

In this excerpt from the novel The Fault in Our Stars, teenagers Augustus (Gus) Waters and Hazel Lancaster—who are both battling terminal illnesses—have dinner in a romantic restaurant in Amsterdam. During an earlier conversation, Hazel had quoted to Gus lines from the poem “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock.” Read the excerpt from the novel and the selection from the poem and answer the questions that follow.

from **THE FAULT IN OUR STARS**

by John Green

1 Augustus pointed up at the trees and asked, “Do you see that?”

2 I did. There were elm trees everywhere along the canals, and these seeds were blowing out of them. But they didn’t look like seeds. They looked for all the world like miniaturized rose petals drained of their color. These pale petals were gathering in the wind like flocking birds—thousands of them, like a spring snowstorm.

3 The old man who’d given up his seat saw us noticing and said, in English, “Amsterdam’s spring snow. The *iepen* throw confetti to greet the spring.”

4 We switched trams, and after four more stops we arrived at a street split by a beautiful canal, the reflections of the ancient bridge and picturesque canal houses rippling in water.

5 Oranje* was just steps from the tram. The restaurant was on one side of the street; the outdoor seating on the other, on a concrete outcropping right at the edge of the canal. The hostess’s eyes lit up as Augustus and I walked toward her. “Mr. and Mrs. Waters?”

6 “I guess?” I said.

7 “Your table,” she said, gesturing across the street to a narrow table inches from the canal. “The champagne is our gift.”

8 Gus and I glanced at each other, smiling. Once we’d crossed the street, he pulled out a seat for me and helped me scoot it back in. There were indeed two flutes of champagne at our white-tableclothed table. The slight chill in the air was balanced magnificently by the sunshine; on one side of us, cyclists pedaled past—well-dressed men and women on their way home from work, improbably attractive blond girls riding sidesaddle on the back of a friend’s bike, tiny helmetless kids bouncing around in plastic seats behind their parents. And on our other side, the canal water was choked with millions of the confetti seeds. Little boats were moored at the brick banks, half full of rainwater, some of them near sinking. A bit farther down the canal, I could see houseboats floating on pontoons, and in the middle of the canal, an open-air, flat-bottomed boat decked out with lawn chairs and a portable stereo idled toward us. Augustus took his flute of champagne and raised it. I took mine, even though I’d never had a drink aside from sips of my dad’s beer.

* Oranje — name of a restaurant

9 "Okay," he said.

10 "Okay," I said, and we clinked glasses. I took a sip. The tiny bubbles melted in my mouth and journeyed northward into my brain. Sweet. Crisp. Delicious. "That is really good," I said. "I've never drunk champagne."

11 A sturdy young waiter with wavy blond hair appeared. He was maybe even taller than Augustus. "Do you know," he asked in a delicious accent, "what Dom Pérignon said after inventing champagne?"

12 "No?" I said.

13 "He called out to his fellow monks, 'Come quickly: I am tasting the stars.' Welcome to Amsterdam. Would you like to see a menu, or will you have the chef's choice?"

14 I looked at Augustus and he at me. "The chef's choice sounds lovely, but Hazel is a vegetarian." I'd mentioned this to Augustus precisely once, on the first day we met.

15 "This is not a problem," the waiter said.

16 "Awesome. And can we get more of this?" Gus asked, of the champagne.

17 "Of course," said our waiter. "We have bottled all the stars this evening, my young friends. Gah, the confetti!" he said, and lightly brushed a seed from my bare shoulder. "It hasn't been so bad in many years. It's everywhere. Very annoying."

18 The waiter disappeared. We watched the confetti fall from the sky, skip across the ground in the breeze, and tumble into the canal. "Kind of hard to believe anyone could ever find that annoying," Augustus said after a while.

19 "People always get used to beauty, though."

20 "I haven't gotten used to you just yet," he answered, smiling. I felt myself blushing. "Thank you for coming to Amsterdam," he said.

21 "Thank you for letting me hijack your wish," I said.

22 "Thank you for wearing that dress which is like whoa," he said. I shook my head, trying not to smile at him. . . . "Hey, how's that poem end?" he asked.

23 "Huh?"

24 "The one you recited to me on the plane."

25 "Oh, 'Prufrock'? It ends, 'We have lingered in the chambers of the sea / By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown / Till human voices wake us, and we drown.'"

26 Augustus pulled out a cigarette and tapped the filter against the table. "Stupid human voices always ruining everything."

27 The waiter arrived with two more glasses of champagne and what he called "Belgian white asparagus with a lavender infusion."

28 "I've never had champagne either," Gus said after he left. "In case you were wondering or whatever. Also, I've never had white asparagus."

29 I was chewing my first bite. "It's amazing," I promised.

30 He took a bite, swallowed. "God. If asparagus tasted like that all the time, I'd be a vegetarian, too." Some people in a lacquered wooden boat approached us on the canal below. One of them, a woman with curly blond hair, maybe thirty, drank from a beer then raised her glass toward us and shouted something.

