

# Looking for Alaska



## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF JOHN GREEN

Green grew up in Orlando, FL, and then attended Indian Springs School in Birmingham, AL—the inspiration for the setting of *Looking for Alaska*. After graduating, Green attended Kenyon College, where he majored in English and Religion. Green began training to become an Episcopal priest, but then switched paths to focus on writing. While working on *Looking for Alaska*, his first book, Green reviewed books for *Booklist*. He has spoken about his own experiences with bullying, which he drew on to write *Looking for Alaska*. Green maintains a number of YouTube channels, of which “VlogBrothers” is most notable, and is thought by some to have ushered in a new era of young adult fiction. A. J. Jacobs of the *New York Times* has deemed his style of fiction “GreenLit,” which he describes as stories that rely on “sharp dialogue, defective authority figures, occasional boozing, unrequited crushes and one or more heartbreaking twists.” Green lives in Indianapolis with his wife and two children.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Green has spoken at length about the parallels between *Looking for Alaska* and his time at Indian Springs School. While he was there, a fellow classmate died, although he did not know her as well as Miles knows Alaska. However, Green has also emphasized the fact that this is a work of fiction, and many of the events in the novel do not correlate with things that actually happened.

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

John Green is also the author of several more books in addition to *Looking for Alaska*: [An Abundance of Katherines](#) (2006), [Paper Towns](#) (2008), and [The Fault in Our Stars](#) (2012). He is also a co-author of *Let It Snow: Three Holiday Romances* (2008) and *Will Grayson, Will Grayson* (2010). *Looking for Alaska* has been widely compared to John Knowles’ [A Separate Peace](#) (1959) and J. D. Salinger’s *A Catcher in the Rye* (1951), both of which are coming-of-age novels set at boarding schools. Green has stated that he drew inspiration from many of the books he read as a reviewer at *Booklist*. Known influences include Jeffrey Eugenides’ *The Virgin Suicides* (1993), David Foster Wallace’s [Infinite Jest](#) (1995), Zora Neale Hurston’s [Their Eyes Were Watching God](#) (1937), Michael Chabon’s *The Mysteries of Pittsburgh*, and Jonathan Rendall’s *This Bloody Mary is the Last Thing I Own* (1997).

## KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Looking for Alaska*
- **Where Written:** Chicago, IL
- **When Published:** 2005
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary young adult literature
- **Genre:** Coming-of-age novel
- **Setting:** Culver Creek, in Birmingham, AL
- **Climax:** Alaska’s Death
- **Antagonist:** The Weekday Warriors, the Eagle
- **Point of View:** First person, from Miles’ perspective

## EXTRA CREDIT

**Countdown.** Green was inspired to write the chapter titles as a countdown by the way the news media adopted the phrase “post-9/11 world.”

**Art from life.** Green and his friends performed a version of the Alaska Young Memorial Prank in high school.



## PLOT SUMMARY

The book begins with Miles Halter leaving his home in Florida to attend the Culver Creek boarding school in Birmingham, AL. Miles arrives at the school as a smart but lonely junior, and he is determined “to seek a Great Perhaps.” At school he befriends Chip (also known as the Colonel), Alaska, and Takumi, each of whom have a special talent—memorizing facts about other countries, quoting poetry, and freestyle rapping, respectively. Miles is obsessed with famous people’s **last words**, and Alaska introduces him to the last words of Simón Bolívar, who died wondering how to “escape the **labyrinth**.” Alaska is often exciting and wild, but she can also be moody and withdrawn. Miles spends a lot of time trying to understand her better, although he makes little progress. Overall, however, he is thrilled to finally have friends.

In addition to making friends for the first time in his life, Miles spends much of his time at Culver Creek learning to break the rules. His friends encourage him to **smoke** and eventually he drinks on campus as well. When Miles first arrives on campus, Kevin and Longwell, two Weekday Warriors (wealthy kids who don’t board at the school), pull him out of bed in the middle of the night, wrap him in duct tape, and throw him into the school’s lake. The Colonel is furious about this, and he and Alaska work on a plan to get back at them. Over time, the group discovers that Kevin and Longwell thought that the Colonel had ratted to the Eagle, the dean of students, about two

students named Marya and Paul. Marya used to be Alaska's roommate, but she and Paul were caught smoking pot after having drunken sex and expelled. Kevin and Longwell thus hurt one of the Colonel's friends because they think he hurt one of theirs. Alaska's desire to get back at the Weekday Warriors is exacerbated when they flood her room and ruin her "Life's Library" of books she is saving to read.

For much of the first semester, how Marya and Paul got expelled is a mystery, but eventually Alaska tells Takumi that she reported them, and Takumi tells Miles. The Eagle caught Alaska breaking the rules and threatened expulsion unless she gave him information about other students. Takumi and Miles can't figure out why Alaska would be so afraid of getting expelled that she ratted on her friend, because not ratting on anyone, no matter what they do, is the most important social code at Culver Creek. The Colonel is furious when he finds out that Alaska was responsible, because he takes loyalty very seriously.

Alaska and Miles spend Thanksgiving break on campus together, and then everyone goes home for Christmas. When they get back, Alaska, Miles, Takumi, the Colonel and Lara, whom Alaska thinks Miles should date, execute a prank on the Weekday Warriors. Takumi and Miles distract the Eagle by setting off fireworks around campus while Lara puts blue dye in Kevin's conditioner and hair gel. Meanwhile, Alaska and the Colonel send fake progress reports with failing grades to a number of Weekday Warrior parents.

The next morning the group hangs out and gets drunk in a barn. They play a game called Best Day/Worst Day, in which each person tells the story of their best and worst day. Alaska's worst day was when she came home from school and her mom collapsed to the ground and started shaking. Alaska was very young, so instead of calling 911, she sat with her mother until she thought she fell asleep, but in fact, she died. Alaska has never told anyone at Culver Creek that her mother is dead, and for the first time, Miles can understand why Alaska is so moody and impulsive. She is paralyzed by the memory of freezing when her mother needed her, so she compensates with constant action. Later that evening Miles and Lara start dating.

The next evening, Alaska and the Colonel get drunk to celebrate the success of their prank. Alaska dares Miles to make out with her. They do, until Alaska says that she is sleepy, and she asks Miles, "To be continued?" Everyone falls asleep until Miles and the Colonel are woken up by a hysterical Alaska. She enlists their help distracting the Eagle so that she can leave campus. Miles and the Colonel have no idea why she is upset or where she wants to go, but they distract the Eagle long enough for her to leave.

The next morning the Eagle announces to the school that Alaska died in a car crash the night before. Miles and the Colonel spend much of the rest of the year trying to deal with their grief, hoping to figure out why Alaska left and whether she

intended to kill herself or not. Miles and the Colonel get into a number of fights, and both fall into a depression, though his World Religion class helps Miles come to terms with what occurred. Eventually the friends decide to memorialize Alaska by pulling the prank she had planned for their senior year. A few days later, with Takumi's help, Miles and the Colonel realize that the night Alaska died was the anniversary of her mother's death. Alaska had forgotten to put **flowers** on her mother's gravestone, and so she had drunkenly driven off with that purpose. Miles ends up deciding that he doesn't care whether or not Alaska committed suicide in the end, because he loves her no matter what. The novel concludes with Miles returning to his quest for the "Great Perhaps" and deciding that forgiveness is the best way out of "the labyrinth of suffering."



## CHARACTERS

### MAJOR CHARACTERS

**Miles Halter** – A junior in high school and the main character and narrator of the novel. He moves to the Culver Creek boarding school in Birmingham, AL from his home in Florida, where he is a good student but has few friends. He decides to leave home "to seek a Great Perhaps" and has a penchant for memorizing famous people's **last words**. Miles is very gangly, so his friends at Culver Creek nickname him "Pudge." Over time, Miles transforms into a confident, risk-taking person with a great capacity for forgiveness and introspection.

**Chip Martin (The Colonel)** – The Colonel is Miles' roommate and best friend at Culver Creek, as well as the facilitator of all the pranks he and his friends pull on the school. The Colonel is very poor and lives with his mother, Dolores, in a trailer park. He attends Culver Creek on an academic scholarship. The Colonel loves memorizing facts about other countries and spearheads the search to find out more facts about Alaska's death. He is an extremely principled person, and he values loyalty and honesty among friends.

**Alaska Young** – Alaska is Miles' love interest at Culver Creek. She is smart and loves quoting poetry, but she can also be moody and unpredictable. Alaska loves sex, **smoking**, drinking, and pulling pranks. She occasionally reciprocates Miles' romantic, or at least sexual, interest, but also has a boyfriend named Jake. Alaska decides that the biggest question in life is how to "escape the **labyrinth** of suffering." When Alaska was young, her mother died in front of her, and Alaska failed to call 911. Alaska dies in a car crash halfway through the novel.

**Takumi Hikohito** – Takumi is very close with Alaska and good friends with Lara, the Colonel, and Miles. He loves to freestyle rap. Like Miles, he also has feelings for Alaska. The Colonel and Miles ignore Takumi after Alaska's death. In response, Takumi withholds information about her death from the Colonel and Miles, but eventually he does help them understand why Alaska

died. Only when Miles decides to forgive Takumi does he understand how to move on from Alaska's death.

**Mr. Starnes (The Eagle)** – Mr. Starnes, known as “the Eagle” among students, is the dean of students at Culver Creek. He believes that discipline is good for young people, and Miles, the Colonel, Takumi, and Alaska spend a great deal of time trying to avoid his watchful eye. The Eagle, however, does decide not to punish Miles and the Colonel for the Alaska Young Memorial Prank.

**Dr. Hyde (The Old Man)** – Dr. Hyde is a very old religion teacher at Culver Creek. Miles thinks that he's a genius, even though he once kicks Miles out of class. Dr. Hyde encourages his students to think about the meaning of life and death, and after Alaska dies, he changes his final exam and asks students to answer Alaska's question about how to escape the **labyrinth** of suffering.

**Kevin** – Kevin and Longwell Chase cover Miles in duct tape and throw him into the lake at the beginning of the school year. Both are Weekday Warriors. The Colonel hates Kevin, and even though Kevin tries to call a truce multiple times, the Colonel dies Kevin's hair blue and sends a fake report card to his parents.

## MINOR CHARACTERS

**Lara Buterskaya** – Lara is a Romanian student at Culver Creek. She is Miles' girlfriend for one day and becomes close friends with Takumi after Alaska's death. Lara is very quiet, but she helps the group pull off a number of pranks.

**Jake** – Jake is Alaska's boyfriend, who doesn't go to Culver Creek. He gives Alaska **white tulips** for their anniversary and calls her the evening that she dies.

**Mrs. Young** – Alaska's mother, who died of an aneurysm in front of Alaska when she was young. She used to **smoke** and put **flowers** in Alaska's hair.

**Weekday Warriors** – Weekday Warriors are students at Culver Creek who do not board on the weekends. Instead, they go home to their wealthy families who have mansions in Birmingham. The Colonel hates Weekday Warriors, but they end up helping him pull off Alaska's last prank.

**Dolores Martin** – Dolores, the Colonel's mom, invites Alaska and Miles to spend Thanksgiving in her trailer. Although she is poor, she is very generous. She is also deeply grateful to have a good son.

**Maxx** – Maxx is the stripper who pretends to be Dr. William Morse at Speaker Day. He helps the junior class pull off the Alaska Young Memorial Prank.

**Marya** – Marya is Alaska's former roommate. She was expelled from Culver Creek after being caught drunk, having sex, and smoking pot.

**Paul** – Paul is Marya's boyfriend and was also expelled from Culver Creek.

**Sara** – Sara is a Weekday Warrior and the Colonel's girlfriend at the beginning of the novel.

**Mr. Halter** – Miles' dad, and an alumnus of Culver Creek. He pretends to be Dr. William Morse on a phone call with the Eagle to help Miles pull off Alaska's prank.

**Mrs. Halter** – Miles' mom, who worries that Miles has no friends in Florida. She allows him to stay at Culver Creek over Thanksgiving when she learns that he has friends at his new school.

**Mr. Young** – Alaska's dad. According to Alaska, he blames her for her mother's death.

**Longwell Chase** – Along with Kevin, Longwell Chase throws Miles into the lake at the beginning of the school year. At the end of the year, he helps Miles convince the Eagle to hire Dr. William Morse for Speaker Day.

**Holly Moser** – Holly is a student at Culver Creek who tells Miles and the Colonel that she thinks Alaska was trying to send her messages from the grave while she was eating at Waffle House.

**Hank Walston** – Hank is the star basketball player at Culver Creek. He loves to smoke weed.

**Madame O'Malley** – Madame O'Malley is the French teacher at Culver Creek. She tries to comfort the Colonel when he first hears of Alaska's death.

**Maureen** – Maureen is the chef at Culver Creek.

**Katie** – Katie is Lara's roommate. She knees Miles in the balls.

**Pelham police officer** – The police officer Miles and the Colonel speak to, and the man who saw Alaska die. He is not sure whether her death was an accident or a suicide.



## 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.



### HOW TO LIVE AND DIE

While life and death are certainly important topics in *Looking for Alaska*, *how to live and die* are much bigger themes. Indeed, the novel is not titled *Alaska*, but rather *Looking for Alaska*—it's the search that matters. Miles and Alaska are both naturally inclined toward looking for meaning. Miles memorizes **last words** because they help him understand how people lived, and Alaska reads and memorizes

poetry from her Life's Library, which helps her find words for what she is feeling. The Old Man's World Religions class then furthers Miles' understanding of how to live and die. The class exposes him to how a variety of cultures and religions have answered life's biggest questions. Alaska's answer to her search is "straight & fast"—she wants to escape from her "labyrinth of suffering" as quickly and easily as possible.

Once Alaska dies, Miles' interest in how to live and die is intensified because it now has a practical application. But when Alaska escapes from her own labyrinth, she creates a new labyrinth for Miles. He gets lost in a pattern of grief in which he simultaneously wants to find answers and avoids looking for them. Despite his love for Alaska, Miles ultimately realizes that she gave up, whether or not she committed suicide. Overcome by guilt, she decided that her life had to be a sad one. When Miles chooses forgiveness—for himself, and for Alaska—he chooses to keep going forward and seek his "Great Perhaps." He learns from Alaska's mistakes that it is the uncertainty of life that makes it worth living.



### MYSTERY AND THE UNKNOWN

Mystery is at the heart of this novel—so much so that it is embedded in the structure of the book.

Rather than separating the novel into chapters, Green sections his book into days, each of which is titled with a number of days and the word "before" or "after." For example, the first section of the book is called "one-hundred thirty-six days before." Before *what*, however, is not made clear to the reader until two-thirds of the way through the book.

Just as the mysterious structure of *Looking for Alaska* makes the novel intriguing, mystery is an intriguing part of Miles' life as well. At the book's beginning, Miles decides to move to Alabama to seek his "Great Perhaps." He is excited about the mysteries that await him, and he immediately becomes obsessed with understanding Alaska, who is a mystery herself. But while Alaska's active cultivation of a mysterious air does make her interesting to others, she suffers because of it. She is not willing to let others in, and is afraid for others to see the horrible person that she thinks herself to be. As a result, Alaska prevents her friends from getting to know her as well as they want to. Indeed, Miles and the Colonel let her drive away on the night of her death because they do not realize how upset she is, or that it is the anniversary of her mother's death.

Only once Miles gives up trying to figure out Alaska and her death can he finally see Alaska for what she really is: a mystery that is not meant to be answered. Further, when he stops chasing after Alaska, he is once again able to pursue his own Great Perhaps. Ultimately, Miles is okay with not knowing exactly what happened to Alaska because it doesn't matter what happened. The solutions to mysteries aren't always important. Miles realizes that whether or not she killed herself, he still loves her and cares about her and believes that her

spirit lives on. For him, that is enough.



### LOYALTY AND FORGIVENESS

Friendship, and particularly loyalty among friends, is extremely important at Culver Creek. The

Colonel emphasizes to Miles that under no circumstances should he tell on a fellow student, and Alaska suffers emotionally for having done so to her roommate, Marya. This code of loyalty, while strict, encourages the students to forgive one another, or at least not to hold grudges. Friends are willing to take the fall for other friends if necessary, and when Alaska does this for Miles, she does not hold her punishment against him. Further, most students are willing to forgive one another even if they have been disloyal. For example, once Kevin has played a prank on Miles, he asks the Colonel for a truce because he feels the Colonel has been adequately punished for telling on Marya (which, of course, he did not in fact do). While the Colonel does not grant the truce, he ultimately forgives Kevin when he enlists his help to pull off the Alaska Young Memorial Prank.

But while the characters in *Looking for Alaska* find it relatively easy to forgive one another, they often struggle to forgive themselves. Whether or not Alaska intended to take her own life, she dies because she is unable to forgive herself for the role she played in her mother's death years ago. And she is so furious with herself for forgetting the anniversary of her mother's death that she drives drunk and angry in the middle of the night. When she is still alive, Miles realizes that Alaska lives so recklessly and carelessly because she cannot forgive herself for her inaction during her mother's aneurysm. She doesn't want to freeze again, so she is constantly moving.

Although Alaska ultimately dies because she cannot forgive herself, Miles survives the suffering brought about by her death because he *can* forgive himself. Miles struggles with this at first—he feels incredibly guilty and disloyal to Alaska for having let her go driving that night. However, when Miles realizes that Alaska would forgive him for letting her go, he decides to forgive himself, too. He restores his relationship with his friends and is able to escape from the grief that has consumed him.



### MEMORY AND MEMORIAL

In *Looking for Alaska*, characters are defined and even introduced to others by their ability to memorize things. The Colonel memorizes

countries, Miles memorizes **last words**, and Alaska memorizes poetry. Despite the fact that these characters find solace in the words and numbers they memorize, they still struggle with their memories of other people and themselves. Indeed, while Alaska may be outwardly defined by her ability to quote poems about sadness and femininity, she defines herself by the

memory of her mother's death. She is tormented by the fact that she was present for the death and yet did nothing to stop it. The memory of this inaction drives Alaska to be a reckless person, which in turn propels her toward her own death.

While Alaska defines herself by a single memory, Miles is able to look at himself more holistically. His memory of wearing peed-on gym clothes is just as important to who he is as his memory of playing a prank with his new friends at Culver Creek. Miles does, however, struggle to remember Alaska correctly. He is so blinded by his love for her and his hope for what could have been that he forgets that she was frequently, as Alaska describes herself, a "sullen bitch." Miles spends a great deal of time after Alaska's death trying to learn everything about her, to make his mental picture of her more complete. Doing this starts driving him crazy, and he finally accepts that he will inevitably forget Alaska, just like Alaska forgot her mother's death. But while Miles may not be able to remember Alaska perfectly, letting go of the need to remember her exactly lets him memorialize her as she truly was through actions of his own. In addition to the Alaska Young Memorial Prank, Miles, The Colonel, Takumi, and Lara each throw a **cigarette** into the Smoking Hole in Alaska's honor. Like a cigarette, Alaska brought others great pleasure, but also a lot of pain. While the memory of some of that pleasure and some of that pain lives on, Alaska will eventually fade away like a cigarette's smoke and dying embers. As much as Miles likes to fix life into place by encapsulating it with last words, he must come to terms with the fact that everything in life can and will fade away.



