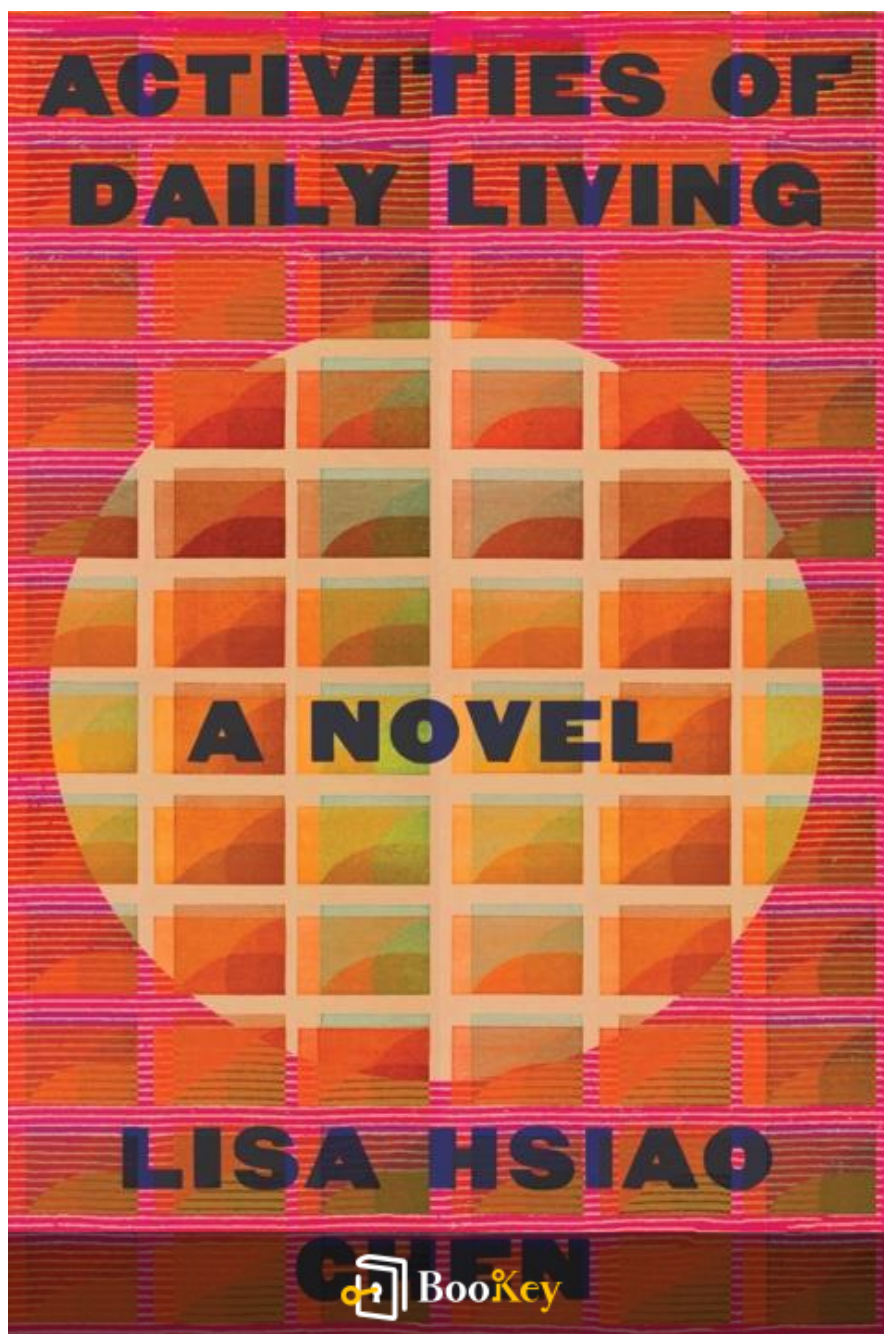


Activities Of Daily Living PDF (Limited Copy)

Lisa Hsiao Chen



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Activities Of Daily Living Summary

"Exploring Life's Routines and Profound Connections."

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About the book

Dive into the intricate tapestry of routines and reflections with Lisa Hsiao Chen's **Activities of Daily Living**—a profound exploration that fuses art, caregiving, and the endless search for connection in our everyday actions. This novel paints an evocative portrait of life through the lens of two distinct lives bound by curiosity and the passage of time. Chen, with her insightful prose and keen observation, masterfully navigates the nuances of relationships, identity, and the relentless pursuit of meaning in the seemingly mundane. Join the journey where every ordinary task is a canvas of discovery, echoing with both the profound and ephemeral rhythm of human existence. Embrace this immersive experience that promises introspection, empathy, and a renewed appreciation for the everyday dance of life.