31 "We don't speak Dutch," Gus shouted back.

32 One of the others shouted a translation: "The beautiful couple is beautiful."

33 We were both really full, but dessert—a succulently rich *crèmeux* surrounded by passion
fruit—was too good not to at least nibble, so we lingered for a while over dessert, trying
to get hungry again. The sun was a toddler insistently refusing to go to bed: It was past
eight thirty and still light.

34 Out of nowhere, Augustus asked, “Do you believe in an afterlife?”

35 “I think forever is an incorrect concept,” I answered.

36 He smirked. “You’re an incorrect concept.”

37 “I know. That’s why I’m being taken out of the rotation.”

38 “That’s not funny,” he said, looking at the street. Two girls passed on a bike, one riding
sidesaddle over the back wheel.

39 “Come on,” I said. “That was a joke.”

40 “The thought of you being removed from the rotation is not funny to me,” he said.
“Seriously, though: afterlife?”

41 “No,” I said, and then revised. “Well, maybe I wouldn’t go so far as no. You?”

42 “Yes,” he said, his voice full of confidence. “Yes, absolutely. Not like a heaven where
you ride unicorns, play harps, and live in a mansion made of clouds. But yes. I believe in
Something with a capital *S*. Always have.”

43 “Really?” I asked. I was surprised. I’d always associated belief in heaven with, frankly,
a kind of intellectual disengagement. But Gus wasn’t dumb.

44 “Yeah,” he said quietly. “I believe in that line from *An Imperial Affliction*. ‘The risen sun
too bright in her losing eyes.’ That’s God, I think, the rising sun, and the light is too bright
and her eyes are losing but they aren’t lost. I don’t believe we return to haunt or comfort
the living or anything, but I think something becomes of us.”

45 “But you fear oblivion.”

46 “Sure, I fear earthly oblivion. But, I mean, not to sound like my parents, but I believe
humans have souls, and I believe in the conservation of souls. The oblivion fear is something
else, fear that I won’t be able to give anything in exchange for my life. If you don’t live
a life in service of a greater good, you’ve gotta at least die a death in service of a greater
good, you know? And I fear that I won’t get either a life or a death that means anything.”

47 I just shook my head.

48 “What?” he asked.

49 “Your obsession with, like, dying for something or leaving behind some great sign of
your heroism or whatever. It’s just weird.”

50 “Everyone wants to lead an extraordinary life.”

51 “Not everyone,” I said, unable to disguise my annoyance.

52 “Are you mad?”

53 “It’s just,” I said, and then couldn’t finish my sentence. “Just,” I said again. Between us
flickered the candle. “It’s really mean of you to say that the only lives that matter are the
ones that are lived for something or die for something. That’s a really mean thing to say to
me.”

54 I felt like a little kid for some reason, and I took a bite of dessert to make it appear
like it was not that big of a deal to me. “Sorry,” he said. “I didn’t mean it like that. I was
just thinking about myself.”

55 “Yeah, you were,” I said.

from The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock

And indeed there will be time
For the yellow smoke that slides along the street
Rubbing its back upon the window-panes;
There will be time, there will be time
5 To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet;
There will be time to murder and create,
And time for all the works and days of hands
That lift and drop a question on your plate;
Time for you and time for me,
10 And time yet for a hundred indecisions,
And for a hundred visions and revisions,
Before the taking of a toast and tea.

In the room the women come and go
Talking of Michelangelo.

15 And indeed there will be time
To wonder, “Do I dare?” and, “Do I dare?”
Time to turn back and descend the stair,
With a bald spot in the middle of my hair—
(They will say: “How his hair is growing thin!”)
20 My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin,
My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin—
(They will say: “But how his arms and legs are thin!”)
Do I dare
Disturb the universe?
25 In a minute there is time
For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse.

. . .

And the afternoon, the evening, sleeps so peacefully!
Smoothed by long fingers,
Asleep . . . tired . . . or it malingers,
30 Stretched on the floor, here beside you and me.
Should I, after tea and cakes and ices,
Have the strength to force the moment to its crisis?
But though I have wept and fasted, wept and prayed,
Though I have seen my head (grown slightly bald) brought in upon a platter,

35 I am no prophet—and here’s no great matter;
I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker,
And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and snicker,
And in short, I was afraid.

. . .

No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be;
40 Am an attendant lord, one that will do
To swell a progress, start a scene or two,
Advise the prince; no doubt, an easy tool,
Deferential, glad to be of use,
Politic, cautious, and meticulous;
45 Full of high sentence, but a bit obtuse;
At times, indeed, almost ridiculous—
Almost, at times, the Fool.

I grow old . . . I grow old . . .
I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled.

50 Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a peach?
I shall wear white flannel trousers, and walk upon the beach.
I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.

I do not think that they will sing to me.

I have seen them riding seaward on the waves
55 Combing the white hair of the waves blown back
When the wind blows the water white and black.

We have lingered in the chambers of the sea
By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown
Till human voices wake us, and we drown.

—*T. S. Eliot*