

NINE YEARS AND THREE MONTHS AGO

The chapter opens with Jameson Hawthorne standing at the base of a tree house, frustrated by his broken arm and the presence of his grandfather, Tobias Hawthorne, instead of his brothers. Tobias's pointed questions immediately set a tense tone, as he challenges Jameson's intelligence and decision-making. The distant sound of Grayson's violin playing underscores the theme of perfection, a recurring pressure in the Hawthorne family. Jameson's defensive admission about his motorbike crash hints at his internal struggle with failure and the high expectations placed upon him.

Tobias seizes the moment to deliver a harsh truth: Jameson's mind is "ordinary" compared to his brothers' exceptional abilities. Grayson is methodical and precise, Xander is brilliantly unconventional, and even Nash's capabilities are ambiguously superior. The word "ordinary" strikes Jameson deeply, forcing him to confront his insecurities. Tobias, however, doesn't leave him without hope; he suggests that Jameson can train himself to see the world differently, to overcome his perceived limitations through sheer determination and focus.

The conversation shifts into a pivotal moment as Tobias challenges Jameson to rise above his weaknesses. He emphasizes that true success comes from wanting it more than others and seeing opportunities where others see obstacles. Jameson's defiant response—"Whatever I have to"—reveals his resolve to prove himself. Tobias's cryptic final words, "I'll see you at the top," serve as both a literal and metaphorical challenge, pushing Jameson to reject the easy path and embrace the struggle.

In the final scene, Jameson chooses to climb the tree house the hard way, ignoring his injury and the pain, symbolizing his commitment to surpassing his limitations. The chapter closes with his determination to become the best, driven by Tobias's harsh but motivating words. This moment encapsulates the Hawthorne family's relentless pursuit of excellence and the personal sacrifices required to achieve it.