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About the author

Lisa Hsiao Chen is a contemporary author who deftly blends observations of daily life with profound meditations on identity and existence. Originating from a multifaceted cultural background, Chen brings a unique perspective to her writing, intertwining both Eastern and Western sensibilities. Her work often explores themes of memory, displacement, and the complexities of familial ties. Known for her lyrical prose and deep emotional insight, Chen has quickly gained recognition as a fresh voice in modern literature. In "Activities of Daily Living," she delves into the nuances of human experiences, drawing readers into a world where the mundane intersects with the profound. As an accomplished writer, Chen continues to captivate audiences with her thoughtful and resonant storytelling.

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Chapter 1 Summary: The Beginning of the Project

Alice finds herself explaining a project that doesn't truly exist when asked what she's up to these days. She claims it's about an artist—The Artist—a mysterious figure who captivated her when she first saw him in a magazine as a young girl. The Artist, known for his extreme endurance-based performance art, often goes unrecognized by most people. Despite descriptions of his notable works—living in a cage for a year, punching a clock every hour for a year, and living on the streets without entering buildings—his name often draws blank stares.

The Artist serves as an underground legend, his performances known more by reputation than by direct witnesses. He didn't gain celebrity status like other iconic figures of the 1980s art scene, such as Basquiat or Warhol, because he belonged to an alternative to the alternative art community. For many years, he remained elusive, further isolating himself through his baffling performances until he eventually announced his withdrawal from art, leaving the public largely forgetting him.

Tim Etchells, another artist, recounts his experience witnessing the Artist's work in 2001. By this time, the Artist had been in self-imposed exile following a brief return to announce his retirement from art. Etchells reflects on a retrospective talk given by the Artist, which showcased six of his performance pieces before his disappearance. One noted work was the



confinement in a homemade cage during 1978-79, leading to another piece in 1980 where he punched a clock every hour for a year. The presentation, stripped of emotion or explanation, left Etchells feeling unsettled yet eerily familiar with the void the Artist's work revealed.

The chapter weaves a sense of mystique and intrigue around the Artist, whose real name is Sam Hsieh. The story delves deeply into his "One Year Performance 1978–1979", a project of forced solitary confinement that prohibited conversation, reading, or entertainment of any kind. It also depended on a friend for basic needs. This piece exemplifies Hsieh's approach to performance art—an exploration of endurance, isolation, and the passage of time, leaving an indelible question of whether his work was a profound artistic expression or an intense personal pathology.

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Chapter 2 Summary: The New York Art World

In the early days of his New York City journey, the Artist, known then as Sam, was a cautious newcomer, avoiding both the subway and his real name to elude the police. He initially resided in an overcrowded apartment near 180th Street in Manhattan, sharing the space with fellow Chinese migrants. However, his artistic aspirations soon pulled him towards Greenwich Village. As he crossed the iconic marble arch of Washington Square, he was captivated by the vibrant scene of artists painting in the open air—a glimpse of the New York art world he yearned to join.

A chance encounter led him to SoHo, a neighborhood characterized by its postindustrial charm and cast-iron warehouses. In the late 1970s, SoHo was still sparsely populated, retaining an air of mystery and potential that both intrigued and inspired him. Although few people roamed its desolate streets, the presence of emerging bars, galleries, and cafés hinted at the area's burgeoning creative community. Entranced, the Artist resolved to return, making a mental note of an address that would serve as his guidepost; however, it took two years before he would find his way back to this artistic haven.

By 1978, Sam had begun to solidify his presence in the New York art scene. While he had yet to achieve significant recognition, he was diligently working to forge connections within the community. He amassed a list of



artists, writers, critics, and gallery owners, determined to share his vision. Investing in a typewriter, stamps, and envelopes, he mailed out copies of his one-page artist statement, announcing his audacious plan: "I, Sam Hsieh, plan to do a one-year performance piece to begin on September 30, 1978."

This bold move caught the attention of the poet Jackson Mac Low, who penned a curious response. Intrigued yet puzzled, Mac Low questioned the purpose behind such performances, seeking insight into the Artist's motivations. His inquiry highlighted the enigmatic nature of Sam's work—performances that seemed to transcend conventional pleasure or understanding, driven by a deeper, more profound intent that was yet to be unveiled to his audience. Through this correspondence, the complexities and ambitions of the Artist's mission began to emerge, offering a glimpse into the unique journey he was embarking upon in the vibrant, evolving landscape of New York's art world.

