and quick wit without any regard for the consequences. He knows what Henry is asking and deliberately obscures the point by responding with a clever answer. Henry takes his response as gospel and decides to continue down a path that will ultimately result in two murders and his own suicide.

☞ The chronological sorting of memories in an interesting business. Prior to this first weekend in the country, my recollections of that fall are distant and blurry: from here on out, they come into a sharp, delightful focus. It is here that the stilted mannequins of my initial acquaintance begin to yawn and stretch and come to life. It was months before the gloss and mystery of newness, which kept me from seeing them with much objectivity, would wear entirely off [...] but it is here, in my memory, that they cease being totally foreign and begin to appear, for the first time, in shapes very like their bright old selves.

Related Characters: Richard Papen (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 79

Explanation and Analysis

This quote comes after Richard describes the first weekend the Greek students spend together at Francis’s country house. Although it is made clear at several points in the novel leading up to this, it is here that Richard openly reveals himself as an unreliable narrator, which is a key feature of the novel that changes how it should be interpreted. Already, Richard has narrated a large portion of the novel, and he does so while largely exuding a sense of objectivity. Yet, here, he states that his recollections are “distant and blurry.” In addition, although Richard claims that the rest of the novel will contain a greater degree of objectivity, it is not clear that this claim should be trusted. Richard spends much of the novel on drugs or in a confused, troubled state. This doesn’t mean that he shouldn’t be trusted at all, but it does mean that readers should be suspicious of him.

Chapter 2 Quotes

☞ Then Henry spoke. His words were low but deliberate and distinct. “Should I do what is necessary?”

To my surprise, Julian took both Henry’s hands in his own. “You should only, ever, do what is necessary,” he said.

Related Characters: Henry Winter , Julian Morrow (speaker), Richard Papen

Related Themes:   



Page Number: 71

Explanation and Analysis

Wondering if he truly belongs in Greek studies, Richard goes to see Julian and ends up overhearing this strange conversation between Julian and Henry. Of all the Greek students, Henry is clearly Julian’s favorite; they lunch together, talk often, and Henry treats Julian like a father. However, Julian clearly abuses his position of power. In this case, Henry and Julian are almost certainly discussing the Dionysian rituals the Greek students are performing, although this is never confirmed. Henry comes to Julian asking for advice, likely because the rituals are not working,

There is a recurrent scene from those dinners that surfaces again and again, like an obsessive undercurrent in a dream. Julian, at the head of the long table, rises to his feet and lifts his wineglass. "Live forever," he says.

Related Characters: Richard Papen , Julian Morrow (speaker)

Related Themes:  


Page Number: 91

Explanation and Analysis

During Richard's first semester at Hampden, the Greek students would regularly hold dinners at Francis's country house, and on occasion Julian would join them. At each dinner, Julian did exactly what this quote describes. There are several moments in Richard's past that often recur in his memory, and this is one of them. Julian's toast to eternal life is ironic, given that, by the end of the novel, two of his six students will end up dead. Meanwhile, those who are still living spend the rest of their lives in a hellish purgatory, each of them stricken with guilt because of what they've done. For those still living, life becomes a curse and, as such, Julian's motto becomes cruel and ironic. However, one gets the sense that Julian does mean what he says. The desire to live forever is ultimately a selfish desire, and Julian proves himself to be a selfish person. Even if he must abandon his students, Julian will do what he can to survive and better his own life.

It was like a painting too vivid to be real—every pebble, every blade of grass sharply defined, the sky so blue it hurt me to look at it. Camilla was limp in Henry's arms, her head thrown back like a dead girl's, and the curve of her throat beautiful and lifeless.

Related Characters: Richard Papen (speaker), Henry Winter , Camilla Macauley

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 99

Explanation and Analysis

This quote is from the scene in which Camilla cuts her foot before being saved by Henry. While everyone else is shocked by the sight of blood, Henry sweeps Camilla up into his arms. Upon witnessing this sight, Richard experiences a confluence of real life and art that he finds hard to describe.

His description is reminiscent of Julian's claim that beauty and terror are two sides of the same coin. Though Richard finds beauty in the image, it is also painful to look at and Camilla's head looks like "a dead girl's." Additionally, this is a moment in the story that foreshadows the relationship between Henry and Camilla. When everyone else in her life starts to fall apart, Camilla goes to Henry so that he can save her. However, in sharp juxtaposition to this memory, Henry is the one who ultimately ends up dead, though he does save his friends in the process.

Out on the lawn, Bunny had just knocked Henry's ball about seventy feet outside the court. There was a ragged burst of laughter; faint, but clear, it floated back across the evening air. That laughter haunts me still.

Related Characters: Richard Papen (speaker), Henry Winter , Bunny (Edmund Corcoran) , Francis Abernathy

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 103



Explanation and Analysis

This passage describes one of Richard's memories from his time at Francis's country house. Outdoors, Bunny and Henry are playing croquet, while Richard sits inside watching them. The laughter that he hears emanates from Bunny, who is elated with himself for blasting Henry's ball outside the court. Though it is a happy moment for Bunny, it is unclear whether the same can be said for Henry. Henry and Bunny's relationship is difficult to pin down. On the one hand, Charles and Camilla insist that they are best friends. On the other hand, there is little evidence to demonstrate this fact in the novel. More often than not, Henry is annoyed with Bunny. Of course, in addition to this, Henry ultimately murders Bunny, and he does so with a smile on his face. Perhaps it is the case that their once good friendship went downhill. Alternatively, it is possible that Henry never cared for Bunny at all, but merely tolerated him. This quote gets to the heart of the ambiguity in their relationship. Bunny is easy enough to read, but Henry remains an enigma.

Chapter 3 Quotes

☞ If I threw myself off, I thought, who would find me in all that white silence? Might the river beat me downstream over the rocks until it spat me out in the quiet waters, down behind the dye factory, where some lady would catch me in the beam of her headlights when she pulled out of the parking lot at five in the afternoon?

Related Characters: Richard Papen (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 119

Explanation and Analysis

After his first semester at Hampden, Richard spends winter break isolated from his friends and living in squalor. During this period of his life, Richard becomes depressed and contemplates suicide. After spending a semester of hearing Julian say that humanity's greatest desire is to live forever, Richard feels the exact opposite. Instead, he is drawn to the depths of the river, and he fantasizes about his own death, as well as what would happen after it. Additionally, this moment is highly reminiscent of a scene from William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, in which another isolated college student contemplates suicide while staring at a river. Like Faulkner's novel, *The Secret History* grapples with themes of identity, incest, and humanity's capacity for cruelty. However, unlike *The Sound and the Fury*, Richard decides against committing suicide, whereas Faulkner's protagonist ultimately kills himself. Instead, *The Secret History* goes a different direction, as Henry rescues Richard from his desperate situation.

Explanation and Analysis

After a significant build up, the novel's big reveal finally arrives in the form of Henry confirming to Richard that he, along with Francis, Charles, and Camilla, killed someone. In this climactic moment, Richard's answer and Henry's response reveal a lot about their respective characters. In Richard's case, it is telling that he knew the answer to his question before he asked it. This comes as a shock to the reader because previously Richard never mentions murder when reciting his story, except in the prologue. As such, it is unclear how long Richard has suspected his friends of murder. Meanwhile, Henry's retort is highly complimentary and demonstrates his appreciation for Richard's intelligence. Crucially, Henry does not appear concerned that Richard knows his secret. In fact, he seems rather excited. Later, Richard will wonder if this is all a ruse and Henry only compliments him so that he will feel good about himself and, in return, do exactly what Henry tells him to. This is a sinister reading of Henry's character, but it runs parallel with the type of leadership role that Julian plays in Henry's life. It is not unlikely that Henry could have picked up such a trick from his mentor.



☞ Things started to come back. I looked down at my hand and saw it was covered in with blood, and worse than blood. Then Charles stepped forward and knelt at something at my feet, and I bent down, too, and saw that it was a man. He was dead. He was about forty years old and he had on a yellow plaid shirt—you know those woolen shirts they wear up here—and his neck was broken, and, unpleasant to say, his brains were all over his face. Really, I do not know how that happened. There was a dreadful mess. I was drenched in blood and there was even blood on my glasses.

Chapter 4 Quotes

☞ And the horrible thing was, somehow, that I did know. "You killed somebody," I said, "didn't you?"


"Good for you," he said. "You're just as smart as I thought you were. I knew you'd figure it out, sooner or later, that's what I've told the others all along."

Related Characters: Richard Papen , Henry Winter (speaker), Charles Macauley , Camilla Macauley , Francis Abernathy , Julian Morrow

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 163

Related Characters: Henry Winter (speaker), Richard Papen

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 169

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Henry describes what he saw after regaining his sanity following the Dionysian ritual. Although the details of the murder are not clear, Henry obviously played a critical role in murdering the man, given that he is drenched in blood. In addition to the description provided here, Camilla will later tell Richard that she remembers a deep cut across the man's stomach that oozed blood. This does not

contradict Henry's description, but it does indicate that he's left out some details, but perhaps not intentionally. A key question in the novel is whether or not to believe Henry when he says, "Really, I do not know how that happened." As the novel progresses, it becomes clear that Henry has no problem with lying and manipulating people. Additionally, Henry will later admit that he enjoys killing and that it makes him feel alive. Perhaps he lies here because he thinks Richard will go to the police if he finds out that the crime was committed on purpose. However, if he was worried about scaring Richard away, then an equally sound strategy would have been to leave out the gory details, which he does not do.


Chapter 5 Quotes

☝☝ "Tell me," Bunny said, and I thought I detected for the first time a note of suspicion. "Just what the Sam Hill *are* you guys doing out here anyway?"

The woods were silent, not a sound.

Henry smiled. "Why, looking for new ferns," he said, and took a step towards him.

Related Characters: Richard Papen , Henry Winter , Bunny (Edmund Corcoran) (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 269

Explanation and Analysis

These are the closing words of Chapter 5, and this is the last moment before Bunny is killed. What is most striking about this passage is that Henry moves forward with the intention of killing Bunny with a smile on his face. Up until this point, Richard has maintained that the Greek students decide to kill Bunny because they must in order to save themselves. While this may be true for the others, it is difficult, given this description, to imagine that self-preservation is Henry's only motivation. In this passage, he is not upset that he has to kill his friend; he is happy about it. Additionally, Richard's belief that he detects "a note of suspicion" in Bunny's voice for the first time seems well-founded, given what is revealed later in the book. As it turns out, Bunny knows that Henry wants him dead and, therefore, it stands to reason that he would have his guard up throughout this conversation.

Chapter 6 Quotes

☝☝ Just for the record, I do not consider myself an evil person (though how like a killer that makes me sound!). Whenever I read about murders in the news I am struck by the dogged, almost touching assurance with which interstate stranglers, needle-happy pediatricians, the depraved and guilty of all descriptions fail to recognize the evil in themselves; feel compelled, even to assert a kind of spurious decency. "Basically I am a very good person." This from the latest serial killer—destined for the chair, they say—who, with incarnadine axe, recently dispatched half a dozen registered nurses in Texas. I have followed his case with interest in the papers.

Related Characters: Richard Papen (speaker), Bunny (Edmund Corcoran)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 275

Explanation and Analysis

Before Richard describes Bunny's death, he includes this brief aside, which comments on the morality of the situation. However, he does so in an odd way. Essentially, he defends himself by demonstrating how his response to murdering Bunny is unlike that of the typical murderer. Yet, like much of what Julian says, this is nothing more than a rhetorical trick. Richard seems to believe that his self-awareness makes him better than "interstate stranglers" and "needle-happy pediatricians," but it doesn't. Perhaps it makes him cleverer than these other people, but cleverness has nothing to do with morality. A similar attitude is exhibited by the Greek students throughout the novel. They think that they are better than other people and that certain rules don't apply to them because of how smart they are. However, this illusion eventually comes crashing down, and ultimately all of the Greek students are punished in one way or another.

☝☝ You see, then, how quick it was. And it is impossible to slow down this film, to examine individual frames. I see now what I saw then, flashing by with the swift, deceptive ease of an accident: shower of gravel, wind-milling arms, a hand that claws at a branch and misses. A barrage of frightened crows explodes from the underbrush, cawing and dark against the sky. Cut to Henry stepping back from the edge. Then the film flaps up in the projector and the screen goes black. *Consummatum est.*

Related Characters: Richard Papen (speaker), Henry

Winter , Bunny (Edmund Corcoran)

Related Themes:    



Page Number: 276

Explanation and Analysis

This quote comes from the beginning of Chapter 6, and it is the only description Richard provides of Bunny's death. The Latin at the end of the passage roughly translates to "It is finished." Notably, these are the words Christ uttered while dying on the cross. Although Bunny is far from Jesus Christ, he does die for his friends' sins. Additionally, what is notable about this passage is that Richard narrates Bunny's death as though it is a work of art—a film, in this case. In doing so, he invokes Aristotle's idea that beauty and terror are one in the same in the realm of art. Because Richard cannot process the reality of Bunny's death, he transfers it to the realm of art so that it is digestible—beautiful, even—for both himself and the reader. His description of Bunny going over the cliff is largely impressionistic and lacks any gruesome details. Additionally, the description cuts off before the full scene is described.

☞ Henry took a sip of his tea. "How," he said, "can I possibly make the Dean of Studies understand that there is a divinity in our midst?"

Related Characters: Henry Winter (speaker), Richard Papen , Julian Morrow

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 317



Explanation and Analysis

While waiting for Bunny's body to be found, Richard and Henry fill out surveys that ask them to describe Julian as a professor. Henry fails to complete the survey and cites as his reason the above quotation. Here, it is apparent how deeply the cult of Julian Morrow has affected Henry. Not only does Henry view Julian as a sort of father figure, but he also sees him as a god. Of course, this is a wildly inappropriate power dynamic for a student/teacher relationship, and it speaks to just how much Julian abuses his authority. Julian knows that his students look up to him. In fact, there is a fair argument to be made that Julian only chooses students who lack any sort of traditional authority figure, such as a parent, in their life. From there, he makes

his students his playthings, and even Henry, who is wildly intelligent in so many ways, fails to realize that he is being duped.

☞ He was looking over the hills, at all that grand cinematic expanse of men and wilderness and snow that lay beneath us; and though his voice was anxious there was a strange dreamy look on his face. The business had upset him, that I knew, but I also knew that there was something about the operatic sweep of the search which could not fail to appeal to him and that he was pleased, however obscurely, with the aesthetics of the thing.

Related Characters: Richard Papen (speaker), Bunny (Edmund Corcoran) , Julian Morrow

Related Themes:  



Page Number: 341

Explanation and Analysis

While searching for Bunny's body, or at least pretending to, Richard comes across Julian. This quote is a description of Julian that Richard provides during the search, and it demonstrates the delusional manner in which Julian navigates the world. Before starting class, Julian always asks his students if they are ready to leave the phenomenal world to experience sublimity. However, Julian himself never seems to return to the phenomenal world. For him, everything is about aesthetics, and so even though one of his students is missing and possibly dead, Julian cannot help but feel "pleased." This is a quality that he has unfortunately passed on to Henry, who notes how much the search for Bunny reminds him of a Tolstoy novel, an observation which delights Julian. However, all of the delight that Henry and Julian take in aesthetics does nothing for them in the phenomenal world. Instead, it leads them down increasingly morbid paths.

☞ "Well, they painted it with a *dado*, sort of, those awful Gucci stripes. It was in all kinds of magazines. House Beautiful had it in some ridiculous article they did on Whimsy in Decorating or some absurd idea—you know, where they tell you to paint a giant lobster or something on your bedroom ceiling and it's supposed to be very witty and attractive." He lit a cigarette. "I mean, that's exactly the kind of people they are," he said. "All surface. Bunny was the best of them by a long shot[. . .]"

Related Characters: Bunny (Edmund Corcoran) , Charles Macauley (speaker), Mr. Corcoran , Mrs. Corcoran

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 349



Explanation and Analysis

This passage is Charles's description of the Corcorans' house. Evidently, Charles is not a fan of how the Corcorans decorate their home, or of the Corcorans themselves. The design of the house speaks to Charles's disdain for the Corcorans because, like the family themselves, it imitates the appearance of wealth and taste without actually achieving either. What annoys Charles is the dishonesty in how the Corcorans portray themselves, which is only made worse by the fact that the truth is blatantly obvious to everyone who meets them. Their style is pretentious, gaudy, and completely anathema to the classical art and architecture that the Greek students admire. As such, Charles's claim that "Bunny was the best of them" largely rings true, which allows Bunny to appear in a more sympathetic light. Even if the reader cannot bring themselves to like Bunny, his background provides an insight into why he turned out the way he did.

Chapter 7 Quotes

☛☛ His gaze—helpless, wild—hit me like a blackjack. Suddenly, and for the first time, really, I was struck by the bitter, irrevocable truth of it; the evil of what we had done. It was like running full speed into a brick wall. I let go of his collar, feeling completely helpless. I wanted to die. "Oh, God," I mumbled, "God help me, I'm sorry—"

Related Characters: Richard Papen (speaker), Henry Winter , Francis Abernathy , Mr. Corcoran , Sophie Dearbold

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 388

Explanation and Analysis

This scene takes place when Richard, Francis, and Sophie arrive at the Corcoran house the day before Bunny's funeral. After witnessing Mr. Corcoran break down over the death of his son, Richard has a mental collapse of his own. For a single moment, Richard's guilt gets the best of him, and he seems as though he is on the verge of admitting the

truth to Mr. Corcoran. The only thing that stops him is a sharp kick from Francis, which is why he stops talking after "I'm sorry." Guilt remains a prominent theme in the second half of the novel, and the Greek students, with the exception of Henry, do not handle it well. Even though they manage to evade law enforcement, the Greek students cannot escape their own minds, which torture them for the evil act they have committed. In this moment, as Richard stands before Bunny's grieving father, his guilt reaches an all-time high.

☛☛ Slowly, slowly, with a drugged, fathomless calm, Henry bent and picked up a handful of dirt. He held it over the grave and let it trickle from his fingers. Then, with terrible composure, he stepped back and absently dragged the hand across his chest, smearing mud upon his lapel, his tie, the starched immaculate white of his shirt.

Related Characters: Richard Papen (speaker), Henry Winter

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 420


Explanation and Analysis

This quotation comes in the closing moments of Chapter 7, after Bunny's casket is lowered into the ground. There is an open question throughout the novel surrounding Henry and Bunny's relationship. Although Bunny obviously liked Henry at one point, it is unclear whether Henry liked Bunny or merely tolerated him. This scene maintains that sense of ambiguity. On one hand, it could be argued that Henry smears the dirt on himself because he is so overcome with what he has done that he loses himself in the moment. However, because Richard describes his movements as "drugged," there is also a possibility that Henry acts this way because he is still influenced by the heavy medication that Richard gave him the night before. Regardless, it is a notable scene because Henry loses control of himself for a moment in public, something that he was previously careful not to do. If even Henry, who admits to a general lack of feeling, cannot pull himself together, then things do not bode well for the other Greek students.

Chapter 8 Quotes

☝☝ Do you know how hard that was? Do you think Henry would lower himself to do something like that? No. It was all right, of course, for me to do it but he couldn't be bothered. Those people had never seen anything like Henry in their lives. I'll tell you the sort of thing he worried about. Like if he was carrying around the right book, if Homer would make a better impression than Thomas Aquinas.

Related Characters: Charles Macauley (speaker), Richard Papen, Henry Winter, Camilla Macauley, Julian Morrow

Related Themes: 


Page Number:

Explanation and Analysis

Charles says this to Richard after Richard gets him out of jail. Charles is angry with Henry and starts to turn on him by questioning his leadership. Importantly, Charles's anger at Henry is dually motivated. Though he does think that Henry's leadership has failed the group, he is also angry at Henry for becoming romantically involved with his sister. Even though it comes from a place of anger, Charles's critique of Henry rings true. Like Julian, Henry does care at least as much about appearances as anything else. Whenever there is something he would rather not do, he delegates that task to someone else. In particular, Charles is mad because Henry's decision to send him with Cloke resulted in endless questions from the police and the FBI. Charles's rant is convincing to Richard, who starts to question Henry's motivations as well. However, like Charles, Richard's judgment is questionable because he is also jealous of Henry's new relationship with Camilla.

☝☝ I had always thought Henry's coldness essential, to the marrow, and Julian's only a veneer for what was, at bottom, a warm, kind-hearted nature. But the twinkle in Julian's eye as I looked at him now, was mechanical and dead. It was as if the charming theatrical curtain had dropped away and I saw him for the first time as he really was: not the benign old sage, the indulgent and protective good-parent of my dreams, but ambiguous, a moral neutral, whose beguiling trappings concealed a being watchful, capricious, and heartless.

