

Madison Laprise, Class of 2021  
John Knowles, *A Separate Peace*

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Dear John Knowles,

How did you do it? How did you so perfectly tell a universal story? When I read *A Separate Peace*, I was struck in the core of my heart, as if in some world I lived through a similar tale of love and loss. It takes a lot to make me cry, but I shed a tear on your pages. I shed a tear not just for Finny, but for Gene Forrester, for Leper Lepellier, for Brinker Hadley. I shed a tear for the friendship of Gene and Phineas, for all its purity and darkness.

If I were given the opportunity two years ago, Mr. Knowles, I would have asked you if Gene shook the branch intentionally. My soul burned for such an answer, as if the sanctity of all mankind depended on if your character intentionally ruined his best friend, because in a way, it did. After all, if someone who loves us as much as Gene loved Phineas could betray us, what hope did we have?

But now, I understand why you kept Gene's intentions a secret. That's the point. Gene doesn't know why he did it, so how could he tell us? How can mankind explain our lengthy wrongdoings if we know nothing except being human? It doesn't matter why Gene jounced the limb. What mattered is that he sent Finny into peril, and that he loved him. Regardless of intent, we are capable of causing others great pain, but also capable of showing them great love.

Evil can be an accident. Love is always intentional.

Madison Laprise