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Critical Thinking

Key Point: Pursue Your Dreams Relentlessly

Critical Interpretation: In the midst of uncertainty and unfamiliarity, the Artist's journey in New York City inspires you to tirelessly chase your aspirations, no matter the odds stacked against you. Moving through the iconic marble arch of Washington Square and the quiet allure of SoHo, these neighborhoods symbolize the transformative power of ambition. Even in the face of anonymity and the absence of immediate recognition, the Artist's persistence in fostering connections and promoting his daring vision echoes a vital lesson: meaningful success arises from unwavering commitment and the courage to take bold steps towards your goals. Let this determination invigorate your life, encouraging you to navigate challenges with resilience and seek opportunities with curiosity, understanding that every interaction and effort is a step closer to turning your dreams into reality.

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Chapter 3 Summary: Disruptions in Continuity

Alice is in a state of introspection as she reflects on her various unfinished projects, many of which remain dormant or stalled on her laptop. A creative spirit at heart, she's struggled with bringing her ambitious ideas to fruition. At present, Alice is working on a project about an enigmatic Artist, though she is uncertain of its final form, only knowing that time will be her medium, much like the Artist she admires.

Currently, Alice is traveling on a red-eye flight from New York to California to visit her father, whom she refers to as the Father. She allows herself to disconnect from her freelance video editing work that, though financially stable, often feels invisible and disconnected, earning her the nickname of "Caspering" due to her role as a temporary, seamless replacement in various production teams. Her most recent gig involved a show called "Bring On the Feels," crafting viral feel-good stories, a welcomed change from previous mundane assignments.

Upon arriving in California, Alice is tasked with attending to her father's daily needs and medical appointments, as his health—especially mentally with his memory and temper—declines following his retirement from a lifelong carpentry career. Her sister Amy also helps, balancing her own busy life as a single mother working full-time.



Alice accompanies her father to a doctor's appointment, noting a moment of frequency illusion—a psychological phenomenon where something she's recently noticed seems to appear everywhere—when a Westworld reference occurs, mirroring her in-flight movie choice. This moment underscores her heightened awareness and the connections her mind weaves between seemingly unrelated events.

Her father's health is a concern to Alice, especially his declining memory and tendency to forget words and plots in books, leading her to persuade the doctor to prescribe him an antidepressant. The appointment includes a clock-drawing test, used to detect cognitive impairments, which her father passes with a perfectly normal, if miniature, clock drawing—offering Alice a sense of relief that he does not have Alzheimer's.

Alice's visits to her father are part of a triage system she and her sister maintain to ensure his well-being, acknowledging how the constraints of space and time shape not only her creative pursuits but also her familial responsibilities.



Critical Thinking

Key Point: Embrace imperfection and uncertainty in your creative journey

Critical Interpretation: Alice's struggle with incomplete projects and the uncertainties surrounding her creative pursuits echoes the common human experience of grappling with imperfection. As you read about this internal conflict, you're reminded that creativity isn't always about producing polished, finalized results. Rather, it introduces you to the beauty of letting ideas simmer and evolve over time. Through Alice's journey, you're inspired to embrace the unknowns in your own projects and recognize that progress can often be found in the mere act of sitting with ambiguity. Allowing yourself the freedom to wander through creative chaos, you might just uncover undiscovered treasures hidden beneath the surface of your initial assumptions.



Chapter 4: Ravens

The chapter "Ravens" weaves a poignant narrative around Alice and James, two friends who reminisce and share stories about their aging fathers over spontaneous phone calls, a rarity in the modern age of texting and social media. The connection between Alice and James blossomed from a serendipitous butt dial, evolving into regular conversations that offered them solace and camaraderie.

James's father, once a vibrant figure admired for his looks and charm, is portrayed in the twilight of his life following a stroke. The stroke left him largely nonverbal and frail, yet retained a stubborn streak of resistance, showing glimpses of his former vigor through unexpected episodes of fierce kicking. Alice, too, shared tales of her father's unpredictable outbursts, highlighting a similar resilience despite aging challenges.

During their conversation, we learn about James's father's recovery, which triggers discussions about the complexities of the brain, mortality, and personal identity. James relays a humorous account of standing on a Williamsburg corner, awaiting ethically-sourced veal, courtesy of an unconventional arrangement with a local farm. This quirky detail underscores James's easygoing nature and willingness to embrace life's peculiarities.