## IDENTITY

Coming-of-age stories, known as *bildungsroman*, often begin with a young person looking for the answers to life's questions, as Miles does in *Looking for Alaska*. In a traditional *bildungsroman*, loss or grief would motivate the main character to depart from home and go on a quest for knowledge, while in *Looking for Alaska*, a death interrupts the search on which Miles has already embarked. Like *Looking for Alaska*, however, a *bildungsroman* ends with its main character having gained maturity and self-knowledge. The character who "comes of age" (Miles) who has a less naïve and more realistic approach to life as a result of his experiences.

While all coming-of-age novels are invested in identity, *Looking for Alaska* is particularly concerned with it. When Miles first arrives at *Culver Creek*, he thinks that he knows himself. He is well liked by teachers, doesn't care for sports, and is perfectly happy being alone. His quest, at that moment, is for adventure rather than self-awareness. Once Alaska dies, Miles turns his attention to trying to figure out who she really was. While she was alive, Miles could identify Alaska as beautiful and mysterious and smart, but she was also mean and selfish and irrational, and he struggles to come to terms with the many

facets of her personality. Ultimately, Miles realizes that while the process of "looking for Alaska" never brought him any real answers about Alaska, it did help him grow closer to his friends and learn more about himself. Miles matures into someone who knows the value of friendship and forgiveness, and it is only once he realizes that he cares about these things that he truly knows himself.



## MISCHIEF

The more time Miles spends at Culver Creek, the more comfortable he becomes with mischief. At the beginning of the novel, he is extremely upset when Dr. Hyde kicks him out of class for looking out the window, but by the end, he is blatantly coordinating and participating in a prank against the school. At one point, Alaska tells him that mischief will always win out over good deeds, and Miles learns that misbehaving at least makes life more exciting, because you never know what will happen next. Even the Eagle appreciates Miles' newfound willingness to get into trouble, to a certain extent at least, because he recognizes how well the prank Miles and the Colonel play captures Alaska's mischievous spirit. The mischief Alaska encourages also forges bonds among her friends, making them very loyal to one another. They do not want to get caught, and as a result, they grow closer by looking out for each other and doing their best to make sure no one gets in trouble.

While Alaska's insistence on breaking the rules loosens Miles up a bit and encourages him to live more freely, Alaska takes mischief to the extreme. Indeed, she uses her mischief-loving personality as a cover for how reckless she really is. The night she dies, her decision to sneak off campus is not inspired merely by wanting to break the rules. Instead, she leaves because she does not value her own life enough to stop herself. Alaska can be wild and fun, but she can just as easily be destructive and dangerous. When she dies, Miles and the Colonel feel so guilty and ashamed that they behave recklessly, too. The Colonel, for example, smokes in front of a police officer even though he is clearly too young to do so. By the end of the novel, however, the Colonel and Miles value themselves enough to behave responsibly, while still having fun and pulling pranks. Green doesn't try to instruct his readers to always follow the rules—instead he demonstrates that breaking the rules can be fun and worthwhile, but also can have dangerous consequences.



## SYMBOLS

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



## SMOKING

When Miles arrives at Culver Creek, one of the first things the Colonel and Alaska convince him to do is to start **smoking** cigarettes. Miles says he doesn't really have a reason for smoking, but to him it just seems like the thing to do. At the beginning of the novel at least, smoking represents fitting in for Miles. For the Colonel and Alaska, smoking cigarettes is a way of defying authority—something the Colonel makes very clear when he smokes in front of the Pelham police officer. However, even if Alaska smokes to be cool, she also smokes because she is sad. She tells the others, "Y'all smoke to be cool. I smoke to die." Smoking was something her mother did before she died, and smoking is, for Alaska, an activity connected to her mother's death. And while the others seem to smoke as a way to pass time or keep up appearances, Alaska invests in the fact that she is knowingly bringing about her own slow demise through smoking. Once she dies, smoking takes on a new meaning. All that is left of her is a vague memory, like the smoke rings she used to blow. Alaska's friends privately remember Alaska by each throwing a cigarette into the Smoking Hole (where they all used to smoke together) in her honor.



## LAST WORDS

For much of *Looking for Alaska*, Miles thinks of **last words** as a way to encapsulate the way a great person lived, and he memorizes many famous people's last words. Like the Buddhist *koans* Miles learns about in his World Religions class, these last words seem like guides on how to live life. Miles maintains his love of last words after Alaska's death, but he ultimately has to accept that he will never know hers. What he has, instead, are Alaska's *lasting* words: "To be continued?" Miles points out the difficulty of preserving people's last words when their death does not seem imminent, and he realizes that last words are not necessarily people's most important words. By the end of the book, last words come to symbolize the many different ways one could choose to live, but they do not provide any definitive answers. By letting go of Alaska's last words, Miles learns to live with ambiguity and ultimately comes to enjoy the fact that he does not know what's coming in his own "Great Perhaps."



## THE LABYRINTH

One of the clearer symbols in *Looking for Alaska* is the **labyrinth**. Alaska loves the last words of Simón Bolívar: "Damn it, how will I ever get out of this labyrinth!" At the beginning of the book, Alaska isn't sure if Bolívar's labyrinth symbolizes life or death, but she eventually decides that life's most important question is "How will we escape this labyrinth of suffering?" Labyrinths differ from mazes in that labyrinths

have only one possible path, winding though it might be, while mazes have many different potential paths. Whether or not Alaska intended to die, she seems certain that her life, tracked through the labyrinth, will be an unhappy one, and that the only way to survive will be "straight & fast"—either to go through it recklessly or not go through it at all. Miles has a more Christian understanding of labyrinths, although he is not particularly religious. In Christianity, with which Green is very familiar, labyrinths symbolize a journey towards salvation. It is not an easy road, and it's full of twists and turns, but if one follows the path, one will arrive at God's doorstep. Because life is not a maze, there are no dead ends. Miles embraces the labyrinthine nature of life, and once he decides to move forward rather than look back, he is excited about where his path might take him.



## WHITE FLOWERS

For Alaska, **white flowers** symbolize her mother. Before her death, Alaska's mother used to put white daisies in Alaska's hair. Daisies are traditional symbols of innocence. Alaska remembers the anniversary of her mother's death when she realizes that she is doodling white daisies while on the phone, and she takes the white tulips Jake has given her to put on her mother's grave. Alaska dies with these flowers by her side, and they symbolize knowledge that might have saved Alaska from that death. White tulips traditionally represent worthiness and forgiveness, and had Alaska been able to forgive herself and understand that she had value, perhaps she would not have left Culver Creek that night. At the same time the white flowers also act as memorials for Alaska herself, as she died with them in her car.



## MEASURES OF DISTANCE

Distance plays an important role in *Looking for Alaska*—so much so that it becomes a part of certain characters' identities. The Colonel connects Miles' name to "**miles**" travelled, and in this way his name comes to refer to how far he feels from Alaska when she dies, and how much distance he would have to cross to know her better. While Miles wants to get closer to Alaska—he is always counting the layers that separate them from each other—Alaska seeks distance. She chose her name when she was young because **Alaska** was as far away from Alabama as possible, and she consciously avoids letting people get to know her too well. And yet, despite the fact that Miles is the one who wants closeness while Alaska wants space, it is Alaska who is ultimately unable to distance herself from her past. Miles, on the other hand, comes to see himself more clearly only when he leaves his home and gains new perspective on his life.





## QUOTES


Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Speak edition of *Looking for Alaska* published in 2008.

## 1. One Hundred Thirty-Six Days Before Quotes

“François Rabelais. He was this poet. And his last words were ‘I go to seek a Great Perhaps.’ That’s why I’m going. So I don’t have to wait until I die to start seeking a Great Perhaps.”

**Related Characters:** Miles Halter (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 5

### Explanation and Analysis

At the beginning of the novel, Miles explains to his parents why he wants to leave Florida and attend Culver Creek. In Florida, Miles' life is entirely predictable, and he is drawn to the idea of going somewhere where anything could happen. Miles loves learning other people's last words and often uses them as guidance for how to live his own life. Here, Miles' takes Rabelais' last words, which refer to the mystery of death, and reinterprets them as inspiration for his life. He doesn't want death to be his "Great Perhaps"; instead, he wants to start seeking adventure now, in life.



Much of *Looking for Alaska* is about Miles' struggle to make sense of the mysteries of life and death, and this quote helps set up that struggle. While Miles is clearly drawn to these mysteries at the beginning of the book, when his life actually becomes mysterious he has trouble accepting the unknown. This statement also demonstrates how invincible Miles feels early on in the novel. At this point, death is something to "wait" for that will happen far into the future--not something that might happen at any moment.

## 2. One Hundred Twenty-Eight Days Before Quotes

“Anyway, when you get in trouble, just don’t tell on anyone. I mean, I hate the rich snots here with a fervent passion I usually reserve only for dental work and my father. But that doesn’t mean I would rat them out. Pretty much the only important thing is never never never never rat.”

**Related Characters:** Chip Martin (The Colonel) (speaker),

Miles Halter

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 17



### Explanation and Analysis



In this passage, we learn about the key rule of life in Miles's new prep school: never rat on another student (AKA, the "schoolboy code"). The Colonel tells Miles, who's new at school, to always remain loyal to other students over the administration--even if the breaking this "loyalty" could result in the expulsion of people neither the Colonel nor Miles likes.

Why is it so important not to rat on your classmates at prep school? While Green doesn't answer the question, he implies that the honor code is important because it creates a bond of trust and loyalty between all students, even those who don't like each other. Miles and Colonel will argue and compete with their peers (the "Weekend Warriors"), and yet they'll also feel a bond of brotherhood with their enemies in the face of a larger authority.

“That’s the mystery, isn’t it? Is the labyrinth living or dying? Which is he trying to escape—the world or the end of it?”

**Related Characters:** Alaska Young (speaker), Miles Halter

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:**  

**Page Number:** 19

### Explanation and Analysis

When Alaska and Miles meet and she learns of his love of last words, she tells him about the supposed last words of Simón Bolívar: "How will I ever get out of this labyrinth." Miles is unsure what to make of Bolívar's words, but for Alaska the lack of clarity in Bolívar's quote is what makes it exciting and interesting: is Bolívar describing a desire to escape death, or a desire to escape life?

This interaction makes immediately clear how different Alaska's perspective on life is from Miles's. To Miles, life is a "Great Perhaps" and is full of opportunities that must be seized. He is generally optimistic about the future and very much intends to make the most of his life. Alaska, on the other hand, entertains the possibility that life might be something that needs to be escaped rather than enjoyed. Unlike Miles, who thinks of eventual death as a reason to



make the most of your life while you have it, Alaska sees death as a potential way out of all of the suffering in the world. And although Alaska often works hard at making herself seem mysterious to others, the "Great Perhaps" of life, which is so attractive to Miles, is not necessarily attractive to Alaska.

At this point in the novel, Alaska still isn't clear on what she believes, and Bolívar's words themselves are still a "mystery" to her. Later in the novel however, Miles thinks back to this moment when he is trying to figure out how to understand the role Alaska played in her own death.

#### 4. One Hundred Twenty-Six Days Before Quotes

☝ “I must talk, and you must listen, for we are engaged here in the most important pursuit in history: the search for meaning. What is the nature of being a person? What is the best way to go about being a person? How did we come to be, and what will become of us when we are no longer? In short: What are the rules of this game, and how might we best play it?”

**Related Characters:** Dr. Hyde (The Old Man) (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 32

##### Explanation and Analysis

During Miles's first day of class at Culver Creek, the Old Man – Dr. Hyde – explains that the topic of his World Religions class will be "the search for meaning." Miles is excited to think about this topic in the context of school because he imagines that he will be told how to solve life's problems. Although Miles claims to be attracted to the "Great Perhaps" and the mystery of what could happen in his life, he actually seems more interested in finding an objectively correct answer for how to best live his life.


What Miles doesn't know at this point in the novel is that the questions Dr. Hyde poses here are questions that Miles will end up struggling with more outside of the classroom than in it. When Alaska dies, Miles is forced to confront the choices Alaska made about how to live and grapple with his beliefs about what happens after death. His struggle with these questions ultimately teaches him that in order to live well, he must learn to accept and embrace – rather than try to solve – mystery and the unknown.

#### 6. One Hundred Ten Days Before Quotes

☝ “Y’all smoke to enjoy it. I smoke to die.”

**Related Characters:** Alaska Young (speaker)

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 44

##### Explanation and Analysis

Early in the novel, Miles, Takumi, the Colonel, and Alaska go down to the Smoking Hole to talk. Miles asks Alaska why she is smoking so quickly, and she says that she is smoking to slowly kill herself. The chapter ends with Alaska's comment, but presumably everyone who hears it takes it as a dark joke. No one takes the comment entirely seriously because Alaska is constantly setting herself apart from the rest of the group, and always trying to be mysterious and morbid. Even when Alaska is doing the same thing as everyone else, she thinks of her motivations as different. Further, the fact that she jokes about smoking to die shows how flippant her attitude toward death can sometimes be.

Alaska's comment gains significance when the group learns about Alaska's mother's death. Alaska's mom smoked, and Alaska ties herself to her mother by carrying on this tradition. It would obviously be difficult for Alaska to fully enjoy smoking if every cigarette reminded her of her mother. Alaska feels an immense amount of guilt over her mom's death, and her smoking habit could be seen as a way of punishing herself. After Alaska's death, Miles thinks about this comment and wonders if he should have suspected that Alaska might commit suicide.

#### 10. One Hundred Days Before Quotes

☝ “Well, later, I found out what it means. It's from an Aleut word, *Alyeska*. It means 'that which the sea breaks against,' and I love that. But at the time, I just saw Alaska up there. And it was big, like I wanted to be. And it was damn far away from Vine Station, Alabama, just like I wanted to be.”

**Related Characters:** Alaska Young (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 53

##### Explanation and Analysis

In this scene, Miles gets to know Alaska Young better. Alaska is the most complicated character in the novel, and in this passage, we get a sense for her inner complexities.






Alaska projects an image of calmness and self-control, but we get the sense that it's *just* an image: deep down, she's more frightened and lonely than she'd like to be. Alaska explains that she first liked the name "Alaska" because it represented something and far away. One could say that Alaska likes the idea of being far away because she's so mysterious and confident in herself--but it's probably more accurate that she wants to be far away from everyone because she's a lonely, depressed young woman.

The idea that the word Alaska also means "that which the sea breaks against" captures the ambiguity of Alaska's character. Any object that can endure the beating of the waves must be pretty strong--but perhaps the waves will break it down in the end (foreshadowing Alaska's emotional breakdown).

☝☝ "Jesus, I'm not going to be one of those people who sits around talking about what they're gonna do. I'm just going to do it. Imagining the future is a kind of nostalgia...You spend your whole life stuck in the labyrinth, thinking about how you'll escape it one day, and how awesome it will be, and imagining that future keeps you going, but you never do it. You just use the future to escape the past."

**Related Characters:** Alaska Young (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 54

### Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Alaska tells Miles about her plans to teach disabled children one day, but then stops herself halfway through an explanation: she insists that she doesn't want to become one of those people who talks about the future constantly. In Alaska's view, talking about the future is a kind of cop-out: a way of avoiding the present. Alaska also thinks talking about the future is useless, since one's dreams never come true. This is a cynical (and often incorrect) view, of course, but it fits in with Alaska's persona of pessimism and dark humor.



In short, the passage shows us some of Alaska's limitations and weaknesses. She believes that "people" never achieve their dreams, but that's only because she's sure *she'll* never achieve her dreams. The irony is that in turning away from the future so willingly, Alaska doesn't embrace the present at all; she just "doubles down" on her past. As we'll see more

and more clearly, Alaska is haunted by her life before coming to prep school: she's afraid of the future because she's haunted by her own memories.

## 11. Ninety-Nine Days Before Quotes

☝☝ "Sometimes you lose a battle. But mischief always wins the war."

**Related Characters:** Alaska Young (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 56

### Explanation and Analysis



In this passage, the Eagle catches Alaska and her friends smoking, and tells them that they'll be brought in for questioning (and probable punishment) soon. Miles is worried about being punished, but Alaska insists that there's no point in being worried: in the grand scheme of things, she and her friends will always win out in the end, with their mischievous pranks--the Eagle and his discipline are useless.

Alaska's speech suggests that she's carefree and eager to have fun, even if doing so involves breaking the rules. And yet her pronouncement seems a little too aphoristic, a little too glib. As we'll come to see very clearly, Alaska isn't truly carefree or adventurous: beneath her "manic pixie dream girl" facade she's fragile and frightened of her own past. Mischief isn't a way for her to "win the war"; it's a way for her to distract herself from her deep inner sadness.

## 29. Two Days Before Quotes

☝☝ "Best day of my life was January 9, 1997. I was eight years old, and my mom and I went to the zoo on a class trip. I liked the bears. She liked the monkeys. Best day ever. End of story."

**Related Characters:** Alaska Young (speaker), Mrs. Young

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 115

### Explanation and Analysis

In this chapter, Alaska and her friends play a game in which they describe the best day they've ever had, followed by the worst day they've ever had. Alaska explains that the best

day of her life involved going to the zoo with her mother. Her story is brief--comically brief, really.

At this point in the book, it's hard to know how to interpret this passage. The brevity of Alaska's story, especially when compared with the unhappy story she's about to tell, suggests that tragedy is more memorable and complex than happiness (as Leo Tolstoy said, happy families are all alike--each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.) But Alaska is also probably withholding the truth about her life; surely there must be more to her happiness. Alaska has been through a lot of tragedy, but here it seems that she's again performing for her friends, trying to provoke their sympathy and confusion whenever she can.

“It was the central moment of Alaska's life. When she cried and told me that she fucked everything up, I knew what she meant now. And when she said she failed everyone, I know whom she meant. It was the everything and the everyone of her life.”

**Related Characters:** Miles Halter (speaker), Mrs. Young, Alaska Young

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 120

### Explanation and Analysis

Alaska has just told Miles and her other friends that the worst day of her life was the day her mother died right in front of her and Alaska failed to call 911. Miles comes to realize that Alaska's mother's death is the "key" to understanding Alaska. Alaska has always hated herself for being so passive during her mother's death: if she had just called 911, she feels, she could have saved her mother's life. Now, Miles realizes, Alaska makes a point of acting impulsively and never hesitating, lest she hurt someone else.

Alaska feels like a failure for "allowing" her mother to die (she was a young girl when the accident happened, but she continues to blame herself, anyway). Since then, she always blames herself when something goes wrong, even if that "something" is completely out of her hands. Miles thinks that he's cracked the code with Alaska: he finally understands why she behaves the way she does.

## 30. One Day Before Quotes

“Pudge, what you must understand about me is that I am a deeply unhappy person.”

**Related Characters:** Alaska Young (speaker), Miles Halter

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 124

### Explanation and Analysis

Alaska and her friends (including Miles) wake up the day after a night of heavy drinking: needless to say, they're all very hungover. Alaska and Miles talk about themselves, and eventually Alaska comes to tell Miles that she's a "deeply unhappy person."


The passage is a great example of the fine line between genuine depression and performative sadness: that which is affected or exaggerated for the purpose of confounding other people. Alaska has dealt with some genuinely tragic events, especially the death of her mother. And yet there's always a sense that she tries to be as mysterious and elusive as possible in order to draw the interest of other people. Here, however, she makes a point of saying that she's "deeply unhappy" to Miles: an oddly matter-of-fact way of talking about her feelings, and a departure from her usual cryptic statements.

## 31. The Last Day Quotes

“But a lot of times, people die how they live. And so last words tell me a lot about who people were, and why they became the sort of people biographies get written about.”