Related Characters: Richard Papen (speaker), Henry Winter, Bunny (Edmund Corcoran), Julian Morrow

Related Themes: 




Page Number: 508

Explanation and Analysis

This quotation describes Julian's reaction when he learns the truth about the bacchanal and Bunny's death. In this moment, Richard realizes that Julian is not the person he pretends to be. Despite his many toasts to eternal life, Julian is "mechanical and dead." He does not care for his students or other people. He is only concerned with himself, and now that his students can no longer amuse him, he abandons them. In fact, Richard's comparison between Henry and Julian is actually unfair to Henry. Though Henry is cold and admits that he has few feelings, he does care for Julian and Camilla, and he sacrifices himself for the good of his friends. Meanwhile, Julian picks up and leaves almost as soon as Henry finishes talking to him, never to be seen again. Julian knows that he could be held responsible for encouraging his students to perform a bacchanal, so he flees to save his own skin.

☝☝ It has always been hard for me to talk about Julian without romanticizing him. In many ways, I loved him the most of all; and it is with him that I am most tempted to embroider, to flatter, to basically reinvent. I think that is because Julian himself was constantly in the process of reinventing the people and events around him, conferring kindness, or wisdom, or bravery, or charm, on actions which contained nothing of the sort. It was one of the reasons I loved him: for that flattering light in which he saw me, for the person I was when I was with him, for what it was he allowed me to be.

Related Characters: Richard Papen (speaker), Julian Morrow

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 510

Explanation and Analysis

This passage comes after Julian makes a sudden departure from Hampden, abandoning his students and his post. In retrospect, Richard attempts to explain why Julian still holds an important place in his heart; even after realizing that Julian is "capricious" and "heartless," Richard cannot bring himself to hate him. Even if everything that Julian did was all part of an act, it still helped Richard to become the person he wished to be. Previously, Richard had no one whom he looked up to in his life, but then Julian came along and revealed new possibilities to him. Richard modeled his

personality after Julian and his fellow Greek students, who also modeled themselves after Julian. Richard cannot bring himself to hate Julian because that would mean hating the part of himself that he actually likes. However, Richard is aware that everything Julian did had an ulterior motive. Julian rarely meant what he said, but that doesn't mean that what he said didn't have an impact.

☝☝ "I can't marry you [...] because I love Henry."

"Henry's dead."


"I can't help it. I still love him."

I loved him, too," I said.

For a moment, I thought I felt her waver. But then she looked away.

"I know you did," she said. "But it's not enough."

Related Characters: Richard Papen , Camilla Macauley (speaker), Henry Winter , Sophie Dearbold

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 555

Explanation and Analysis

This is the final conversation between Richard and Camilla in the novel, and it occurs after both of them fly to Boston to see Francis after his failed suicide attempt. At this point in his life, Richard is desperate for anyone and anything he can cling to. He's lost Sophie and he has no one else in his life. His proposal to Camilla comes from a place of desperation more than one of love, and Camilla is smart to turn it down. Not only does she still love Henry, but she also realizes that marrying Richard will not solve anything for either of them; they will still have to live with the heinous acts they've committed. This is what Camilla is referring to when she

says, "But it's not enough." The unfortunate truth implied in her statement is that nothing will ever be enough. No matter what Francis, Richard, Charles, and Camilla do, they cannot escape the guilt they hold within themselves.


Epilogue Quotes

☝☝ "Are you happy here?" I said at last.

He considered this for a moment. "Not particularly," he said. "But you're not very happy where you are, either."

Related Characters: Richard Papen , Henry Winter (speaker), Bunny (Edmund Corcoran)

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 559

Explanation and Analysis

These are the final lines of dialogue in the novel, and they occur in a dream Richard has featuring Henry. In the dream, Richard and Henry are in a museum surrounded by men who are staring at an exhibit, which is constantly changing its shape to resemble great feats of classical and medieval architecture. In other words, the museum exhibit is a symbolic representation of the past, and it is a place where both Richard and Henry appear to be stuck. Henry is stuck in the past because he's fixated on the great civilizations of the past. Even while alive, Henry rarely existed in the present moment. Meanwhile, Richard is tortured by the more recent past. He cannot get over the deaths of Bunny and Henry; they are too significant to move on from. As such, the end of the novel sees both Richard and Henry trapped in a sort of purgatory, unable to let go of the past.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

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

PROLOGUE

Richard Papen recounts the FBI's discovery of a dead man named Bunny. Bunny's disappearance led to a full-on manhunt; it took the FBI 10 days to find his body in the mountains because it was covered in snow. Richard, along with his friend Henry and three other as-of-yet unidentified people are responsible for Bunny's death. However, the FBI never suspected them, and they got away with the crime. Years later, Bunny's death still haunts Richard.

Donna Tartt has described The Secret History as a "whydunit." In other words, it is a mystery story about why a crime was committed, rather than who committed the crime. Unlike normal murder mysteries, the killers in The Secret History are revealed almost immediately. Additionally, this story is being told from the perspective of one of the killers, which is also somewhat out of the ordinary.



CHAPTER 1

Richard Papen is now 28 years old, and he is recalling the events that led up to this point in his life. Richard grew up in Plano, California. His father ran a gas station and his mother answered phones for a living. Richard is not fond of his childhood and claims not to remember much of it. However, he recalls that his parents did not treat him well and he associates his childhood with "a melancholy feeling." He also remembers that his family was relatively poor, and he had difficulty making friends.

It is often unclear in this novel, whether Richard can be trusted. At times, he is surely an unreliable narrator, a fact to which he openly admits. Elsewhere, he withholds information, and this is one of those instances. Richard remembers more of his childhood than he lets on, though it is obvious that he would prefer not to remember it. In place of his genuine memories, Richard provides a romantic sentiment—"a melancholy feeling"—which allows the reader to create a more interesting background for him than he can create for himself. In reality, it seems that Richard comes from a lower-middle class background and that his childhood was largely uneventful.



Richard finds his upbringing unsatisfactory compared to those of his friends. He is jealous of Charles and Camilla (who are orphaned twins), Francis (whose birth was the result of a fling between a 17-year-old girl and a rockstar), and Bunny (who had a typical American childhood in the suburbs). The two things all of them have in common are a love for one another and a knowledge of Greek.

Richard's jealousy of his friends' upbringings again highlights his flair for the dramatic. As the story unfolds, it becomes clear that Richard's upbringing might even be the most desirable compared to those of his friends. Importantly, although the reader doesn't yet know the full extent of Camilla's, Charles's, Francis's, and Bunny's backgrounds, Richard does. He is telling this story in retrospect, and he knows that his friends' upbringings were not as great as he makes them seem.



After graduating high school, Richard spent two years studying Greek at a local college while majoring in pre-med. While there, he excelled at Greek but hated his pre-med classes and found them disgusting. Without telling his parents, he switched his major to English, even though it wouldn't help him make money. He liked English better but was unhappy living at home. One night, Richard found a pamphlet for Hampden College, a liberal arts school in Vermont. He decided to apply. Over the next few months, Richard fought with his parents about Hampden. His parents were worried about the cost, as well as the point. However, after many arguments, he ended up at Hampden. It was a stressful time in his life, and he ultimately concludes, "Even today I do not fully understand the chain of events that brought me to Hampden."

When he arrives at Hampden, Richard falls in love with his living accommodations, which he describes as "a white room with big north-facing windows, monkish and bare, with scarred oak floors and a ceiling slanted like a garret's." During his first days at Hampden, he is happy in a way that he never was back home. Soon, it is time to sign up for classes, so Richard meets with Georges Laforgue, a French teacher and Richard's academic advisor. Richard explains to Georges that he wants to take Greek, but Georges says that likely isn't possible because there is only one Greek professor, and he is particular about who he lets into his class.

The Greek professor's name is Julian Morrow and Georges tells Richard that Julian is independently wealthy and doesn't accept payment to teach. He also informs Richard that many professors at Hampden operate in similarly odd and difficult ways. Though Richard is shocked by what Georges tells him, he still wants to take Greek, so he goes to talk to Julian. When Richard knocks on Julian's door, Julian only opens the door enough to stick his face out. Richard asks to join his Greek class, but Julian refuses to take him on as a student, despite having only five people in his class.

Over his first week at Hampden, Richard meets some acquaintances, but no one he considers a close friend. When he asks people about Julian, everyone knows about him, although no one seems to know the truth of his background. Richard is fascinated by Julian and spends much of his time observing him as he walks around with his five students. All of Julian's students—Bunny, Henry, Charles, Camilla, and Francis—stand out to Richard compared to the other people his age that he meets at Hampden. However, Richard finds them unapproachable, and he is therefore hesitant to talk to them.

Once again, it is clear that Richard does not like talking about his background. He provides only the necessary details to explain how he came to Hampden and does not elaborate. Throughout the story, Richard's background and his lack of money will prove to be an issue.



It is often unclear why Richard has a fondness for certain things and people. This is true of his living conditions, which appear largely unremarkable. More than anything else, it seems as though Richard enjoys his independence and the distance he's put between himself and his parents. However, he will not be able to hide his background entirely, no matter how far away he moves from California.



Academia is a completely foreign world to Richard. He is shocked by Georges's frank way of speaking and by the strange habits of Hampden's professors. Julian is introduced as a mysterious figure; his background isn't expanded upon, and he doesn't even let Richard fully see him the first time they meet. In addition, the fact that he only has five students is bizarre, even for a small liberal arts university.



Julian and his students retain a level of mystique for Richard during his first week at Hampden. The Greek students act like a clique, which Richard desperately wants to be a part of—something that underscores Richard's yearning to find a sense of belonging and camaraderie.



During his second week, Richard overhears a conversation between Bunny, Charles, and Camilla while in the library. They are having an esoteric argument about translating Greek, and Richard takes an interest. When he hears that the three Greek students cannot come to a firm conclusion, he offers his own suggestion. Bunny, Charles, and Camilla are surprised, but find his answer satisfactory. After, there is an awkward round of introductions, and then Henry shows up. Henry is more standoffish than the other Greek students, but he does introduce himself to Richard. When Bunny tells Henry about Richard's solution to their problem, Henry is intrigued, though he doesn't fully approve of Richard's suggestion. Before long, the Greek students leave, but before they go, Bunny suggests that Richard try talking to Julian again. He

After his conversation with the Greek students, Richard heads to Dr. Roland's office. Dr. Roland is a psychology teacher whom Richard works for as part of his work-study. Richard asks Dr. Roland if he could be paid early for his work. Dr. Roland is skeptical, but Richard lies and says he needs the money soon because he is having car trouble. Dr. Roland gives him advice on where to fix his car and then writes him a 200-dollar check. Richard is amazed at the amount and immediately heads into town where he buys himself expensive clothes.

The next day, Richard returns to Julian's office. This time, to Richard's surprise, Julian lets him in and begins asking him questions about himself. Julian is curious about Richard's background and why he wants to study Greek. The two of them cover a variety of other topics as well, many of which Richard pretends to know more about than he actually does. Richard also fabricates his background to make his life sound more exciting to Julian. In retrospect, Richard feels as though he handled himself quite well, despite being overwhelmed.

At the end of their conversation, Julian offers to take Richard on as his student, though he has two conditions. First, Richard must go to the registrar and make Julian his academic advisor. Second, Richard must drop all his current classes, except French, and sign up for Julian's classes instead. In fact, the vast majority of Richard's classes for the rest of his time at Hampden will be with Julian. Richard is excited but is unsure of Julian's plan. He briefly considers declining the offer, but ultimately accepts it. Richard then tells Georges the plan. Georges tells Richard it is a terrible idea, and that no student should only be taught by one professor. However, Richard does not listen to Georges's advice and becomes Julian's student.

Richard proves himself to be quite competent in Greek. Later in the novel, it becomes clear that Julian's students (except Bunny) are all exceptional, so the fact that Richard is able to help them is no small feat. Additionally, there is a degree of dramatic irony present in this section, since readers know from the novel's opening that Henry and the others will eventually kill Bunny—something that none of them know yet.



Unlike the other Greek students, Richard must work to earn his position at Hampden. However, in order to hide his lower-class background, Richard uses the funds he earns from his work study to purchase expensive clothing—a move that illustrates Richard's willingness to lie and be somewhat deceitful for his own benefit.



In this portion of the novel, Richard develops a “fake it until you make it” attitude. Wanting to impress Julian, he pretends to be someone he is not while also pretending to know more than he does. Embarrassed by his background, Richard seeks to create a new identity for himself—one that is more in line with the elites of Hampden.



Georges's warning to Richard is correct; Julian's teaching practices are highly irregular and carry with them a number of risks, many of which become apparent by the conclusion of the novel. However, Richard is too caught up in the mystique of Julian and his students—and is perhaps too talented at Greek—to decline Julian's offer. Although Richard succeeds in becoming a member of this elite group, he also isolates himself from the rest of the college in the process.



Richard heads to his first class with Julian, which is held in Julian's office. On the way, he spots Francis and tries to avoid him. However, Francis waits for him and asks him if he is the new student. Richard says he is, and Francis asks, "Cubitum eamus?" Richard doesn't know what he is asking so the conversation ends and the two of them move into Julian's office. When they enter, they find Bunny teasing Henry, who has just purchased a Montblanc pen. Bunny asks Richard what kind of pens he uses, to which Richard responds, "Ballpoints."

Henry questions Richard about his knowledge of Greek literature. Though Richard has read some of the works Henry mentions, he's unfamiliar with others. Trying to impress Henry, Richard lies and says that he's read Plotinus, though he thinks Henry sees through the lie. Bunny chastises Henry for treating Richard so harshly and, to Richard's delight, Charles comes over and kindly introduces himself. While introductions are being made, Julian enters the room and says, "I hope we're all ready to leave the phenomenal world, and enter into the sublime?"

Richard is fascinated by Julian's lectures. Julian begins by talking about the Furies who drove people mad by "turn[ing] up the volume of the inner monologue" and making people "so much themselves that they couldn't stand it." Because of the danger posed by one's own mind, the Greeks needed ways to lose themselves, such as fighting in battle. Julian jokes that his students could easily take over Hampden because of the military knowledge they've gained from their readings. The students riff back and forth on how they would capture Hampden before Julian refocuses the class to center around questions of violence. He reminds his students that though the moments of violence in Greek literature are brutal, they are also the most beautiful. To make his point, he asks Camilla to recite the speech Klytemnestra gives after killing Agamemnon, which she then does.

As Camilla recites the speech, light streams in from the window and onto her face, causing Richard to take note of her beauty. Julian asks his pupils why the passage is so beautiful, and they eventually conclude that "beauty is terror." They come to this conclusion via Aristotle, who claims that objects that are disturbing or grotesque in real life often become beautiful in art. After the discussion on beauty and violence, Julian says that people have only one desire and asks what it is. Bunny gives the answer he is looking for, which is: "to live forever."

Richard is intimidated by Francis, which is why he tries to avoid him, albeit to no avail. The question Francis asks Richard roughly translates to "Will you go to bed with me?" in Latin. This opens up a question about Francis's sexuality that will become more prominent as the novel progresses. In addition, the conversation about the pens once again highlights the class difference between Richard and his fellow Greek students. Montblanc pens are rare and absurdly expensive, whereas Richard's ballpoints are standard and cheap.



Again, Richard tries to act as though he knows more than he does, though he is wary of being caught by Henry. Although Henry appears unimpressed by Richard, his judgments are largely unfair, as Bunny points out. In fact, Richard has read a lot of Greek literature, and the fact that he hasn't read Plotinus certainly doesn't undermine his otherwise admirable knowledge.



Julian's lectures in this first part of the novel are full of foreshadowing, while also presenting several of The Secret's History's primary thematic concerns. Later in the novel, particularly after Bunny's death, the Greek students find themselves unable to escape their own inner monologues. In addition, the speech Julian asks Camilla to recite, which is from Aeschylus' [Agamemnon](#), foreshadows the plot of The Secret History. Like [Agamemnon](#), The Secret History's plot is structured around a violent act that leads to more violent acts.



Richard's attraction to Camilla is a key feature of their relationship, although he is too socially awkward to act on it for much of the story. Julian's lesson here—that "beauty is terror"—is a key insight for the novel moving forward, although it's arguable that it is a slight misinterpretation of Aristotle's ideas. What Aristotle observes about the realm of art, Julian and his students bring into real life. Additionally, this passage contains a bit of dark irony. Tartt chooses to let Bunny say "to live forever," even though the reader already knows that Bunny will die soon.



The class takes a quick break to serve tea, and then transitions back to the question of madness, particularly Dionysian madness. Julian talks about the mysterious nature of Dionysian madness, which is difficult to intellectualize because it involves the individual concerned to revert to a pre-civilized state of being. Julian believes it is important for people, especially intelligent people, to confront their desire for Dionysian madness, even in the present day. He believes that highly intelligent people do the most to repress their pre-civilized selves, which, if not confronted, can result in violence. Richard is impressed and disturbed by Julian's lecture and can only imagine what other people would think if they knew what was going on in Julian's classroom.

After class, Richard's head is still spinning from what he's experienced. Heading to the post office to send a postcard to his mother, he spots Bunny placing something in his mailbox. As it turns out, Bunny has written him a nearly illegible letter asking him to go to dinner. On his way out of the post office, Richard runs into Dr. Roland, who asks him about his car. Richard makes up a lie and then Dr. Roland starts to pontificate about cars. Richard is bored by Dr. Roland and hardly listens to what he says. Soon after, Dr. Blind enters the post office—a man who is somehow even more boring than Dr. Roland—and the two professors strike up a conversation with one another, allowing Richard to slip out unnoticed. Richard is unsure how either of the two men managed to become college professors.

CHAPTER 2

Richard gets ready for his lunch with Bunny but is concerned that his best clothes will make him too hot in the warm weather. When he enters the shared bathroom, he spots Judy Poovey, a fellow Californian. Judy tells Richard a story about a time when she was at a party and Camilla bumped into her. This incident led to a drunken fight in which Henry broke the collarbone and ribs of a tough kid name Spike Romney. Because of the fight, Judy doesn't like Henry or Camilla. However, she is fond of Bunny and thinks he's funny. After she finishes her story, Judy offers Richard a different jacket, which she stole from the Costume shop. Judy is a costume design major, so to her the jacket is no big deal, but Richard finds it surprisingly nice.

Dionysus is the Greek god of festivity, fertility, and ritual madness. In ancient Greece, rituals known now as the Dionysian Mysteries were performed. As Julian says, their purpose is to remove social constraint from those taking part in the ritual. However, Julian's claim about "highly intelligent people" is one he comes up with on his own. Richard is right to be equally fascinated and concerned by Julian's lecture because it is an odd mix of facts and history with Julian's unscrupulous opinions mixed in.



Bunny's letter is odd for two reasons. First, it reveals that Bunny has somehow made it into Julian's highly selective Greek classroom without being able to communicate clearly in English. Second, it seems to be an overly formal gesture. Nonetheless, it is a seemingly kind offer that will allow Richard to get to know one of his new colleagues better. Also, Dr. Roland's reappearance creates a strong juxtaposition with Julian's lecture. Regardless of their veracity, Julian's lectures are rhetorically sophisticated, and his charisma allows him to shine as a professor. Meanwhile, Dr. Roland and Dr. Blind couldn't be less interesting.



Judy's story about Henry develops his character in an unexpected manner. Previously, Henry has come off as quiet and studious, but here he is explosive and violent. Throughout his first semester at Hampden, Richard hears a variety of stories about his fellow Greek students, which lead him to believe that they are hiding something from him. This is only the first example of many. Additionally, Judy's attitude toward the Greek students demonstrates how detached they are from the rest of the student body.



When Bunny sees Richard, he immediately complements his jacket but tells him it's not appropriate for the time of year. Nonetheless, they make their way to the restaurant where Bunny has put in a reservation. Bunny knows the restaurant well and even claims to be friends with the Maitre d', though he's not in today. On the way to their table, Bunny makes Richard uncomfortable by loudly whispering, "Queers love to work in restaurants." The waiter, who hears Bunny, angrily shows Richard and Bunny to their seats, though Bunny doesn't seem to realize—or care—that he has caused offense.

Bunny asks Richard how often he goes to The Polo, the nicest restaurant in town. Richard responds, "Not much," despite the fact that he's never heard of it. Bunny tells Richard that his father took him to The Polo for his first drink. Bunny also tells him a story about going to a place called the Oak Bar where he ran up the tab and then left without paying. Later, Bunny returned to the Oak Bar with his father and his old bill got added on to the new one. However, his father didn't notice. After telling this story, Bunny sees the waiter on his way to their table and says, "Look, here comes Twinkletoes."