The narrative draws deeper meaning when James revisits an old copy of Edith Hamilton's "Mythology," particularly intrigued by the Norse god Odin's ravens, Hugin (Thought) and Munin (Memory). The ravens' daily flights and their return to whisper worldly observations to Odin parallel James's reflections on his father's mental deterioration. Alice posits that they,

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Chapter 5 Summary: Aphasia

In the chapter "Aphasia," we explore the challenges faced by Alice and her father as his cognitive abilities decline. As people age, memory issues often manifest, and Alice's father frequently forgets simple words, such as "calf," which Alice helps him recall, finding satisfaction in being useful. The Father, a multilingual man with knowledge of English, Chinese, and Vietnamese—languages he picked up during his service in the Vietnam War—struggles with a condition more severe than mere forgetfulness: expressive aphasia. Despite understanding conversations and knowing what he wants to say, he is unable to articulate his thoughts.

The impact of this condition frustrates the Father, even more so than his occasional struggles with day-to-day tasks like dressing. Alice and her sister, Amy, have tried various solutions to manage his decline, from arranging meals and health aides to researching and purchasing adaptive products for elderly care. Yet, the solutions often fall short; the bath chair leads to minor accidents and familiar sneakers are no longer available, highlighting the inadequacy of material solutions for emotional and psychological distress.

Parallel to these contemporary struggles, the chapter weaves in insights from philosopher Henri Bergson, who was fascinated by aphasia in his quest to understand the nature of memory. Bergson studied cases where individuals retained intelligence and emotional depth despite losing linguistic skills,



using this to argue for a division between memory and the physical brain, hinting at the existence of the soul. The revelation that thoughts and memories persist despite aphasia supports Bergson's theories, suggesting that consciousness might transcend physical limitations.

Alice's father embodies this dichotomy, as his emotional and intellectual presence remains intact despite his physical and linguistic challenges. In moments of frustration, he audibly encourages his brain to cooperate, underscoring the internal struggle and the resilience required to navigate his condition. Through the lens of Bergson's philosophy and Alice's attempts to assist her father, the chapter poignantly addresses the complexities of aging, memory, and the enduring spirit.

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Critical Thinking

Key Point: Emotional and intellectual presence is powerful

Critical Interpretation: Despite physical and linguistic challenges, retaining emotional and intellectual presence underlines the resilience of the human spirit. By witnessing Alice's father navigating his condition, you become inspired to recognize and honor the strength that lies beyond physical limitations. You learn that even in the face of aging and cognitive decline, the essence of who you are—the core emotions, thoughts, and values—endure and continue to resonate with those around you. This insight encourages you to value emotional richness over material solutions and to find strength in your inner world, regardless of external obstacles.



Chapter 6 Summary: Activities of Daily Living

"Activities of Daily Living" is a poignant exploration of life's cyclical and often mundane aspects, set against the backdrop of an artist's performance and a daughter's care for her aging father.

The narrative begins with Alice examining photographs from the first performance of a Taiwanese Artist in New York called "Cage Piece." In this performance, the Artist isolates himself without reading material, television, or interaction, attempting to embody the raw passage of time. His friend and documentarian, Cheng Wei Kuong, photographs this year-long ordeal, capturing moments of stoicism and vulnerability. Kuong's life remains obscure, existing only in this photographic documentation, which reflects the transitory and often unseen nature of human support in artistic endeavors.

Interwoven with this is Alice's own story, involving her stepfather, the Father—a White man from a Pentecostal family background in Alabama, illustrating stark contrasts in cultural experiences. Alice recalls the Father as a man who didn't shy away from humor related to the body's natural processes, using crude jokes to connect and entertain. His past service in Vietnam and subsequent life choices reveal a pattern of escapism, highlighted by a propensity for drinking and an indifference to life's deeper complications.



With his health deteriorating post a fall at home, the Father exhibits behaviors associated with sundowning—a condition common among dementia patients, triggering confusion and agitation. The narrative delves into Alice's role, torn between judgment and care, as she grapples with his possible dementia, exacerbated by years of alcohol consumption. Her reflection on his contribution to her parents' divorce reveals an intricate web of personal history tied to neglect and unspoken familial duties.

Alice's relationship with her Father is further strained as he becomes a patient in a healthcare facility, where his inability to manage his Activities of Daily Living (ADLs)—basic self-care tasks—surfaces. Here, a contrast is drawn between Alice's observation of nurses, primarily women of color, and her role as a stepdaughter misconceived as a caregiver. The concept of ADLs serves as a tangible marker of independence, dictating the Father's living situation and care requirements.

The story reaches a critical point at the skilled nursing facility (SNF), where the Father eagerly anticipates watching Super Bowl 50, symbolizing a link to his pre-hospitalization normalcy. This becomes a negotiating tool for Alice and Amy, her sister, to encourage his participation in therapeutic activities. However, an unexpected bout of constipation and the subsequent embarrassment of soiling himself highlight the vulnerability of aging and the indignities it can entail.