**Related Characters:** Miles Halter (speaker)

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 128

### Explanation and Analysis



In this passage, Lara asks Miles (with whom she's having a strange sexual relationship) why he's so interested in famous people's last words. Here, Miles gives a reason: he thinks that it's possible to learn something deeply important about a famous person (and about life itself) by studying the last thing they say, or are rumored to have said. Famous last words, in a sense, are never random: they're always deeply revealing of the way a person lived.


It's characteristic, too, that Miles is interested in famous last words because he wants to know how to become famous and memorable himself (i.e., how to get a biography written

about oneself). Miles is a young, ambitious, but inexperienced person: he's willing to take any bits of information that he thinks could help him on the way to greatness. Furthermore, we've already seen that Miles is fascinated by the concept of using a "key" to understand a person's entire life. Just as Miles believes that the "key" to understanding Alaska's existence is her mother's death, he believes that the key to understanding a great man's life to learn what he said just before he dies. In Miles's world, nothing is random: everything has an explanation.

☞ “This is so fun...but I'm so sleepy. To be continued?”

**Related Characters:** Alaska Young (speaker), Miles Halter

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 142

### Explanation and Analysis

in this rather climactic scene, Alaska "dares" Miles to kiss her, knowing full-well that Miles is in love with her. Alaska kisses Miles, and even lectures him on how to kiss better. Miles is in a quasi-relationship with Lara at the moment, but he's so much more in love with Alaska that kissing her is practically the defining event of his life so far.

Green conveys the "asymmetry" of Alaska and Miles's relationship. Miles is deeply attracted to Alaska, and while Alaska knows this full-well, she seems not to feel quite the same level of attraction for Miles. Abruptly, she tells Miles that she's feeling tired, and needs to go to bed. The matter-of-fact way she opts out of the make-out session is, as always with Alaska, intended to be both disarming and confusing: she's always cultivating an aura of mystery and unpredictability. The passage is also a good example of tragic foreshadowing: Alaska is going to die soon, and so Miles and Alaska's relationship will never actually "continue"--thus this otherwise normal moment of teen drama takes on tragic proportions, and Alaska's ambiguous words become her *lastwords* to Miles.

☞ “We left.

We did not say: *Don't drive. You're drunk.*

We did not say: *We aren't letting you in that car when you are upset.*

We did not say: *We insist on going with you.*

We did not say: *This can wait until tomorrow.*

*Anything—everything—can wait.”*

**Related Characters:** Miles Halter (speaker), Chip Martin (The Colonel), Alaska Young

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 132

### Explanation and Analysis



In one of the central scenes in the novel, Miles and his friend the Colonel watch passively as Alaska, drunk and sad, gets off the phone, crying loudly, and rushes toward her car. Although it's pretty obvious that Alaska is in no condition to drive, Miles and the Colonel allow her to leave. Alaska will eventually die in a car crash (perhaps accidentally, perhaps on purpose), leaving Miles to blame himself for her death. In this passage, Miles lists all the things he did wrong that night: he could have stopped Alaska and prevented her from getting behind the wheel of a car, but instead he just left her alone.

Why does Miles leave Alaska alone? To begin with, he's intimidated by her. Alaska has cultivated an aura of mystery and impregnability: nobody is brave enough to tell her the truth because she's always acting spontaneous. Thus, it's possible for Miles to construe Alaska's behavior that night as "Alaska being Alaska." Moreover, Miles seems to allow Alaska to go off alone because he's just had an odd romantic encounter with her: he feels so overwhelmed and confused (and he's drunk as well) that he doesn't know what he'd say to her, and is almost afraid to confront her and make her angry with him. It's important to notice the major turning point in the novel: the first half of the book is dominated by Alaska's guilt for allowing her mother to die, while the second half of the book is dominated by Miles's guilt at having played a role in Alaska's death.

### 32. The Day After Quotes

☝ “I could hear the Colonel screaming, and I could feel hands on my back as I hunched forward, but I could only see her lying naked on a metal table, a small trickle of blood falling out of her half-teardrop nose, her green eyes open, staring off into the distance, her mouth turned up just enough to suggest the idea of a smile, and she had felt so warm against me, her mouth so soft and warm on mine.”

**Related Characters:** Miles Halter (speaker), Chip Martin (The Colonel), Alaska Young

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 141

#### Explanation and Analysis


In this passage, Miles has learned of Alaska's death. At first, he can't believe that someone who he knew and loved--someone with whom he exchanged a kiss only the night before--could suddenly be dead. And yet eventually, the thought of Alaska's corpse becomes inescapable: he pictures her body in the morgue, the contrast between her warmth and beauty while alive and her appearance in death perfectly clear.

Previously, Miles has suggested that people can't bear to think about their loved ones as mere bodies--a body must have a soul, too. And yet here, in his moment of panic, Miles can only think of Alaska's dead body. The passage conveys a sense of Miles's trauma and guilt: just as Alaska was singularly fixated on her mother's untimely death, Miles is now totally fixated on Alaska's dead body. He blames himself for her death, and so he can't stop thinking about her.

☝ “I know so many last words. But I will never know hers.”

**Related Characters:** Miles Halter (speaker), Alaska Young

**Related Themes:**     

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 142

#### Explanation and Analysis

Miles, we've known for some time now, is obsessed with people's last words. As an immature young man, Miles enjoyed the concept of dying words because it suggested a "fast ticket" to fame: he thought that by studying people's

last words, he could know something about what made them so great--what the secret of being remembered was. Now that Miles has experienced the death of a loved one, he's not so glib about the concept of death or dying words. Alaska is dead, and he's no longer thinking about himself at all: he's fixated on her memory.

The passage also reinforces the idea that it's impossible to know people completely. Previously, Miles thought that he had Alaska "figured out." Miles's error is clear, symbolized by the fact that he'll never know Alaska's last words (and, by extension, he'll never know if she killed herself or just had an accident, what she was thinking of just before she died, what kind of person she really was on the inside, etc.). There's a limit to how much we can know about one another, especially when we make an effort to surround ourselves in mystery (as Alaska did).

### 33. Two Days After Quotes

☝ “And now she was colder by the hour, more dead with every breath I took. I thought: *That is the fear: I have lost something important, and I cannot find it, and I need it. It is fear like if someone lost his glasses and went to the glasses store and they told him that the world had run out of glasses and he would just have to do without.*”

**Related Characters:** Miles Halter (speaker), Alaska Young

**Related Themes:**  



**Page Number:** 144

#### Explanation and Analysis

After Alaska is killed in a car accident, Miles doesn't know what to do: he feels as if he'll be unable to go on living without his beloved friend. Miles chooses an interesting metaphor; living without Alaska is like needing glasses and not having them--and not having any way to ever get them again. The metaphor is instructive, because it suggests that Alaska helped Miles see and understand the world more clearly. In reality, as we've seen, Alaska created smoke and mirrors around herself, disguising her real thoughts and feelings. And yet she also helped Miles come to terms with his own feelings about himself and other people. The passage sets the tone for the second half of the novel: Miles will have to struggle with his own guilt and trauma in order to gain a semblance of control over the way he feels.

“Goddamn it! God, how did this happen? How could she be so stupid! She just never thought anything through. So goddamned impulsive. Christ. It is not okay. I can't believe she was so *stupid!*”

**Related Characters:** Chip Martin (The Colonel) (speaker), Alaska Young

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 145

### Explanation and Analysis

In times of crisis, everybody has different ways of coping. Miles chooses to blame himself almost immediately, while the Colonel chooses to throw all the blame back on Alaska herself: he claims that she was stupid and foolish, and that she caused her own death (claims that seem harsh, but are also partly true).

The Colonel copes with death by ignoring his own sense of guilt. Deep down, as we'll see soon, the Colonel knows that he's partly responsible for Alaska's tragic death: if he had just stopped her from getting in the car, she would still be alive. Instead of facing his feelings, the Colonel tries to bury them away with rage and frustration. Although he's usually a fairly calm person, the Colonel's emotions are clear in this passage: he has a lot of emotion to bury.

## 56. One Hundred Eighteen Days After Quotes

“So we gave up. I'd finally had enough of chasing after a ghost who did not want to be discovered. We'd failed, maybe, but some mysteries aren't meant to be solved. I still did not know her as I wanted to, but I never could. She made it impossible for me.”

**Related Characters:** Miles Halter (speaker), Alaska Young

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 212

### Explanation and Analysis

For much of the second half of the novel, Miles and his friends try to answer the question of why Alaska drove off in the car the night that she died. Eventually, they think they've come to a "solution": Alaska had forgotten the anniversary of her mother's death, and was driving off to put flowers on her mother's gravestone. Although Miles gets some satisfaction from this information (since it partly

explains what happened that night), he also realizes that some mysteries aren't meant to be solved.

As a less mature young man, Miles had believed that he could understand what makes people tick by focusing on a single moment from their lives, or a single quote. After Alaska's death, Miles comes to realize the opposite: there's no "key" to understanding people's complexity: certain mysteries are impossible to solve. Miles could never truly understand what happened to Alaska the night she died: she'll always be a great mystery to him.

“But we knew what could be found out, and in finding it out, she had made us closer—the Colonel and Takumi and me, anyway. And that was it. She didn't leave me enough to discover her, but she left me enough to rediscover the Great Perhaps.”

**Related Characters:** Miles Halter (speaker), Chip Martin (The Colonel), Alaska Young

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 212



### Explanation and Analysis

Miles learns a lot after Alaska's death, and in a way, Alaska's death brings him closer to his friends, especially the Colonel and Takumi. Although Miles and his friends are trying to answer the question of why Alaska drove off into the night, they come to realize that the question is irrelevant and ultimately impossible to answer thoroughly. As in so many books about mysteries and quests, the journey (Miles bonding with his friends) is more important than the destination (solving the mystery of why Alaska died).

Miles has always had a theory of the "Great Perhaps"—the sense of wonder and unknowability that dominates a young person's life. And yet Miles has changed his theory slightly: previously, he thought that the purpose of the Great Perhaps was to solve mysteries and answer questions about the world. Now, he's come to realize that there are certain mysteries that can't, and shouldn't be, solved: "Perhaps" is better than certainty.

“And POOF we are driving through the moment of her death. We are driving through the place that she could not drive through, passing onto asphalt she never saw, and we are not dead. We are not dead! We are breathing and we are crying and now slowing down and moving back into the right lane.”

**Related Characters:** Miles Halter (speaker), Chip Martin (The Colonel), Alaska Young

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 213

### Explanation and Analysis



In this climactic scene, Miles and the Colonel finally get over Alaska's death, at least a little, when they decide to drive over the place where Alaska died. As they drive they begin to cry and get emotional, for the simple reason that they're alive and Alaska is dead--they've passed through the place where she could not.


While they are overcome with grief at Alaska's death, Miles and the Colonel also seem to achieve a sudden clarity regarding the fact that *they* are alive. This is part of the tragedy of Alaska's death--that she too was once as alive and breathing as they are now--but it's also a way for Miles to move on. By acknowledging his own life he can better seize the present and live fully, without being so weighed down by memory and guilt.

## 59. One Hundred Thirty-Six Days After Quotes

“He was gone, and I did not have time to tell him what I had just now realized: that I forgave him, and that she forgave us, and that we had to forgive to survive in the labyrinth.”

**Related Characters:** Miles Halter (speaker), Alaska Young, Takumi Hikohito

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 218

### Explanation and Analysis

In this scene, Miles realizes that he's ready to forgive his old friend Takumi. Takumi has been angry with Miles ever since Alaska's death: he blames Miles for Alaska's death (partly as a way of distracting himself from his own role in Alaska's death). Miles realizes that there's no point in blaming other people: the only way out of the cycle of self-hatred that arises after a loved one's death is to accept blame, forgive other people, and slowly move on. And yet Miles's forgiveness is incomplete: he never gets to forgive Takumi face-to-face.

Perhaps the scene is supposed to symbolize the flawed

nature of life: people can't always be honest with one another and open up about their feelings, even if they want to show love for each other. There are always layers dividing people, whether layers of distance, miscommunication, or any other number of things. But even if Miles can't forgive Takumi in person, he can love and forgive himself.

“I would never know her well enough to know her thoughts in those last minutes, would never know if she left us on purpose. But the not-knowing would not keep me from caring, and I would always love Alaska Young, my crooked neighbor, with all my crooked heart.”

**Related Characters:** Miles Halter (speaker), Alaska Young

**Related Themes:**     

**Page Number:** 218

### Explanation and Analysis

Miles has learned to embrace uncertainty: a Zen-like way of looking at life that parallels some of his earlier observations about the nature of religion. As a younger man, Miles believed that it was possible to "decode" human beings: hence his fondness for famous last words. Now, however, Miles seems to accept that people can't be decoded: Alaska, for all her beauty and fascination, is just too complicated and elusive to ever be properly understood.

The paradox of Miles's epiphany is that it's possible to love someone without understanding them completely. Instead of loving Alaska's "soul," Miles loves Alaska as he knew her; the image of herself that she presented to him. By accepting the limits of his knowledge of Alaska, Miles seems to accept the limits of his knowledge of Alaska's death: he'll never know if her death was accident or suicide. By the same token, Miles seems to escape his own sense of guilt.

“Forgetting her mother, failing her mother and her friends and herself—those are awful things, but she did not need to fold into herself and self-destruct. Those awful things are survivable, because we *are* as indestructible as we believe ourselves to be. When adults say, “Teenagers think they are invincible” with that sly, stupid smile on their faces, they don't know how right they are. We need never be hopeless, because we can never be irreparably broken.”

**Related Characters:** Miles Halter (speaker), Mrs. Young,

Alaska Young

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 220

### Explanation and Analysis


In the end, the novel is a kind of cautionary tale, but also a tale of redemption. We all have to deal with pain and grief, but we don't all deal with it in a healthy way. Some, like Alaska, will collapse under the pressure: Alaska hates herself because she believes that she's to blame for her mother's tragic death. As a result of her guilt, Alaska has spent most of her life hiding from other people and dissembling her true feelings.

Miles, on the other hand, is a symbol of how it's possible to escape grief and love oneself. Miles knows that he's responsible for Alaska's death in some capacity, but he finds the courage to forgive himself. In a way, Green steers the novel toward an optimistic, youthful conclusion: teenagers really *are* invincible--with their hope and drive, they can find the courage to escape from depression, especially if they have the love and support of their friends.

“So I know she forgives me, just as I forgive her. Thomas Edison's last words were: “It's very beautiful over there.” I don't know where there is, but I believe it's somewhere, and I hope it's beautiful.”

**Related Characters:** Miles Halter (speaker), Alaska Young

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 221

### Explanation and Analysis

The novel has dealt with religious themes, but in the final lines of the novel, Green brings religion to the center of the stage. Miles is trying to come to terms with his own feelings of grief regarding the death of his friend Alaska. He's come to accept that while he played a role in Alaska's death, he forgives himself, and knows that Alaska forgives him, too. Furthermore, Miles here seems to allude to the concept of a Heaven. As with earthly matters, though, Miles doesn't profess to know what happens to human beings after they die. Nevertheless, he continues to hope that somewhere in another life, Alaska is happy and content.

In short, the novel ends on a note of blind, beautiful hope. Miles is still a young man, but he's learned how to take care of himself and show his love for other people. Thus, he hopes that Alaska finds happiness somewhere, even after her death.



## 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.

## 1. ONE HUNDRED THIRTY-SIX DAYS BEFORE

The book begins with Miles discussing the going away party his mother throws for him the week before he leaves for boarding school in Alabama. His mother thinks that lots of people will come, but Miles knows that he has few friends, and only two people show up. His parents expect Miles to be upset by this, but Miles isn't, as he never expected more people to come.

Miles' mother asks him if he wants to leave Florida because he doesn't have any friends. His father suggests that Miles wants to go to Culver Creek because he himself is an alumnus of the school. Miles explains to them that he is in fact going "to seek a Great Perhaps." Miles loves reading biographies and learning people's **last words**, and this phrase comes from the last words of François Rabelais, a French poet.

*Green begins the novel by establishing the fact that Miles' identity does not depend on having a lot of friends. He knows who he is, and, unlike his mother, he does not interpret the fact that few people care to say goodbye as significant or upsetting.*



*When Rabelais sought a "Great Perhaps," he was referring to the mystery of what might await him after death. Miles reinterprets this quote to be about living rather than dying. In this single phrase, life and death are intertwined, and this union sets up a major theme of the novel: how to live and die.*



## 2. ONE HUNDRED TWENTY-EIGHT DAYS BEFORE

The following week, Miles arrives at Culver Creek. He says goodbye to his parents, does some unpacking, and then meets his roommate Chip Martin. Chip asks Miles if he is named after a Robert Frost poem that concludes with the line "**Miles** to go before I sleep," but Miles doesn't know what he's talking about. When Chip sees the map of the world that Miles has hung on the wall, he starts to list the countries of the world in alphabetical order. Miles is stunned, but Chip assures him that "everybody's got a talent." When he asks Miles what his talent is, Miles struggles to come up with an answer, but eventually says that he knows people's **last words**.

Chip tells Miles that he is at Culver Creek on an academic scholarship. He wrote his scholarship essay about his love for long books, and said that the only problem with them was that his dad would beat him with those books. Chip tells Miles that his parents are recently divorced and that this is his third year attending the school. He warns Miles that he needs to be careful about other students and teachers at Culver Creek.

*The line "Miles to go before I sleep" comes from Robert Frost's poem, "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening." In the poem, a lone traveler passes through a "lovely, dark and deep" forest and considers staying there, but reminds himself that he has "promises to keep" and a long way to go before he can sleep. This poem foreshadows a choice with which the characters in the novel are confronted: to stop when things are "dark," or to persevere in the responsibilities of living.*



*Chip's decision to focus on school and make his way to Culver Creek despite his difficult home circumstances is another example of the perseverance that marks many of the characters in the novel. Even though Chip has just met Miles, he gives him advice and seems to care more about him than Miles' classmates in Florida did.*





After Miles helps Chip unpack his things, Chip explains to Miles that there are two types of people at Culver Creek: boarders and Weekday Warriors. Boarders live at the school, while Weekday Warriors spend their weekends in their mansions in wealthy Birmingham suburbs. Chip, who is poor, hates Weekday Warriors and implies to Miles that he should do the same.

Chip nicknames Miles “Pudge” because he’s so skinny, and he tells Miles that he should call him “the Colonel” instead of Chip. Then he takes Miles to meet Alaska, who has a single room because her roommate was recently expelled. When Miles sees Alaska, he decides that she is “the hottest girl in all of human history.” She tells them a story about how she was watching TV with a friend over the summer and even though she has a boyfriend, the friend reached over and squeezed her breast in the middle of their otherwise platonic conversation. Miles is astonished by Alaska and the huge stacks of books that cover the floor of her room.

After buying **cigarettes** from Alaska, the Colonel and Miles go down to the lake and Miles smokes for the first time. The Colonel explains to Miles that they refer to the dean of students as the Eagle because he has such a sharp eye for misbehavior. Miles worries that he will get in trouble and his parents will find out, but the Colonel tells him that the Eagle almost never calls anyone’s parents. Much much more important than staying out of trouble, the Colonel says, is remembering never to rat on another student, even Weekday Warriors. Miles is skeptical because he wonders how he will be able to deal with bullies if he cannot rat them out.