Bunny orders a gaudy drink and tells Richard that he first drank one while in Jamaica. Richard changes the subject and asks Bunny his thoughts on Henry. Bunny likes Henry, but says that he is hard to live with, primarily because he doesn't like having fun. Instead, Henry spends his time studying; he knows at least seven languages and can read hieroglyphics. Bunny shocks Richard by telling him that Henry is from Missouri and that his father is probably some sort of construction tycoon. Bunny's never met Henry's father—Henry is quite secret about his home life—but he did see Henry's mother once. She was attractive and clearly rich, though Bunny says the family is "new money."

Bunny shifts the conversation back to Richard by asking him what his father does. Richard responds with, "Oil," which is technically true, but deliberately misleading. Wanting to change the subject, Richard asks how Henry came by his intelligence. Bunny tells Richard that Henry was in a bad accident when he was young that took him out of school for years. In that time, Henry read voraciously and never stopped. After this conversation, their waiter returns. When he leaves, Bunny once again uses a homophobic slur and says that gay people should be rounded up and burned at the stake. At this point, Richard realizes the extent of Bunny's homophobia. He asks what Bunny thinks about Francis, suggesting he might be gay. Bunny dismisses the notion and moves the conversation back to Richard by asking if he has a girlfriend. This time, Richard tells the full truth and says no.

Despite Richard's efforts and Judy's help, Bunny still notices that Richard doesn't fit in. In addition, this passage is a turning point for Bunny's character, who was previously wholly likeable. Now, his prejudices are starting to show, and they will only become more prominent as the novel proceeds. Also, Bunny's lack of awareness for how loudly he speaks is a key character trait and one that will be important later on.



Once again, Richard attempts to keep up appearances. Largely, he succeeds because Bunny is always happy to brag about himself. The story Bunny tells makes it clear that he faces few consequences for his bad behavior and provides insight into Mr. Corcoran's poor parenting.



All of Richard's friends regularly travel abroad—a luxury he did not have growing up. Although all the Greek students seem to come from wealth of some kind, it is clear that Henry's family is by far the wealthiest, even though little is known about them. Interestingly, like Richard, Henry is secret about his background, perhaps because he is embarrassed by it for different reasons.



Many characters in The Secret History come from backgrounds which are never entirely fleshed out. In particular, Henry and Julian maintain an air of mystery throughout the novel, partially because so little is known about them before their arrival at Hampden. However, while the mystery of Henry deepens, Bunny continues to expose more of his personality, making him significantly less likable. Although it is not yet clear if Francis is gay, the possibility that he could be sets up trouble for his relationship with Bunny in the future.



Bunny tells Richard that he has a girlfriend who is an elementary-education major and is “a real girl.” He says that he prefers his girlfriend to someone like Camilla, who “lacks a mother’s firm hand.” Abruptly, Bunny stops talking, as though he is disturbed by something. However, he returns to normal when he sees their food is coming.

Bunny and Richard spend their entire afternoon in the restaurant, eating expensive food and drinking expensive drinks. By the end of the day, both of them are quite drunk. Realizing they have overstayed their welcome, Richard suggests they leave. Bunny agrees and then asks Richard to pay the check, claiming he left his wallet at home. Richard is alarmed because Bunny had previously agreed to pay for everything, and he is in no position to be able to do so himself. Richard tells Bunny he cannot pay so Bunny leaves and calls Henry. He tells Richard it is no big deal, and that Henry will be there soon. Indeed, Henry shows up and pays the check.

Henry gives Richard and Bunny a ride home from the restaurant. During the ride, Bunny repeatedly tries to make casual conversation, but Henry refuses to humor him. Richard worries that Henry is mad at him. After Henry drops Bunny off, he apologizes to Richard on Bunny’s behalf. Apparently, Bunny often pulls a similar stunt where he asks someone out to a nice meal and then pretends to forget his wallet. At first, Richard refuses to believe it was anything but an honest mistake, but then Henry reminds him that Bunny paid for their cab earlier in the day.

The next day, Charles and Camilla invite Richard to take a walk with them. He agrees and they start to walk and talk about his lunch with Bunny. They tell him the incident was no big deal and that Henry isn’t angry with him. Richard questions Bunny and Henry’s friendship, but Charles and Camilla assure him that the two are best friends, despite their contrasting demeanors. During the walk, Camilla points out an old cemetery, which is all that remains of a town from the 1700s. She tells Richard that it is beautiful, and he should visit it sometime, particularly in the snow. They also come across three ravens. Richard is shocked—he’s never seen such birds before—and Charles jokingly suggests that it might be an omen.

The Secret History is set during the 1980s, when conservative views toward gender roles were widespread in the United States. Bunny regularly makes a point of expressing these views, much to the chagrin of his fellow Greek students, who are more open-minded and progressive.



This meal is likely the most expensive meal Richard's ever eaten. As such, Richard is shocked that Bunny treats their predicament so lightly and is equally surprised that Henry agrees to pay for their meal.



Again, the initially likeable Bunny starts to seem less pleasant. Additionally, Bunny's inability to pay for his meal calls into question his level of wealth. Meanwhile, Henry proves himself to be kinder and more charitable than Richard previously expected. Although they are still a long way from murder, the dynamic between these three central characters is beginning to align with what was revealed at the start of the novel.



Whether or not Henry and Bunny are actually best friends is an open question throughout the novel. Though they often spend time together and generally get along, not much is revealed about their relationship prior to Richard's arrival at Hampden. Like many other seemingly significant details in this novel, their relationship is shrouded in mystery. Also, several times throughout the novel, the Greek students will suggest that something, usually an animal, is ominous. In this case, the three ravens foreshadow the three prominent deaths that will occur throughout the novel.



Near the end of their walk, Charles and Camilla invite Richard over for dinner. At first, he declines, but he ultimately accepts after they assure him that it would be no trouble for him to join. After arriving at their house, Charles and Camilla ask Richard about the other Californians at Hampden. Richard tells them that he doesn't know many except Judy. Unsurprisingly, the dislike between Camilla and Judy is mutual, and Camilla seems annoyed when Richard jokingly brings it up.

Charles and Camilla tell Richard that Hampden is the "last place on earth for the worst people in the world." They are half-joking, but also believe there is some truth to that idea. They use Henry as an example. Apparently, Henry is a 10th-grade dropout who refused to take the SATs. No good college would've let Henry in if not for Hampden. During this conversation, Richard begins to feel ill. He's still hung over from his lunch with Bunny, and the whiskey he's just consumed starts to make him nauseous.

Before the conversation can continue, Bunny and Henry arrive. Richard excuses himself to the kitchen, where he gets himself a glass of water. Charles follows close behind to check on the lamb chops he's cooking. The smell of lamb only nauseates Richard further, and he feels a strong desire to get out of the house. Before long, Bunny and Henry also end up in the kitchen, Henry in search of some aspirin and Bunny in search of food.

When Henry notices that Richard doesn't look well, Richard tells him it's "just a headache." Meanwhile, Charles chastises Bunny for eating the lamb before he can serve it. Richard is quiet throughout dinner while his new friends engage in pedantic conversations. Richard leaves early and walks home, "straining to remember exact words, telling inflections, any subtle insults or kindnesses [he] might've missed." When he returns home, he lays down and watches as the wind ruffles through the pages of the *Parmenides*, a book he's been reading.

Richard wakes up late the following morning and has to rush to Julian's office to make it in time for class. Bunny lightly ribs Richard for his tardiness, but before he can get far, Julian arrives. Class begins and it's a particularly rough day for Richard because he's behind. Richard enjoys the days where class is spent talking about philosophy but finds the classes that focus on grammar and prose composition "brutal, bludgeoning labor." Unfortunately, the latter category is what the majority of the class consists of. As Richard works throughout the week, he thinks that he's alienated himself from the other Greek students and feels that they are cold to him.

Again, the divide between the Greek students and everyone else is highlighted. Only Richard and Bunny connect with people who aren't other Greek students throughout the novel.



As Charles and Camilla point out, Hampden is an odd school filled with eccentric students and professors. On the one hand, it is willing to accept Bunny, who can barely write in English—and on the other hand, it brings in people like Henry, who, despite not taking his SATs, is extremely intelligent. Similarly, Hampden houses professors ranging from Julian, who, while sometimes pretentious, is an effective instructor, to Dr. Blind, who is utterly incomprehensible.



The last thing Richard wants to do is embarrass himself in front of the other Greek students, though he also worries that he will further alienate himself if he leaves. Although he attempts to find solace in the kitchen, the Greek students find him there, including Henry whose need for aspirin foreshadows his more significant headaches later in the story.



Richard worries that he isn't sophisticated enough to fit in with his new friends. However, the book he is reading, the *Parmenides*, is one of the most complicated and enigmatic works in all of Greek literature. As such, Richard's worries are unnecessary, especially since the group is fine putting up with Bunny's rather rude behavior.



Although Julian likes to think of his class as entering into the sublime, it does also contain a lot of practical linguistic work, some of which will aid the Greek students later in the novel. However, between this work and the attitudes of the Greek students, this moment is clearly a regression for Richard, who thought he'd found a place where he belonged.



Richard starts to think that he's made a mistake by joining Julian's classes. He wonders whether his decision was made too hastily. Hoping a meeting with Julian will make him feel better, Richard heads to Julian's office. However, he stops just short of it because he hears the voices of Julian and Henry. Richard hears Henry say, "Should I do what is necessary?" In response, Julian takes Henry's hands and says, "You should only, ever, do what is necessary." Confused, Richard watches as Henry gives Julian a "quick little businesslike kiss on the cheek" and then walks away. Not wanting to be seen, Richard sneaks down the stairs and then runs away.

The following week is isolating and bizarre for Richard. The weather gradually gets colder, and he feels completely detached from those around him. He spends his evenings working on Greek and reading his favorite book, [The Great Gatsby](#). Unfortunately, all Richard can think about when he reads the novel are the similarities between himself and Gatsby. That weekend, Richard attends a party. He knows the other Greek students don't like parties and will not be in attendance.

At the party, Richard talks to a girl he finds attractive but annoying. When she realizes Richard is a Greek student, she warns him to be careful because the other Greek students "worship the fucking Devil." Richard doesn't take her warning seriously, but she insists that she's heard a lot of concerning rumors about the Greek students from another student named Seth Gartrell. Gartrell is an artist Richard thinks is a pretentious fake. As such, he does not care for Seth and says so. The girl he's talking to takes offense because Seth is her friend, and she thinks he's a "genius." Richard starts to argue with the girl but doesn't get far before Camilla shows up and pulls him away. She tells Richard that she and Francis are going to Francis's place in the countryside and extends him an invitation. Richard accepts and they leave immediately.

Francis, Camilla, and Richard ride in a Mustang convertible until they reach the country house. The house is immense—it is more like a castle than a house—and Richard is in awe when he sees it. Francis tells him that it belongs to his aunt, and it is empty most of the year. Francis and Camilla begin to give Richard a tour, as the sound of a piano filters in from a back room. When they enter the library, Richard spots Charles at the piano. As it turns out, all the Greek students have come to stay for the weekend.

This moment between Henry and Julian adds to the air of mystery surrounding both of their characters. Although the novel never confirms what this conversation is about, it likely relates to something that Henry tells Richard later in the novel regarding what the Greek students have been doing all semester. Regardless, it is clear that Henry has a privileged relationship with Julian; he is the clear favorite in an already elite group of people.



Richard is correct in comparing himself to Gatsby. Like Richard, Gatsby obscures his lower-class background and pretends to be something that he is not. Also, for much of the novel, Gatsby isolates himself from other people, similar to Richard. Richard attends the party because he worries that his relationship with the other Greek students is unsalvageable, but he still wants to find people to connect with.



As it turns out, Richard does not do well when trying to connect with non-Greek students. However, he does learn a new rumor about the Greek students, and although he quickly dismisses it, it adds yet another layer to the mystery surrounding them. Additionally, it is strange that Camilla knows where to find Richard. The Greek students often manage to show up in strange and unexpected places throughout Richard's first semester. Once again, even though Richard thinks the Greek students don't like him, they are the ones extending an invite. Meanwhile, Richard has yet to do anything to improve his relationship with them.



Here, Francis shows off the massive amount of money he has access to. The convertible and the house are wildly extravagant, although these things have evidently come to seem normal to the Greek students.



Richard admits that his memories of the past are “distant and blurry” before his arrival at the country house. However, from this point forward, he feels that his memories, “for the first time” will appear “in shapes very like their bright old selves.” He thinks of this moment as the turning point in his relationship with the other Greek students. The house is beloved by both Richard and the Greek students; each room holds a new surprise, and it is revealed to Richard piece by piece.

On Saturday, Henry and Camilla take Richard out in a rowboat on the nearby lake. As Henry rows, he talks about a passage from T. S. Eliot’s *The Wasteland*. Although Richard now knows the corresponding lines from the poem and recites them, at the time he had no idea what Henry was talking about. When Richard, Henry, and Camilla return from their boat ride, they find the others playing Go Fish because it’s the only card game that Bunny knows how to play.

The next morning, Richard wakes up early and goes outside where he finds Henry. Henry is working on a Latin translation of Milton’s *Paradise Lost*; a project he’s doing for fun, rather than for school. After a brief conversation about Milton, Henry abruptly says to Richard, “You’re not very happy where you come from, are you?” Richard is taken aback, though Henry promises not to tell the others the truth about his background. This moment gives Richard a newfound respect for Henry, and he begins to realize why the other Greek students like him so much.

Richard believes that his Fall semester at Hampden made him who he is as a person. Though the Greek students are strange, they help to develop his personality. Each of the other students has their own quirks. Henry, though highly intelligent, is completely unaware of contemporary events. Richard recounts an anecdote where Henry is shocked to learn that men have walked on the moon. Meanwhile, Bunny has a girlfriend named Marion, whom he never brings around the Greek students because they don’t get along. Richard still remembers the times Bunny would come to his room to hide from Marion, only for Marion to come and find him anyway. Though Richard likes all of the Greek students, he prefers the twins and spends much of his time with them.

Here, Richard admits that everything leading up to this passage should be called into question. He openly states that he is not a reliable narrator and there is also an open question as to whether he should be trusted moving forward. Richard has already proven himself to be overly romantic and melodramatic, and the upcoming passages relating to the country house also fit that pattern.



T. S. Eliot is an odd source for Henry to quote, given that he almost exclusively reads ancient texts. Eliot is a 20th-century poet who is referenced several times in the novel as a potential friend of Julian. Perhaps Henry knows more about this relationship than he lets on and has taken an interest in Eliot because of his proximity to Julian. Meanwhile, in sharp juxtaposition to Henry’s ability to recite poetry on a whim, Bunny struggles to play any card game other than Go Fish.



John Milton is a 17th-century English poet whose masterpiece—[Paradise Lost](#)—is one of the crowning works of English literature. [Paradise Lost](#) is an epic poem that retells the biblical fall of man and the Garden of Eden story from the perspective of Satan. Although [Paradise Lost](#) is not a Satanic text, it adds to the previous accusation that the Greek students are devil worshippers. Additionally, Henry proves himself to be sharper than the other Greek students by immediately sniffing out the truth about Richard’s background. Little does Richard know, though, that none of the other Greek students are satisfied with their backgrounds either (something he will learn later in the novel). Beyond studying Greek, this dissatisfaction is what unites them.



Although Richard’s childhood surely had a significant impact on the person he became, Richard prefers to think of Hampden as the place where he developed his sense of self. Meanwhile, Bunny proves himself to be the only Greek student other than Richard to engage with someone outside of his major. Unlike the other Greek students, Bunny has a social life and even a girlfriend, although little is actually seen of his relationship with Marion.



Richard's favorite memories of his first semester are of the time he spends in the countryside. While there, the Greek students drink, read, and relax. Among other activities, they shoot guns, play croquet, and cook elaborate dinners. On occasion, Julian comes for dinner, and everyone is on their best behavior. Richard remembers finding the dinners "troublesome" at the time but looks back on them fondly. At each dinner, Julian gives the same toast: "Live forever."

Richard finds himself wondering how he spent so much time with the Greek students, "yet knew so little of what was happening at the end of that term." He says that there are "plenty of things they didn't let me in on and would not for some time." In retrospect, he realizes that there were many clues he should have picked up on. In particular, he cites the others getting angry when Bunny randomly bursts into a rendition of "The Farmer in the Dell." Also, they would often show up with injuries and had "a strange preoccupation with the weather." In addition, Richard overhears a strange conversation between the twins about bed sheets and, in a separate incident, finds a boiling pot of revolting "blackish water" on the stove, which Francis claims is for his bath.

One day, late into the Fall semester, Richard goes outside and finds Francis and Bunny drinking prairie oysters to cure their hangovers. After a brief conversation about the best cure for a hangover, Francis suggests they walk to the lake, and everyone comes except Bunny. At the lake, Richard and Camilla wade in the water together and Richard thinks about how beautiful she is. Suddenly, Camilla steps on something sharp and blood begins to appear in the water around them. She lifts her foot to find that a shard of green glass has cut an artery.

While everyone else appears stunned, Henry comes to Camilla's rescue and takes charge. He orders Francis to get the first aid kit and tells Richard to make a tourniquet while he holds Camilla in his arms. Though Richard is shocked, he is also struck by the beauty of the moment and thinks that it would make for a great painting. Charles runs down to help Camilla and eventually removes the shard of glass from her foot. Afterwards, Francis and Bunny take Camilla to the emergency room; Francis goes out of obligation and concern, while Bunny goes because he's mad that he's missed all of the excitement.

Richard's memories of his time at Francis's country house are idyllic—however, they are undercut by Julian's toast. The phrase "live forever" carries with it a brutal irony because the reader already knows that Bunny's death is imminent.



This portion of the novel is full of foreshadowing. Clearly, the Greek students are up to something, although Richard withholds that information. As such, the reader is in a similar position to the one Richard was in at the time; although something suspicious is obviously occurring, its exact nature is unclear. All of the examples of strange behavior that Richard cites in this passage will be explained by Henry later on in the novel.



Although Richard is in love with Camilla, he does not outwardly make his feelings known. In all of his relationships with the Greek students, Richard is passive. He enjoys their company but does not make efforts to develop those relationships in meaningful ways.



Here, Henry establishes himself as the leader of the group. Everyone else looks to him for guidance, which he is able to confidently provide. Additionally, Richard sees in this moment an example of Julian's theory concerning beauty and terror. Though there is blood and chaos, Richard believes the moment would make a great painting. Meanwhile, while everyone else shows great concern for Camilla, Bunny treats the incident flippantly, once again showing that he is not the most supportive friend.



Later in the day, Charles and Richard talk about their desire to stay in the countryside home forever. Charles tells Richard that it might be possible; Francis will likely inherit the home and if he doesn't, then Henry could buy it. Charles says that such a set-up would be perfect for Henry, who wants to spend his life writing books rather than teaching. Richard loves the idea but knows it sounds too good to be true. Meanwhile, Bunny and Henry are out in the yard playing croquet and laughing. While remembering this moment, Richard says, "That laughter haunts me still."

This day still haunts Richard because he knows how sharply it contrasts with the way the remainder of his time at Hampden plays out. In particular, the previously warm and friendly relationship between Henry and Bunny will turn into something nearly unrecognizable in the coming months.



CHAPTER 3

Richard dreads the end of his first semester at Hampden. As the weather starts to get colder, he wonders what he will do over winter break. He doesn't want to return to Plano, where his parents have made friends with the MacNatts, "a gabby, childless couple." Meanwhile, Henry and Bunny are planning a trip to Italy, and Francis and the twins intend to travel within the U.S. to see their respective families. Francis and the twins both invite Richard to stay with them, but Richard is concerned about money and doesn't want to tell his friends the truth about his finances. Richard knows he needs to make money over break if he wants to continue living like he has over the past semester. Richard's plan is to continue working for Dr. Roland and live in a warehouse owned by an old hippie for free.

Here, the person Richard wants to be and the person he is come into conflict with each other. Though Richard would love to spend his holiday like his classmates, he knows that isn't a possibility.



The last week of the semester is busy for everyone except Richard. In particular, Bunny is occupied by a paper on John Donne, which Richard describes as "the worst of all the bad papers he ever wrote." Ironically, a reworked version of this paper ended up in *People* magazine after Bunny's death. The paper is about the relationship between John Donne and Isaak Walton, whom Bunny argues are connected by "Metahemeralism." Everyone tells Bunny that the paper is not a good idea—in fact, they are unsure whether Metahemeralism is even a word—but he writes it anyway. The final product is triple-spaced and ends with the sentence, "And as we leave Donne and Walton on the shores of Metahemeralism, we wave a fond farewell to those famous chums of yore." The other Greek students are unsure of whether Bunny will pass.