Further compounding the narrative are insights into the human condition as seen through existential struggles of the Artist documenting life through performance and the Father embodying its slow erosion. The story quietly juxtaposes the calculated endurance of the Artist with the Father's reluctant, chaotic navigation through dependency, ultimately scrutinizing how we find meaning in the vestiges of human experiences.

In a nod to literature, Alice reflects on Annie Ernaux's work, drawing parallels between her own shifting perspective of a once robust father to a vulnerable man shaped by life's unpredictabilities. Alice's realization about personal growth echoes Ernaux's narrative on familial bonds—how education and societal changes redefine relationships, presenting a universal theme of change and acceptance.

The narrative's depth is enriched through Alice's observations of the care landscape—a realm dominated by underappreciated nursing staff, whose labor-intensive routines preserve the dignity and semblance of life for those they serve. Alice acknowledges these caregivers in awe and gratitude, understanding their essential role in bridging life's fissures where time and care converge.

Ultimately, "Activities of Daily Living" is a profound meditation on intergenerational ties, art as a reflection of life's crude realities, and the



universal, albeit messy, journey toward understanding and acceptance
amidst life's inevitable cycle of care and dependence.

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Critical Thinking

Key Point: The Role of Undervalued Caregivers

Critical Interpretation: In your own journey, you may often overlook or undervalue the impact of those who support and care for others—especially those in roles that involve tending to daily needs, like nurses and caregivers. Immersing yourself in their world, as Alice does, reveals a profound truth: these caregivers are the uncelebrated stewards of dignity and humanity. Witnessing the depth of compassion and labor they exert not only preserves the essence of life but serves as a humbling reminder to practice gratitude and awareness of the silent guardians in our lives. Allow this realization to inspire you to acknowledge and respect those who work tirelessly behind the scenes, ensuring the continuity of care and restoring dignity. Embrace a mindset of appreciation and empathy, recognizing that it's the small, consistent acts of service that truly support the foundation of a nurturing society.



Chapter 7 Summary: Project for a Trip to Westworld

In "Project for a Trip to Westworld," Alice and Amy are grappling with the challenging task of finding an appropriate assisted living facility for their father, whose insurance coverage is soon to end and who can no longer live independently. As they visit various facilities, they notice that many are designed with nostalgic themes reminiscent of the 1950s, complete with jukeboxes and soda counters. This leads Alice to ponder what kind of settings her own generation will find comforting in its old age.

Among the facilities they tour, one stands out to Amy due to the presence of a friendly chocolate Labrador, a comforting presence for the residents and reminiscent of their father's love for dogs. Alice also notes a pleasant vegetable garden as a positive feature. However, they are collectively searching for silver linings amidst their anxiety.

Meanwhile, their father's rebellious spirit manifests during his stay at a skilled nursing facility (SNF) in Oakland. Despite regaining some strength, he defies the facility's rules by venturing out into the parking lot, declaring that he's protesting the constraints placed upon him. This act results in him being fitted with a wristband that triggers an alarm if he attempts to leave again, underscoring the restrictions placed on his autonomy.

The father's behavior, while disruptive, reveals his awareness of his



limitations and a tacit understanding that venturing beyond the facility's grounds is beyond his capacity. The wristband serves as a poignant symbol of the border drawn by his diminishing abilities.

Alice reflects on innovative models of care in Europe, where entire villages are designed for individuals with Alzheimer's. These communities mimic real-world environments, complete with restaurants, cafés, and shops. The caregivers dress in everyday attire to create a sense of normalcy and familiarity, enriching the residents' experiences and aiding memory retention. In these villages, friendly faces—caregivers in disguise—are always nearby to assist, offering a comforting sense of community and support.

Ultimately, the story juxtaposes the father's current reality with a hopeful vision of what elder care could evolve into, painting a picture of a more compassionate and integrated approach to aging within a community context.

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Chapter 8: Souvenir

The chapter, "Souvenir," delves into themes of memory, legacy, and the nature of art, framed through the life of the Artist who becomes more enigmatic with his decision to stop creating art. This chapter recounts the resurgence of his work through the Museum of Modern Art's exhibition of Cage Piece, a performance art installation symbolically represented by a wooden cage filled with mundane objects. These objects, such as a toothbrush and cigarettes, serve as metaphors for the hidden depths of the Artist's creations, as he likens them to the visible tip of an iceberg with the true art submerged and unseen beneath.

Concurrently, the narrative pivots to Alice, grappling with the physical and emotional remnants of her Father's life after his declining health necessitates a move from his West Berkeley home into a residential care facility. The house, heavy with the lingering scent of cigarettes and memories, becomes a vessel of nostalgia and unacknowledged mourning. Alice faces the challenge of sorting through her Father's possessions, categorizing them by value and sentimentality while grappling with the possibility of his never returning home.