The Colonel leaves and Miles tries to **smoke** another cigarette. He tells the reader that he doesn’t have a good reason for smoking, so it might as well be that it will keep bugs away. Alaska shows up and she introduces Miles to the last words of Simón Bolívar, as recounted by Gabriel García Márquez in the novel *The General in His Labyrinth*. According to the book, Bolívar died just after saying: “Damn it. How will I ever get out of this **labyrinth**.” Miles asks Alaska what the **labyrinth** is, and as she contemplates her answer, he thinks about how beautiful she is. She tells Miles that the labyrinth is a mystery because it could mean life or death—Bolívar might have been trying to escape from either.

*Miles will come to learn that Chip is a very principled and strict person, and the fact that he hates an entire group of people simply because they are wealthy is a good example of this.*



*When Chip tells Miles to call him “the Colonel” and gives Miles his own nickname, he welcomes him into his circle of friends. Alaska is similarly friendly toward Miles, even though she doesn’t know him at all. Both Alaska and the Colonel are comfortable enough with themselves that they do not feel the need to change how they behave around a stranger. Miles, on the other hand, feels overwhelmed.*



*While Miles’ parents hover over him in Florida, students are very independent at Culver Creek. There, loyalty is valued above all else, and while doing things like smoking manage to go unpunished, reporting bad behavior—something with which Miles sees no problem—is a serious offense. When Miles decides to try a cigarette, he tests out a new identity for himself, but his thoughts reveal that he is not entirely comfortable with this new way of living.*



*Miles and Alaska both spend a lot of time thinking about the mysteries of life, but while Miles actively seeks the mystery of his Great Perhaps, Alaska is concerned with figuring out how to get out of whatever labyrinth life gives her. At this point in the novel, Alaska does not know what that labyrinth is. However, the fact that she conceives of life as something someone might want to escape intentionally suggests that Alaska’s life has not always been a happy one.*



Miles doesn't know how to respond, so he asks Alaska about the books in her room. She says that this is her Life's Library. She wants to always have something to read, but she hasn't read all of her books yet because there are so many cigarettes to smoke and so much sex to be had. Alaska tells Miles that he is smart like the Colonel, but cuter, and she promises to find Miles a girlfriend if he helps her figure out what the **labyrinth** is. Alaska then asks Miles if he ever runs home in the dark because he is scared of walking. This strikes Miles as a very intimate thing to say, and the two of them run back to their dorm holding hands.

*Miles interprets Alaska's willingness to confess a secret habit to him as significant, but this is not necessarily the case. Although Alaska is interested in heavy topics like literature and understanding the labyrinth of life, she gives equal value to smoking cigarettes and finding Miles a girlfriend. Her willingness to be vulnerable around Miles might suggest that she considers him a friend, but it also could mean nothing at all.*



### 3. ONE HUNDRED TWENTY-SEVEN DAYS BEFORE

The next morning Miles asks the Colonel about Alaska's boyfriend. The Colonel says that she must like him, because he's the first boyfriend she hasn't cheated on. He also tells Miles to stop thinking about Alaska and look for a girl who isn't already taken. Then he takes Miles to the cafeteria where the chef, Maureen, is serving "bufriedos," which are deep-fried bean burritos. Bufriedos are Maureen's specialty and everyone at Culver Creek loves them. While he eats, Miles meets Takumi, a Japanese student who is close friends with the Colonel and Alaska.

*Just as the meaning behind Alaska's actions is often impenetrable, her behavior is often inconsistent. While Alaska has been kind to Miles thus far, the Colonel reveals that she always cheats on the boys with which she is involved. Miles does not pick up on it, but this is the first sign that Miles might need to question Alaska's character.*



At lunch the other students discuss Marya, Alaska's former roommate, and her boyfriend Paul, both of whom were expelled for drinking, smoking marijuana, and having sex. The Colonel says that Paul deserved to be kicked out because he was a Weekday Warrior, and Takumi reminds the Colonel that his own girlfriend is a Weekday Warrior. Miles thinks it's dumb to hate an entire group of people. There is much speculation among the others about who might have ratted Marya and Paul out to the Eagle.

*The group spends an entire lunch period talking not about the fact that Paul and Marya were having sex, but rather about who might have gotten them in trouble. This testifies to the truth of the Colonel's warning about not telling on other students.*



That night, Miles decides to sleep in only his boxers because it is too hot to wear anything else. He wakes up to find two people pulling him out of his bed. The Colonel tells someone named Kevin to go easy on Miles. The two boys take him to the lake and duct tape his arms to his body, his legs together, and his mouth shut. Then they throw him in the lake. Before they throw Miles, they warn him not to hang out with the Colonel. Miles eventually wiggles back to shore and out of his duct tape. He goes to see Alaska, and she tells him that some people have more serious problems to worry about than being thrown in a lake.

*Alaska's uncaring response to the trauma Miles has just suffered is a clear indication that Alaska's behavior is something of a mystery. She can be kind, but she can equally be cruel. In this, Alaska presents a contrast to the Colonel. While his hatred for the Weekday Warriors is unwavering, despite the fact that his girlfriend is one of them, Alaska has so few principles that she is not even consistently nice to her friends.*



The Colonel is confused by why it took Miles so long to come home, and he is shocked to learn that Kevin and the other boy covered Miles in duct tape. It is a Culver Creek tradition to throw new students into the lake, but usually it's easy for them to swim out of it. The Colonel declares war on Kevin and his friends. Miles goes to sleep, happy to have a friend of his own and excited about what might happen next.

*While no one from Miles' old school even bothered to say goodbye, his new friends are willing to seek revenge on his behalf after knowing him for only two days. The Colonel's anger makes clear to Miles that the Colonel considers him a friend, and he looks forward to their mutual "Great Perhaps."*



#### 4. ONE HUNDRED TWENTY-SIX DAYS BEFORE

Miles attends his first class at Culver Creek and is surprised to find that all of the girls wear pajamas to class. He is overwhelmed by Madame O'Malley's French class and worries that his school in Florida didn't prepare him for Culver Creek. Alaska ignores him, and Miles feels conflicted about his feelings toward her. She is smart and beautiful, but she seems to have a mean streak. For the rest of the day he is stressed by how smart the other students and teachers seem, and he struggles to find his way on campus.

*At this point in the novel, Miles struggles with the unknown. He is attracted to Alaska's mysterious nature, yet also repelled by how unpredictable she can be. Even though last night he went to sleep excited by the future's uncertainty, he spends the next day wondering if he should have stayed in Florida—because he is not certain that his future will contain good grades.*



Later that day Miles attends World Religion class. The teacher, whom the students call the Old Man, announces that the class will be dedicated to the exploration of "the most important pursuit in history: the search for meaning." This phrase makes Miles think of Alaska's **labyrinth**. Miles likes the Old Man and looks forward to being taught and lectured to rather than having to have class discussions. During class, the Colonel figures out that the other person who threw Miles into the lake was Longwell Chase, a Weekday Warrior who is friends with the Colonel's girlfriend, Sara. Alaska complains to Miles about the Old Man, whose real name is Dr. Hyde, but Miles tells her that the Old Man is a "genius."

*Although Miles' World Religions class is dedicated to studying the mysteries of life, Miles feels relieved to be taught facts about these mysteries rather than be expected to discuss them himself. Even though he spends a great deal of time thinking about how to live, from memorizing last words to pursuing his own Great Perhaps, he is too shy to discuss his thoughts. He does, however, stand up for Dr. Hyde when Alaska complains about him.*



#### 5. ONE HUNDRED TWENTY-TWO DAYS BEFORE

A few days later, Miles finds the Colonel in their bedroom, trying—and failing—to iron a shirt for his dinner with Sara and her family. He tells Miles that when he asked Alaska for help, she accused him of imposing the "patriarchal paradigm" on her and refused. Miles does not know how to iron, either, and when Sara arrives to pick the Colonel up, the two get in a fight over his wrinkled shirt. The Colonel makes rude comments about her family's wealth and eventually refuses to go to dinner.

*The Colonel has adopted a number of adult behaviors, such as smoking, but his inability to iron reveals that he is still an adolescent. As much as he thinks he has the world figured out, he doesn't. His struggle with ironing also hints at the poverty in which he was raised, as he likely did not need to iron a shirt until he got to Culver Creek. Alaska shows another important part of her personality here—railing against the patriarchy.*



After Sara leaves, the Colonel starts drinking “ambrosia,” which is a mixture of milk and vodka designed to evade detection by the Eagle. Sara calls on the payphone down the hall and explains to the Colonel that all of the Weekday Warriors are mad at him, because they think he got Marya and Paul expelled. The Colonel, who values loyalty above all else, is stunned that anyone would imagine he would rat on a fellow student. Miles doesn’t understand why the Colonel doesn’t break up with Sara if he hates Weekday Warriors so much, but the Colonel tells Miles that he and Sara deserve each other.

*Kevin and Longwell did not duct tape Miles and throw him into the lake for no reason; they did it to punish the Colonel for ratting on their friends. Their decision to play a prank on Miles rather than on the Colonel himself suggests that Culver Creek operates under an eye-for-an-eye, tooth-for-a-tooth system of justice. They tried to eliminate one of the Colonel’s friends because he eliminated some of theirs.*



## 6. ONE HUNDRED TEN DAYS BEFORE

One day Miles gets in trouble with Dr. Hyde, who catches him staring out a window during class. Even though Miles was thinking about religion, but just looking away, Dr. Hyde kicks him out of the room. Alaska stand up and leaves with him. She tells Dr. Hyde that he is being unfair, but he says that they can either follow his rules or fail. In Florida, Miles was always the teacher’s pet, and getting kicked out of class upsets him more than being thrown in the lake.

*While Kevin and the Colonel are motivated to act by the desire to right a wrong, Miles cares a great deal more about the opinions of people he admires. Miles can shake off being thrown in a lake, because he is used to being ignored or disliked by his classmates in Florida, but he is deeply upset by disappointing someone he respects.*



Alaska is angry at the Colonel and Takumi for not leaving with her and Miles, but when they finally get out of class, the four walk down to “the **Smoking Hole**” in the forest behind the school. They talk about who might have ratted on Marya and Paul. Alaska says that it was probably another Weekday Warrior, and that the two deserved to get expelled because they were stupid enough to get caught. This comment strikes Takumi as lacking loyalty, and when he says so, Alaska rudely tells him to stop trying to figure everything out and to find some problems of his own.

*Alaska proves yet again to be inconsistent. When Miles got thrown in the lake, she told him that other people had more important problems to worry about. When Takumi shows an interest in other people’s problems, however, she tells him to worry about himself. Ultimately, part of Alaska’s façade of mystery is that she neither takes an interest in other people’s problems nor divulges information about her own.*



Alaska tells Miles that she wants to kiss him but she can’t because she has a boyfriend. Takumi makes up a rap about Miles, and Alaska picks it up and keeps going when he stops. Takumi’s rap is full of literary references that Miles doesn’t understand. When they finish, Miles asks Alaska why she smokes her **cigarettes** so quickly. She says to him, “Y’all smoke to enjoy it. I smoke to die.”

*Alaska actively cultivates an air of mystery, and it can be difficult to tell when she’s serious. While it seems like her comment about smoking to die is a joke, it could also be read an interest in suicide. What is clear, however, is that Alaska sees herself as set apart from the rest of her friends.*



## 7. ONE HUNDRED NINE DAYS BEFORE

The Colonel convinces Miles to go to the Creek's first basketball game, despite the fact that Miles hates sports and people who watch them. This is mostly because when he was in second grade, he was beaten in a game of baseball by a one-armed kindergartener. The Colonel explains to Miles that the only time he will put up with Weekday Warriors is at a basketball game, because he loves the games so much. He tells Miles about Hank Walston, who is the star basketball player. The Colonel describes Walston as loving weed as much as Alaska loves sex. Walston is only the star player because the rest of the team is so bad.

Miles is shocked to find that everyone in the school, from the goth girls to Kevin Richman, is at the basketball game. Kevin offers Miles and the Colonel a truce, but the Colonel and Miles refuse. Finally, the Colonel makes him a deal: if Kevin can pick a president whose **last words** Miles doesn't know, he'll agree to a truce. Kevin chooses Millard Fillmore, and Miles responds with his last words, "The nourishment is palatable." Miles realizes that Kevin would have believed anything he said, as long as he said it in a confident way.

The Colonel leads the Creek crowd in cheers that make fun of the opposing team's intelligence and SAT scores. Instead of making noise while the other team shoots free throws, the Creek crowd is silent until the moment the player starts to shoot, when the Colonel stands up and yells something ridiculous. Eventually, the Colonel gets kicked out, which turns out to be his goal. Miles is happy to be friends with someone as bold as the Colonel.

*Miles' hatred of sports demonstrates how much his memories affect his actions. Indeed, despite the fact that Miles thinks it's stupid for the Colonel to hate all Weekday Warriors, Miles holds a similarly irrational prejudice in hating all sports enthusiasts. His memory of a negative experience is so strong that it overrides his aversion to hating any group of people, and leads him to discount an entire subset of society.*



*As Miles spends more time at Culver Creek, he slowly emerges from the shell that protected him in Florida. While he is not yet as confident as the Colonel, he at least realizes the value of confidence, and he is able to turn down Kevin's request for a truce.*



*The Colonel's game-time ritual only works because the sense of community at Culver Creek is so strong. Even though the students fight among themselves, they come together and are incredibly loyal to one another when pitted against a common enemy.*



## 8. ONE HUNDRED EIGHT DAYS BEFORE

The next day Dr. Hyde asks Miles to stay behind after class. He knows that Miles likes the class, and he tells Miles that while he was looking out the window and thinking about the Buddhist idea of interconnectedness, he missed hearing about the Buddhist idea of being present in every moment. He suggests to Miles that he be present in the classroom, and then present in his life outside of class too.

*Miles' focus on interconnectedness at the expense of being present foreshadows a moment later in the novel, when he gets so caught up in thinking about the many possibilities in his future that he forgets to think critically about what's going on around him in the present.*



## 9. ONE HUNDRED ONE DAYS BEFORE

A week later, Alaska drives a group of people to McDonalds to study. A girl named Lara has to sit in Miles' lap to fit in the car, which Alaska has named "Blue Citrus." Hank suggests to Alaska that it would be healthier for her to smoke weed instead of **cigarettes**. Alaska tells him, "I may die young...but at least I'll die smart."

*Once again, Alaska links her cigarette habit to death. Although her comment is a joke, she doesn't seem to be at all afraid of dying and shows very little interest in taking measures to prolong her life.*



## 10. ONE HUNDRED DAYS BEFORE

Miles asks Alaska about her name. She explains that when she was born, her parents couldn't decide on a name for her, so they called her "Mary" until she was old enough to choose one for herself. On her seventh birthday, she spent the day looking at a globe. At first she chose "Chad," but when she found out that that was a boy's name, she picked **Alaska** because it was big and as far away from Alabama as possible. Alaska explains that at the time she wanted to go out into the world and do big things, but she loves her name even more now that she knows that it comes from an Aleut word that means "that which the sea breaks against."

Alaska talks to Miles about how difficult it's going to be to get out of her hometown of Vine Station, Alabama. She tells him about how she wants to teach disabled children. Miles moves in to kiss her, but she interrupts him to say that she doesn't want to be one of those people who just talks about the future, because she thinks that only ever thinking about the future is "a kind of nostalgia." To Alaska, thinking about the future is a way of avoiding the present, particularly because people never end up doing the things they think about. Miles silently disagrees; he never would have come to Culver Creek if he hadn't imagined it first. Miles tells Alaska that sometimes he doesn't understand her, and she responds that "that's the point."

*Alaska is someone who is very much in control of her identity, and the fact that she chose her own name reflects that. Whether or not Alaska is truly as big and strong and important as she wants to be, she projects herself as that person, and consequently, others see her that way. However, while being something the waves break against could be interpreted as being strong, it could also be read as being in pain.*



*Miles and Alaska have very different conceptions of the future. For Miles, the future is exciting and he thinks about it all the time. To Alaska, however, thinking about the future too much is indulgent. She has no hope for her own future, and it seems foolish to her to imagine things she has no confidence will happen. The fact that Alaska admits to making herself seem mysterious on purpose forces the reader to wonder what she is concealing and who she really is. Part of her "mystery" is that she is sometimes upfront about the mysteriousness itself.*



## 11. NINETY-NINE DAYS BEFORE

Miles, the Colonel, Takumi, and Alaska go down to the lake to **smoke**. The Eagle happens to be by the lake and he catches the Colonel and Alaska with cigarettes in their hands. He tells them that he will see them all in Jury the next day. Miles is terrified over what will happen, but Alaska explains to Miles that the Eagle loves her, but that he also thinks he's teaching her something by punishing her. She says that the conflict between good and bad behavior is the "eternal struggle," but that "mischief" will always win.

*Alaska's statement that bad behavior will always win out over good behavior suggests that she doesn't see much point in following the rules, and doesn't take getting in trouble very seriously. Miles will discover, however, that like many of Alaska's personality traits, this lack of concern over being punished is nothing but an act.*



## 12. NINETY-EIGHT DAYS BEFORE

Miles, the Colonel, Takumi, and Alaska go to see the Jury, which is a group of twelve students who determine punishments for non-expellable infractions. Alaska nervously tells Miles not to say anything. She worries that she will get in trouble and upset her dad. Miles doesn't understand, and asks if Alaska's mom **smokes**. Alaska says that she used to.

*The Jury represents an alternative form of justice to that which the students dole out among themselves. Alaska is suddenly very concerned about getting in trouble, and even though Miles is terrified himself, he doesn't understand why she suddenly cares so much.*



Alaska and the Colonel take the fall for **smoking** and keep Miles and Takumi out of trouble. Alaska has been in trouble enough times that she is nearing a call home, and the Colonel can't afford to lose his scholarship, so Miles doesn't understand why they would be willing to get in trouble to protect him when he has much less to lose than they do.

*Miles is still new to the way the students at Culver Creek deal with punishments, and he is not used to having friends that would sacrifice themselves on his behalf. This act has strong Christian undertones, particularly in the context of Miles' World Religions class.*



### 13. EIGHTY-NINE DAYS BEFORE

Days later Miles is still confused by what happened at the Jury, but then Alaska tells him that she has found him a girlfriend: Lara. The Colonel says that Lara has "great breasts," a statement that provokes Alaska to yell about the objectification of women. He changes his assessment to "perky breasts," which he says is a fact rather than a judgment. Alaska announces that her boyfriend, Jake, will be in town, so he and Alaska, the Colonel and Sara, and Lara and Miles are going to go on a triple date. Takumi is going to come too.

*Alaska takes the objectification of women very seriously and feels the need to stand up for her gender. The fact that Alaska can find Miles a girlfriend without Miles ever having to interact with the girl beforehand, however, seems out of line with her otherwise feminist ideals—but it fits in with her sometimes condescending behavior. Alaska promised to find Miles a girlfriend, and now brings him his "prize."*



### 14. EIGHTY-SEVEN DAYS BEFORE

Alaska introduces Jake to Miles and Jake jokes that he hopes Miles and Lara get along so that Miles can't steal Alaska away from him. They all go to the basketball game, and just before the other team's star player, the Beast, is about to shoot, The Colonel shouts at him that Takumi slept with his girlfriend (which is not at all true). The Beast stops shooting and walks toward Miles and Takumi, who take off running. He throws the ball at them and it hits Miles in the head, knocking him to the ground. Miles says "I am concussed," and repeats this phrase frequently for the rest of the night. Lara comes out to see if Miles is okay, and he throws up on her pants. The nurse diagnoses Miles with a concussion.