How Bunny ended up in Julian's select group of students is a mystery that the novel never answers directly. Clearly, he is a terrible scholar, and his paper is completely absurd and yet somehow also pretentious. Meanwhile, everyone else in the group is a competent—if not exceptional—Greek scholar. This suggests that Julian's criteria for selecting students is not simply based on their competence.



In the following days, everyone leaves campus except Richard. The twins are the last to leave, and Richard sees them off on a cold, snowy morning. Camilla gives Richard a big hug before departing and Richard recalls, "I had never seen anyone so maddeningly beautiful as she was at that moment." After the twins leave, Richard is left alone on the cold, dark campus. He is "as depressed as [he's] ever been" as he makes his way back to his dorm room and falls into bed.

Once again, Richard is too shy to express his love to Camilla, even though he would obviously like to. After the twins leave, Richard is forced to live with his decision to stay on a campus that has changed from an environment of excitement and companionship to one of depression and solitude.



Richard packs up all of his things—which don't amount to much—and begins a trek through the snow to get to his new living quarters. It is a long walk, especially with two suitcases in the snow, and Richard is alarmed by the location. The warehouse is near Prospect Street in East Hampden, a place Richard has never been before. Prospect Street is located in a run-down section of Hampden, which is known as an epicenter for violent crime. When Richard arrives at his new accommodations, things only get worse. There is trash all over the floor of his room and the roof has a large hole in it where the cold and the snow can get in.

Only in retrospect does Richard recognize how dangerous these living arrangements were. It would've been fairly easy for him to freeze to death. Previous students who lived in the room came equipped with blankets and heaters to survive the winter. However, Richard brought almost nothing to keep himself warm and doesn't have the wherewithal to buy anything. Furthermore, the hole in the roof is apparently a new addition to the space, which previous students didn't have to deal with.

To combat his terrible living conditions, Richard spends as much time elsewhere as possible. He works long hours for Dr. Roland, who eventually gives him a raise because he is impressed with his work ethic. Dr. Roland is unaware of Richard's living situation and doesn't realize that his efforts will revert to the way they were before as soon as break is over. However, eventually, Richard is forced to return to the warehouse where he experiences the worst cold weather of his life. Leo, the old hippie, is regularly angry with Richard because he doesn't spend any time carving boards—which Richard is supposed to do as payment for living in the warehouse—but Richard doesn't feel bad because the accommodations are terrible. One day, Richard tries to fix the hole in the roof, but in doing so he falls, cuts himself, and has to get a tetanus shot.

Throughout the winter, Richard receives mail from his friends. Charles and Camilla send him cookies from their grandmother and Bunny sends a postcard from Rome. Charles and Camilla write letters, some of which inquire about Richard's housing situation, but he responds vaguely so as not to give them an idea of what is really going on. Richard writes his letters whenever he gets a chance, which is often while he is in the Commons where he spends his evenings until he is told to leave.

Clearly, Richard did not do enough to prepare for winter, perhaps because he was too caught up in the excitement of spending time with his fellow Greek students. However, now, he is forced to reckon with the reality of his financial situation. After spending months going to Francis's palatial country house, Richard must now live in a place that isn't even protected from the elements. In a matter of days, Richard moves from the luxuries of upper-class life to the miseries of abject poverty.



Like Henry, there are times when Richard's lack of knowledge about the modern world is completely confounding. Intelligent though he may be, Richard never thinks to seek out the bare necessities (like a heater) to live in such an environment. Nor does he talk to the administrator at Hampden who recommended the warehouse and who surely could have helped him. However, these terrible living conditions are necessary for Richard's character development because they increase his desperation to escape his working-class background. The excruciating winter he spends in the warehouse help explain some of his more questionable actions later on in the story.



Unlike Julian, who takes an interest in his student's lives outside of the classroom, Dr. Roland is completely oblivious of Richard's plight. Meanwhile, book smart though Richard may be, he is completely inept when it comes to practical survival. His sole attempt at making his living conditions viable result in an injury.



The Greek students are Richard's sole comfort in what is otherwise a brutal winter break. Richard welcomes their kind words and reciprocates with letters of his own, although he is still not comfortable admitting the truth of his situation.



Richard doesn't interact within anyone over the course of winter break—mostly by choice—and this only makes him more depressed. Every day, on his way back and forth from work, he stops on a bridge and looks down at the river. He thinks about what it would be like to jump off the bridge and kill himself. In his dreams, he pictures himself as a corpse, frozen to death. Although Dr. Roland is supposed to be a psychologist, he never seems to notice that something is wrong with Richard. However, he does repeatedly mention that he's seen Richard's friend in town—“Great big boy. Wears glasses”—though Richard thinks that he must be mistaken. On one occasion, Richard decides to call his parents, hoping they will cheer him up, but when his dad answers the phone with a “beery and irritated” voice, Richard changes his mind and hangs up.

Eventually, the temperature drops so low that Richard is forced to stay in a cheap motel. He is the only resident other than the owner. One night, while sleeping in the motel, he wakes up from a nightmare to find his door handle slowly turning. He shouts, “Who's there?” and it stops. After this incident, Richard decides that he would rather risk death from sleeping in the cold than spend another night in the motel.

February arrives and the cold begins to make Richard delirious. While working, he thinks he sees Henry outside, but he decides that it must be his imagination. Shortly afterward, Dr. Roland leaves for a long weekend, which means Richard will have to spend more time in the warehouse. Richard makes his way home but worries he might freeze to death. Begrudgingly, he tries to call a cab to take him back to the cheap motel. However, while doing so, he drops a quarter, tries to pick it up, but then falls and hits his head. Slowly, Richard manages to get up, though his head is bleeding. Now without money and barely conscious, Richard makes his way back to the warehouse.

Richard enters the warehouse and is shocked to find Henry. Henry looks jovial until he registers Richard's condition. Barely conscious, Richard starts to fall, but Henry catches him before he can hit the ground. Then, Henry takes Richard to the hospital where he gets stitches. When Richard comes to, Henry tells Richard that he came back early from Italy. Henry spent several days trying to find Richard in Hampden but had trouble because Richard hadn't told anyone where he's been living. Henry offers to call Richard's parents, but Richard tells him not to bother. Instead, he asks Henry to tell him about Rome, which Henry does.

Richard's dreams—which are typically nightmares—are often direct reflections of his fear and guilt. Here, Richard worries that he will die, and later he will be wracked with guilt over Bunny's death. His dreams directly track these emotions, and Richard regularly shares their contents. Additionally, Dr. Roland continues to demonstrate his complete incompetence; a student he sees everyday has rapidly deteriorated over the course of the winter, yet he does not notice. However, Dr. Roland does end up being correct about seeing Richard's friend, even if he doesn't know his name.



Richard's circumstances continue to grow more dire, and, in turn, he becomes more desperate. While his friends are off in Italy or spending time with family, his life is in genuine danger.



This is another point in the narrative where Richard's narration appears unreliable. He admits that he is delirious, although his sighting of Henry is not as far-fetched as it may seem. Richard's desperation is emphasized by the fact that he wants to go back to the cheap motel, a deathtrap of a living situation that he'd previously sworn off. However, even that plan fails, and now Richard does truly seem as though he is on the precipice of death.



Once again, Henry plays the role of savior for another member of the group. As it turns out, Dr. Roland was correct, one of Richard's friends was in town; Richard just didn't know it. Additionally, Richard was likely correct that he saw Henry earlier in the day. Meanwhile, Richard continues to push his parents as far away as he can by not letting them know that he's in the hospital.



Richard spends four nights in the hospital with Henry by his side. Henry brings him books and magazines to read, while Henry does some reading himself. Richard is impressed that Henry can read for hours on end without taking a break. One night, Richard's nurse is late giving him his medicine, so Henry gives her an "eloquent reprimand." Afterwards, the nurse treats Richard much better. Additionally, the ER doctor tells Richard that Henry saved his life, and although in that moment Richard thinks this is an overstatement, he later comes to realize that it is likely true.

When Richard is discharged from the hospital, Henry takes him to his apartment, which is large but bare. In the apartment, Richard spots a picture of Julian whispering to Vivian Leigh. Interested, Richard questions Henry about Julian's past. Henry tells him that he's seen pictures of Julian with the Sitwells, T. S. Eliot, and someone who may or may not be Marilyn Monroe. After, Henry offers Richard his room and says that he'd prefer to sleep on a bed in one of the back rooms. Richard protests, but Henry insists.

The next few days are uneventful. Richard finds Henry easy to live with because he spends much of his time working. They have few interactions with one another except at mealtimes. During one dinner, Richard asks Henry if Bunny is still in Rome. Henry says that he thinks so. He also tells Richard that Bunny's family is not wealthy. Though they like to affect the appearance of wealth, Henry thinks that they likely borrowed beyond their means and are now in considerable debt. Henry believes that Bunny's father made a mistake by sending him to college because "he certainly has no gift for scholarship."

The Saturday before college resumes, Richard hears a loud banging on the door. He answers it and finds Bunny who is surprised to see him. Bunny is looking for Henry who isn't around. He asks Richard why he's staying with Henry and Richard tells him about his accident. Richard invites Bunny inside and the two of them drink coffee together while discussing Rome. Before long, Henry returns, and Bunny starts questioning him about where he's been. Henry lies to Bunny and then asks Richard if he'll drive him to an eye appointment. Richard says yes, and the two of them start to leave. Before they can go, Bunny tells Henry he needs to talk to him and so Henry tells Bunny that he can come by in the evening. After, Richard drives Henry to the optometrist. Henry laughs when he sees where they are, saying, "Keep driving."

Henry watches over Richard like a father-figure and makes sure that he gets proper care. This section of the novel is a significant moment for Henry and Richard's relationship; it bonds the two of them together and, in retrospect, Richard realizes that he may have died if not for Henry. In addition, Richard now feels as though he owes Henry for saving him, which becomes significant as the plot progresses.



Perhaps unsurprisingly, Henry lives an ascetic lifestyle. It is notable, then, that the items that do populate his apartment relate to Julian. Henry's pictures and knowledge confirm many of the myths concerning Julian. He seems to know many famous and influential people. Vivian Leigh was one of the great actresses of the 20th century, T. S. Eliot was one of the great poets of the 20th century, and the Sitwells were an influential literary circle that played a part in defining the landscape of 20th-century literature. As such, despite Julian's love of the past, he is also very much a man of the present, even if he rarely lets that side of himself show.



Henry's attitude toward the Italy trip is evasive, for reasons that are soon to be revealed. However, he does reveal important information about Bunny's background, which explains some of his peculiar antics, such as pretending to forget his wallet. Like his parents, Bunny likes to pretend that he's rich, even if that's not the case. As such, Richard is not the only Greek student whose financial situation is tricky.



Clearly, something bad has happened between Bunny and Henry, though its exact nature has yet to be revealed. It's obvious that Henry does not want to be alone with Bunny, although he does not tell Richard why. As usual, Richard is a bit slow to pick up on the machinations of his fellow Greek students, so he believes Henry's lie about the eye appointment. However, Richard will not be able to live in his naivety for much longer.



That night, Richard wakes up to more loud banging on the front door. He gets up to see who it is and runs into Henry, who is carrying a kerosene lamp, in the hallway. Henry motions to Richard to be quiet, and neither of them answer the door. The knocking stops and then they go back to bed. The following day, there is more knocking on the door. However, the knocking is much less aggressive, so Richard and Henry assume that it isn't Bunny. They decide to open the door for their guest, who turns out to be Francis.

Francis enters and then goes into the back of the apartment to talk to Henry. Richard only catches fragments of what they are saying, but both sound unhappy. They are concerned about the "state" that someone is in and what that person might do, but Richard doesn't hear this person's name. After their conversation, Francis returns and tells Richard that he has to leave. Then, Henry asks Richard for a favor; he wants Richard to call Bunny and tell him to come over. He heavily implies that Richard should not be present when Bunny arrives. Richard happily agrees to do so. Henry gives a heartfelt thanks and then Richard leaves to take his things to school and call Bunny.

CHAPTER 4

Richard is concerned that school is about to start and he's only heard from Henry and Bunny. The day before classes resume, Richard visits Julian's office and Julian says that he hasn't seen anyone except Bunny. He also tells Richard that Henry was sick while in Italy, though he doesn't go into detail. Richard is annoyed that his friends haven't called or come to visit and so he tries to go to them. First, he goes to Bunny's room only to find that he's gone, and then he calls Francis. Francis answers the phone but uses a fake voice. This annoys Richard so he hangs up.

Restless, Richard stays up reading. After a few hours, he leaves his room to go to the Commons, where he finds Bunny drunk and watching TV. Richard asks Bunny where everyone is, but Bunny says he doesn't know. Richard also inquires about what happened between Bunny and Henry in Rome, to which Bunny cryptically responds, "He's not what you think he is." Richard doesn't know what to make of this. For a moment, he thinks it is possible that Henry made a sexual pass at Bunny, but he quickly dismisses the idea. Richard doesn't think that Henry is gay and, even if he was, he certainly wouldn't be interested in Bunny. Contemplating this makes Richard tired, so he excuses himself and goes to bed.

The loud bangs on the door presumably emanate from Bunny, who's returned to talk to Henry. However, Henry continues to avoid Bunny for reasons he has yet to disclose. A strange feature of this scene is that Henry uses a kerosene lamp rather than a flashlight or some other more practical light source. This detail emphasizes that Henry is a man of the past and also adds to the novel's gothic feel.



The person Francis and Henry are talking about is clearly Bunny, although the exact nature of the conversation still isn't clear. Once again, Henry is treated as the leader of the group; Francis comes to him in attempt to solve a tricky situation, and Henry gives orders to Richard who happily complies. It is unclear why Henry does not call Bunny himself, though perhaps it is because he is worried about what Bunny could be overheard saying on the phone.



Like the reader, Richard is drawn to his friends' strange behavior, even though he is also annoyed by it. By the end of the previous semester, Richard felt bonded to his classmates, especially Charles and Camilla, whom he hasn't even heard from since they've been back. Additionally, Julian once again demonstrates that he is aware of his student's lives outside of the classroom, especially Henry's.



Bunny's response is startling, particularly because he and Henry were previously best friends. Although Richard is right to quickly dismiss that Henry is gay, sexual attraction between the male Greek students does show up throughout the novel.



Richard wakes up the next day planning to do some Greek homework but then realizes he left his textbook at Henry's apartment. He tries to call Henry, but no one answers. As such, he makes his way to Henry's apartment, where he finds that no one is home. He unlocks the door and immediately locates his book. On his way out of the apartment, Richard spots a piece of paper with what looks like flight information and a telephone number. Curious, Richard calls the number and pretends to be Henry. In doing so, he learns that Henry has a flight to Argentina scheduled for the following day. More bewildered than ever, Richard leaves the apartment.

Classes begin the same day, Thursday, though Richard doesn't have class with Julian until the following Monday. Richard spends his day wondering what is going on with the Greek students and whether Bunny knows about it. The next day, Richard calls Francis's mother in Boston to try to figure out the truth. Francis's mother is alarmed when Richard insinuates that Francis is not in school, so Richard makes up an excuse so as not to worry her and then hangs up the phone.

Shortly after the phone call, Richard runs into Bunny, who asks him whether he's seen anyone else. Richard says he hasn't. Then, the two of them have a conversation about what happened in Italy, though Bunny doesn't provide any specific answers. When Richard asks him if the problem is money-related, Bunny responds, "That Henry . . . I love him, and you love him, but just between the two of us I think he's got a little bit of Jew blood." Bunny thinks that Henry worries about whether people like him for him or for his money. However, he does not go into further detail.

Richard spends the weekend thinking about his fellow Greek students while eagerly anticipating his first class with Julian, which he hopes will provide him with answers. When Monday arrives, Richard goes to class to find everyone there and acting normal. Everyone gives Richard and Julian elaborate excuses for why they haven't been in contact, although Richard doesn't believe them. After class, Richard returns to his room and continues to contemplate the situation. While lying in bed, he hears a knock on the door, which turns out to be Henry. Henry asks Richard if he will take a drive with him, and Richard accepts.

During this section of the novel, Richard plays detective and finds that his friends are not particularly good at hiding their secrets. Already, he's caught Francis pretending to be someone else on the phone and now he's quickly ascertained that his friends might be trying to leave the country. Such carelessness wouldn't normally be noteworthy, but this is the same group that the reader already knows will eventually commit murder. In the case of Henry, who always seems two steps ahead of everyone else, it is possible that what looks like carelessness is actually the result of meticulous planning. In other words, it is possible that Henry wanted Richard to find the flight logs.



As time stretches on, the tension for both Richard and the reader is agonizing. At this point, it is clear that something significant is going on, yet the reveal of what that thing is gets repeatedly delayed. Every time it seems like Tartt is close to revealing something, another obstacle appears, such as Richard not having class with Julian until the following week.



Although Bunny knows more about the situation than he lets on, he doesn't know where the others are either. Bunny's comment about Henry—on top of being anti-Semitic—does not ring true to what is known about Henry so far or what will appear in the rest of the book. Henry doesn't seem to worry about whether people like him for his money, though he does get annoyed by someone like Bunny who overtly takes advantage of his wealth.



More tension is built up, and then once again, nothing of significance happens. Although it is clear his friends are lying, Richard is still no closer to learning the truth. However, Henry's offer to take a drive makes it sound as though answers are finally coming.



First, Henry and Richard go to an estate sale and then to dinner. At dinner, Henry abruptly asks, “Don’t you want to know about our trip to Argentina?” Richard is surprised that Henry knows that he knows about Argentina. However, Henry explains that when he called the airline to cancel his ticket, they were confused because someone had just called to confirm the previous day. Before Richard can get more answers, Henry suggests that they go to Francis’s apartment.

When they arrive at Francis’s place, Francis is not home. Henry tells Richard that he is out at a movie with Bunny. Then, Henry explains that he and the other Greek students didn’t go to Argentina because of money issues. Although each member of the group is quite wealthy, they all have limitations on how much of their wealth they can access at any given time. As such, they decided the move was too risky. Richard, his head still reeling, says, “Henry, what in God’s name have you done?” Henry tells Richard to guess, to which Richard responds, “You killed somebody.”

Richard’s guess turns out to be correct. Henry admits that he and the other Greek students—excluding Bunny—accidentally killed someone while taking part in a bacchanal. Richard has a hard time believing him, but Henry swears it is true. After the conversation about Dionysian madness took place the previous semester, the Greek students made it their goal to have a similar experience. They experimented with drinking, drugs, prayer, and even poison in an attempt to induce Dionysian madness. Henry tells Richard that he almost caught them many times; the random injuries, the strange mixture on the stove, and the bizarre conversation about bedsheets were all related to the rituals they’d been performing. However, for a long time, they did not achieve the results they were looking for.

Henry thinks that their initial attempts to induce Dionysian madness failed because their belief wasn’t genuine. From then on, all the members of the group took the rituals incredibly seriously, except Bunny. As such, Bunny was exiled from participating in future rituals. Shortly after Bunny’s expulsion, the Greek students succeeded in inducing Dionysian madness. Henry tells Richard that the experience was amazing and indescribable. Richard interrupts to inquire about the sexual nature of the rituals, and though Henry admits that sex was a part of it, he refuses to go into detail.

Again, Henry postpones telling Richard the truth, although this time it seems as though the truth is finally coming.



Henry’s initial explanation is underwhelming; the group’s financial situation is not what Richard is interested in hearing about. Nonetheless, the group’s overall lack of finances is surprising given the opulent lifestyle they usually lead, suggesting that something else is going on. Richard’s guess, that Henry has killed someone, is both shocking and unsurprising. On the one hand, it seems impossible that a group of charismatic, intelligent, and well-to-do Greek students would’ve killed someone. On the other, the many rumors Richard has heard and the strange behavior he’s observed point precisely to such a crime.



Finally, the big reveal arrives, and the novel’s dark side begins to show itself. As it turns out, the rumors Richard heard about his friends being devil worshippers wasn’t too far off the mark. If anything, their activities are even more extreme than Richard could have imagined. From here on out, a prominent theme in the novel is the human capacity for violence. Despite their unassuming nature and privileged upbringings, the Greek students commit a horrific act of violence. Not only that, but the reader already knows that they will eventually commit another terrible act of violence, this time with Richard’s help. This moment in the novel marks the beginning of Richard’s transition from a more or less average college student to someone capable of murder.



Although Bunny’s intelligence is often called into question throughout the novel, here he appears to be the only sane and rational member of the group. Bunny treats the rituals like they are parties, while the others treat them as though they are serious intellectual or religious pursuits. Bunny’s reaction closely tracks with the typical social atmosphere of a college environment, yet this behavior gets him exiled. Additionally, Henry’s admission that sex was a part of the rituals is rather startling, considering that two members of the group are siblings.