Her musings connect to broader explorations of souvenirs and memory, touching upon historical references, such as the grisly tale of David Tyrie, whose body parts were taken as souvenirs, highlighting how objects only



gain significance once removed from their origins. In contrast, Alice debates what items to keep from her Father's collection of cameras, records, and cookbooks, representing his melancholic tendency toward amassing things rather than relationships—his faithfulness to objects rather than people.

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Chapter 9 Summary: Myrtle Avenue

In the narrative "Myrtle Avenue," Alice is a recurring character who navigates the complexities of time and change in her Brooklyn neighborhood. The story opens in the fall, when Alice visits her father, referred to as the Father, at a residential home. The Father initially struggles with the new environment, displaying anxiety and belligerence, but eventually finds solace in something as simple as a cheeseburger, easing his transition.

Alice returns to Brooklyn, experiencing a familiar comfort as she walks down Myrtle Avenue. The avenue, reminiscent of Edward Hopper's paintings, represents more than just a physical space—it embodies the passage of time, both measured and felt in personal experience, aligning with philosopher Henri Bergson's concept of "durée réelle."

While revisiting Brooklyn, Alice reflects on the transient nature of the neighborhood. Her observations capture the ephemeral essence of businesses, as they open and close, marking the rhythm of gentrification. The transformation of familiar places into new entities underscores both progress and loss, a sentiment Alice grapples with as a resident. She becomes increasingly aware of these changes, akin to the measurement of days by tabloid headlines, weeks by movie posters, and years by the rise and fall of storefronts, an idea proposed by Luc Sante.



Alice's curiosity leads her to consider visiting a fortune-teller on Myrtle Avenue, whose presence is signaled only by a mysterious neon hand above a bodega. This plan symbolizes her desire to discern the future amid the continual metamorphosis surrounding her. Yet, when she returns home, the neon sign is gone, epitomizing the evanescent nature of the street and its allure.

Alice's musings on documenting every business façade on Myrtle Avenue echo the work of artist Ed Ruscha, who photographed the Sunset Strip to capture its evolution. Her interest in documenting Myrtle Avenue serves not as an artistic endeavor but as a personal archive against forgetting, a way to hold onto memories amid the neighborhood's flux.

Throughout her narrative, Alice observes the broader social shifts around her. Stores she once cherished, like the hybrid café and haberdashery Culture for Life, vanish without a trace. This reflection on loss is compounded by an ever-changing demographic landscape marked by new, culturally homogenous enterprises like Starbucks, supplanting local icons.

In her contemplation, Alice resonates with Annie Ernaux's philosophy that time is sensed externally rather than internally, as changes in the environment reveal the passage of time. The story concludes with Alice contemplating the allure of a fortune-teller's insights into the street's destiny,



the unpredictability of which mirrors her personal journey through a constantly evolving urban world. The narrative closes with Alice on the subway, surrounded by advertisements for new, sensational television shows, each hinting at different versions of time and reality, underscoring her quest for stability in an ever-shifting landscape.

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Chapter 10 Summary: The Residency

Alice has been struggling to regain her momentum with a project she calls the "Project," which she had neglected during a stint in California. This endeavor involves exploring the artistic footprints of the enigmatic Artist in Lower Manhattan, places where he created performance pieces and lived transiently, such as parking lots and eatery doorways. The Artist's connections to the city's fabric provide Alice with a sense of grounding and continuity, drawing her closer to the allure of New York City despite its high costs and the relentless capitalist hustle.

The story transitions to Nobu's new art studio on Rector Street, part of an arts residency sponsored by an organization displaced after 9/11. This residency now occupies the Beaux Arts building, which was initially constructed for a national freight shipping company and is being repurposed to attract tech and media companies. Nobu, an artist with an unconventional outlook, uses the space to reclaim and repair discarded aluminum cans he finds on the streets, seeing them as “wounded” objects that bear their own stories. His studio is also adorned with quirky elements like a pair of maneki-nekos engaged in a simulated tug-of-war over a dollar bill.

Alice accompanies Nobu on a tour of the residency, meeting various eclectic artists, including Allyson, a poet capturing the mundane beauty of trash in her social media work, and Wojciech, a painter creating layered canvases



that emulate and reinterpret subway ads. The resident dancers and Aisha, a sculptor exploring concepts of identity through imaginative fabric sculptures, further highlight the diversity and creativity flourishing within the residency community.

Alice observes the cityscape from different vantage points of the building, one view capturing the construction of a new skyscraper, another the routine precision of a housekeeper in a neighboring hotel, each scene reflecting a distinct aspect of New York City's complexity and dynamism.