*In this scene, Miles literally takes the fall for the Colonel's prank. No one is particularly concerned about his injury, even though he repeats frequently that he has been hurt. However, his friends' lack of concern does not stem from not caring about Miles, but rather from the fact that this is just how prank works. Sometimes people get punished for other people's decisions, but that's just the way it is. There's not much sympathy, but there also isn't any fighting.*



Miles wakes up the next morning and continues to repeat that he is concussed. The Colonel tells Miles that Sara broke up with him because she thought that he had hooked up with Alaska. Alaska heard Sara say this, and became furious with her for breaking "the sacred covenant between women." Sara broke up with the Colonel after he called her a "crazy bitch." The Colonel tells Miles that even though he doesn't like Sara, he is really upset about the breakup.

*It is ironic that Alaska is offended that Sara would accuse her of sleeping with the Colonel, when Alaska has cheated on all of her previous boyfriends. She concerns herself with the "sacred covenant between women," but doesn't seem to value highly the sacred covenant of a romantic relationship.*



## 15. EIGHTY-FOUR DAYS BEFORE

It rains for days in Birmingham, and no one socializes. Miles tries to eat dinner with Alaska, but she tells him she doesn't feel like answering anything that begins with "how, when, where, why, or what." When he asks her if he's done anything wrong, she condescendingly says, "Of course not, sweetie."

*Alaska is consciously behaving in a mysterious way, but she gets annoyed with Miles for trying to understand what's going on and suggesting that he might have something to do with it. In moods like this, she is impossible to please.*



## 16. SEVENTY-SIX DAYS BEFORE

Dr. Hyde announces the topic for the final paper of the semester: "What is the most important question human beings must answer?" The students are supposed to pick a question and then discuss how Christians, Muslims, and Buddhists would answer it. Miles decides his question will be about what happens when we die. The Colonel plans to write about why bad things happen to good people. They run into Alaska on their way back to their dorms, who is furious because the Weekday Warriors have flooded her room and destroyed her books. The Colonel admires the prank, but vows to Alaska that he will help her get back at them.

*In striving for universality, Miles and the Colonel end up picking topics for Dr. Hyde's essay that are actually deeply personal. Miles asks what happens when we die, which makes sense given his fondness for last words and thinking about what could happen in the future. The Colonel, on the other hand, chooses a question that stems directly from his experience living with an abusive father and his firm belief that his mother is a good person.*



## 17. SIXTY-SEVEN DAYS BEFORE

It finally stops raining, and Miles sits outside thinking about the **last words** of Civil War commanders. Takumi finds him and the two go down to the **Smoking Hole**. When they get there, Takumi decides that it isn't a safe spot, and he takes Miles to another spot in the forest where they smoke. He tells Miles that Alaska was the one who told on Marya, and that she might have told the Eagle about the Smoking Hole as well. The Eagle caught Alaska leaving campus with a bottle of wine in her car and he threatened to expel her unless she told him everything she knew.

*Although Alaska acted as though she were not upset about getting in trouble when the Eagle caught her smoking with the Colonel, she clearly will do anything, even break Culver Creek's most important unspoken rule, to avoid being expelled. Alaska teaches Miles that he should value loyalty over his own self-interest, but she does not follow her own advice.*



Miles is skeptical at first, but Takumi explains that he figured out that no one could have known where Marya was that night except Alaska. He points out that it was actually smart of Alaska to tell on one of her friends, so no one would suspect her. Miles and Takumi can't understand why Alaska is so afraid of getting expelled.

*The fact that Alaska is willing to betray her fellow students in order to save herself suggests that she only values loyalty because it is convenient to be loyal at Culver Creek—not for its own sake. When put under pressure, she quickly abandons her principles.*



Takumi tells Miles that the Colonel and Alaska are planning a prank, and Miles will need to be prepared to take the fall for it if necessary. Miles thinks back to the day he went before the Jury, and finally understands that Alaska took the blame so that she could demonstrate to him how to be a loyal friend.

*Takumi and Miles are truly loyal friends, and they forgive Alaska. Further, they will take the fall for her if necessary, because they know how much she cares about staying at Culver Creek—and we will later learn that both Miles and Takumi are basically in love with Alaska at this point too.*





## 18. FIFTY-EIGHT DAYS BEFORE

A week later, Alaska herself tells Miles that she ratted out Marya. Miles is very attracted to Alaska, but he can't tell if he should trust her, and he's annoyed with her mood swings. Alaska climbs into bed with him and he counts the five **layers** of clothing that separate their bodies. Alaska convinces Miles to ask his parents if he can stay with her at Culver Creek over Thanksgiving break. When Miles calls his parents to talk about it, he tells them about how nice it is to finally have friends that he wants to spend time with. This convinces his mom to let him stay.

Later that day, the Colonel warns Miles not to go after Alaska over the break because of the drama that would ensue if she cheated on Jake. Miles worries that maybe he shouldn't have decided to stay, but when he calls his parents to say he might come home, he learns that they've already booked a trip to England for the week of Thanksgiving. Miles feels abandoned, even though he abandoned Thanksgiving with his family first. He starts to cry and Alaska finds him and comforts him, even though she doesn't know what's wrong. He asks her why she isn't going home, and she tells him that Vine Station is "full of ghosts" that she's scared of.

*Miles seems unable to escape from Alaska's spell. He knows that she is not necessarily trustworthy, and that she can be mean, yet he is obsessed with getting closer to her—so much so that he forgoes the opportunity to see his family to do so. The layers of fabric that separate Miles from Alaska not only measure how far he is from her physically, but also symbolize how far he is from her emotionally.*



*There is a stark contrast between Miles' home life and Alaska's. Neither of them feels that they can go home for Thanksgiving, but Miles can't return mostly for logistical reasons. His parents will not be home because he did not want to be home. Alaska, on the other hand, is afraid of going home. She is haunted by something that happened there or someone who lived there, and she does her best to avoid having to remember these ghosts.*



## 19. FIFTY-TWO DAYS BEFORE

Everyone leaves for the break. Alaska takes Miles down to a spot in the forest and tells him to start digging. He uncovers a bottle of Strawberry Hill wine, which she has buried there for safekeeping. Alaska says she has a bad fake ID, so every time it works, she buys enough alcohol for a semester. Miles has a sip, which he does not really like, and thinks to himself about the improbability of the fact that he has ended up being someone who drinks on campus.

Alaska and Miles lie in the grass reading, and Miles considers telling Alaska that he loves her. Just as he is about to say it, she says that she's realized that the **labyrinth** isn't life or death, but suffering, which she defines as "[d]oing wrong, and having wrong things happen to you." Alaska says that there is always suffering—it's something that every religion thinks about.

*By this point in the novel, Miles' identity has definitely been changed. He is no longer the shy, lonely boy he was in Florida, or the new student trying to fit in at Culver Creek. Instead, he is willing to take risks and break school rules. Miles doesn't love the taste of alcohol, but the fact that he is drinking it is exhilarating, like a taste of his "Great Perhaps."*



*Alaska's labyrinth is a more nuanced version of the Colonel's question of why bad things happen to good people. Alaska doesn't just define suffering as the result of having something bad happen to you, but also as the result of doing something bad one's self.*



## 20. FIFTY-ONE DAYS BEFORE

Alaska wakes Miles up the next morning so that he can accompany her in going into other students' rooms. She wants to learn things about them that she might be able to exploit for her next prank. Miles doesn't totally understand how to determine what people love based on what's in their room, but Alaska helps him figure out that Kevin has tons of shampoos and gels, so he must love his hair. She asks Miles where he thinks she might be able to buy blue dye.

*Alaska tends to get annoyed at her friends when they ask her why she's upset, yet she has no reservations about snooping in other people's rooms. She has incredibly high, and often inconsistent, expectations of others, but she doesn't hold herself to these same expectations.*



## 21. FORTY-NINE DAYS BEFORE

Alaska decides that she and Miles should go "porn hunting" in their fellow students' rooms. Alaska is particularly skilled at finding people's secret hiding spots. The two drink all the alcohol that they find. Finally, they find a video called "The Bitches of Madison County" in the room of two boys from Mississippi, and they watch it. Miles has not watched much porn before, and he makes mental notes about what he observes the men doing in the tape, even though Alaska warns him not to try anything he sees. Alaska falls asleep, and Miles thinks about how much he wants to lie down next to her.

*Although Miles has started drinking and smoking, his lack of experience with pornography shows how innocent he still is in many ways. Part of Alaska's appeal is that she exposes Miles to whole realms of activity that were otherwise unknown or unavailable to him. She seems to have the answers to the things he finds mysterious.*



## 22. FORTY-SEVEN DAYS BEFORE

A few days later, Miles goes to see Alaska, and when he gets to her room, she is melting down a candle. Miles tells her not to **burn** herself, and she quotes back, "Night falls fast./ Today is in the past." Miles recognizes the quote from a biography he read of Edna St. Vincent Millay. Alaska asks him why he reads people's biographies but never their actual writing. Miles responds that he is more interested in who people were than what they had to say. Miles thinks that the line she quoted is about nighttime, but she tells him it's about depression. Miles and Alaska spend the rest of the morning melting down candles to create one giant candle and smoking **cigarettes** lit from the candlelight.

*The poem Alaska quotes to Miles ends with the lines, "The once confined thing/ is never free," which suggests that escape from the labyrinth of suffering is impossible. Had Miles paid attention to what Millay wrote when he was reading about her instead of just looking for her last words, he might have been concerned that Alaska said these in response to his warning about burning herself. Alaska seems to be suggesting that she might as well get hurt because there's no hope that things will get better.*



The Colonel shows up unexpectedly and invites Miles and Alaska to come back to his house for dinner. As they drive to his town, the Colonel explains that he isn't thrilled they're coming, because he's going to have to sleep in a tent, but his mother insisted that no one should be alone on Thanksgiving. Miles initially thinks that the Colonel is joking about the tent, but when he arrives at the Colonel's house, he realizes he was being serious. He and his mother live in a small trailer with only one bed. Miles now understands why the Colonel hates the wealthy Weekday Warriors so much. The Colonel apologizes to Miles and Alaska if his poverty makes them uncomfortable, but Alaska says that "poor is poor" and she understands.

*Earlier in the novel, Miles felt like the Colonel's hatred of the Weekday Warriors was unwarranted, even though Miles blindly hates anything having to do with sports. Once Miles realizes that, like his feelings about sports, the Colonel's hatred is based on years of memories of feeling different from everyone else, he understands it much better. The generosity of Miles' mother speaks to her character—she has very little to offer, but she is generous with what she has.*



Alaska helps the Colonel's mom, Dolores, cook dinner, while Miles and the Colonel play video games. The food is delicious and Miles realizes that the Colonel is not embarrassed by his mom or her job as a cook at Waffle House. Miles feels like he understands the Colonel better after having met his family, and he hopes that one day he'll be able to meet Alaska's family as well.

Dolores insists that Alaska and Miles sleep in the bed, while she sleeps on the couch and the Colonel sleeps outside. Miles counts the three **layers** of fabric that separate him from Alaska. He stays up all night imagining their mutual Great Perhaps.

*Meeting the Colonel's mother makes Miles feel closer to the Colonel, who is already fairly easy to understand, so Miles hopes that by meeting Alaska's family, he might gain a better understanding of who she is. Despite having spent all of Thanksgiving with her, she still seems as mysterious as ever.*



*Once again, Miles measures his degree of separation from Alaska, and this time they are two layers closer together. This feels like very little space to Miles, and he is excited by their proximity.*



## 23. FORTY-SIX DAYS BEFORE

The next day is Thanksgiving, and Miles thinks that Dolores makes the best Thanksgiving meal he's ever had. In Miles' family, everyone says what they are thankful for before the meal, so they usually end up rushing through it so that they can get to the food more quickly. At the Colonel's house, on the other hand, they say what they're grateful for after the meal, and they take it much more seriously.

Miles says that he's grateful for the food, company, and having a place to spend Thanksgiving. Alaska says that this is her best Thanksgiving in the past ten years. The Colonel says he's grateful for his mom, but she says that's not enough, so he adds that he appreciates being the smartest person in their trailer park. Dolores is thankful for having a phone that works, her son back home, Alaska's help in the kitchen, a job with nice coworkers, a bed, and a son who loves her. On the drive back to school, Miles realizes that he's not just going back to school: he's going home.

*Miles comes from an extremely stable family and the Colonel comes from a broken home, yet the Colonel and his mother appreciate family much more than Miles' family do. The Martin family Thanksgiving is much more about the people who participate in it than the food they eat.*



*Miles, the Colonel, and Dolores give concrete answers to what they're thankful for, but Alaska, as usual, gives a mysterious one. Further, while the others speak about the things they are grateful for in that moment, Alaska is grateful to experience something different from her memory of Thanksgivings past. No one asks if anything happened ten years ago that made Alaska's Thanksgivings bad, and she does not give any more detail.*



## 24. FORTY-FOUR DAYS BEFORE

Miles and Alaska go to Coosa Liquors, where Alaska buys her alcohol and **cigarettes**. Getting cigarettes is easy, but they ask for an ID card for buying booze, so Alaska has to flirt with the clerk to avoid this. Alaska is a reckless driver and she and Miles spend the drive back telling knock-knock jokes. Alaska's favorite is one that her mom told her when she was six and that she still thinks is funny.

*This scene foreshadows a number of events that will take place later on in the novel, but unfortunately Miles does not pick up on these warning signs. Alaska's poor driving and obsession with her mother will come to be things that Miles wishes he had paid more attention to.*



Later that day Alaska shows up crying at Miles' door. She asks Miles why she messes everything up, but Miles doesn't know what she's referring to. He guesses she might be talking about the Marya situation, so he suggests that maybe she told on Marya because she was scared, but Alaska says that scared isn't a good enough excuse. Miles doesn't understand why Alaska is worried about Marya now. She says that there's more going on than just that, but she also tells him that she told the Colonel about ratting on Marya.

When the Colonel found out that Alaska was the one who told, he said to her that he could never trust her again. Miles suggests that maybe it would help if Alaska explained to him why she turned Marya in. Miles asks if she was afraid of going home. Alaska falls silent, glares at him, and tells him, "There's no home." Remembering that Alaska's joke came from her mom, Miles tells Alaska that even if she doesn't have a home, she has a family. Alaska insists that she messes everything up. She tells Miles that he is in love with the fun version of Alaska, but not the "crazy, sullen bitch."

## 25. CHRISTMAS

Everyone goes home for Christmas break—even Alaska. Miles spends most of the break studying for his exams, which start the day after he gets back to school. His parents avoid talking about London because they feel guilty for enjoying themselves and leaving him alone, even though he was the one who asked to stay at school. Miles feels immensely grateful to have a family and forgives them for Thanksgiving.

## 26. EIGHT DAYS BEFORE

Everyone returns to campus. Alaska suggests that they need to time an attack on Kevin with a "pre-prank" that will trick the Eagle into thinking that the yearly prank on the school has already happened. She decides that she, Miles, the Colonel, Takumi, and Lara, whom Miles hasn't spoken to since he threw up on her, will spend the weekend in the barn at the edge of campus. She's not sure what the prank is yet, but she tells Miles that she and the Colonel will come up with one.

Miles is annoyed at Alaska for leaving him out. It's happened before, but Miles thought that it would be different after Thanksgiving. He thinks about the fact that he never had to deal with any of these emotions when he was back in Florida, and decides that he's not going to care about Alaska anymore.

*Alaska treats Miles like a friend and she comes to him for support, but she doesn't allow him to know enough about her to give her the support that she truly needs. Even in times of crisis, Alaska insists on maintaining a sense of mystery, and the decision to keep her friends at arm's length will have serious ramifications for her own future, as well as Miles'.*



*Alaska is not usually self-aware enough to hold herself to the same standards she has for others, but she does know herself well enough that she realizes she can be difficult to get along with. Alaska's mistake, however, is that she believes that no one will love the sad and unhappy version of herself, and that she must be fun to have friends. What she doesn't realize is that all Miles wants to do is get to know her, no matter how she behaves.*



*After having seen the conditions in which the Colonel grew up, and having witnessed how deeply Alaska is afraid of going home, Miles is relieved to have a stable and well-to-do family. He forgives his parents because, in the context of Miles and Alaska's family, their offense of going to London while he was out of town does not seem so severe.*



*Alaska decides to prank Kevin to get back at him for flooding her room, but also for covering Miles in duct tape and throwing him in the lake. Even though this decision is based on Miles' experience, she will not let Miles participate in the planning of the prank. She does, however, convince Lara to join the group as a favor to Miles.*



*Miles continues to have conversations with himself in which he doubts Alaska's ability to be a good friend. Nonetheless, he continues to find himself unable to stay away from her.*



## 27. FOUR DAYS BEFORE

Miles doesn't have any details about the prank, and the Colonel and Alaska ignore him all week long. Miles uses the time to work on his religion paper. He answers his question about death by focusing on Muslim and Christian ideas of heaven and hell and the Buddhist doctrine of *anatta*, which holds that humans do not have "eternal souls." This idea says that when people die, their energy is passed on to other people until eventually the energy reaches enlightenment.

Instead of writing a more academic conclusion to his paper, Miles decides to talk about why he thinks people care about what happens when we die. He attributes this fascination to a need for security. People don't want to imagine their family or themselves as ceasing to exist. He decides "people believed in an afterlife because they couldn't bear not to."

## 28. THREE DAYS BEFORE

Miles packs two-days worth of black clothing for the weekend in the barn and he, the Colonel, Takumi, Alaska, and Lara present the Eagle with a variety of reasons that they need to leave campus. He agrees to all of them, and the group goes to set up in the barn. Alaska **smokes**, despite the fact that she is in a building filled with hay. The Colonel finally tells the group his and Alaska's plan: they are going to send fake progress reports to the parents of Kevin and his friends saying that they are failing school. Miles is certain they'll get expelled, but the Colonel assures him that he has done his research and they are not actually committing any expellable offences.

The Colonel has coordinated the prank down to the second. As they leave the barn, Miles thinks that this is the coolest he has ever felt, and that the Great Perhaps is finally happening. Takumi and Miles are tasked with distracting the Eagle by setting off fireworks around campus. Takumi puts on a fox hat because it makes him feel like he can run faster.

Miles and Takumi set off a string of fireworks. Their timing and path has been carefully planned by the Colonel, but they make a mistake and end up closer to the lake than they expected. They are forced to run through a clearing where they can be clearly seen by the Eagle, who is now pursuing them. Miles and Takumi cannot stop running for fear of getting caught, and Miles ends up running into the swan that lives in the school lake. The swan bites him, which makes running difficult. Eventually they make it back into the woods and head to the barn.