Henry says that he's forgotten much of the night, though he knows that the group ran through the woods for many miles. However, when he came to, he found himself covered in blood with a dead man at his feet. Each of the members of the bacchanal have slightly different versions of what occurred, but ultimately no one is sure how the man died. Frightened, they left the body and escaped without anyone seeing them. Henry is disturbed by the incident but would not be worried about being caught if not for Bunny. Before he can explain further, Francis returns home.

CHAPTER 5

Francis walks in the door and is immediately concerned when he realizes that Henry has told Richard what happened. Henry tells Francis that Richard already knew anyway, and Richard reassures him by saying, "It doesn't matter." Richard then asks why they didn't try going to the police. Henry explains that it is unlikely that four rich college students from out of state would be looked kindly upon by a Vermont jury. In addition, Henry reveals that the crime was committed on the murdered man's land. Also, if they had turned themselves in right away, they would've shown up at the police station drunk, covered in blood, and wearing nothing but bedsheets. Henry is still surprised that they managed to get home without being seen. They were still partially out of their minds, and he says that Camilla couldn't even speak for a few days.

Although they weren't caught by the authorities, Bunny remains an issue because "he just can't keep his mouth shut." Henry explains to Richard that, although Bunny wasn't part of the crime, he has knowledge of it. He hasn't gone to the authorities, which would likely result in jail time for Bunny himself, but even so, Bunny cannot keep quiet. Though Francis and Henry don't think that he will go to the authorities, they worry that he will let something slip to Marion or his father.

Francis tells Richard that he and Bunny were at a movie together the night of the murder. Richard remembers the night well and tells Henry and Francis that after the movie they had a drink and then, as far as he knew, Bunny went to his room. Henry reveals that this is not the case; instead, Bunny went to Henry's apartment with the intention of scaring Henry when he arrived home. However, instead, he fell asleep on the couch. When Henry and the others arrived dressed in bedsheets and covered in blood, Bunny woke up and started screaming. Eventually, they calmed him down by telling him they hit a deer with their car.

This section of the novel utilizes multiple levels of unreliability. Not only is Richard an unreliable narrator, but he is also now narrating Henry telling him about an event, which Henry himself claims to not fully remember. In fact, neither murder in the novel is narrated in detail, making the violence seem distant from the characters who commit it.



Unlike Henry, who seems disturbingly calm in relating his story to Richard, Francis is reasonably concerned that Richard could turn them over to law enforcement. However, instead, Richard is nonjudgmental about the situation, which is a significant development for his character. Richard spends much of the novel contemplating the moments that radically changed the direction of his life, and his decision here to react nonchalantly to murder is chief among them. Meanwhile, although his emotionless delivery is alarming, Henry is almost certainly correct that law enforcement and a Vermont jury would not look kindly upon the Greek students' actions.



Indeed, Bunny's inability to keep secrets and speak quietly are indeed central qualities of his character that are far from ideal when attempting to cover up a crime.



Although The Secret History is a serious and often dark novel, it is also quite funny, and even its disturbing scenes can contain dashes of humor. In this case, Bunny awakening to find his fellow Greek students covered in blood contains an element of farce. Though the Greek students think that they've pacified Bunny with their deer story, it seems unlikely that he fully believes them. Even if Bunny is as intellectually incompetent as the Greek students believe—and there is evidence in the novel that this is not the case—their story is hardly convincing.



Henry continues his story. As the Greek students are cleaning up the mess, Bunny starts to notice peculiar details. For instance, Charles has a large bite on his arm. Although Bunny is suspicious, the others have no reason to believe that he knows the truth of the matter. Furthermore, at this point, Henry doesn't think he will tell Marion and, apparently, Julian is already aware that his students have been attempting a bacchanal. Ultimately, they all manage to clean themselves up and hide the evidence of their crime without attracting unnecessary attention.

The next day, Bunny acts as though nothing is out of the ordinary. He calls and invites the other Greek students to dinner, including Richard. After dinner, he sees that Henry's car looks fine, despite having supposedly hit a deer. Still, Bunny isn't too suspicious. However, a few weeks later, Bunny spots an article in the newspaper about the man that was killed. Although he still doesn't outwardly accuse his friends of the crime, Bunny begins joking that they are responsible. At this point, Henry starts to worry that Bunny's comments will be heard by the wrong person and cause trouble.

Wanting to keep Bunny on their good side, the other Greek students go out of their way to lend him extra money and pay for expensive things. In particular, Henry pays for the expensive trip to Rome, where he and Bunny live luxuriously. Unfortunately, the trip to Rome only makes matters worse. Bunny regularly complains about their accommodations—despite their opulence—and this makes Henry angry. In addition, Henry starts to experience intense migraines, which he is prone to having from time to time. This incapacitates him for a few days.

When Henry begins to feel better, he wanders out of his bedroom to find Bunny reading his diary. Because Henry writes his diary in Latin, he thought it would be safe from prying eyes. However, he underestimates Bunny's Latin abilities because it turns out that Bunny is able to translate the contents of the diary. The diary contains a number of passages that are not flattering to Bunny; among other things, Henry refers to him as *cuniculus molestes*, which roughly translates to “annoying rabbit.” More importantly, Henry has written about the murder in his diary, and it seems that Bunny has definitively learned the truth.

Once again, Bunny causes a scene, and this time it attracts the attention of those within earshot. The “chambermaid” starts banging on the door. Henry opens it and manages to convince the concerned woman that all is well, but he knows the situation has now grown more complicated.

The most shocking part of this section is that Julian knows about his students' extra-curricular activities, although he isn't aware of the murder. As such, he can no longer be characterized as merely an eccentric professor; he is actively promoting dangerous behavior to his students and is therefore at least wildly irresponsible and at most a sinister figure.



Although Bunny may not believe his friends' story at first, he has no reason to assume that something as terrible as a murder has occurred. However, after seeing the newspaper article, Bunny's beliefs become less clear. Although Henry doesn't believe that Bunny has figured out the truth, it later becomes clear that the Greek students have regularly underestimated Bunny's intelligence and level of awareness.



Assuming Henry's story is to be believed, Bunny starts to lose any goodwill that he's built up. Whether or not he suspects the truth, his actions in Italy are crude and obnoxious. He becomes less likeable both to his friends and the reader, both of which help to set up the drastic measures that the Greek students eventually resort to.



This is the first moment where Bunny appears significantly more resourceful and cleverer than the Greek students give him credit for. It is also a moment in which Bunny feels doubly betrayed. Not only was he lied to about the murder, but he also sees that his best friend has been writing negatively about him behind his back.



Even more so than before, Bunny has become a liability for the Greek students. He had trouble keeping his mouth shut when he didn't know the truth. Now that he does, it seems unlikely that he'll be able to keep it to himself for long.



Though Bunny is angry, Henry still doesn't think that he will go to the police. Henry believes that Bunny's response to the crime is not one of "moral outrage," but rather that he is upset because he was "excluded." In order to get Bunny back on his side, Henry starts spending inordinate amounts of money on him. Eventually, unable to stand Bunny's company any longer—and unable to afford him—Henry leaves Italy in the middle of the night while Bunny is asleep. In hopes of mollifying Bunny, he leaves behind \$2,000, which he says is a relatively small sum compared to what he spent over the course of the trip.

Finishing his story, Henry explains that Bunny continued blackmailing everyone when he returned from Italy—even the twins, who are relatively poor compared to Henry and Francis. Although Henry and Francis are wealthy, even they have their limits, and soon they will no longer be able to afford Bunny's silence. They tell Richard that he shouldn't let Bunny know what he's just learned, lest Richard be implicated in the crime as well. Although Francis and Richard are concerned about the situation, Henry remains relatively calm. He thinks that he will be able to solve the situation, though he says that it will depend "to a certain extent on how much, in the end, we are willing to do."

Richard spends the night in Francis's apartment. The next morning when he wakes up, he wonders how well he actually knows his newfound friends and contemplates what they are capable of. In retrospect, he realizes that his reaction in this moment—or lack thereof—profoundly impacts the trajectory of his life. When he returns to his room, Richard works on his Greek homework, which he's been neglecting. He thinks about the benefits of studying Greek, which makes "certain common ideas become inexpressible" while "other, previously undreamt-of ones spring to life, finding miraculous new articulation." He wonders whether his deeply felt connection to the other Greek students comes from the fact that they are the only people he knows who have access to this alternative way of thinking.

After finishing his Greek homework, Richard heads to Bunny's room. Bunny tells him that he and Henry are planning a lengthy and expensive trip to France for the coming summer and invites Richard to come along. Charles and Camilla are also present and when Charles gets the chance, he takes Richard aside and tells him that he knows that Henry told Richard what happened. When Richard asks Charles what he plans to do about the situation, Charles can only shrug. Richard and Charles head to class to let Henry know that Bunny is planning a trip to France. Henry tells them to spare the details until class is over, so he doesn't spend the whole session thinking about it.

Though Bunny is a far cry from an ethically sound character, jealousy seems like a strange response for him to have in this situation. As the novel continues, character motivations become increasingly murky, and even some of Henry's claims seem somewhat outlandish or out-of-touch with reality.



The key issue with Bunny's blackmailing scheme is that there is a breaking point. Eventually, the Greek students will no longer be able to afford Bunny's silence, and it sounds as though Henry is willing to resort to drastic measures. If it wasn't clear already, this section of the novel puts together the puzzle that opens the story. Readers already know who committed the crime, but now it's becoming clear why they did it.



At this point, Richard is now a criminal as well; he knows information about a murder and is withholding it from law enforcement. As such, there is no turning back. Additionally, at various points throughout the novel, Julian and the Greek students find ways to intellectualize their violent or abusive behavior. Richard's internal monologue about studying Greek partially serves as a precise articulation of the benefits of learning another language, while also covering up or excusing something darker. Yes, new ideas are now available to Richard and friends that were previously inaccessible. However, these ideas involve violence and other morally dubious behavior.



If Henry is already hurting for money, then the trip Bunny is planning to France sounds as though it could be a nearly fatal blow to his bank account. This, in turn, creates a sense of urgency that propels the plot, effectively pushing Henry and the others toward increasingly drastic measures.



Before long, Bunny and Camilla also arrive for class, and Bunny makes a misogynistic comment about Camilla that everyone is forced to ignore. After class, Richard returns to his room and takes a sleeping pill. Later in the day, he is awoken by Camilla, who asks him if he wants to go on a ride. He accepts, and together they go to the Commons, where they meet Henry and Francis. Notably, everyone is happy to spend some time away from Bunny. As they drive, Henry sees a particular property that he mentions he would like to own. It is made up of 150 acres, which Henry loves because he could live there without seeing any signs of civilization.

The drive ends at a cheap local restaurant where Bunny would never come looking for them. Their meal is largely uneventful, though Richard does take note of how quickly Henry strikes up a conversation with their server, a kind but relatively uneducated young man who is curious about how such a group ended up at such a restaurant. Richard reflects on the fact that, like Julian, Henry's personality is popular among "country people," despite his background and appearance.

As time progresses, Richard is shocked by how little he thinks about the murder his friends committed. Instead, he is concerned with Bunny's increasingly erratic behavior. One evening, while everyone is at Francis's country house, Richard overhears a loud argument between Henry and Bunny. Among other things, Richard hears Bunny yell, "You make me sick," before rattling off homophobic and antisemitic slurs (though he also, confusingly enough, calls Henry a Nazi). Soon after, Henry comes up and knocks on Richard's door and says that their fight was related to the murder. He also asks Richard to go into his room—where Bunny is now asleep—to grab some aspirin. Richard hesitantly agrees, but when he goes to the room, he finds that it has been trashed. He quickly grabs Henry's pills and leaves. The next day, Bunny is moody but silent at breakfast.

In the following weeks, Bunny's behavior continues to worsen. He is exceptionally rude and reactionary, even toward Marion. The Greek students worry about what Bunny might tell Marion and Cloke Rayburn, his friend from high school who now attends Hampden. Furthermore, Bunny begins making it a point to single out and attack individual members of the group. He attacks Charles for how much he drinks, Francis for his homosexuality, Richard for his relative poverty, and Camilla for being female. Additionally, in one particularly nasty moment, he accuses Charles and Camilla of having an incestuous relationship. Although Camilla usually doesn't bat an eye at Bunny's attacks, this one bothers her, and she gets up and leaves the room.

Bunny's behavior gets gradually more intolerable, making his friends—and the reader—resent him all the more. Meanwhile, the group ride without Bunny is the one moment in this section of the novel that feels as though it could fit in with Richard's first semester at Hampden.



Once again, class becomes a central theme in the novel. Interestingly, both Henry and Julian are well-liked by lower-class people despite their exorbitant wealth. This speaks to the charisma that both characters exude.



The murder becomes almost unreal to Richard, who wasn't there to witness it. However, Bunny serves as a constant reminder that it did, in fact, happen, and he doesn't appear to be handling that information delicately. As Bunny's behavior grows more erratic, it becomes clear that the Greek students will have to do something about it before it is too late.



Although Bunny's attacks on his friends are nasty and speak to his prejudices, they also demonstrate that he is perceptive. Despite Richard's attempt to disguise his poverty, Bunny is aware of it. He is also correct that Charles has a drinking problem and is the first person to point it out in the novel. Meanwhile, although Richard finds his claim about the twin's incestuous relationship baseless, Henry's earlier admission that their rituals contained sex makes it seem somewhat plausible.



While everyone endures Bunny's attacks, Henry is plotting, though Richard doesn't yet know what he has in mind. One day, while driving around high on cocaine with Judy Poovey, Richard spots Henry in a head shop talking to a hippie. Henry seems to be purchasing something from the store, though Richard cannot tell what it is. Judy asks Richard if they should get Henry's attention, but Richard thinks it would be better to lay low. In the following days, Richard tries to make sense of Henry's actions, but he has no luck.

A few days after the head shop incident, Henry shows up at Richard's door. Richard invites him in, and Henry begins asking questions about "a formula for dosage." He thinks Richard might be helpful because of his pre-med background. Although Richard's knowledge of medicine is cursory at best, he tries to answer Henry's questions while also attempting to figure out what is going on. Eventually, Richard gets Henry to tell him that he is experimenting with deadly mushrooms. Henry wants to prepare a dish with the mushrooms that both he and Bunny will consume. However, he wants Richard's help to figure out the proper dosage to kill Bunny, while only making himself sick. Henry believes that by also poisoning himself, he will avoid suspicion.

Richard is impressed by the plan because, "if anything could be relied upon with almost mathematical certainty, it was that Bunny, at any given meal, would somehow manage to eat almost twice as much as anyone else." However, he also notices that Henry already knows a bit too much about the mushrooms he plans to work with. When Richard asks how he came by such knowledge, Henry reveals that he's been experimenting on some dogs that live nearby, one of which ended up dead.

Ultimately, Richard agrees to help Henry. His rationale is as follows: "emotional appeals, I knew, were useless, but if I pretended that I knew what I was doing I might be able to talk him out of it." Richard spends the following 30 minutes attempting to concoct the proper formula for Henry. However, as he expected, he fails. He informs Henry that the plan is unlikely to work and that even a seasoned mathematician would have a difficult time solving the problem due to the number of variables and unknowns involved.

After learning of the murder, Richard's drug use becomes more frequent. This only adds to his paranoia and his unreliability as a narrator. Meanwhile, he is once again left in the dark about what his friends are planning.



What was heavily implied before is now verbally confirmed by Henry: he wants to kill Bunny. His method for doing so (poison) is decidedly old fashioned and wouldn't be out of place in a Greek tragedy. Crucially, Henry is asking Richard to move from his place as an observer to an active participant in a crime.



Here, Henry continues to demonstrate his ingenuity as well as his capacity for violence and cruelty. Though his plan is clever, he's only arrived at it by killing an innocent creature.



Richard slowly allows himself to become involved in an attempt on Bunny's life. Although he doesn't directly contribute to Henry's plan, he shows a willingness to contribute to it that is concerning, to put it mildly.



Henry isn't satisfied with Richard's answer. He continues his line of questioning and asks if it would help if he possessed an antidote for himself. He tells Richard that atropine—also known as deadly nightshade—can counteract poison when given in small doses. Richard finds this unlikely and asks Henry for his source, which Henry reveals to be an Arabic text from the 15th century. This is concerning to Richard, though Henry insists that, "People have used these books for centuries. Their accuracy is beyond dispute." Richard continues to try to get Henry to reconsider his plan, but Henry remains resolute, saying, "The more I hear about luxury barges, the less terrible death begins to seem." After this pronouncement, he thanks Richard for his help and leaves.

The next day, Richard meets up with Charles and asks him if he knows about Henry's plan. Charles reveals that he does in fact know, and that Henry has been working on the plan for a while. Surprised, Richard asks Charles if they are contemplating killing Bunny, to which Charles responds, "I'd rather go to jail than know that Bunny was going to be hanging around my neck for the rest of my life." Soon after this conversation, Richard has a brief conversation with Camilla, who wonders aloud whether it would have been better if they had all just gone to South America. Richard tells her that he is glad that she didn't go, but she doesn't respond to his comment.

As the weeks continue to pass, the Bunny situation gets more and more precarious. Even Francis and Henry are running out of money. One day, Julian invites Richard to a one-on-one lunch. Richard is concerned and asks Henry what Julian knows. Henry tells him that Julian is aware of the success of the bacchanal, but not the murder. Richard ends up enjoying his lunch with Julian, although he is slightly alarmed by a mushroom dish, the ingredients of which were sourced by Henry. However, Richard quickly realizes that the mushrooms are Henry's way of covering his tracks and are not dangerous.

After lunch, Julian asks Richard if he's noticed anything unusual about Bunny. Julian thinks that something is wrong with Bunny, in part because of Bunny's recent interest in ethics. This confuses Julian, who refers to Bunny as "one of the least morally concerned boys I've ever known." Richard lets him think that perhaps this change in Bunny is a result of his relationship with Marion, who is Presbyterian. Julian has an "implacable contempt" for all Judeo-Christian traditions, and this explanation seems to satisfy him for the time being.

Once again, Henry demonstrates that his rigorous academic training hasn't left him without blind spots. Clever though he may be, Henry does not act rationally or practically, and without Richard's help, he may well have poisoned himself to death.



What is notable in all of the conversations between the Greek students is their complete lack of morality. They are too concerned with self-preservation to consider the weight of their actions. Meanwhile, even while planning a murder, Richard is still romantically interested in Camilla, although there is no sense that she feels the same way about him.



Henry cleverly gives Julian mushrooms to establish that picking mushrooms is a hobby of his. That way, if he uses them to poison Bunny, he will not seem suspicious.



Again, although Bunny is by no means a character with a good moral standing, there is evidence that the other characters underestimate him. According to Julian, he is at least taking an interest in ethics, something the other Greek students have yet to contemplate.



April arrives and the weather around Hampden starts to improve. On one particularly nice night, Bunny shows up at Richard's door, drunk and ready to spill all of the secrets that he doesn't think Richard knows. Realizing he cannot tell Bunny that he already knows the truth, Richard listens while Bunny tells him about the murder. Shortly after finishing his account of what happened, Bunny leaves and Richard worries that he might be on his way to tell Marion and Cloke as well. Richard calls Charles and tells him what happened. Charles tells Richard to come over right away while he goes and fetches Henry.

When Richard arrives at the twins' place, Charles hasn't managed to get ahold of Henry. However, Camilla contacts him by using a code: "ring twice, hang up, ring again." Charles is annoyed that Camilla and Henry have "a secret code" that he doesn't know about, although Camilla assures him that it is not secret. Charles continues to question his sister, but she tells him not to be "such a baby."

Henry arrives and Richard recaps the situation for him. After, he asks Henry if he plans to poison Bunny. Henry tells him that he's given up on that idea because—among other reasons—the poison would be too slow. Everyone is at a loss for what to do next, except Henry, who leaves to run some errands, although he does not elaborate on what this means. Before he leaves, he thanks Richard for his help and tells him to buy a newspaper on his way home in case anyone questions why he is out and about. Richard spends the day sleeping, "a comfortable dead-man's float only remotely disturbed by a chill undertow of reality."

In the evening, Richard goes to Henry's place, where he finds Henry, Charles, and Francis. They tell him that Camilla is at a party with Cloke, Bunny, and Marion. Although Camilla goes to the party as Cloke's date, she only does so to keep an eye on Bunny. In the meantime, Henry lays out his plan to the others. He wants to make Bunny's death look like a hiking accident. The following day, he expects Bunny to take his usual hike, assuming the weather allows for it. Part of Bunny's normal route passes by a ravine. Henry's idea is to come from the opposite direction and wait for Bunny. When Bunny arrives at the ravine, the plan is to push him off the cliff and flee. Although the plan relies on some luck, Henry believes it to be the best course of action.