Appreciating Nobu's fortunate position within this creative oasis, Alice acknowledges the opportunity provided by the residency. With a generous nine-month term, Nobu is poised to cultivate what Alice metaphorically terms a "super art baby," underscoring the nurturing environment ideal for producing groundbreaking work.

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Critical Thinking

Key Point: Finding grounding in the city's continuous change

Critical Interpretation: In the bustling landscape of New York City, where capitalist pressures often threaten to uproot individuals, grounding oneself in its historical and artistic narratives offers a profound sense of continuity. As you immerse yourself in the city's ebb and flow, much like Alice discovers through the enigmatic Artist's traces, consider how anchoring your experience in shared stories and places can provide solace and inspiration. Delve into the city's layers, observe its juxtaposed moments from past to present, and connect these observations to your own journey. This keen appreciation of urban complexity doesn't just offer insight into the city's soul but also inspires a reflective understanding of your existence amid change, urging you to find comfort and motivation within continuous creation and transformation.



Chapter 11 Summary: ESL

In a sunlit corner of a Lower East Side library, Alice immersed herself in the rich history of New York's downtown arts scene. The setting was serene, the third floor offering a rare tranquility amidst the city's hustle. Settled next to her, an elderly Chinese man with a quail-egg freckled face busied himself with newspapers and an English-language dictionary, his white hair tucked beneath a baseball cap. His intent focus was revealed through animated gestures, striking the air with his pencil like an orchestral conductor.

As he pored over his materials, a familiar face—a middle-aged Indian woman—approached him. Their shared history, likely rooted in attending the library's ESL (English as a Second Language) conversation class, was evident in their casual banter. They lamented the absence of promised tea and biscuits, speculating humorously that library funding might be the cause of this minor inconvenience. Their conversation took a turn towards current events, as they humorously questioned newspaper headlines discussing recent developments on same-sex marriage, pondering incredulously on the possibility of "two men having babies."

Once his friend departed, the old man confided in Alice with a whisper, expressing his bewilderment at how the world seemed to be changing rapidly before their eyes. Shortly thereafter, he rose and left his reading area temporarily, leaving behind his papers. Curiosity piqued, Alice glanced over



his notes scrawled on pages from a food bank's notepad. Beneath a playful cartoon pumpkin, he had written definitions for words new to him: 'hobble,' meaning to create difficulty; 'ironically,' denoting something happening contrary to expectations; and 'boomer,' a term humorously misdefined as a large male kangaroo.

Through this scene in the library, a tapestry of lives intersecting is woven, reflecting broader themes of cultural exchange, the humor found in adaptation, and the shared human experience of navigating a rapidly evolving world.

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Critical Thinking

Key Point: Cultural Exchange through Shared Spaces

Critical Interpretation: It's inspiring to recognize how shared spaces, like libraries, facilitate spontaneous cultural exchanges and foster connections between diverse individuals. As you observe the interactions between Alice, the elderly Chinese man, and their Indian acquaintance, you begin to appreciate how such settings serve as melting pots for cultural dialogue and mutual understanding. These spaces become platforms for learning, humor, and the sharing of experiences, reminding you that the richness of the human experience thrives in diversity and curiosity. These interactions mirror the larger world, encouraging you to embrace cultural exchanges more openly in your day-to-day life, recognizing the potential for growth, humor, and connection in every encounter.

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Chapter 12: Dictionary

In the chapters titled "Dictionary," the narrative unfolds around the symbol and significance of dictionaries in various contexts and lives. In a dusty corner of the living room, Alice discovers Chinese-English dictionaries belonging to her father, relics of a time when learning Chinese kept him from combat duty in Vietnam, potentially saving his life. Her mother, conversely, relied on a Chinese-English dictionary to escape a difficult marriage, paving a way for a new life in a foreign land.

Alice works with a volunteer collective in a Brooklyn bookstore basement, fulfilling book requests from inmates across the U.S. Dictionaries are in high demand, requested in diverse editions. The letters from prisoners reveal varied tones and desires for knowledge, underscoring the dictionary's role as a beacon of learning and liberation within the confines of incarceration.

Famous historical figures, such as Malcolm X, also illustrate the profound impact dictionaries can have. While imprisoned, Malcolm X used a dictionary to expand his vocabulary, a journey that marked the beginning of his intellectual liberation. This prompts a reflection on the associations between words and race, as depicted in Spike Lee's biopic, highlighting the loaded definitions of "black" and "white."

The narrative further delves into the eccentricities and dedicated efforts



behind the creation of dictionaries, notably the Oxford English Dictionary (OED). An American surgeon, William Chester Minor, contributed to it even while imprisoned in an asylum, his life marred by madness rooted in war trauma.