*Miles' questions about what happens after death will turn out to be useful to him in only a few days, when he must confront an actual death. As the novel progresses, the foreshadowing increases, and there continue to be signs that something bad is in Miles and Alaska's future.*



*Not having had a close friend or family member die, Miles imagines that it is unbearable to consider a loved one rotting in the ground with no hope for another life. Even in considering death, Miles maintains his belief that the future can hold great things.*



*Earlier in the novel, Alaska acknowledges that while her friends smoke to enjoy themselves, she smokes to die, and throughout the book, Alaska endangers her fellow students by selling them cigarettes. In this scene, however, Alaska's smoking habit and lack of concern over living a long life endangers everyone in the barn. Alaska does not simply fail to see the value in her own life—she also has no trouble jeopardizing the lives of the people she loves.*



*Miles spends a great deal of time at Culver Creek thinking about what awaits him in the future, but in this moment, he focuses on what is happening to him now. He finally fully fits in at the school. He is not just accepted—he is needed.*



*Miles spends a lot of time at the beginning of the novel worrying about what school officials and teachers think of him. At this point, however, he blatantly flouts Culver Creek rules. He cares much less about getting in trouble than he does about letting down his friends. Following the model Alaska set for him at Jury, he willingly accepts a swan bite in order to protect his friends from getting caught.*



Once everyone is back at the barn, the group debriefs. Lara successfully managed to put blue dye into Kevin's conditioner and hair gel. The Colonel is mad at Alaska because she decided to send progress reports to the parents of twenty more Weekday Warriors rather than just Kevin and his friends. The Colonel worries that this will limit the number of suspects and make it easier for the Eagle to catch them. Alaska promises to take the fall if they end up getting in trouble for her decision.

The Colonel doesn't believe Alaska because she ratted on Marya, and he also points out the improbability of the idea that anyone would believe that Alaska single-handedly set off fireworks around campus, put dye in Kevin's hair products, and mailed out fake progress reports all at the same time. Takumi says that he will take the fall with Alaska if necessary, because the Colonel has more to lose (his scholarship) than anyone else.

The group talks about how angry Kevin is going to be, and Alaska says that he deserves it. Miles, on the other hand, doesn't really hate Kevin anymore. He thinks that it takes too much energy to hate the popular kids and it's not worth it. Miles realizes that for him, this is just a prank, but to Alaska, it is something more meaningful. The group drinks wine until they fall asleep and Miles thinks about how exciting life can be when he takes risks.

## 29. TWO DAYS BEFORE

The next day, the group spends the morning hanging out and rapping. They eventually start drinking, and Alaska decides that they are going to play a drinking game she has just made up called Best Day/Worst Day. Everyone tells the story of their best day ever and whoever has the best story doesn't have to drink. Then everyone talks about their worst day and the worst story doesn't have to drink. This repeats to everyone's second best and worst day, and so on. Alaska is confident that she will win.

Miles says that his best day is today. He tells them that he woke up next to a beautiful "Hungarian" girl and hung out with his friends and everything was perfect. Lara is happy that Miles thinks she's pretty but reminds him that she is Romanian. Alaska says her story will beat Miles' answer: on January 9, 1997, she and her mom went to the zoo and her mom liked the bears and she liked the monkeys. The Colonel says that this isn't a good enough story. Miles silently agrees, although he knows that Alaska has been intentionally vague to make herself seem more mysterious.

*Alaska's reckless behavior endangers not only herself, but also everyone else in the group. She is often selfish, and she does what she wants without asking the opinion of anyone else. While Alaska claims that she will take the fall if they get caught, her past behavior suggests that she cannot consistently commit to protecting her friends.*



*Unlike Alaska, Takumi models what a good and loyal friend should do. He is willing to take the blame for the prank even though he had nothing to do with expanding its scope, and should only be punished for setting off fireworks on campus. He appreciates how much the Colonel has to lose and will do what is necessary to keep his friend safe.*



*Even though the Weekday Warriors almost killed Miles, he finds it easier to forgive them than expend energy on hating them. Alaska, on the other hand, seems to truly hate them, despite the fact that what they did to her was much less serious than what they did to Miles. As wild and free and Alaska appears to be, she struggles to let things go.*



*When Alaska creates Best Day/Worst Day, she clearly has some intention of revealing parts of her past. Miles will soon learn that her worst day is a dramatic one, but rather than simply tell Miles or her other friends about what happened, Alaska has to present it in a dramatic and competitive way. In keeping with the meaning of her name, she makes herself big.*



*While the story Alaska tells likely represents her true best day, she tells the story in a way that does not allow anyone else to appreciate or access it. She offers no explanation as to why this was her best day, but has insisted that her best day is better than anyone else's. Miles knows that Alaska is withholding information to make herself more intriguing, but the fact that Miles is aware of this manipulation suggests that her efforts are not necessarily working.*



Lara's best day was the day she moved from Romania to America. Her parents couldn't speak English and they needed her to help them fill out forms and figure things out. It was the first day she felt like a grownup. Takumi's favorite day was when he lost his virginity, but he declines to tell that story to the group. The Colonel says that his best day is in the future, when he can buy his mom a giant house in the middle of Mountain Brook, where all of the Weekday Warriors live, as a thank you for being his mom and letting him come to Culver Creek.

The group decides that the Colonel's story wins and everyone else drinks. The Colonel's worst day was when his father left. He had cheated on his mom and she kicked him out and he never came back. The Colonel hasn't heard from him since. Miles can't top this, but tells his story about the time when a boy in his grade peed all over Miles' gym clothes and the gym coach told him that if he didn't wear his uniform, he'd fail the class. He didn't want to fail, so he had to wear them while everyone whispered about him behind his back. Miles says that after that, he stopped caring about having any friends at school.

Lara's worst day was the same as her best day—she lost her childhood because all of a sudden she had to be responsible for the things her parents could no longer do. Miles realizes that Lara is quiet like he is and they finally have something in common. He wants to kiss her and is no longer embarrassed about throwing up on her.

Takumi's worst day was when his grandmother died two days before he was supposed to go to Japan to visit her. He had never met her before, and instead of spending the summer with her, he only got to see her as she was being lifted onto her Buddhist funeral pyre. Miles decides to smoke a cigarette even though he knows it's dumb to **smoke** in such a flammable environment.

Alaska's worst day was the day after her best day. She came home from school and started doing her homework when she heard her mom screaming. She found her lying on the floor having what she later learned was a seizure. In the moment, Alaska froze and sat with her mom until she stopped moving. Alaska thought she had just fallen asleep, but when her dad got home, he yelled at her for not calling 911. She had had an aneurysm and died.

*At this point, everyone else's best days seem truly significant, and it isn't clear why Alaska's best day was a random visit to the zoo. Then again, this was not a random day, because Alaska remembers the exact date. But while Alaska dwells in the distant past, the Colonel thinks about the future. The fact that his best day involves buying his mother a house suggests that he is, deep down, a very generous person.*



*Just as the Colonel's memories of his father's abuse motivate him to improve his mother's life, so Miles is motivated to make friends at Culver Creek by the memory of having none in Florida. The fact that he chose to be humiliated into wearing his gym clothes rather than to get a bad grade testifies to how much Miles used to value (and likely still values) external validation.*



*This is the first time that Miles feels anything for Lara, even though Alaska picked her out to be his girlfriend months ago. Miles sees himself as quiet and can appreciate the trait in Lara, but it does not really seem like theirs would be a lasting relationship.*



*The more time Miles spends around Alaska, the more reckless he becomes. The difference between Miles and Alaska, however, is that the well-being of the other people in the room occurs to Miles, while Alaska is entirely self-absorbed.*



*Alaska's references to Thanksgiving being bad for the last decade and the ghosts that haunt her home make sense in the context of her mother's death. Up until now, however, Alaska has only dropped mysterious hints about what occurred, instead of giving anyone the full story. She is being dramatic here, but also finally opening up to her friends and being honest.*



The group is stunned because no one knew that Alaska's mother was dead. Alaska talks about how her dad blames her for her mother's death, and everyone tells her that she was too young to have known what to do and that it's not her fault. Miles thinks back to when Alaska said that her mother doesn't **smoke** anymore and now understands what she meant. Everyone is quiet for a long time and Miles remembers the last words of President William McKinley. Just before he died, his wife yelled that she wanted to go with him. His last words were, "We are all going."

Miles now understands that this "was the central moment of Alaska's life." He understands why she cried over Thanksgiving break about messing everything up. He realizes that Alaska must be haunted by the fact that she froze at that moment and must spend a great deal of her life feeling powerless. Miles speculates that this is why Alaska behaves so impulsively—she is afraid of freezing. No one ever speaks to Alaska about the story again.

Later that night, Miles decides to make a move on Lara and eventually ends up climbing into her sleeping bag and making out with her. He isn't very experienced, so he has some trouble with kissing, but Lara tells him that it's cute. Miles asks her to be his girlfriend and she agrees.

### 30. ONE DAY BEFORE

Everyone wakes up hung-over the next morning, but Alaska is particularly sick. Miles suggests that she should drink less, and she tells him that he doesn't get the fact that she is "a deeply unhappy person." Everyone checks back in with the Eagle, who doesn't seem to suspect anything. Miles sleeps for the rest of the day, but, in retrospect, he realizes that he should have taken as much advantage of the day as possible.

### 31. THE LAST DAY

Kevin shows up at Miles and the Colonel's room and congratulates them on dying his hair blue. He asks for a truce, but the Colonel says he has more trouble coming. Kevin is nice about this and says they can talk after the Colonel is finished, but the Colonel continues to be rude to him.

*Alaska's mother's mortality makes Miles think of the fragility of all human life, despite the fact that he never knew Mrs. Young. Her death serves as a memento mori, or warning that everyone is mortal, and it foreshadows the death that is soon to come. Alaska clearly holds herself responsible for her mother's death, even though her friends are certain that she was too young to have been able to handle what was happening.*



*While the Colonel and Miles are both defined by their memories of experiences before they arrived at Culver Creek, these memories are not the single most important events in their lives. Alaska, on the other hand, is fundamentally defined by her memory of her mother's death and her own role in it.*



*Miles is able to fairly seamlessly transition from hearing about Alaska's mother's death to making out with Lara because death seems like an impossibility at his age. He does not yet have to take it seriously.*



*Alaska indicates to her friends that she isn't doing well many times, but no one ever does anything about it. This is largely because Alaska pushes away anyone who tries to get close to her, but also because no one can figure out when she is being serious. She is too mysterious for her own good.*



*The Colonel continues to be unforgiving and resolute in his hatred of the Weekday Warriors, even though he has gotten them back for hurting Miles. He perseveres whether or not he is going after a worthy cause.*





Lara and Miles spend the day hanging out. Lara tries to give Miles a blow job, but neither of them know what she's supposed to do. They end up having to ask Alaska for help, who demonstrates in great detail what Lara should be doing. Miles and Lara try again, and this time it works. Then Lara does homework while Miles reads a biography. Lara asks him why he likes **last words** so much, and Miles realizes that he has never thought about it.

Miles thinks a bit and then tells Lara that the way people die is often indicative of the way they lived. **Last words** give him a lot of information about how someone ended up being interesting enough to have a biography written about them. After explaining this, Miles and Lara have trouble making conversation and eventually Miles leaves.

That night, Alaska and the Colonel get drunk to celebrate the success of their prank. There are **white tulips** in Alaska's room, and she tells Miles that Jake got them for her for their anniversary. Eventually Alaska suggests a game of truth or dare, which Miles has never played, and she dares Miles to hook up with her. He starts to kiss her. Miles worries about Jake and Lara as they make out, but Alaska interrupts him to teach him how to kiss better. After a while, Alaska says, "This is so fun but I'm so sleepy. To be continued?"

When the Colonel drunkenly realizes that Miles hooked up with Alaska, he tells Miles that things are not going to end well. Miles falls asleep and vaguely hears Alaska go answer the pay phone that is ringing in the hall. When she returns she is hysterically crying. She screams that Miles and the Colonel have to help her sneak off campus.

The Colonel and Miles don't understand why Alaska is so upset. She keeps saying that she forgot something and she messed everything up. They decide to help her, and they set off their leftover fireworks so that she can drive away unnoticed. They do not tell her that she is too drunk to drive, or demand to come with her, or tell her to wait until the morning. She leaves, and Miles and the Colonel fall back asleep.

## 32. THE DAY AFTER

The Eagle wakes Miles and the Colonel up the next morning and tells them to go to the gym. They think they've been caught, and Miles prays that he won't be expelled so that he has more time to kiss Alaska. The Eagle tells them that they are not in trouble, but that they need to go to the gym immediately because something terrible has happened.

*Miles' and Lara's sexual encounter is entirely passionless. Miles enjoys the experience, but they are so lacking in intimacy that they immediately return to their homework after they finish. This experience presents a stark contrast to Miles' relationship with Alaska, which is full of passion yet devoid of physical intimacy.*



*While Miles and Lara do not have much of a connection, she asks him an important question that no one else has thought to ask him and he has never asked himself. His answer reveals how deeply invested Miles is in living a life that is exciting and memorable.*



*On the same day that Miles has an awkward physical encounter with Lara, he has an incredible interaction with Alaska. All they do is make out, but this is infinitely more exciting to Miles than Lara's blow job. Alaska, however, could hook up with Miles at any time, but she only does so in the context of a game. What is deeply meaningful for Miles is not necessarily as significant to Alaska. Her "last words" here will come to haunt Miles.*



*The Colonel is entirely correct in his assessment that things are not going to end well, although the outcome of the evening will end up having little to do with Alaska and Miles' hookup. Once again, Green relies heavily on foreshadowing.*



*Despite the many signs that Alaska is depressed and reckless and a horrible driver, Miles and the Colonel let her drive off drunk and upset in the middle of the night. At a school in which protecting one another is immensely important, they fail to protect their best friend.*



*At this point in the novel, the chapter titles stop counting down, and start counting days after. The reader, like Miles, does not yet know what has happened, although all of the foreshadowing in the book is enough for the reader to suspect that Alaska is dead.*



The Colonel assumes that the assembly is because Dr. Hyde has died. When they arrive at the gym, they don't see him, and the Colonel thinks that his suspicion is confirmed. Miles is sad about Dr. Hyde, but can't stop thinking about what Alaska's words "To be continued?" might mean. Then Dr. Hyde walks in, and the Colonel realizes that Alaska isn't in the gym. The Eagle asks if everyone is present and Miles shouts over and over again that they need to wait for Alaska. The Eagle starts crying, and Miles refuses to believe what he now suspects has occurred.

The Eagle finally tells everyone that overnight, Alaska died in a car crash. The room falls silent. Miles runs out of the gym to throw up and is overwhelmed with guilt for letting her drive away. Eventually he decides that she isn't actually dead and is just playing a prank on everyone. He walks back to the gym and everyone is in total despair. The Colonel lies on the bleachers screaming at the top of his lungs, "I'm so sorry." Madame O'Malley, the French teacher, tells him that he has nothing to be sorry for.

Miles tells the Eagle that Alaska is just playing a prank on everyone. The Eagle explains to him that he saw her body. She was driving on I-65, where a truck had jackknifed across the interstate. A police cruiser pulled up to the scene and Alaska, drunk, ran straight into his car and died instantly. All Miles can think about is the contrast between making out with Alaska last night and how her dead body must look now.

Miles starts running through people's last words in his head. He knows lots of them, but, he thinks to himself, "I will never know hers." The Colonel collapses on the frozen ground on their way back to their room and starts to hyperventilate. He and Miles hug, which they've never done before.

### 33. TWO DAYS AFTER

Miles calls his parents and tells them about the car crash. They pity Alaska's parents and Miles realizes that only her dad is left. Miles gets off the phone and can't stop thinking about Alaska's dead tongue and dead mouth. He is afraid that he has lost something he needs and will never be able to find it again. He thinks about being without Alaska as like being blind.

*Miles is so preoccupied with thinking about his Great Perhaps with Alaska that he does not focus on the fact that a member of the Culver Creek community has died. He doesn't struggle to accept this death because Dr. Hyde is old. When he realizes that Dr. Hyde is present and Alaska is not, however, he cannot process even the possibility that she might be dead.*



*Alaska's death is obviously a huge blow to the Colonel and Miles, but its impact is intensified by the fact that they played a part in it. Indeed, Miles feels so guilty that his body has a physical reaction, and he rejects the notion that she could possibly be dead. Any comfort offered to Miles and the Colonel falls on deaf ears, because no one else knows that they let her go.*



*Miles suggested in his World Religions essay that people can't bear to imagine their loved ones simply dead (as only a body, without an immortal soul), but now that Alaska is dead, he can only picture her as a rotting corpse. This single moment challenges so much of what Miles thought he knew about the world.*



*In the past, Miles has been able to distance himself from death with his game of collecting last words. Now, Miles must face the reality of what death means, and that reality cannot be expressed in a single phrase.*



*Miles cannot reconcile the gruesomeness of Alaska's death with the intimacy of their last moments together, and the two become intertwined in his mind. Nothing about this image of Alaska is appealing, yet he feels entirely lost without her.*



The Colonel tells Miles that he spent the night memorizing the capitals of every country in the world. They decide to **smoke** in their bathroom but they can't make the cigarette light. The Colonel throws the cigarette and screams about how impulsive and irresponsible Alaska was. Miles tells him that it's their fault that she's dead, and the Colonel agrees, but also says that they shouldn't have had to stop her. She was like a child who needed constant supervision. The Colonel grabs his almanac and leaves to go on a walk.

Miles wonders if an instantaneous death feels instantaneous to the person dying. Did Alaska think about him before she died? Miles guesses that she was probably driving up to Nashville to see Jake. He wonders if he meant anything to Alaska, but he reassures himself that "To be continued?" must mean that he did.

Lara comes to see Miles but he doesn't know how to talk to her, because he feels like he's in "a love triangle with one dead side." Lara tries to comfort him again later in the day, but he turns and walks away. That night Miles has horrible dreams about Alaska's mouth oozing with dead flesh and formaldehyde. When he wakes up, the Colonel still hasn't come back from his walk.

### 34. FOUR DAYS AFTER

The Colonel finally returns. He is freezing and tells Miles that he walked to Montevallo and back, which adds up to be 84 miles in 45 hours, because he didn't want to sleep. Instead, he memorized the populations of every country. The Colonel says that he can't remember what Alaska looked like, and he and Miles find her picture in the yearbook. He complains to Miles about how Alaska was always so sad and moody but would never explain to anyone what was going on, and never seemed like she had a reason to be as upset as she was. He was tired of her drama that night, so he let her drive away.

### 35. SIX DAYS AFTER

On the way to Alaska's funeral, Miles feels so much pain that he physically hurts. He loves Alaska and she cannot love him back because she is dead, and he feels like that isn't fair. He thinks about Meriwether Lewis' last words—"So hard to die"—and decides that being left behind is just as hard.

*While Miles seeks last words as a source of comfort, the Colonel turns to memorizing geographical facts. They each return to the traits by which they identify themselves in an attempt to find stability in an entirely horrific situation. The Colonel feels incredibly guilty over his role in Alaska's death, but he is also able to detach himself enough from the situation to see how recklessly and stupidly she behaved.*



*Miles, on the other hand, cannot detach himself from the situation at all. Although he does not remember the last words Alaska said to him, some of her words are lasting, and they haunt him rather than providing any sort of comfort.*



*While Miles and Lara's relationship, passionless as it was, could exist when everything was right in the world, things fall apart after Alaska's death. They have no real connection, so Miles pays her no attention. His romantic feelings clearly lie with Alaska rather than Lara.*



*Only days after Alaska's death, Miles and the Colonel's memory of her is already starting to change. But although the Colonel struggles to remember Alaska's face, he is able to remember her behavior quite clearly. Despite the immense sadness that he feels over her death, he also remembers how annoying and moody she could be. He doesn't place all of the blame for her death on himself.*



*Up until this point, Miles has put great faith in other people's last words, but coming face to face with death now makes him question them. They are not necessarily the infallible guides to life he believed them to be.*



At the funeral Alaska's casket is closed, and Miles realizes that he will never see her again. When he asks her father why it's not open, he tells Miles that Alaska always said she wanted a closed casket because her mother had an open one. Alaska didn't want anyone to see her dead. Miles and the Colonel stand by Alaska's coffin, and Miles thinks that there are "too many **layers**" separating them from one another. When Miles says that he loves Alaska, the Colonel says he knows Miles did. Miles insists that he *still* loves her, and that the love shouldn't be in the past tense. He wonders if the **labyrinth** of death could really be worse the labyrinth he currently feels like he's in.

