

## Chapters 8:

Finny's return prevents Gene and Brinker from enlisting; Gene because he feels guilty abandoning Finny, and Brinker, because, for all his talk, won't actually act alone. What we also see of Brinker is his unwillingness to give up on getting to the root of Finny's accident. When he sees Finny back in the dorm room, he challenges Gene with an insinuation about his plan not working. In order to deflect attention, Gene mocks Brinker, saying he never really intended on enlisting with him, ultimately earning Brinker the nickname Yellow Peril. Shortened to yellow, the connotation is chicken, and that is not something that sits well with Brinker. (We see this side of Brinker again when the mock trial takes place in Ch. 11.)

Finny downplays any talk of war by: 1. Pretending it is a propaganda scheme devised by fat old men; 2. Insisting that Gene become the athlete he once was. Consider why he behaves this way: the reason is the same for each (he cannot participate and Finny prefers to live in denial than accept the truth, much like Gene ducks the truth in admitting what happened and much like Finny will struggle when finally confronted by Leper's account of what happened that day in the tree).

When Gene challenges Finny's story about the war being a fiction, he asks him why is he so special, in that he is in on the joke of a story devised by fat old men. Finny's answer shocks Gene: "I've suffered." It is a deeply personal admission and likely is the catalyst for Gene to grab the exercise bar; he does something he has never done before (30 chin up) as a means of lessening the tense atmosphere, but what his gesture actually does is three fold:

1. It compels Finny to admit he had been training for the 1944 Olympics (and when Gene says there will not be any, as the war is on, he is reminded again by Finny that the war is "a fantasy."
2. Gene begins to buy into this fantasy, as if it is part of an exclusive secret between Finny and him.
3. It gets Finny to embark on the scheme of training Gene for the 1944 Olympics, to be the athlete he can no longer be, so take that thought a step further; Gene is now the stand in for...Finny. Gene turns out to be a pretty good athlete; thus, oddly, in a sense, he is acquiring what he wanted; the top in marks and sports. Just like the mirror selecting finny back at him when he wore Finny's clothes, Gene feels once again an odd sense of peace, more confident in this role than as Gene.

## Chapter 9:

Deals initially with the enlistment of Leper who is misled into enlisting in the Army; his version of war is that of sunny slopes and ski patrol. He is the first of their class to enlist and his action makes the war less believable than ever; if someone as much of a misfit as Leper is deemed war-worthy, how seriously should anyone take it? Thus, stories are spun about the heroics of Leper; think of him as a Where's Waldo or flat Stanley character; showing up everywhere but considered solely on an entertaining level. However, it is quickly proven that Leper is unfit to serve, and it comes at the end of the Devon Winter Carnival, yet another Finny scheme that the others willingly go for.

Brinker is another character who undergoes some form of change. It seems he does not have the courage to enlist alone, but, frustrated with the rules of school being metaphoric for the ordinary nature of society, he has withdrawn from all clubs he formerly ran and has become, in Devon, at least, some kind of rebel.

As winter drags along, the malaise that is winter sets in, and it is only Finny who seems unaffected by it. His plan for the Olympics, hosted in the park by the Naguamsett, involve lots of contraband (cider jugs and the leaky fridge, no real order and as with Blitzball, the rules quickly fall apart (the only rule being there are no rules, p.134). This leads to general chaos and an incident in which Gene plugs a jug of cider up against Brinker's mouth. There is a tension (enmity) between these two, but maybe gene is forcing Brinker to force the story of the fall?

The violence that always lurks just beneath the surface is demonstrated by the sudden destruction of the 'prizes' they had collected for the Carnival. Finny pronounces Gene the victor of the Decathlon, an Olympic event: consider carefully the significance of why Gene excels.

The significance of the book's title is then revealed; for a moment Finny moves as gracefully as he once did; what Gene calls his choreography of peace. It is momentary for the chapter ends with the telegram from Leper sent to Gene (one misfit to another). It is rather interesting that Leper calls himself Gene's best friend.

## Chapter 10:

Focus in on Gene's visit to Leper's home in rural Vermont. Leper greets him in the dining room and is unresponsive to Gene's attempts at humor. Gene learns that Leper is AWOL (what Leper clams as "escaped") and there is discussion about the perception of normal. Leper is defensive; he knows people will call him crazy, and such a concept (that the army has done this to Leper) terrifies Gene. If it can happen to someone like Leper, what hope can the others have to avoid it? Leper is to be given a Section 8, and knows the negative connotation of that.

But the fact is Leper has suffered a nervous breakdown (loss of appetite, lack of sleep, hallucinations) yet he has moments of great perception and in one of those he confronts Gene's very nature, calling him "lord of the manor" meaning Gene has desired to be better than his station in life and posed as such while at Devon. Gene strikes at Leper, both with words, and literally, because the reality before his eyes scares him. Leper calls him a savage (again, the violent nature evident in the snowball fight, Blitzball, the sudden jolt from the tree) and calls Gene upon "That time you knocked Finny out of the tree."