Richard knows that as soon as Bunny tells him the truth, he will no longer be deemed innocent in the eyes of the law. Additionally, if Bunny has told Richard the truth, it seems likely that he'll tell others soon as well. As such, the Greek students feel as though they must handle the situation immediately.



This seemingly minor moment between Charles, Henry, and Camilla becomes more significant in the second half of the novel. Charles's jealousy of Henry and Camilla's relationship only grows after Bunny's death.



Although Richard is by no means innocent in all of this, it appears that Henry wants to shield him from being part of the crime itself. Although Richard will later wonder about Henry's motivations at various points in the novel, it seems here that he is genuinely trying to protect Richard from being a part of something so horrid, not to mention illegal. A less generous interpretation of Henry's character would be that he doesn't care about Richard one way or the other, but he knows that they are less likely to get caught with fewer people involved.



Later in the novel, it is revealed that Bunny was paranoid in the days leading up to his death. Camilla's presence at the party is certainly something that would have given him pause. It's already been established that the Greek students don't like parties, so it would be strange to see Camilla there, especially with his close friend from high school.



Francis is much less sure of Henry's plan. He thinks there are too many variables and that they are likely to get caught. However, Henry convinces him that some luck will be necessary no matter what and that they need to act soon if they hope to avoid prison. During this conversation, Charles wonders aloud whether they have all gone insane. Once everyone is convinced that they have no other option but to kill Bunny, Henry tells Richard that he should leave; the less Richard knows, the better for everyone involved. Richard wishes everyone good luck and then quickly takes his leave. On his way home, Richard runs into Camilla, who is drunk and seemingly in a good mood. Richard tells her to come home with him as a romantic gesture, but Camilla denies his advances. Instead, she gives him a quick kiss and then continues on her way.

Richard doesn't wake up until the following afternoon. Before long, he runs into Judy, who informs him that today there is a campus-wide party called "Swing into Spring." Richard is immediately concerned about what this means for Henry's plot. He politely listens as Judy tells him about her previous experiences at Swing into Spring, but the whole time he worries about Bunny. Judy ends by telling Richard that he should bring Bunny to the party because at the moment he's in the library. Richard goes to the library in search of Bunny but instead he only finds a brief note from Bunny addressed to Marion, which reads, "Bored stiff. Walked down to the party to get a brewski. See ya later."

Richard tries to get ahold of Henry but is unsuccessful. Not knowing what else to do, he puts on his jacket and goes looking for his friends out in the woods. Eventually, he finds them and tells them that Bunny will not be taking his normal walk because he is attending a party. However, just when everyone is about to depart, they hear heavy footsteps, which turn out to belong to Bunny. When Bunny sees his former friends, he is confused. Bunny makes a few sarcastic remarks, as Henry moves toward him with a smile on his face.

For the first time, one of the Greek students, Charles, shows that he has a conscience. Previously, the Greek students have talked with a coldness and detachment about Bunny's murder, but now that their plan is becoming a reality, Charles begins to have second thoughts. Meanwhile, Richard finally lets Camilla know how he feels, though he chooses an odd night to do so. Perhaps in comparison to what the following day brings, asking out his crush does not seem so daunting anymore.



Because the Greek students isolate themselves from everyone else, they are completely unaware of something that nearly everyone else on campus knows about. Additionally, it is suspicious that Bunny is in the library, mainly because he never goes there, particularly if there is fun to be had.



Just when it seems the Greek students will fail, they get extremely lucky. Crucially, the actual moment of Bunny's death is not narrated by Richard. Though he will say a little more about it later, the moment is never described in detail. Again, this creates a distancing effect from the violence, which allows the Greek students to maintain some of their likeability. Nonetheless, they've now completed their transitions from exceptional students to cold-blooded murderers. Even more so than the others, Henry becomes a disturbing character because he commits the murder with a smile on his face.



CHAPTER 6

Richard doesn't describe the moment of Bunny's murder in detail. Instead, he momentarily pauses the story he's been telling to reflect upon the morality of the situation. He says, "But while I have never considered myself a very good person, neither can I bring myself to believe that I am a spectacularly bad one." Bunny's death haunts his dreams, though his description of the event is impressionistic and surreal rather than grounded in reality like the rest of his story. Richard is shocked that he was able to be convinced to help murder Bunny in such a short amount of time. Previously, he would never have thought himself capable of such an act.

While escaping the scene of the crime, Henry's car almost gets stuck in some mud, though Henry quickly manages to maneuver out of it. Together, the Greek students drive back to Francis's place, where they come up with a plausible alibi for Richard. Meanwhile, it begins to snow. Henry tells Richard that, if he's asked, he should say that he went home after leaving the Commons and then met up with the other Greek students later on. In the meantime, he tells Richard to head home, which Richard does.

As Richard walks home, the snow starts to come down hard, despite the fact it is almost Easter. Richard arrives home and tries to read but can't focus on anything. He calls Francis and Henry, hoping they can spend time together. Henry tells him that would be unwise. Richard worries that he is going insane, so Henry recommends thinking in a different language to slow his thoughts. Richard is not satisfied with this answer, but before he can say anything, Henry hangs up the phone.

Still searching for relief from his racing thoughts, Richard seeks out Judy, who gives him what she says is a sleeping pill. During a brief conversation, Judy tells Richard that she saw Bunny earlier that day. This causes Richard to space out, though Judy doesn't notice; instead, she continues telling Richard about her day. At the end of her monologue, Judy invites Richard to a party, and he accepts.

By the time Richard gets to the party, the pill Judy gave him starts to work. As it turns out, it is not a sleeping pill, but rather an opioid. The pill provides Richard with a sense of euphoria, and he spends his time at the party appreciating the company of people who he would normally find uninteresting. Although much of the night is a blur for Richard, he eventually ends up talking to a girl he doesn't recognize. After a brief interaction, the two of them decide to go home together.

Richard's insight, here, is one of the key concerns of the novel. At the start of the story, Richard was more or less a normal person. Even if he isn't the most charismatic character, he is always relatable and he certainly doesn't appear outwardly evil. Nonetheless, he's proved himself capable of committing a heinous crime, which he will now have to live with. Richard's nightmares, which become more frequent in the second half of the novel, are a manifestation of his guilt.



Although the Greek students manage to leave the scene of the crime without being spotted, it is unclear how well they covered their tracks. Already, they've been exceedingly lucky with their plan, and it seems like only a matter of time until their luck runs out.



For most of this chapter, Richard experiences a mixture of guilt and fear for his own safety. He has difficulty coping with what he's done and worries what will happen if someone finds out. Meanwhile, Henry is exceedingly calm, which is another red flag for his character.



Drugs are Richard's primary coping mechanism in the weeks to come. Because of this, his reliability should once again be called into question.



Richard's other way of coping with his fear and guilt is through interactions with people who aren't Greek students. Rather than act standoffish like he usually does at parties, Richard manages to connect with others and even goes home with someone. Of course, the nature of this connection is ultimately somewhat shallow, given that he doesn't even know the name of the girl he goes home with.



After having sex with the girl he does not know, Richard falls asleep and dreams that he and Charles are on a train, attempting to avoid “a mysterious third passenger.” The dream wakes him up and he finds himself still in bed with the unknown girl asleep next to him. He gets dressed and leaves in the middle of the night. As he does so, he realizes that the girl lives in the same dorm as Bunny. Still upset and not thinking clearly, Richard heads to Francis’s apartment.

Francis is alarmed by Richard’s presence but ultimately lets him in and makes him some tea. Francis tells him that so far, he hasn’t heard anything about Bunny’s disappearance. After sitting in silence for some time, Francis leans in and kisses Richard long and hard on the mouth. Richard is shocked, but he kisses Francis back. After a moment, Richard pulls away and tells Francis to stop, but Francis replies, “It’s fun[...]I promise you.” They start to move further but are quickly interrupted by a knock at the door.

Francis answers the door and finds Charles standing outside. Charles is clearly upset and drunk, but Francis lets him in anyway. Charles says that there is still no news about Bunny and that Henry is in a bad mood because of the weather. He also reminds Francis and Richard that they have Greek homework due for class the following day. Everyone attempts to sober up and complete their work, but events of the last few days still weigh heavily on their minds.

The next day in class, Julian asks about Bunny. Henry, who “seemed calm, well rested, more than he had any right to be,” says he isn’t sure where Bunny is. Julian suggests that they wait a few minutes, though, of course, Bunny never arrives. After class, Richard runs into Judy, who is angry at him because he “went home with Mona Beale.” She warns him that Mona is in a relationship with a boy who assaulted the last person he thought was flirting with Mona. Richard shrugs this off and says, “She was the one who was hitting on me.” The same night, Richard has a surreal and terrifying dream about Bunny drowning in a bathtub. When Richard wakes up, he goes to the bathroom to splash water on his face, where he begins to cry and dry heave. He wonders whether he will be able to hold himself together.

Richard’s dream reflects his fear that someone will come after him for what he has done. Meanwhile, there is a disturbing synchronicity to the fact that Richard ends up in Bunny’s old dorm unwittingly.



Although it was all but confirmed previously, here it is revealed that Francis is gay. What is more surprising is that it takes so little convincing for Richard to accept his advances. Once again, Richard is moving in a direction that he wouldn’t have thought possible just a few months ago. It is also clear that sex serves as another coping mechanism for Richard, and perhaps for Francis as well.



Just as Richard uses drugs and sex to cope, Charles uses alcohol. Meanwhile, none of them have kept up on their day-to-day lives and so, at least for the night, they have the distraction of their Greek homework.



Judy’s anger at Richard barely phases him, which is unsurprising, considering that he has more pressing matters to worry about. However, it seems unlikely that Judy is angry at Richard because Mona has a boyfriend. It seems more likely that Judy is infatuated with Richard and is upset that he went home with someone else after she invited him to the party. Later in the day, Richard’s inability to cope with Bunny’s death only worsens, and it is unclear whether he will be able to keep his cool for much longer.



The next night, Richard goes to the twin's house for dinner. Henry asks him to go see two movies and memorize the plot. The movies are the alibi for Henry, Francis, and the twins; they bought tickets to them and then snuck out the back before murdering Bunny. However, Henry doesn't want to go back and watch them himself because he is afraid someone will be suspicious. Richard goes to see the movies, which turn out to be terrible, and then reports back to the others. In the meantime, Charles forges Richard's Greek homework for him.

The next day, Marion calls Henry and asks if he's seen Bunny. Henry tells her that he hasn't. He reports this call to the others and says, "I just hope the weather breaks soon." Unfortunately, it doesn't, and the people who know Bunny, including Julian, become increasingly concerned. Not wanting to seem unconcerned, but also not wanting to go to the police, Henry gives Marion a call a few days after their first conversation and asks about Bunny. When he hangs up, he tells the others that Marion has not seen Bunny, however, someone claims to have spotted him earlier in the day. Although this obviously isn't true, this is concerning to Henry, who would prefer that the whole affair be wrapped up as soon as possible.

The Thursday following the murder, Julian's concern reaches a high point, and he begins pressuring his students for Bunny's location. Henry calmly fields his questions and tells him that they do not know what's happened to Bunny. Richard worries that Julian knows that this is a lie. That night, Francis and Henry show up in Richard's room asking after Camilla. They think Marion and Cloke may have informed the local security about Bunny's disappearance, and they want to use Camilla to figure out what's happened. Richard doesn't know where she is, so the three of them drive to the twins' place to see if they are home.

Henry, Francis, and Richard arrive at the twins' place to find Charles, Camilla, and Cloke. Cloke tells everyone that he's worried because he hasn't seen Bunny in the last few days. He knows that Bunny's had a lot of extra money recently and he worries that Bunny may have flaunted that money to the wrong person. Cloke himself is a drug dealer, and recently Bunny rode along with him to meet his distributor. Cloke is worried that Bunny may have gone back to the distributor on his own with enough money in his pocket to wind up dead. According to Cloke, "These guys'll chop you up and put you in a garbage bag for twenty bucks." Henry leads Cloke to believe that this is a plausible explanation for Bunny's disappearance.

Once again, Henry acts as the leader of the group and is quite effective in doing so. The other Greek students need something to focus on, and Henry provides that for them while also building an alibi.



The longer Bunny's body goes unfound, the longer the Greek students must sit and worry about being caught. Although Henry shows the fewest signs of distress, even he is beginning to be worn down by how long the situation is being dragged out. However, he doesn't let his stress get the better of him, and he continues to be mindful about not attracting suspicion.



More than anyone else on campus, Julian seems most likely to ascertain the truth, making his students especially nervous around him. However, even if he thinks that they are lying, he has no reason at this point to suspect the truth.



Cloke's worries are a useful tool for the Greek students for multiple reasons. First, they provide a plausible explanation for Bunny's disappearance other than the truth. Second, there is now a reason to report Bunny's disappearance in a manner that doesn't directly tie him to the other Greek students. In addition, Cloke does not appear to be the most clever or cautious character. Henry immediately picks up on this fact, which is why he leads him on.



Worried about his friend, and his own potential culpability, Cloke suggests that they break into Bunny's apartment. Although he and Marion had previously contacted campus security to get into the apartment, security told them that they couldn't let them in. Wanting to play along, Henry tells Charles to check out the apartment with Cloke, which he does. After Charles and Cloke leave, Henry tells the others that he thinks Cloke will realize something suspicious is going on once he sees Bunny's apartment. He hopes that people will begin looking for Bunny the following morning.

While waiting for Charles's return, the others pass the time by playing cards. Everyone is outwardly concerned—except Henry—and their concern only grows as time continues to pass. However, as soon as they start vocalizing their concerns, Charles returns. He asks that someone make him a drink while he explains what happened. The first thing Charles noticed upon entering the apartment is that Bunny still had the newspaper article about the murder on his desk. Charles quickly disposed of it before Cloke could see, but he worries that there are other clues in the apartment that could allow the police to connect the dots.

Cloke and Marion quickly realized that something strange is going on, so they called security, who in turn called the police. When the police arrived, they questioned everyone about Bunny's last known whereabouts. They also performed a search of the apartment, where they found Bunny's wallet. This discovery made everyone think something was very wrong, and one of the policemen said, "I think we'd better contact this boy's family." The presence of the police caused a large crowd to form, though Charles eventually managed to slip away after answering all the police's questions. He now warns Henry and Francis that the police have their names because they were identified as Bunny's friends. Henry isn't disturbed by this news, but Francis starts to panic.

Henry drives Richard back to school, and the two of them check their mailboxes. There, they find faculty questionnaires asking them to review Julian. Richard watches as Henry fills out the form and notices that he's taken 19 classes with Julian. This alarms Richard, but Henry shrugs it off. Henry leaves much of the form blank and says to Richard, "How... can I possibly make the Dean of Studies understand that there is a divinity in our midst?"

Again, Henry gives out orders and Charles is quick to obey. Later, Charles regrets listening to Henry and begins to question his leadership. However, for now, Henry acts as the unquestionable leader of the group.



As usual, Henry is able to maintain his calm demeanor, even as his friends begin to crack. However, as it turns out, the others are right to worry. Charles reveals that they were not as careful as they thought. For all of Henry's cleverness, there are details that even he did not pick up on, and this does not bode well for the coming investigation.



Because Bunny hasn't been seen for several days, the discovery of his wallet tells the police that he is likely missing and possibly dead. Now that Bunny's case is officially under investigation, it is important for the Greek students to remain calm if they don't want to be caught. Francis is reasonably upset by Charles's news, while Henry's calm demeanor seems absurd and almost inhuman.



At a typical liberal arts college, it would be considered a lot to take four classes with any one professor—but Henry has taken 19 with Julian. This is highly irregular and speaks to how significant of a role Julian plays in Henry's life. Henry speaks of him as though he is a god, which is obviously an unhealthy student/teacher relationship. This is not the first time that Julian's relationships with his students appear suspect.



That night, Richard is wracked with nerves and is unable to sleep. He calls Camilla to make himself feel better and asks her to tell him a story. Camilla tells him about the only time she remembers seeing her father. The next morning, Camilla wakes Richard up and tells him that the police are questioning Charles and Henry. In addition, Camilla says that Bunny's disappearance has led to a media circus all over campus. Concerned, Richard gets up and prepares for the coming day. While doing so, he runs into Judy, who offers him some kind words because she knows about Bunny's disappearance. However, Richard is too preoccupied to care.

When Richard goes outside, he realizes just how insane the situation has become. The media, the police, and people from the local area have flooded campus because of Bunny's disappearance. Camilla tells Richard that the Corcoran family put up a large monetary reward for anyone who finds Bunny, which has led to the extra attention. Later, Henry tells everyone not to worry. He and Charles were both questioned by the police, but he thinks everything went fine.

On Friday, everyone drives to Julian's house together. Richard has never been to Julian's place and is curious to see where he lives. Indeed, the house turns out to be impressive, but unfortunately, Julian is not home, or at least, he doesn't come to the door. On the way home, Henry drops off the twins and then he, Richard and Francis go to join Bunny's search party. After searching for some time, people slowly begin to dissipate and so Richard, Francis, and Henry return home as well.

Henry drives everyone back to Francis's place, where they reunite with the twins to watch the local news. On the news, a man named William Hundy is being interviewed. He is the owner of a local car shop who thinks he has information about Bunny's whereabouts. Hundy tells the reporter that last Sunday he saw Bunny getting into a LeMans with three other men. Although this doesn't implicate the other Greek students, Henry worries that this will cause Bunny's disappearance to be treated as a kidnapping case, which will turn it into a criminal investigation. He is concerned that if someone looks hard enough, particularly into their bank accounts, it could mean trouble. In the middle of this conversation, Bunny's father calls and invites everyone but Richard, whom he does not know, to dinner at his hotel.

One thing that unites the Greek students is that they all have issues with their parents, a fact that becomes increasingly important as more is learned about Julian. Also important here is that Bunny's disappearance has turned into a much bigger story than the Greek students anticipated. They assumed that his body would be found quickly and the case would be wrapped up quickly. Instead, it's turned into a missing person case, which is something the media loves to spotlight.



These new developments only make everyone's nerves worse, although Henry still remains calm. Not only are things now worse for the Greek students, but also for the Corcorans, who must wait to find out what has happened to their son.



Although Richard gets a glimpse at Julian's home, much of his life away from school remains shrouded in mystery. After failing to find Julian, Henry knows that it is necessary to keep up appearances, which is why they join Bunny's search party. Of course, they know where the body is, but they don't want to attract extra attention to themselves by "finding" it.



As will soon be revealed, Hundy turns out to be an opportunist and a fraud. Even though the Greek students know Hundy is lying, they can't do anything about it. Henry knows that if Hundy keeps it up, the FBI could get involved with the case. And even though Henry has been meticulous, he hasn't been quite careful enough to fool the FBI. As such, it once again appears that, despite their intelligence, the Greek students failed to account for some crucial variables.



After the others leave, Richard watches TV until he is drunk and tired enough to fall asleep. Francis wakes Richard up at six in the morning and tells him that he's spent the entire night drinking with the Corcorans, who "were still going at it when [he] left." As it turns out, the Corcorans are staying in what Francis describes as a "big flat [motel] with a neon sign and no room service." He tells Richard that it was an awful experience, and that it was difficult to tell whether the Corcorans were actually concerned for their son. In addition, he tells Richard that the National Guard has been called and will be arriving shortly.

Shortly after their conversation about the Corcorans, Henry calls and tells Richard and Francis to come join the search party. Francis is exhausted and doesn't want to go but ultimately complies. When they arrive at campus, things have gotten even more out of hand. Richard and Francis find Henry, who is "reading, with absorbed interest, a tiny, vellum-bound book written in some Near Eastern language." Soon, Cloke shows up and tells them that he contacted his distributor, who claims not to have seen Bunny. He is worried that the others may have told the police about his initial theory of the case. Henry assures him that the topic never came up.

The entire day is spent searching for Bunny. While looking, the Greek students run into a number of familiar faces, including Julian. Julian tells them that he briefly saw and talked to Bunny's family, whom he clearly finds abhorrent, although he doesn't outwardly say so. Richard believes that Julian is genuinely concerned for Bunny, though he also thinks that Julian secretly enjoys "the operatic sweep of the search." Later in the day, two FBI agents approach the Greek students and ask Charles to come with them. This development is concerning to everyone; unfortunately, they can do nothing but wait.