*The fact that Alaska told her dad she didn't want anyone to see her at her funeral is alarming, considering that most children would expect to die after their parents. Miles, now faced with the reality of never seeing Alaska again, once more counts the layers of separation between them. This time, however, he does not think about how close they are to one another, but how far apart. Alaska has escaped from her labyrinth of suffering, but Miles has only just now entered into his.*



### 36. SEVEN DAYS AFTER

The Colonel tells Miles that he has just had lunch with the Eagle, who asked him if he was responsible for setting off the fireworks. Alaska's aunt is coming to pick up her things, so Miles and the Colonel have to rid her room of anything she wouldn't want her aunt to find. Her room still smells like Alaska: **cigarette smoke** and vanilla. Miles is overwhelmed by her Life's Library and all of the things she'll never read.

*Alaska's smell is a mixture of smoke and vanilla—something harsh and something sweet. Alaska herself could be both cruel and kind, and the scent she leaves behind captures the nature of her personality.*



Miles takes Alaska's condoms and the Colonel looks for her alcohol stash. Miles is happy to realize that Alaska never told the Colonel about her hiding place and that she only shared it with him. Miles finds her copy of *The General in His Labyrinth* and flips through it, even though it was severely damaged when Kevin flooded her room. The book is readable, but Alaska's notes have all blurred together.

*Alaska's death not only separates Miles from Alaska, but also from the Colonel. All of a sudden Miles is competitive about how well he knew Alaska, and he takes great pleasure in discovering things that are secrets just between the two of them.*



Miles turns to the general's **last words** and is surprised to find the words "Straight & Fast" written beside the question about how to escape the **labyrinth**. The note is in blue ink instead of black, and is completely legible, so Alaska must have written it recently.

*All of the foreshadowing Green uses gives the book a great deal in common with mystery novels. In this moment, Miles finds a clue that will launch him into a search to figure out who Alaska really was.*



Miles shows the note to the Colonel, who realizes that Alaska died "straight and fast." She ran straight into a police car without even swerving. They realize how difficult it would have been for Alaska not to see a cop car with its lights on, even if she was very drunk. Miles doesn't believe Alaska would have killed herself after saying "To be continued," but the Colonel starts trying to piece together what upset her so much and made her want to leave. Miles doesn't help him. To Miles, Alaska cannot be responsible for her own death because it must be his and the Colonel's fault.

*The Colonel deals with death by memorizing facts and looking for answers. Miles, on the other hand, has few coping strategies because he has never had to deal with the loss of a loved one, unlike the Colonel, whose father left him. As a result, Miles spends his time reminiscing over the past and imagining how wonderful his future with Alaska could have been. He focuses on his own guilt, so he can avoid the idea that Alaska might have done this to herself.*



### 37. EIGHT DAYS AFTER

School starts back up and Dr. Hyde decides to write Alaska's exam question—How will we ever get out of this **labyrinth** of suffering—on the board, and leave it for the rest of the year. He says that the questions that religions seek to answer now have much more significance for everyone, and he hopes the students will remember Alaska when what they study seems boring or foreign to them. Dr. Hyde then asks the class how they're doing, and a number of people who didn't know Alaska well speak about their grief, while Miles and the Colonel remain silent.

The Colonel hates the way the other students pretend like they were close to Alaska, but Miles isn't bothered by it, because he realizes he doesn't know her as well as he thought he did because if he had known her well, he would have stopped her. He also thinks that everyone else has more of a right to grieve than he and the Colonel do, because he stills feels responsible for her death.

*The other students' grief over Alaska's death can be interpreted in one of two ways. On the one hand, they might be faking how much they cared about her and using the moment to get attention. But on the other hand, the Culver Creek community is a tight one. Alaska was a big personality, and even if these people were not her friends, there is a very real chance that they still care for and miss her.*



*Miles feels that because he let Alaska go driving that night, he does not have the right to mourn her death. Alaska was a mystery for the entire time Miles knew her, but now he must wonder if he really knew her at all. His guilt is compounded by the fact that he will never be able to learn more about her.*



### 38. NINE DAYS AFTER

The Colonel theorizes that maybe Alaska got a call from Jake and realized that she needed to see him immediately, but as she was driving, she saw the jackknifed truck and realized it could be "the end to her **labyrinthine mystery**." Miles tells the Colonel that she couldn't have been thinking about Jake because she was making out with him and didn't want to talk about Jake when Miles tried to bring up the subject. Miles yells at the Colonel for trying to figure everything out, and even though Miles knows he wants to know what happened. He is simply scared that he will not like the answers that he finds. Miles tells the Colonel that he doesn't care about figuring out what happened to her anymore.

The Colonel responds that he wants to know because Alaska made him "her accomplice," and he's furious with her for driving a wedge between himself and Miles. He wants to ask Jake about his call with Alaska that night, but Miles isn't interested in speaking to Jake. The Colonel tells Miles that he needs to stop thinking about himself all the time and start thinking about Alaska.

*Miles' two main impulses toward Alaska—to find out more about her and to make her love him—come into conflict with one another after she dies. Miles desperately wants to understand what happened that night, but he is scared that if he finds any answers, he will learn that she was going to see Jake and that her "To be continued?" didn't mean anything significant. Miles wants to imagine that Alaska's last words would have been about him, and he can't bring himself to let go of this fantasy.*



*Miles is so dedicated to maintaining his dream of being with Alaska that he is willing to sacrifice his relationship with the Colonel, despite the fact that Alaska is dead and the Colonel is still very much alive.*



## 39. THIRTEEN DAYS AFTER

Miles and the Colonel walk to the Pelham Police Department to talk to the police officer whose car Alaska hit. The Colonel **smokes** in front of the officer even though he's underage. The officer tells them that he was in his car and he saw her headed straight for him. He had to get out of his car and run to escape. He turned on the lights and the siren but she kept driving straight. He says he's never heard of someone being so drunk that they didn't know to swerve. Miles asks if the officer heard Alaska's **last words**, but he tells them she was dead by the time he made it over to her car.

The Colonel asks the officer if he thinks it was an accident. He says he's not sure, but he can't imagine someone not being able to swerve. He tells them that Alaska's blood alcohol level was .24, which is very high. They ask him if there was anything in her car, and he says he saw a bouquet of **white flowers** in the backseat.

The Colonel tells Miles about a time last year when he and Takumi and Alaska were at the **Smoking Hole** and Alaska jumped into the river to pick up a **white flower** that was floating down it. She told them then that her parents used to put white flowers in her hair, and the Colonel wonders if maybe she wanted to die with white flowers nearby. Miles suggests that she might have been returning them to Jake.

Miles becomes frustrated and says that whatever they find out, they are no less guilty, and learning that Alaska meant to kill herself just turns her into "a selfish bitch." The Colonel reminds Miles that she often was a selfish bitch, and he accuses Miles of only remembering the parts of Alaska that he liked. Miles thinks that the Colonel cannot understand what he is feeling, because he doesn't know what it's like to have kissed Alaska and to be faced with the meaning of "To be continued." Miles storms off. Finally, the Colonel catches up to him and tells him he just wants things to go back to normal, and that can't happen until they know what went wrong.

*Miles asks the police officer for Alaska's last words, even though he knows she died instantly. This shows that he has not fully processed her death. The Colonel, on the other hand, smokes in front of the police officer, suggesting that he either no longer cares if he gets in trouble or, more likely, that he is not concerned with trivial matters when trying to understand his friend's death.*



*The white flowers in the backseat are the second clue in the search for a sense of what happened to Alaska that night. The police officer's statements suggest that there is a very real chance that Alaska intended to die.*



*Miles continues to be self-involved, and only thinks about what the white flowers might signify about his own relationship with Alaska. The fact that Alaska would jump into a river just to get a flower suggests that white flowers are a powerful symbol in her life.*



*Miles doesn't want to think of Alaska as anything other than perfect after her death, but he often ignored her bad character traits when she was alive as well. Over and over, Miles jeopardizes his previously very strong relationship with the Colonel in order to maintain his fantasies about Alaska's death. The Colonel is much less self-obsessed than Miles is, and he makes an effort to keep their friendship going.*



## 40. FOURTEEN DAYS AFTER

The Colonel and Miles research the signs of suicide, most of which Alaska never exhibited. She did, however, fit some of them: she had lost a loved one and she drank heavily. Miles remembers when Alaska said that she **smoked** to die, but the Colonel brushes the comment off as a joke. Miles also mentions her erratic moods, but the Colonel says that even though “she was up and down—from fire and brimstone to **smoke and ashes**,” that was mostly due to what happened with Marya. He points out that she definitely wasn’t thinking about suicide while she was making out with Miles, so something must have happened afterward that made her consider it.

Miles says that looking for answers is only making him hate Alaska. He thinks to himself that she is still refusing to answer his questions and still insisting on being mysterious. The Colonel tells him that there have to be answers and that they can figure them out if they’re smart enough.

A student named Holly Moser interrupts them to say that she had received a message from Alaska. She tells them that when she was at the Waffle House near campus, the lights in the restaurant flickered on and off, and she thinks that it was Alaska trying to communicate in Morse code. Unfortunately, Holly tells them, she doesn’t understand Morse code. The Colonel calls Holly a “stupid bitch” once she leaves. Miles points out that Alaska wouldn’t have wanted him to ever call a girl a bitch.

## 41. TWENTY DAYS AFTER

The Colonel brings up calling Jake again, and Miles still refuses to participate in the call. The Colonel tells him he can’t figure it all out without him, and Miles yells back that he doesn’t want to know anything about Alaska and Jake. He asks the Colonel to give him his **cigarettes**, but instead the Colonel grabs him and screams that all Miles cares about is his fantasy relationship with Alaska, and doesn’t actually care about the real Alaska at all. He says that they both know Alaska never would have left Jake and that everything would have ended in horrible drama. The Colonel asks Miles why he didn’t stop her from leaving if he loved her so much. Miles stares at the Colonel and calmly says, “Fuck you.”

*Based on the police officer’s description of the accident, Miles and the Colonel are now faced with the very real possibility that Alaska committed suicide. When they try and look for signs that they should have seen this coming, however, they do not find many. The fact that Alaska said “To be continued” to Miles suggests that she at least wasn’t planning on killing herself at that moment, so something must have happened later that changed her mind.*



*Even Alaska’s death is mysterious, and this is extremely frustrating for Miles. But while Miles thinks that lacking answers means he didn’t know Alaska well, it might be that knowing Alaska means knowing that she is a mystery.*



*Despite Miles’ insistence that he doesn’t know Alaska as well as he thought he did, he is able to intuit what she would have said in response to the Colonel’s comment about Holly.*



*This is the most heated exchange in Miles and the Colonel’s entire relationship. Neither of them are fundamentally angry with one another, but their grief over Alaska’s death is so intense that they take their sadness out on each other. Miles asks for his cigarettes, which suggests that he wants to escape from the moment, but the Colonel insists on calling Miles out on his behavior. The Colonel upsets Miles so much that Miles responds as if he actually hates the Colonel.*



Miles goes to the **Smoking Hole** and screams at the top of his lungs about everything that has happened. He's mad at the Colonel for being condescending, and also mad that the Colonel is right. Miles knows that he does wish Alaska had left Jake to be with him. He wants "to be the last one she loved." He is furious with her for abandoning him and furious with himself because he believes that if he had been good enough for her, she never would have left.

Miles wonders if he should hope that he can forget Alaska and not have to think about her every day. He thinks to himself that she is the reason he changed when he got to Culver Creek. Everything was fine until he met her, and then she became his Great Perhaps. Now she has left him "Perhapsless" and "stuck in [her] goddamned **labyrinth**." He thinks that maybe he can't remember Alaska correctly because he never really knew her. He decides that before he can move on, he needs to get to know her. He needs to know the how, why, when, where, and what that she always refused to answer.

## 42. TWENTY-ONE DAYS AFTER

In religion class, Dr. Hyde talks about a Sufi story in which a woman pours water on the flames of hell and lights heaven on fire. She does this so that people will love God because he is God, not because doing so will get them to heaven. Miles hasn't read the story, because he has studied very little since Alaska's death. He likes the story, but the afterlife is still important to him and he very much wants to know where Alaska is. He wants to feel her looking down on him, but he can only picture her as a corpse.

Miles and Takumi go to McDonalds and Miles apologizes for ignoring Takumi since the accident—something he's done so that Takumi won't know he is responsible for what happened to Alaska. Takumi asks Miles if he's dating Lara anymore, because she had been wondering. Miles says he probably isn't.

## 43. TWENTY-SEVEN DAYS AFTER

Four weeks after Alaska's death, the Colonel decides that that he and Miles should steal the Eagle's Breathalyzer and try to replicate Alaska's intoxication level on her last night, so that they can understand what she would have been capable of doing. The Colonel asks Takumi for booze, and when Takumi says he'll join them, the Colonel says that he and Miles need to do something alone. Takumi says he's tired of their secrecy, and the Colonel promises to tell him everything tomorrow.

*Finally, the reason Miles insists on his fantasy relationship with Alaska becomes more clear. He does not simply wish he could be with her—he feels that if he were good enough for her, she wouldn't have driven away that night. He not only feels guilty for letting her go, but also for not enticing her enough to make her stay.*



*Miles accepts the fact that he is going to need to know more about what happened that night, even if he suspects that he will not like what he hears. He is stuck in a paradox, or a contradiction, in which he must get to know Alaska better in order to be able to forget her. In accepting this, Miles already knows Alaska a bit better than he did before. For the first time, he starts to understand her labyrinth of suffering.*



*Although Miles has written about the afterlife in an academic context, he hasn't yet fully come to terms with what he personally thinks happen when people die. His obsession with last words has not prepared him to understand death in its reality. He must now apply what he has learned about how to live and die, and start figuring out his own beliefs.*



*Miles gets so caught up in his fake relationship with Alaska that he essentially forgets that he is in a real one with Lara. This is the ultimate proof that his and Lara's relationship was really only one of convenience.*



*The search for information about Alaska has ramifications not only for the Colonel and Miles' friendship with one another, but also their relationship with Takumi. Rather than coming together in a time of mourning, they allow their guilt to separate them from the rest of their friends.*





Miles knocks on the Eagle's door to distract him so that the Colonel can run in and steal the Breathalyzer. Miles talks to the Eagle about how the Colonel is really struggling with Latin because he's so grief-stricken. The Eagle tells Miles that he's certain Alaska would have wanted the Colonel to do well in school. He also asks Miles if he's up to anything, but Miles manages to distract him long enough for the Colonel to escape.

The Colonel spends the night trying to reach a .24 blood alcohol level so that he and Miles can figure out what Alaska would have been capable of doing in that state. They hear footsteps coming down the hall, and Miles tells the Colonel to cry just before the Eagle walks in. Miles lights a **cigarette** to cover the smell of alcohol, and when the Eagle comes in Miles tells him he was only smoking so he could stay awake with the Colonel. The Eagle tells Miles to report to Jury tomorrow. He leaves, and the Colonel keeps drinking until he reaches Alaska's intoxication level. He is unable to stand up or walk in a straight line.

#### 44. TWENTY-EIGHT DAYS AFTER

The next morning Miles takes a French test that he hasn't studied for at all. The exam asks him about the significance of the rose in the book [The Little Prince](#). Miles has no idea what it signifies, so he writes that it symbolizes love. He does not really care about the answer to the question, however, and wishes instead that he could figure out the significance of the **white flowers**.

Miles and the Colonel tell Takumi about how they helped Alaska leave, and he says they were stupid but he isn't angry at them. The Colonel insists that they won't be able to figure anything else out without talking to Jake. Miles and Takumi agree, but they both ask the Colonel to tell them only what they absolutely need to know about Jake and Alaska.

#### 45. TWENTY-NINE DAYS AFTER

While the Colonel calls Jake, Takumi accuses Miles of hoping to find out that Alaska was on her way to break up with Jake so that she could come back and marry Miles and have genius kids who knew poetry and **last words**. Miles is offended, and Takumi tells him that he is sick of Miles acting like he is the only person who was in love with Alaska. Miles tells him that he kissed her right before she died, and he's the only person who did that. Takumi is shocked, but he agrees not to tell Lara.

*Although Alaska's death makes Miles' life much more difficult, he does grow up a lot in the process of dealing with it. In this scene, Miles is finally able to take control of a prank and lie on his own. He now cares more about finding out what happened to his friend than disappointing authority figures.*



*Miles has technically done nothing wrong in this scenario—he has not had any alcohol, and he doesn't even smoke the cigarette he's holding—but he takes the fall for the Colonel because they are looking for Alaska together. Miles used to be frozen into inaction out of fear of how others would react or treat him, but now he doesn't even hesitate to risk punishment if doing so helps his friend.*



*In The Little Prince, the prince discovers that caring for and giving to his rose is more valuable than anything his rose might give back. Miles could learn from this—he might realize that the act of loving Alaska is more important than winning her reciprocal love—but he hasn't read the book.*



*Takumi readily forgives what Miles and the Colonel consider an unforgivable act. While Miles has spent much of the time after Alaska's death feeling that no one understands him, Takumi's decision to forgo learning about Alaska and Jake's relationship suggests that Takumi might. Miles wasn't the only one in love with Alaska.*



*It turns out that Takumi can, in fact, relate to what Miles is going through because he loves Alaska, too. Both are jealous of Jake, and when Takumi learns that Miles and Alaska kissed, he is jealous of him as well. However, as frustrated as he is with Miles, he helps him out by not telling Lara about what he's just learned.*



The Colonel comes back and tells them that Jake called Alaska late that night because she wanted to talk to him at their exact anniversary, down to the second. They talked normally for about five minutes, while Alaska doodled, and then suddenly Alaska freaked out. Jake doesn't think she was on her way to visit him, because she told him that she'd "talk to him soon" rather than "see him soon." The fact that she made this plan with Jake and said "To be continued" to Miles suggests to the group that she wasn't planning on killing herself.

Miles and the Colonel try to remember the conversation they had with Alaska on her last night, but the Colonel was drunk and Miles wasn't paying attention for most of it. Miles thinks to himself that no one remembers **last words** when you don't know the person is about to die. The group decides that something in Alaska's head must have triggered her freak-out, rather than something someone else said.

#### 46. THIRTY-SEVEN DAYS AFTER

One day Miles literally runs into Lara and he apologizes. This is the first time they've spoken since the days after Alaska's death, and Lara runs away without responding. Miles feels horrible about how he's treated her, and he wants to make it better, but doesn't feel like he has the emotional space left to do so. All he can think about is figuring out Alaska, and Lara cannot help him with that.

#### 47. FORTY-FIVE DAYS AFTER

People have stopped giving Miles and the Colonel **cigarettes** out of sympathy, so Takumi drives them to Coosa Liquors to buy some more. Miles goes in to buy the cigarettes and the clerk says that she's heard about the death at Culver Creek, and she's sorry about it. Miles thinks that it's when life starts to feel normal that Alaska's death hits everyone the hardest, because that's when they miss her the most.