Gene proves him right, too, by knocking him over in his chair ("You stupid crazy bastard...") and is shamed immediately by what he has done yet does not fully own up to it, placing the blame somewhat on Leper when Leper's mother comes into the room (consider Gene's actions similar to the tree incident). Gene winds up staying for lunch, eating heartily if guiltily, and going for a walk with Leper in which he has to hear Leper recounting some of the hallucinations he has had (consider the symbolism: hallucinations are not what they appear to be, yet people consider them reality).

Confronted by Leper's struggles, Gene proves unable to help/accept what Leper is going through (again, familiar motif) and reacts by turning on him, telling him (151) to "*Shut up!*" and running away.

Consider, therefore, the significance of the chapter's final sentences: "What did he mean by telling me a story like that! I didn't want to hear any more of it. Not now or ever. I didn't care because it had nothing to do with me. And I didn't want to hear any more of it. Ever."

## Chapter 11:

Upon returning to Devon, Gene seeks Finny's company only. He finds him among the others in the midst of a snowball fight. He wonders later whether such action is a wise move on Finny's part (concern about breaking his leg again; foreshadowing). There is something happy about the chaos of the fight, how they all pile on top of Finny, how there are no sides, no winners or losers.

Brinker's inquiry about Leper compels the discussion forward about who is fit to serve, and it is Brinker who pushes the truth into the open, that like Leper, Finny is "sidelined." This compels Finny to cease talking about the war as fiction. It had been a fiction created by Finny to deal with the truth of his own chances of enlistment; had he been able, the war would have been his one reality (158). What Finny truly does believe and admits it being fundamental to him is Gene; he must believe Gene, without that reality, all foundations, for Finny, are shaken.

Again, it is Brinker who will compel all truth forward; Gene, by his own admission, is too passive to do so (159) but Brinker feels, perhaps rightly, that there will be no resolution for anyone, but Gene and Finny, specifically, unless and until the events the day of the fall are presented openly.

Finny reveals to Gene that he has seen Leper on the campus (there because he wants things to return to how they were; to the past; to 'normal' just as Finny does, just as Gene does. (164).

The arrival of Leper and the insistence of Brinker now brings on the 'midnight trial' held in the First Building (a building that had been burned down and been rebuilt many times, yet is still known as First0. where they pass the motto: "Here Boys Come to Be Made Men" (165).

Inquiry begins before a jury of their peers (about ten seniors all in their black graduation gowns). There are vague memories on Finny's part, who really does not want to uncover the whole truth because then there are admissions he needs to face...that people are not always honorable, that Gene has let him down, that people are not as good as he is; learning the truth will destroy his innocence.

Gene, on the other hand, is too afraid of rejection, of losing Finny's friendship to own up; thus, he continues to lie, getting caught again and again (first on the ground, no, climbing the tree, no, on the branch), and it can be considered fateful that although people think there are no witnesses, in actual fact, Leper was there and Leper is now here. Gene can no longer hide the truth as Leper is brought forward to tell his version of events (173). Again, Leper has a moment of clarity, describing the actions (in shadow) of two figures moving like an action (Newtonian physics). The first to move would have compelled the motion of the other; Gene moved first, resulting in Finny's fall (metaphorically, it is Gene's fall from grace and Finny's from his state of innocence).

Unable to accept the full significance, Finny retreats from the hall, resulting in his second fall, this time along the hard, cold unyielding marble stairs. Go back to Chapter one; this is the place Gene first seeks to revisit.

## Chapter 12:

p. 181: Gene hides outside Finny's hospital room to learn what Finny's fate is (concerning the second break). When opportunity arises, he goes into Finny's room and for the first time, we see Finny's anger: "You want to break something else in me!" (185) Gene apologizes...finally and retreats.

He returns prior surgery and finally they speak. Gene learns that more than anything (any dream of athleticism or Olympics) Finny had wanted to enlist but because of the first fall, Finny cannot. Irony: Gene prevents Finny from fulfilling this dream; thus, sparing him from dying at war (further irony comes with Finny's sudden death). Along with the irony comes an epiphany: Gene realizes it as he says aloud: "You wouldn't be any good in the war, even if nothing had happened to your leg." Reality is Finny is no more mentally fit for the war than Leper but for another reason; reason being that Finny – godlike as he is – lacks the frailty and fallibility of man. Literally, he is too good to experience the corruption and dark nature of mankind, better embodied by Gene in his deception and mistaken perception of competition and getting ahead. Finny would not have lasted in part because he is naïve and innocent, which is why he left the marble hall of the First Building when he did; he cannot bear to face reality: that Gene lied and harmed him; that war is not noble but bloody and violent.

There is forgiveness in the exchange between Finny and Gene; it is the last time Gene sees him alive.

Finny's death (bone marrow to the heart) symbolizes death by way of a broken heart.

So what, metaphorically speaking, killed Finny:

- A. betrayal by his best friend
- B. loss of dream/ambition/goal
- C. Finny, unfit for the corruption of competition and war, dies "unsullied", not "maimed" (word is deliberate) by the darker side of human nature.