After a long day of searching, everyone returns to the twins' apartment, where they find a slightly drunk Charles. Charles reveals that he was fingerprinted and questioned by the FBI agents. Although he doesn't think he revealed anything, it is difficult to tell. He impresses upon the others how much more intelligent the FBI agents are than the other officers they've dealt with. He also tells Henry that the agents had a lot of questions about his trip to Italy with Bunny, although they didn't ask about who financed it. Ultimately, though, Charles thinks that the agents are more suspicious of Cloke than anyone else.

For some time, Richard rarely sleeps without the aid of some kind of drug. Apparently, the Corcorans like to cope the same way, although their drinking appears almost celebratory. In addition, Henry's previous statement about the Corcorans' financial situation is proved correct. If Bunny's family was as rich as he pretended, it seems unlikely that they would stay in a dingy motel.



Only Henry manages to act normal through this entire situation. He barely seems to be bothered and has no trouble performing difficult intellectual labor. Additionally, when Henry reassures Cloke, he may be being less than truthful. Henry knows that Cloke is obviously suspicious and therefore would be a good conduit for diverting attention away from the Greek students.



Here, Richard perceives a fundamental aspect of Julian's personality that is quite sinister. Even if he is concerned for Bunny, Julian just can't help but be excited about his disappearance. This is the perfect mixture of beauty and terror that he craves. However, the problem is, it isn't confined to the artistic sphere. Someone who Julian claims to care about has gone missing, and he finds it thrilling.



Because there is no detailed account of the FBI's questioning, it is difficult to know if Charles's statements are accurate. On the one hand, the Greek students often think they are cleverer than they actually are. On the other, they do eventually manage to get away with the crime.



That night, the news runs another story featuring Mr. Hundy, who claims that the men he saw with Bunny were Arabs. The Greek students are all dumbstruck by this development, though none of them think that the FBI are taking Hundy's story seriously. In addition, the news interviews Bunny's mother, whose response to her son's disappearance is rather performative. The Greek students are largely critical of her reaction, though Francis defends her. Charles says that he only does so because Mrs. Corcoran "kisses up to [him]" due to his financial background. Charles tells Richard that the Corcorans are incredibly vain and even have something they call "the Gucci Room" in their house, which is painted with Gucci stripes.

While walking home from the twins' place, Richard is suddenly punched in the face and kicked in the ribs by a large man who yells at him to "Stay away from Mona!" The next day, Richard wakes up in pain with a black eye. On his way to class, Richard runs into Julian. When Julian asks him what happened, Richard decides to tell the truth. Julian is surprised by Richard's truthfulness. Then, he tells Richard that the FBI talked to him the day before. At first Julian thought they came to discuss the Isrami government, whose "exiled crown princess" he tutored. Instead, they talked to Julian about Bunny and told him that Bunny was on drugs. Julian asks Richard if he thinks that this is the case, though Richard doesn't answer.

Later, Henry tells everyone that he, too, was spoken to by the FBI. However, he feels confident that the FBI are more concerned about Cloke than anyone else. In fact, Henry spent most of the time talking with the FBI about Cloke's drug dealing business rather than his relationship with Bunny. Richard is concerned that pointing the FBI in Cloke's direction will come back to bite them, but Henry tells him not to worry. In the following days, the media turns Bunny's disappearance into a story about drug dealing and drug abuse. Largely, this is because a mirror was found in Bunny's room with cocaine residue on it. However, everyone who knows Bunny thinks he likely stole the mirror from Laura Stora, who is also known as "the Snow Queen." Nonetheless, this new development scares Cloke, who Judy thinks may have tried to flee.

Soon, the FBI locates Cloke and brings him back to campus. Cloke refuses to speak about the situation without an attorney. Meanwhile, the media turns on Mrs. Corcoran now that they have reason to believe that drugs were involved in Bunny's disappearance. Mrs. Corcoran adamantly refuses to believe that her son was on drugs, which results in the headline, "MOM SEZ: NOT MY KID."

Here, Hundy's agenda is laid bare: he is a racist who uses Bunny's disappearance for his own agenda. Although the FBI largely ignores him, Hundy still manages to attract more eyes to the case, much to the chagrin of the Greek students. Meanwhile, the behavior of Bunny's family continues to be strange; it is as though they care about appearing concerned rather than actually being concerned. This notion fits nicely with Charles's description of how the Corcorans' carry themselves and how they decorate their house.



Richard finds it easy to tell the truth of Julian about his eye because it seems so minor an admission in comparison to the other secrets, he's carrying around with him. Also, the line of questioning the FBI uses on Julian suggests that they are onto Cloke. Additionally, it is worth noting that the Isrami government is an invention by Tartt, although it shares a number of similarities to the real life Saudi Arabian government.



Henry's decision to drag Cloke into their mess is a clever but cruel one. Although he is leading the FBI on a wild goose chase, it will not be without consequences for Cloke. As usual, Henry appears unconcerned for the wellbeing of others, as do his fellow Greek students. Admittedly, though, even without Henry's influence, Cloke would've likely gotten himself in trouble. He isn't great at keeping his drug dealing business a secret and he acts incredibly suspicious.



The apathy of the media becomes a brief but important concern for The Secret History in this chapter. Clearly, the media cares much more about creating a story than they care about helping find Bunny. They also have little empathy for Bunny's family because they think his disappearance could be drug related.



Richard spends Monday night alone with Camilla, whom he asks, "What really happened, that night in the woods." Camilla says that she doesn't remember much, but she does recall a fifth person who "wasn't always a person" walking around with them. Camilla calls this figure Dionysus. In addition, she has a clear memory of the dead man's body. She says, "his stomach was torn open and steam was coming out of it." Also, she tells Richard that shortly after the murder, Henry made everyone kill a piglet and let it bleed on them because "murder defiles everyone he comes into contact with. And the only way to purify blood is through blood." Camilla assures Richard that Henry won't perform such a ceremony again because he knows it will upset Richard. Richard leaves shortly after this conversation because Charles arrives and is annoyed that Richard is alone with his sister.

The search for Bunny continues to drag on. Richard hears a rumor that "the police had brought in a psychic, a fingerprint expert" and "a special team of bloodhounds trained at Dannemora." More than anything else, Henry is worried about the presence of the psychic. Richard laughs this off, which annoys Henry who says, "You amaze me [. . .] You think nothing exists if you can't see it." That night, Charles and Richard go to dinner at a local bar where no one will recognize them. Charles is silent throughout the meal and drinks heavily.

While eating at the restaurant, Richard and Charles take notice of a television program featuring William Hundy. The program largely consists of a fight between Hundy and a middle eastern man who is offended by Hundy's characterizations of Arabs. Before long, Hundy reveals himself to be an overt racist, as he refers to middle easterners using a bigoted slur. The outburst receives whoops of approval from a number of the people surrounding Richard and Charles. In response, the two of them decide that it would be a good time to leave.

The next day, Bunny's body is found. Richard and Camilla jump up when they notice an ambulance parked below their window. It turns out Bunny was found by a college student named Holly Goldsmith, who was out on a walk with her dog. As Richard, Henry, and Camilla go downstairs toward the ambulance, they are bombarded with questions about Bunny from the media. Later, Henry talks to the FBI agents who questioned him and asks what they think happened. They don't think Bunny killed himself, but they have no other leads. One of the agents starts to provide a theory, but the other cuts him off. This conversation disturbs Camilla, who begins crying. The FBI agents offer to drive her home and she accepts. Before leaving, the agents reveal that the case will be left in the hands of the local authorities because no federal crime has been committed.

Camilla's description of the night of the murder brings the novel into the realm of the supernatural, a common theme in gothic literature. Additionally, her description of the body fills in some gruesome details that Henry previously failed to provide and gives a clearer image of the crime they committed. The ritual with the piglet only makes things worse, and Henry is right to assume that Richard would find it shocking. Meanwhile, Charles's annoyance that Richard is alone with Camilla only adds to the theory that their relationship is incestuous.



Henry's fear of the psychic is comical, especially considering how calm he remains in the face of everything else. Once again, he proves himself to be completely out of touch with contemporary thought, which surprises Richard. Meanwhile, Charles's drinking is getting worse, which could lead to problems, as Bunny previously pointed out.



Once again, the media proves itself to be more interested in sensationalism than helping people. It is obvious that Hundy should never have been given a platform, especially when law enforcement doesn't even take his claims seriously.



Finally, the moment the Greek students have been waiting for arrives and the case can finally be wrapped up. Although Henry tries to get information out of the FBI, he fails. However, it seems unlikely that they suspect the Greek students, otherwise the agent who gets cut off wouldn't be so willing to share his theory. Meanwhile, now that this process is over, at least one of the Greek students, Camilla, begins exhibiting remorse.



As the FBI agents walk away with Camilla, they try to change the subject and make her feel better. Meanwhile, Richard starts to disassociate from his surrounds. He describes this feeling as “an incomplete dreamscape that was like a sketch for the world you knew [. . .] an amnesia-land, a kind of skewed Heaven where the old landmarks were recognizable but spaced too far apart.” While looking around, he spots a single old shoe lying on the ground; it isn’t Bunny’s but for some reason Richard doesn’t understand, it makes an impression on him.

Richard’s reaction to the discovery of Bunny’s body is difficult for him to describe. The world begins to seem unreal, which once again puts his reliability into question. Although the image of the shoe is ultimately ambiguous, there is a moment earlier in the novel where Bunny gets Richard’s attention by throwing a shoe at his window. Perhaps this is the connection that Richard’s mind is making between Bunny and the shoe, even if he isn’t consciously aware of it.



CHAPTER 7

Richard is shocked by how many people come out of seemingly nowhere to mourn Bunny’s death. He regularly hears people say about Bunny, “He would have wanted it that way,” despite the fact that they barely knew him. In addition, the college donates money in Bunny’s name to the ACLU, which Richard describes as “an organization Bunny would certainly have abhorred, had he been aware of its existence.” For some time, all upcoming events at the college incorporate Bunny in some fashion and even communities who previously hated him—such as the local hippies—find ways to mourn his passing. Although Richard is skeptical as to whether this outpouring of grief is genuine, he does realize that he underestimated how many people cared for Bunny.

Largely, the reaction to Bunny’s death appears disingenuous, particularly from the institutional level. Nonetheless, there is also an outpouring of genuine grief because of Bunny’s passing, and this only adds to the guilt Richard and the other Greek students feel.



In the days following the discovery of Bunny’s corpse, Richard doesn’t see much of his friends. Henry goes to Connecticut with the Corcorans, and Richard doesn’t spend time with the others. Instead, he hangs out with Judy and her friends. Whenever Judy is left alone with Richard, she tries to sleep with him, though Richard declines her advances. In addition, Richard does briefly see Francis, who tells him that Bunny’s parents have ordered an autopsy. This fact, along with Richard’s general feelings of guilt, keep him up at night. Ultimately, the autopsy reveals nothing about Bunny’s cause of death, and no drugs are found in his system.

After Bunny’s body is found, the relationships between the other Greek students gradually begin to fray. Richard, in particular, becomes increasingly isolated from the others and is not able to find comfort anywhere else either. Plus, even after Bunny’s body is found, the guilt still remains and seems to only be getting worse.



The following Monday, Richard receives a letter from Henry inviting him to stay at the Corcorans’ house the night before the funeral. Henry strongly suggests that Richard do so because he is having a hard time dealing with the Corcorans on his own. Together with Francis and a girl named Sophie Dearbold, a casual acquaintance of Bunny’s, Richard travels to Connecticut for the funeral. They have fun on the car ride together, though Richard dreads their arrival at the Corcoran home. Eventually, they find it; it is a large house decorated in a garish postmodern style. Richard is clearly appalled by its appearance, though Francis shrugs it off.

A night at the Corcorans is sure to only make the Greek students’ sense of guilt even worse. However, the introduction of Sophie does make this one of the few happy moments in the second half of the book. Sophie is the only non-Greek student in the novel whom the Greek students seem to like. Meanwhile, the Corcorans’ home looks every bit as bad as Richard was promised, and, as Henry said, it is clear that they are attempting to affect the appearance of wealth.



Mr. Corcoran answers the door and greets Francis warmly. Next, Sophie introduces herself, though Mr. Corcoran clearly has no idea who she is. Before Richard can introduce himself, Mr. Corcoran breaks down crying. In response, Francis comforts him, and he quickly pulls himself back together. This moment scars Richard who recalls, "Suddenly, and for the first time, really, I was struck by the bitter, irrevocable truth of it; the evil of what we had done." Francis realizes what's on Richard's mind and kicks him so that he'll snap out of it. All of a sudden, Mr. Corcoran stops crying and invites everyone inside for a beer. Everyone is shocked by his reaction, though Francis accepts the offer. Before they go inside, Richard manages to introduce himself to Mr. Corcoran, who recognizes him from Bunny's stories.

Shortly after they enter the house, the doorbell rings and Mrs. Corcoran answers it to find a boy delivering flowers. She begins chastising the boy for a previous delivery, which he did not make, while Mr. Corcoran tries to deduce who sent the latest batch of flowers. Mr. Corcoran seems to appreciate the flowers, though Mrs. Corcoran is suspicious of many of them. She thinks that a man named Bob Bartle who works for Mr. Corcoran only sent a wreath because he plans on asking for a raise.

After the dispute over the flowers, Mrs. Corcoran turns to her guests and asks Francis how his mother is doing and says, "I was so sorry when I heard she'd been admitted to the Betty Ford Center." Francis assures her that his mother is fine and attempts to drop the subject. Mrs. Corcoran does not get the hint and continues to discuss the subject. However, she is soon cut off by Mr. Corcoran, who sees Henry coming down the stairs and loudly greets him. Mr. Corcoran asks Henry if he's spent his time upstairs "[l]ooking at girlie magazines." Henry responds by telling Mr. Corcoran that he's been reading the *Upanishads*.

Mrs. Corcoran tells Henry to show Francis, Richard, and Sophie where they are staying. Before Henry can do so, Mr. Corcoran has another one of his crying fits. No one knows how to react, and it is clear that Mrs. Corcoran is not happy with her husband's breakdown. Eventually, Mr. Corcoran calms down when his sons and grandsons arrive. As Mr. Corcoran plays with the children, Mrs. Corcoran once again repeats her order to Henry about showing the others their accommodations.

The Corcorans' response to their son's death is abnormal to say the least. However, Mr. Corcoran is occasionally struck by genuine fits of grief, which make Richard feel so guilty that he almost loses control of himself. Although Mr. Corcoran is vain and conceited at times, he also seems to have taken more of an interest in his son's life than the other Greek students' parents have taken in theirs.



Mrs. Corcoran shows that she can be every bit as nasty as Charles said. She is incapable of realizing that other people might genuinely be trying to comfort the Corcorans by sending flowers. Instead, she assumes everything is about money, which is what her world revolves around.



It is unclear whether Mrs. Corcoran's comments about Francis's mother are genuine. On the one hand, she is certainly capable of showing false concern. On the other hand, it is soon revealed that she has a substance abuse issue herself and may be sincerely sympathetic. Regardless, she fails to pick up on the many signs that Francis is not interested in discussing the subject. Additionally, it is evident that Bunny's lack of scholarly knowledge is something he shares with his parents.



Mr. Corcoran is the more sensitive of Bunny's parents and, again, though he has some undesirable qualities, he seems to genuinely care for his family. He is deeply saddened by the loss of his son, and the thing that consoles him in this scene is spending time with his family.



Henry points Francis and Richard to the basement where they will be staying. The basement is dank, and they quickly realize that they will have to sleep on cots, likely alongside a number of other people. Francis is revolted and suggests that they leave and check into a hotel. At the same time, Camilla comes down the stairs and tells them that their accommodations are nothing compared to what she's had to endure. She arrived the night before and had to share a bed with Marion. She also tells them that Henry is having another bout of headaches and is therefore taking a lot of pills.

Richard describes the time he spends with the Corcorans as "one of the worst nights of [his life]." He is forced into many awkward conversations while eating bad food and trying to withstand the hustle and bustle of the house. In addition, he is wracked with guilt for the role he played in Bunny's death and is reminded of a line from [Crime and Punishment](#): "It was I killed the old pawnbroker woman and her sister Lizabeta with an axe and robbed them." Eventually, he is able to get away from the crowd and talk to Henry, alone. Henry tells him that he is doing his best to keep up appearances, but he's run out of medicine for his headaches.

Together, Richard and Camilla raid one of the Corcoran's bathrooms in search of medicine for Henry. While they look, someone aggressively and repeatedly knocks on the door. After much searching and little success, Richard opens the door to find Cloke. Cloke is surprised and annoyed to find Richard and Camilla in the bathroom together, and he interrogates Richard about what they were doing. Richard eventually tells him the truth and Cloke turns out to be helpful. He reveals that Mrs. Corcoran "is on about sixteen different types of dope" and promises to show Richard where to find the drugs when the opportunity arises.

Richard returns downstairs to find more chaos. The young children are yelling and crying, while Mr. Corcoran attempts to regale a captive audience with a story about Henry. As it turns out, the story is about someone else entirely. Eventually, Richard manages to step away again, and Cloke shows him the location of the drugs. He pockets some for Henry and heads back downstairs. Before he can find Henry, he runs into Francis who is concerned because Charles left in Francis's convertible in the rain with the top down. Richard tells Francis not to worry and assures him that everything will be fine.

The Corcorans have overextended themselves in inviting so many people to their home, and they cannot fit them all comfortably. Meanwhile, Henry's headaches are back, a phenomenon that often occurs when the Corcorans are around.



Dostoyevsky—the author of Crime in Punishment—is mentioned multiple times in The Secret History. Like Tartt, Dostoyevsky wrote characters who are psychologically complex and often wracked with guilt. As its title suggests, the crimes committed by the protagonist of [Crime and Punishment](#) do not go unpunished. As such, the fact that it is referenced here is not a good sign for the Greek students. Though they may have avoided the law, there are other ways that they will be punished for their crime.



Like several other male characters in the novel, Cloke is infatuated with Camilla, even though she has no interest in him. Additionally, it is here that the extent of Mrs. Corcoran's drug addiction is revealed. Perhaps the reason she is so apathetic about the death of her son is because of the number of pills she is on.



It's hard to find a sympathetic character in this scene. Everyone seems self-absorbed, and the two characters who aren't—Richard and Cloke—and stealing drugs.



Shortly after his conversation with Francis, Richard finds Henry and gives him the pills. He tells Henry to be cautious because he shouldn't be taking the pills with alcohol in the first place. Next, Richard runs into Camilla. He tells her to be careful while talking on the phone when around other people because apparently Cloke has been attempting to listen in on her conversations. Camilla assures him that she is being careful. Then, on a whim, Richard gives her a brief kiss. Before anything else can happen, Charles stumbles drunkenly through the door, closely followed by Francis. The two are fighting because Francis thinks Charles may have ruined his car by leaving the top down in the rain. Eventually, Francis ends the argument because he realizes the extent to which Charles is disturbed and upset.

The next morning, Richard gets up and prepares for the funeral. Because Henry is a pallbearer, he must leave early. This leaves Richard, Camilla, and Sophie alone with an irritated Mrs. Corcoran, who is annoyed because no one else is ready. Richard assures her that Francis is coming, however, he isn't finished dressing. Though this is the truth, Richard fails to mention that Charles and Cloke are on the porch smoking pot. Eventually, Mrs. Corcoran manages to round everyone up, and they make their way to the church.

The funeral service is long and features a sermon from the minister, a cliché speech from Bunny's high school football coach, and a poem from Henry. The Greek students find the poem, which is A. E. Housman's "With Rue My Heart Is Laden," to be in poor taste. However, Henry chooses it because it is something that Bunny would often recite. During the closing prayer, Richard once again begins to dissociate and worries that he might pass out. Ultimately, though, he manages to hold himself together.

After the church service, Richard overhears a conversation between Mr. Corcoran and his son Hugh. Hugh is excited because Paul Vanderfeller, who owns a large percentage of Mr. Corcoran's bank, attended the funeral. Upon learning this, Mr. Corcoran rushes off to talk to him. Following this interaction, everyone makes their way to Bunny's grave. Richard finds the site of the grave almost unbearable, and he is stricken with guilt as he watches Bunny's casket be lowered into the ground. After Bunny is in the ground, Henry picks up a handful of dirt and lets it fall on the coffin. Then, he smears his hand across his clean shirt. The other Greek students all stare at him in shock, though he doesn't seem to realize what he's done.

None of the Greek students are acting as carefully as they should be. Even Henry isn't able to hold himself together without the help of drugs. However, Richard does finally make a move to develop his relationship with Camilla. It doesn't amount to much, which is probably for the best. When Charles comes through the door, it's obvious that he has been driving drunk, an unfortunate decision that will soon turn into a habit for him.