#### 48. FORTY-SIX DAYS AFTER

Takumi guilt trips Miles into talking to Lara by asking how Miles thinks Alaska would react to the fact that he has completely ignored Lara. Miles isn't sure about this, but Takumi tells him he's going to want to remember his first blow job fondly. This convinces Miles, and he goes to see Lara later that afternoon. He apologizes and she forgives him even though her roommate, Katie, tells her not to do so. Katie knees Miles in the balls and then announces that she forgives him too.

*Later on in the novel, Miles will learn that the day Alaska died was also the anniversary of her mother's death. The fact that Alaska made plans for the date—she realized it was her anniversary with Jake—but forgot to plan to go to her mother's grave suggests that Alaska had managed to move on, a least a bit, from her mother's death. This is further evidence in favor of Alaska's death being an accident.*



*Miles has previously held that last words are a good indication of how people lived their lives, but his realization about how last words are recorded makes them seem a bit less significant. Are people whose last words aren't recorded any less interesting?*



*Miles has now fully come around to the idea of figuring out what happened to Alaska—so much so that he is able to think about little else. He wants to know the truth, whether or not it indicates that Alaska loved him.*



*Just as Alaska was able to associate the date with her anniversary with Jake rather than the anniversary of her mother's death, so Alaska's friends slowly start to return to their normal lives. But their normal lives involved Alaska, and each time things seem better, they are reminded of her death.*



*Memory is a powerful thing in this novel. It potentially brings about Alaska's death, and causes Miles to get stuck in a fantasy relationship. In this instance, it is the memory of something fun rather than sad or mysterious that prompts Miles to act. He has enough sad memories, and he doesn't want to spoil this good one.*



Miles and Lara walk to the lake. He tells her as much as he can about what happened on Alaska's last night and what he and the Colonel have learned since. He explains to her that ever since Alaska died, it's felt like he's doing something wrong if he thinks about anything or anyone else. Lara tells him this isn't a good excuse, but she forgives him anyway.

That evening, Lara, Takumi, the Colonel, and Miles each throw a **cigarette** into the Smoking Hole, which is actually more like a fishing hole, in memory of Alaska. Miles likes that this feels like a ritual because he likes "the idea of connecting an action with remembering." He imagines that Alaska would be grateful for the cigarettes they give her.

The group works on making a list of the evidence for and against Alaska's suicide. They decide that the **white flowers** were not in Alaska's car as a way for Alaska to memorialize herself. Takumi repeats that he doesn't want answers, and Miles finally understands that he does not "have a monopoly on Alaska"—she mattered to everyone else, too. The group struggles to make much more headway, and the Colonel announces that someone else needs to come up with something because he is out of ideas.

## 49. FIFTY-ONE DAYS AFTER

Miles learns about *koans*, which are a type of riddle in Zen Buddhism that are meant to help people find enlightenment. Miles hopes that he might be struck by enlightenment the way that people in the Buddhist stories are, but he thinks it's unlikely. Dr. Hyde draws the class' attention to the Buddhist idea that everything will eventually fall apart. He relates this theory to Alaska's question, which is still written on the board.

Miles likes the idea that someday no one in the world will remember Alaska. She has started to slip out of his memory, and he considers this to be her second death. Miles thinks that maybe they will never know why Alaska fell apart—maybe she fell apart because everything falls apart. But this answer isn't enough for Miles. Even though he was initially resistant to figuring out what happened to Alaska, he now wants to find answers.

*Lara was Alaska's friend too, and Miles abandoned her in a time of need, but Lara forgives him anyway. This decision to forgive is very different from the vengeful way in which conflicts between students at Culver Creek were handled in the past.*



*Earlier, Miles could not imagine Alaska in any sort of afterlife, much as he wanted to. In this moment, however, he feels a connection with the rituals that other religions use to deal with death, and is finally able to imagine Alaska looking down on him.*



*Now that the group has forgiven each other, they are able to work together on solving the mystery of Alaska's death. In doing this, Miles finally understands how self-obsessed he has been and how much everyone else cares about Alaska too. His friends are not his competition—they are his teammates.*



*Miles gains perspective on Alaska's death in Dr. Hyde's class. For the past fifty-one days, Alaska's death has defined Miles' life. But, Dr. Hyde reminds him, everyone will die and everyone will suffer. As devastating and painful as Alaska's death has been, everyone in the world will experience something similar.*



*When Miles considers the idea that maybe Alaska died because simply because death is inevitable, he frees himself from some of the guilt he has held on to since her death. Miles accepts that he may never know why she died, but he is determined to keep looking for answers.*



## 50. SIXTY-TWO DAYS AFTER

Miles calls his parents to tell them that he hasn't been doing well in school because of Alaska's death. As he talks, he looks at the notes written around the payphone and notices one of the **daisies** that Alaska always used to draw. He remembers that Jake told the Colonel that Alaska freaked out while she was doodling on the phone. Miles hangs up and rushes off to tell the Colonel about his discovery. He thinks that the flowers reminded Alaska of something she had forgotten. The Colonel is not as excited about the flowers as Miles is, and he points out that they still have no idea what Alaska remembered.

*Miles finds the final clue to the mystery of Alaska's death: her doodles of flowers. Miles didn't pick up on the many references Alaska made to her sadness and her feelings about death while she was alive, but he has finally started to pay attention and now knows that the white flowers are significant.*



## 51. SIXTY-NINE DAYS AFTER

The school calls an assembly, where the Eagle announces that they are going to build a playground in Alaska's honor. This does not strike Miles as something Alaska would have particularly liked, and Lara stands up and says that they should honor her with something funnier. The Colonel agrees, and later that day he decides that they need to pull a prank in her honor—The Alaska Young Memorial Prank. He tells them that Alaska had been saving up a prank called “Subverting the Patriarchal Paradigm” for her senior year, and that it is going to be the best prank of all time. Miles hopes that if he memorializes Alaska properly, she might send him a clue explaining what happened.

*The Eagle's memorial to Alaska is a sad one because it has nothing to do with Alaska's life, and is simply a reminder of her death. The Alaska Young Memorial Prank is a much better way to memorialize Alaska. If it really is the best prank of all time, people will remember Alaska for many years to come, and when they remember her, they'll remember how she lived—mischievously—rather than just the fact that she died while at school.*



## 52. EIGHTY-THREE DAYS AFTER

The Colonel spends spring break coordinating the prank, and the group convenes once everyone is back on campus. Miles suspects that the Colonel has spent so much time working on the prank so that he won't have to feel like he's failed Alaska again. As long as they are able to find a stripper—and convince Miles' dad to cooperate—they decide the prank will work.

*To the Colonel, the expert planner, the prank is a chance to redeem himself in Alaska's eyes. While he may have failed to keep her safe, he will not fail to keep her spirit alive.*



## 53. EIGHTY-FOUR DAYS AFTER

Speaker Day is an annual Culver Creek tradition in which the students get an afternoon off of school to listen to two speakers selected by the junior and senior class. In order for the prank to work, the group needs to get the Eagle to agree to host “Dr. William Morse,” who they will say is a friend of Miles' dad and a scholar of adolescent sexuality. Miles calls his dad and asks him if he will help out with the best prank in the history of Culver Creek. Miles' dad hated Speaker Day when he was a student, and he eventually agrees to help Miles as long as Miles promises not to tell his mother.

*In order to pull off the Memorial prank, Miles must enlist the help of others. The more Miles connects with other people, the easier it becomes to deal with his grief. Further, the fact that he cannot memorialize Alaska alone, but needs the help of so many people, is a testament to how many people truly cared about Alaska. He can remember her more perfectly with the help of others, because he did not know her perfectly on his own.*



The Colonel is forced to enlist the help of the Weekday Warriors, who love the prank and are happy to assist. Longwell Chase, the class president, goes with Miles to the Eagle's office, and they tell him that they have chosen a friend of Miles' dad, Dr. Morse, to be the junior class speaker. Miles and Longwell, of course, make an odd pair considering that Longwell once tried to kill Miles. Eagle calls Dr. Morse, although in reality he actually calls Miles' dad, and Miles' dad is convincing enough as a professor that the Eagle agrees to bring him to Speaker Day.

*In the days following Alaska's death, Miles and the Colonel grew apart from the rest of the student body because each felt that he cared about Alaska more than anyone else. While the Colonel once thought the grief of the other students was fake, their willingness to work on his prank suggests that he now understands how much Alaska mattered. Her death now brings people together instead of pushing them apart.*



## 54. ONE HUNDRED TWO DAYS AFTER

Although Miles' dad pretended to be Dr. Morse on the phone, the group hires a male stripper named Maxx to play him on Speaker Day. It takes a while to find a stripper that would agree, but Maxx finally agrees so on the condition that there won't be any nudity in front of students. Miles and Takumi get every member of the junior class to contribute five dollars toward paying Maxx's fee, so that the responsibility for the prank will be distributed evenly and no one will be expelled. The prank, which everyone has known about for two weeks, only works because of the strong no-ratting culture at Culver Creek.

*The people who once played pranks on Alaska are now expending time and energy to pull a prank in her honor. This time, no one seeks retribution or payback. Instead, this prank is about making things better rather than making them worse. As a result, everyone works together to ensure that no one will be punished for the group effort.*



When Maxx arrives that afternoon, the Colonel gives him the speech he has written him and pays his fee upfront. Miles accompanies Maxx to the gym, since he is supposed to be a friend of Miles' father, even though Miles knows this means he runs the risk of getting in trouble. Maxx takes the podium and starts talking about how frequently boys objectify girls' bodies, but notes that girls rarely do the same to boys. While he is talking, Lara stands up and says, "You're so hot! I wish you'd shut up and take off your clothes."

*This prank is a fitting memorial for Alaska because it remembers her in two ways. First, the content of Maxx's speech reflects Alaska's feminist views. Second, Alaska loved mischief and challenging authority figures, so the spirit of the prank is very much in line with Alaska's personality.*



When Lara insists again that Dr. Morse take off his clothes, Maxx says, "Well, it is certainly important to subvert the patriarchal paradigm." Then he shouts, "This one's for Alaska Young." Takumi puts on music and Maxx strips and dances in front of the entire student body until the Eagle asks him to leave.

*Green pays less attention to Lara than he does to the other characters in the novel, but Lara's willingness to publicly ask Maxx to take his clothes off suggests that she, like Miles, has changed and become much more comfortable with herself.*



Students from the other grads can't figure out who was responsible for the prank, and Miles tells everyone that it wasn't him or the Colonel or Takumi, but Alaska. Alaska once told Miles that the worst part of pulling a prank was that you could never claim it as your own, and Miles enjoys being able to tell people that this one was her doing. Later that night, the Eagle shows up at Miles and the Colonel's room and tells them he knows they are responsible. He warns them never to do something like that again, but adds, "Lord, 'subverting the patriarchal paradigm'—it's like she wrote the speech."

*The fact that the Eagle recognizes how perfectly the prank suits Alaska—without knowing that she planned it before her death—is a testament to just how well the prank serves as a memorial. The prank does not mourn her death, like the playground, but instead celebrates her life. Even though Miles and the Colonel did all the work to pull the prank off, they are happy to give Alaska the credit for it. They love her and want people to remember her correctly.*



## 55. ONE HUNDRED FOURTEEN DAYS AFTER

A week and a half later, Takumi suggests that the date January 10 might be significant. To Miles, it's the day Alaska died, but Takumi reminds him that Alaska's best day of her life—the day at the zoo with her mom—was January 9, which means that January 10 was also the day Alaska's mother died. They tell this to the Colonel. The three of them decide that doodling **daisies** must have reminded Alaska that she forgot the anniversary of her mother's death. She left campus to take Jake's white flowers to her mother's grave. Maybe she thought she could make it past the police car or, as Takumi suggests, maybe she was so upset for forgetting to call 911 and then forgetting the anniversary of her mother's death that she decided to kill herself.

*While the white flowers have a fairly clear symbolic value for Alaska, she unfortunately does not recognize their full meaning. To Alaska, these flowers were symbolic of her mother's death, but more generally, white daisies and tulips are symbolic of innocence and worthiness, respectively. At the moment when she feels the most guilty, Alaska is unknowingly driving to put flowers that symbolize forgiveness on her mother's grave. This action—the fact that Alaska cares so deeply about her mother that she is distraught about forgetting the anniversary of her death—shows what a worthy person Alaska is deep down.*



## 56. ONE HUNDRED EIGHTEEN DAYS AFTER

After this realization, the group gives up trying to find out anything else. They aren't certain whether she intended to die, but Miles decides "some mysteries aren't meant to be solved." Miles isn't sure if he should be angry at Alaska for making him an accomplice or angry with himself for letting her leave. Miles realizes that although they didn't find all the answers, the search made him grow closer with Takumi and the Colonel. Miles credits Alaska with making them better friends, and decides that while he may not have found what he was looking for, he has found a way back to his Great Perhaps.

*Miles is excited by the mystery of his future at the beginning of the novel, but at that point he has never really experienced anything mysterious. Having now dealt with the mystery of Alaska's life and death, he understands that mysteries do not necessarily have solutions. The process of trying to solve the mystery, however, has brought Miles much closer to his friends. He is now excited for his Great Perhaps again, but this time his anticipation comes with the knowledge that it is the search, rather than the result, that is important.*



The Colonel and Miles decide that the last thing they need to do before they can let go of Alaska is to drive past the place where she died. As they drive, Miles says, "Sometimes I liked it that she was dead." He says that it felt "pure," and the Colonel agrees with him. He is surprised that the Colonel, too, harbors such horrible thoughts. Miles and the Colonel drive through the spot and Miles wonders if she decided to die at the last possible moment. He thinks that it would not have been a bad way to die. But he and the Colonel drive through the spot, and they do not die, and they pull over and cry because they are alive.

*Miles and the Colonel beat themselves up over Alaska's death, just like Alaska beat herself up over her mother's. Unlike Alaska, however, Miles and the Colonel are able to eventually move past their grief and guilt—so much so that they can admit that they sometimes feel something other than sadness over her death. The act of driving through the spot where she died is one of catharsis, and it enables them to let go of some of their emotions.*



## 57. ONE HUNDRED NINETEEN DAYS AFTER

The group spends the next few days cramming for exams, and all of them miss Alaska because she used to be so good at teaching them precalculus. When they run out of time to read their assigned books, they read Cliffs Notes, although the Colonel feels that even Cliffs Notes are too long. For the first time, they don't have to talk about Alaska because they don't need to.

*At the beginning of the novel, the Colonel told Miles about his application essay to Culver Creek, which focused on his love of long books. Now, even Cliffs Notes feel long to him. Alaska's death has made things like school feel much less important.*



## 58. ONE HUNDRED TWENTY-TWO DAYS AFTER

Dr. Hyde holds the last class of the year outside and distributes the final exam to the class. Each person must write about how he or she will get out of Alaska's **labyrinth**. He tells them that they don't need to do any research, and that he would rather them write about their personal understandings of the world. He points out that in the three religions they have studied, the Buddha, Jesus, and Muhammed "each brought a message of radical hope" for those who are lost. He ends the class by asking them, "What is your cause for hope?"

Miles asks the Colonel how he is going to escape the **labyrinth**, and the Colonel says that he has no idea. Miles responds that that's not going to help Alaska much, and the Colonel realizes that he had forgotten about her. The Colonel decides that "straight and fast" may be the only way out of the labyrinth, but as hard as life is, he doesn't want to leave it.

*Dr. Hyde uses Alaska's death as a tool for teaching his students how to apply the knowledge they have acquired in his classroom. He does not take Alaska's death as a sign that life is pointless, but rather uses it as something to encourage his students to be hopeful. They are not ignorant—they know that life contains suffering, and they have experienced it—but he encourages them to find a reason to keep going despite this.*



*By forgetting about Alaska, the Colonel is able to be hopeful about his own life. He doesn't have a plan, and he knows life won't be easy, but he wants to keep living all the same. He allows himself to forget, and in doing so, enables himself to move on in a way in which Alaska never could.*



## 59. ONE HUNDRED THIRTY-SIX DAYS AFTER

On the last day of school, Miles finds a note from Takumi slipped under his door. In it, Takumi tells Miles that he has already left for Japan and apologizes for being mad at him all semester. He explains to Miles that he saw Alaska on the night that she died. She told Takumi that it was the anniversary of her mother's death and that she had forgotten to put flowers on her mother's grave. Takumi says that when she left, he thought she wasn't going to do anything but look for flowers outside, so he let her go. He apologizes to Miles because he knows that he loved Alaska too.

Miles runs to Takumi's room to forgive him but he's already gone. In that moment, Miles realizes that forgiveness is the way out, and that Alaska forgave them and he forgives everyone else. He finally accepts that he will never know her **last words** and thoughts. He realizes that he will love her forever, despite the fact that he doesn't know her completely.

Miles runs back home and sits down to write his religion paper. He writes that before he came to Culver Creek, he avoided the **labyrinth** by pretending it didn't exist. He and the Colonel messed up with Alaska just like Alaska messed up with her mom, but while Alaska let that mistake ruin her life, Miles chooses to believe in the Great Perhaps.

*Miles and the Colonel distanced themselves from Takumi because of the role they played in Alaska's death, only to find that he played a role as well. Takumi could have saved Miles and the Colonel a great deal of questioning had he told them this information upfront. Then again, perhaps he would have told them if they hadn't left him out. Either way, guilt drove a wedge between Takumi and Miles and the Colonel.*



*Miles does end up struck by a sort of enlightenment—like that he desired from the Buddhist koans—except his revelation is not about Alaska, as he had hoped, but about life. He chooses to forgive Takumi and Alaska and himself, and in forgiving, he finds peace.*



*Miles has always sought the Great Perhaps, but before coming to Culver Creek, he was naïve about how difficult or bad things could be. He has now learned that the future often holds suffering, but that this doesn't keep the Great Perhaps from being worth seeking.*



Miles writes that eventually he will forget Alaska, but he knows that she will forgive him for that. In turn he forgives Alaska for being selfish and forgetting about everyone she left behind. Alaska's body will return to the earth and be recycled, but Miles believes that Alaska was more than her body. He writes that "[t]here is a part of her greater than the sum of her knowable parts. And that part has to go somewhere because it cannot be destroyed."

Miles knows that matter cannot be truly destroyed, and he believes that Alaska's energy works the same way. He has hope because he believes that people are indestructible, and consequently, anything is survivable. He wishes that Alaska had not self-destructed because she did not need to. He says that "[w]e think that we are invincible because we are. We cannot be born, and we cannot die. Like all energy, we can only change shapes and sizes and manifestations." Miles ends his essay by quoting Thomas Edison's **last words**, "It's very beautiful over there." He says that he's not sure where Alaska is, but he hopes it's beautiful.

*Although Miles' beliefs and actions sometimes correspond with Christian teachings, he doesn't believe in any specific religion. Instead, he believes in an idea of radical hope: that even if things fall apart, they cannot be truly destroyed. He can seek his Great Perhaps because he believes that Alaska's energy is still alive, and life is worth living no matter what.*



*Often, books dealing with teenage deaths serve as reminders that we are not invincible, but Green, through Miles' essay, argues against this idea. He concludes that rather than being overly cautious, we should live life as fully as possible—because even if and when we die, our energy will continue to exist. Miles doesn't believe in a specific afterlife, but he instinctively feels that there is something more than just physical existence. That belief gives him the hope and strength he needs to survive and move on.*







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