Again, Mrs. Corcoran seems worried about all of the wrong things on the day of her son's funeral. Her outbursts do not seem to be a way to sublimate her grief. Rather, she simply seems annoyed that people are not keeping up appearances. Meanwhile, Charles and Cloke continue to cope by using drugs.



Henry's choice of poem is strange for someone who was reading The Upanishads the night before. Whether he chose the poem as a genuine tribute to his former friend or because he's playing to an audience is unclear. Meanwhile, guilt continues to get the best of Richard, who can barely keep himself rooted in the phenomenal world.



Here, Mr. Corcoran's character takes a turn for the worse. Although his grief is more genuine than that of his wife, this moment is still one of gross self-interest. Not only that, but it is also encouraged by another member of Bunny's family, who is supposed to be grieving. At Bunny's grave, the guilt becomes unbearable for everyone, even Henry, who uncharacteristically appears out of sorts. As Bunny is lowered into the ground, the Greek students are finally hit with the full weight of their actions, and it is overwhelming.



CHAPTER 8

Richard doesn't clearly recall the events following the funeral because he took a bunch of painkillers to keep himself under control. Everyone leaves the Corcoran home as soon as they can, though Richard isn't able to leave until four in the afternoon. On the way back, he notices that Camilla and Charles are angry with one another, though he doesn't know why. When Richard returns to campus, he isolates himself from the other Greek students for a while and thinks about his future. At night, he is plagued by bad dreams, all of which are clearly tied to the guilt he feels over Bunny's death.

When Richard does see his friends again, he notices that the twins are still angry with each other, seemingly because of something to do with Henry. In addition, Charles's drinking begins to get out of control, and he often drives drunk. In fact, everyone is doing quite poorly, and attendance is regularly low for Julian's classes. Although Richard is not doing great himself, he is looking forward to the summer. In particular, he is interested in house sitting for a professor from Brooklyn. This will give him a chance to live comfortably and be alone with his thoughts.

One night, not long after Bunny's funeral, Richard is awoken by a late-night call from Francis, who thinks he's having a heart attack. Richard doesn't believe him, but he decides to take him to the emergency room just in case. Francis behaves erratically at the ER, and it takes a lot of convincing before he lets the doctor run tests. Richard assures the doctor that Francis is not on drugs. Believing Richard to be truthful, the doctor tells Francis that he is likely experiencing a panic attack. After they leave the ER, Francis feels silly; he knows he should see a psychiatrist, but he also knows that he can never tell anyone the truth.

A few nights later, Richard is woken up again in the middle of the night, this time by Henry. Henry tells Richard that Charles has been arrested for drunk driving and he gives Richard money to bail Charles out of jail. Richard complies with the request but realizes on his way to the police station that he has no understanding of what's happened. When he arrives at the station, the police tell him that Charles must spend the night in jail because his bail hasn't been posted yet.

Once again, Richard's narration is unreliable because of the drugs in his system. However, the anger he witnesses between Camilla and Charles is legitimate, and it is the beginning of the end of their relationship. In fact, at this point, a number of conflicts that have laid dormant among the Greek students begin to show themselves.



Guilt and anger begin to overwhelm the friend group as they all give into their vices, particularly Charles. Whereas once Richard wished to be part of a friend group, now he wishes he were back on his own and that none of this ever happened. However, he will soon discover that it takes more than isolation to cure a guilty conscience.



Francis is not as reliant on substances as Richard and Charles, so he is not numbing his feelings. Instead, he feels the full force of what he's done, and he is having panic attacks because of it.



The combination of alcohol, Charles, and law enforcement is not a good one for a group of students trying to keep a murder secret. Once again, Henry acts as a leader in this situation, and Richard acts quickly and without questioning him.



Richard waits around until morning and then calls Henry and explains the situation. He asks Henry why he didn't come and get Charles himself, to which Henry responds, "I am afraid that I'm the last person Charles wants to see." Apparently, Henry and Charles got into a fight the night before, although Henry doesn't provide any details. Richard is annoyed that Henry won't say more, but he sticks around to help his friend. Richard goes to court and posts Charles's bail. Charles has his license suspended for the time being and has a court date set. Because it was Henry's car that he got pulled over in, Henry will also be required to attend the hearing.

Charles asks Richard to come home with him because he doesn't want to be alone. While walking home, Richard asks Charles what happened between him and Henry. Charles doesn't go into detail but says that he is sick of Henry's demands. He blames Henry for putting them all in such stressful circumstances in the first place. In addition, he talks to Richard about his conversations with the FBI. Apparently, the agents knew about Henry and Bunny's fight in Italy and the booked flights to South America. They never put everything together, but they did come close. Charles says that Henry was almost sure that he'd be arrested.

When Charles and Richard arrive at the twins' place, Charles kisses his sister, aggressively and romantically, in front of Richard. Richard is caught off guard, though he doesn't say anything. Shortly after he witness this interaction, Richard visits Francis and asks him if Charles and Camilla have an incestuous relationship. Francis laughs and tells Richard that they do and that everyone has known for a long time. He also tells Richard that the twins are exceptionally jealous of one another, especially Charles. In addition, he tells Richard that he—Francis—has slept with Charles in the past, though Charles will never admit to it.

A few days after his conversation with Francis, Richard runs into Cloke, who asks Richard about Camilla's new place. Richard doesn't know what Cloke is talking about. Cloke reveals that he saw Henry help Camilla move somewhere, though he doesn't know the exact location. He also tells Richard that he doesn't trust Henry. Cloke believes that Henry tried to pin Bunny's murder on him during his interviews with the FBI. He isn't sure of this fact, the FBI could have been bluffing, but he thinks it is true. In addition, Cloke tells Richard that the FBI brought his name up as well. Though Cloke can't prove it, he believes that Henry gave it to them.

Once again, Richard must navigate a situation without knowing the details. Nonetheless, he follows Henry's orders, though he starts to question his leadership. In addition, the upcoming court date set for Henry and Charles seems as though it will prove troublesome.



Charles's anger at Henry stems from the same place as Richard's. Henry acts as the group's leader, while regularly withholding information. Like Julian, he takes advantage in the trust that others place in him. Although the other Greek students are initially eager to follow Henry, they are beginning to realize that he, too, is flawed.



In the final chapter of the novel, many of the group's secrets are revealed, although many of them are not surprising. By the end of the novel, every member of the group will have slept with another member, except Richard. Of course, the truth about Charles and Camilla is especially shocking, although it doesn't radically change how Richard views them. However, Charles's jealousy of Camilla does become a key issue for the rest of the novel.



Cloke's suspicions about Henry only make Richard more paranoid that his friend has been manipulating him and is not to be trusted. In addition, considering that Charles is already jealous of Camilla and angry with Henry, this new turn of events is not leading anywhere good.



The same night, Richard goes out and parties with Cloke, Judy, and Sophie Dearbold. He wakes up the next evening to a knock on the door, which turns out to be Sophie. Sophie has come to check on him to make sure he is okay. Richard appreciates the gesture, and wonders whether he and Sophie slept together. In the middle of their conversation, Francis shows up and says to Richard in Greek, “Important news, my friend.”

When they are alone, Francis tells Richard the important news: Camilla has indeed moved out of her place with Charles. She is living in an expensive inn called the Albemarle, which only Henry could afford. Furthermore, Camilla has cut off all communication with Charles and he doesn’t know how to get ahold of her. Francis worries that this new development will incense Charles and make matters much worse. Francis and Richard speculate whether Henry and Camilla are sleeping together. They don’t know for sure but assume that this is the case.

The next night, while on a walk, Richard finds Charles drunk and passed out on a playground at the Early Childhood Center. Concerned for his friend, Richard takes him back to his room. For the next few days, Richard takes care of Charles, who has a high fever. Charles repeatedly hallucinates that Bunny is in the room, though Richard tells him that this is not the case. When he realizes that Charles isn’t getting better, he decides to take him to the emergency room. The doctors tell Richard that Charles is okay—it’s just a case of bronchitis—but they worry about Charles’s stress levels as well as how dehydrated he is.

When Charles regains consciousness, he asks Richard to go to his house and get him some of his things, including a bottle of scotch. After consulting with Francis and Henry, Richard does as Charles asks. Francis comes with Richard to the hospital to see Charles. When they arrive, Charles is in a bad mood. Francis mentions that he’s seen Camilla and Charles tells him, “I hope you told her I said go to hell.” On their way out of the hospital, Francis tells Richard that he isn’t sure what is going on, but he thinks they should stay out of it.

Richard returns to his room, where he finds Camilla. At first, he treats her coldly, but then Camilla starts to explain the situation. She tells Richard that Charles has been physically abusive since Bunny’s funeral and shows him a cigarette burn on her arm as proof. Richard feels bad and apologizes, but then is angry again when the topic of conversation turns to Henry. He tells Camilla that she puts too much faith in him. Camilla doesn’t understand why Richard is so upset with her and when she asks him, he tells her to leave. In the following days, Richard finds himself contemplating his previous interactions with Henry and wonders what to believe.

Richard is still trying to cope by partying but is destroying his mind and body by doing so. His only saving grace is Sophie, who will eventually become an important figure in his life.



Richard is not happy with this development both because he is in love with Camilla and because he worries about what this will do to Charles. Previously, Bunny seemed like a liability for his fellow Greek students, and now Charles appears to be in a similar situation.



Essentially, Charles is drinking himself to death, and it doesn’t look as though he plans to stop. Richard does his best to help Charles, but the help Charles needs is more than Richard can provide.



Only Francis and Richard appear relatively uncompromised leading up to the climax of the novel. Henry has his own agenda, Camilla is nowhere to be found, and Charles is a complete wild card.



Richard is torn by the sympathy he feels for Camilla and his own sense of jealousy. However, he is not entirely in the wrong to question Henry’s judgement. Although the other Greek students are not without blame, it is Henry’s leadership that led them to this point.



A few days later, Richard has a heated conversation with Henry. He is annoyed that Henry continues to act like the boss of everyone while leaving them in the dark. Quickly, Henry changes the subject and says to Richard, “You don’t feel a great deal of emotion for other people, do you?” Richard says that he does, though Henry doesn’t believe him. Henry then tells Richard that he’s always felt dead inside or, at least, he always had until he killed the man as part of the bacchanal. He tells Richard that the night of the bacchanal was the best night of his life because he was able “to live without thinking.” Richard is deeply disturbed by what Henry says, but he also thinks that he might be right.

The same day, Francis and Richard go to see Julian, hoping he will lift their spirits. When they find him, Julian shows them a letter addressed to him that was accidentally slipped into the mailbox of a professor who was on sabbatical. The letter is purportedly from Bunny, although Julian thinks it must be a fake. However, when Richard and Francis read the letter, they quickly realize that it may be genuine. The letter talks about the bacchanal murder and Bunny’s fear that Henry wants to murder him. When Richard and Francis flip the letter over, they see that it was printed on “hotel stationary, engraved, at the top, with the address and letterhead of the Excelsior: the hotel where Bunny and Henry had stayed in Rome.” Frightened that Julian will learn the truth, Francis and Richard realize that they must try to get the letter away from him.

Francis and Richard try and fail to lure Julian away from the letter. Upon leaving, they decide to involve Henry, who they know has a key to Julian’s office. As it turns out, Henry is already at Julian’s office, though it takes them some time to discover this fact. As quickly as he can, Richard bursts into Julian’s office and urges Henry to talk to him in private. Henry is annoyed by Richard’s presence and arrogantly denies his request. Richard continues to beg and eventually Henry agrees, but not before exposing the letterhead of the Excelsior to Julian.

A moment of silence pervades Julian’s office as everyone connects the dots at the same time. Realizing they can no longer hide the truth, Henry tells Julian everything. When he finishes, “the expression on [Julian’s] face [is] impossible to read.” Julian hands Henry the letter and says, “I think you better keep this.” Afterwards, he leaves the room; it is the last time Richard ever sees him. In retrospect, Richard cannot bring himself to fully love or hate Julian. On the one hand, he finds him “silly and vain and remote and often cruel,” but on the other hand, he believes that he is an amazing teacher and he still loves him.

Here, Henry reveals his true nature; he is unfeeling, and he takes joy in killing. This explains why he is able to cope relatively well compared to the other characters in the novel. Even though Richard thinks Henry might be right when he says that Richard is the same way, there is evidence to suggest otherwise. Although some of Richard’s behavior may exist on a similar spectrum to Henry’s, he clearly feels guilt and remorse. He also does not take any pleasure in killing or feel the urge to do it again. Notably, in this passage, Henry parrots the phrase “to live without thinking” from Julian’s lecture earlier in the novel. This speaks to the degree to which Julian influenced Henry.



Once again, another detail overlooked by the Greek students pops up. However, this time it is in the hands of Julian, someone who knows them intimately and could quickly deduce the truth. Additionally, the letter reveals that Bunny was more aware of his impending death than the Greek students would have ever expected.



Henry’s refusal to listen to Richard—after Richard has obediently followed his orders the entire novel—reveals a thirst for power that is ultimately his downfall. Julian, who knows his students well, quickly deduces what is wrong and learns the truth.



Julian’s final moments with Richard and Henry say a lot about his character. Evidently, he is not concerned with morals. Nor is he concerned with his students, whom he immediately abandons. Instead, Julian is entirely motivated by his own intellectual curiosity and wellbeing. As soon as he senses that there will be trouble for him, he flees, leaving behind the students who viewed him as a father figure.



The next day, Charles is released from the hospital, so Richard and Francis take him to lunch. However, Charles refuses to eat anything and only orders alcohol. The next day, the Dean shows up in place of Julian for Richard's Greek class. He tells the Greek students that Julian suddenly had to depart, likely due to his relationship with the Israeli government. The Dean tells them that the classics department is likely to get discontinued, though he does plan to find them a substitute to finish the semester. In the middle of all of this, Charles bursts in drunk, asking after Julian. The Dean reexplains the situation and then Charles leaves, assuming that Julian's rapid departure is Henry's fault.

The next day, everyone except Charles shows up on time to class. The substitute teacher is awful and turns out to know less Greek than his students. Midway through his lesson, Charles stumbles in drunk and the teacher starts again from the beginning. After class, Henry vows never to go back, regardless of if he fails. Charles is annoyed by Henry's headstrong attitude and mocks him. Richard worries that things are spiraling too far out of control between Henry and Charles. Soon, they will have to appear in court together, and that appearance is shaping up to be a disaster.

Hoping to mollify Charles, Francis and Richard convince him to ride with them out to the country house. Charles worries that this is a trap set up by Henry, though Francis and Richard assure him that that is not the case. On the way to the house, Francis and Richard reassure Charles that they are his friends and want what's best for him. This seems to calm him down. While at the country house, Charles spends his time alone, drinking. Things go sideways when Henry calls the house and Charles overhears him talking to Richard on the phone. Although Richard does nothing to comprise Charles, Charles is convinced that Richard, Francis, and Henry are scheming to have him killed. He runs away by borrowing a truck from Francis' gardener.

Francis and Richard look everywhere for Charles but fail to find him. They realize that if they don't find him soon, the police will. Eventually, they end up back at Camilla's hotel room at the Albemarle, where they find Camilla and Henry. They begin strategizing a plan to find Charles, but before they can get far, Charles bursts into the room, drunk, angry, and holding a gun. Charles tells Henry that he's come to kill him for ruining his life.

Charles's drinking continues to worsen, as does his anger. However, his anger is not baseless. Blindly, he guesses that Henry is responsible for Julian's departure, and he is exactly right. In addition, it looks like none of the Greek students will be able to finish their degree at Hampden if they want to continue studying classics.



Despite his many faults as a teacher, Julian did train his students well, and they prove to be too much for their hapless substitute. However, their inept teacher is the least of their problems, as the tension between Henry and Charles is about to reach a breaking point.



Charles becomes paranoid that Henry wants to kill him just like he killed Bunny. He wants to believe that the other Greek students are not in on this plot, but after hearing Henry's voice on the phone he becomes fully paranoid. Although Richard and Francis have no interest in killing Charles, it is unclear if the same can be said for Henry. Henry says very little to Richard in this section of the novel, so it is possible that he has something in mind. The argument against this would be that Henry is now romantically involved with Camilla, and although Camilla has distanced herself from her brother, it seems unlikely that she wants him dead.



Even if they were never formally caught by law enforcement, Bunny's murder destroys the lives of its perpetrators. Here, the story ramps up towards its tragic climax.



Henry, Francis, Camilla, and Richard try to calm Charles down, but they fail. They do manage to get the gun away from him, but not before he fires it, hitting Richard in the stomach. Chaos erupts below them, and they know it is only a matter of time before the police are called. In the confusion, Henry whispers something in Camilla's ear, takes the gun, and shoots himself in the head just as the innkeeper opens the door.

Henry's suicide is a difficult action to interpret. Is he trying to save his friends? Is he sick of life? Something else? One compelling theory is that he wants to differentiate himself from Julian. Julian was a charismatic leader, but his rhetoric was ultimately empty; he turned out to be entirely self-absorbed. Henry, who admires Julian, does not want to do the same thing to his friends as Julian did to him. As such, he attempts to save them by sacrificing himself, proving that he was, in some regards, a leader worthy of respect.



EPILOGUE

Henry's mother comes to see Richard in the hospital to thank him for trying to save her son. Richard quickly works out that the new working story is that Henry was suicidal, and Richard was inadvertently shot while trying to save him. Henry's mother gifts Richard Henry's car before leaving. After he gets out of the hospital, Richard spends his summer housesitting in Brooklyn and reading. The following fall, Richard returns to school and eventually gets a degree in English. He is the only one of Julian's former students to return.

In the wake of Henry's death, the students officially disband, as only Richard returns to Hampden. Here, the novel provides a brief look at Henry's mother, though she doesn't reveal anything new about Henry.



Richard fails to keep in close contact with his former friends. However, he does start dating Sophie Dearbold during his senior year of college. After graduating, the two of them move back to California together. Unfortunately, their relationship doesn't last long because Sophie finds Richard "uncommunicative," and she is scared of the way he looks at her when he wakes up. While in California, Richard goes to graduate school and studies Jacobean tragedies, a project he largely enjoys.

Finally, Richard enters into a relationship, albeit an unsuccessful one. More successful, however, is his newfound interest in Jacobean tragedy, which he probably finds all too relatable. Jacobean tragedies, after all, are full of violent deaths and guilt-stricken characters; they also tend to focus on revenge, so it's possible that Richard's interest in these plays is a manifestation of his subconscious feeling that he deserves punishment for what he has done.



While writing his dissertation, Richard gets a letter from Francis that is essentially a suicide note. Richard travels to Boston, where he finds Francis in a hospital after a failed suicide attempt. Francis is miserable because his grandfather found out that he is gay and is forcing him to marry a woman he finds repulsive. If Francis refuses, his grandfather will not give him any more money. Francis doesn't think he can live without his inheritance, which annoys Richard.

Although Francis can live with the guilt of what he has done in the past, doing so without money is apparently too much for him to bear. It is unsurprising that this annoys Richard, who carries the same baggage without the added wealth.



The next day, Camilla arrives, and the three friends share a brief reunion. Camilla tells Francis and Richard that she is no longer on speaking terms with Charles and does not know his exact location. As far as she knows, he is living with Texas with a woman he met in rehab. Both of them still regularly drink. Meanwhile, Camilla's life now revolves around taking care of her grandmother who is sick and on the verge of death. Before Camilla departs, Richard asks her to marry him. Camilla says that she can't, at first citing her grandmother and then her continued love for Henry. Saddened by this result, Richard returns to California.

Richard ends his story by relating a dream he had recently. The dream takes place in "a strange, deserted city . . . underpopulated by war or disease." Richard walks through the city, where he finds a museum-like building where men are standing around and looking at **an exhibit**. The exhibit is "a machine with metal parts that slid in and collapsed in upon themselves to form new images. An Inca temple . . . click click click . . . the Pyramids . . . the Parthenon." While looking at the exhibit, Richard sees Henry. Richard asks Henry if he is happy, and Henry replies that he is not. However, he also tells Richard, "You're not very happy where you are either." Richard watches the exhibit morph into different cities. As he does so, Henry excuses himself and walks down a "long, gleaming hall."

Everyone's lives have gone downhill since Bunny's death. Though Camilla and Richard are both keeping their heads above water, neither of them is over the past. Richard thinks that their one path forward is together, but Camilla cannot bring herself to accept his offer. Indeed, it seems unlikely that their marriage would fix anything.



Richard's dream acts as a sort of purgatory that both he and Henry are stuck in. Both are transfixed by the past, represented by the museum exhibit, while being forced to exist in the present. Ultimately, there is no escape for Richard; he feels guilty about what he has done, and this guilt seems as though it will define the rest of his life.





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