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Chapter 13 Summary: Why a Year?

The chapter, titled "Why a Year?" delves into the origins and motivations of Sam Hsieh, an artist from a rural township in southern Taiwan, known for its tuna fisheries and wax apples. Born in 1950, Hsieh grew up in a large family as the eldest of ten children, with a father who ran a small trucking company and had five wives. From a young age, Hsieh showed interest in art, which disappointed his father, who did not see art as a viable career path. Despite this, Hsieh pursued his passion, eventually dropping out of school to follow his artistic inclinations.

Initially, Hsieh focused on painting, creating hundreds of pieces before moving on to performance art—a medium he stumbled upon through experimental actions that involved pushing his physical and mental limits. His early works included extreme acts like overeating until he vomited, subjecting himself to physical strain by holding large weights until injury, and jumping from heights, resulting in broken bones. These intense and often dangerous experiments marked the beginning of his journey in performance art, which would eventually leave a significant mark on his career.

Hsieh's performance work is characterized by its intensive commitment to time. In nearly every interview, he is questioned about his choice to frame his performances within the span of a year. When asked why he settled on



this duration, Hsieh provides several insights. He views a year as the largest single unit of time that humans use, a unit long enough to mirror the Earth's orbit around the sun, symbolizing a full life cycle. He explains that choosing a period beyond a year would become an exercise in endurance rather than a conceptual statement. For Hsieh, a year represents a cycle that embodies human existence, time measurement, and life's repetitive nature.

The chapter also highlights one of Hsieh's notable pieces, "ONE YEAR PERFORMANCE 1980–1981," which commenced in April 1980. In this performance, Hsieh committed to punching a time clock every hour, on the hour, for an entire year. Each time he clocked in, he left the room immediately afterward, effectively confronting the passage of time and the relentless cycle of routine. This performance encapsulates Hsieh's exploration of time and existence, using a rigorous structure to emphasize the human experience embedded within the confines of a year.



Critical Thinking

Key Point: A Year as a Symbol of Human Existence

Critical Interpretation: In Chapter 13, 'Why a Year?', Hsieh's dedication to framing his art around a year-long cycle reflects a deeper understanding of time as an intrinsic measure of human existence. This perspective can inspire you to embrace the notion of time as a series of cycles — each year offering opportunities for growth, reflection, and transformation. The way Hsieh views a year not just as a duration but as an encompassing life cycle pushes you to see beyond mere endurance or survival in your day-to-day life. Instead, consider each year as a canvas for exploration, repetition, and rhythm, mirroring nature's orbit around the sun. Hsieh's work encourages you to confront the cycles in your own life, to appreciate them as a framework within which you can artistically navigate the passage of time and reinforce the commitment to live each moment intentionally, even within the mundane rhythms of routine.



Chapter 14 Summary: Making Time

Making Time

In "Making Time," the Artist creates a unique film called "Time Clock Piece," pieced together from the thousands of moments he documented by punching a clock every hour over the course of a year—resulting in 8,627 clock punches (missing 133). This film operates like a time-lapse, where an hour of real life is condensed into a single second of film time. As the movie unfolds, the Artist appears to vibrate slightly, illustrating the toll on his body and mind. His hair visibly grows over time, and the clock next to him spins wildly, symbolizing the relentless passage of time. Over the six-minute runtime, the film reduces life to its barest form, revealing the essence of time.

Alice, another character, is first seen at a bodega, distracted by a cat and the commotion of city life. She's on her way to a dinner party hosted by Nobu—an artist whose latest project involves recreating meals from grocery lists found on city streets. Unlike professional gig economy shoppers, Nobu isn't paid for his efforts, and while Alice finds his work absurdly charming, she wonders about his livelihood since she only knows about his intermittent art class teaching gigs.



While at the bodega, Alice reflects on a tragic story she read about a New Jersey woman who died in her car between shifts for a donut company, suggesting a death by algorithm-driven scheduling. This melancholic thought aligns with Alice's research into the effects of sleep deprivation, considered a form of torture from historical witch hunts to modern-day Guantánamo.

Similarly, the Artist experienced sleep deprivation during his project. After only three days, he struggled with cognitive fog and irritability, forcing him to rig an elaborate alarm system to keep him awake for his clock-ins. Despite this, he missed some across the year. The narrative looks at human vulnerability against relentless productivity demands and highlights how modern life's reduction in sleep undermines personal well-being.

As Alice perceives, punch clocks hold a historical context. Invented in 1888 alongside the rise of industrialization, they revolutionized time tracking, a system now perfected by biometric data. Alice's volunteer work connects her to Auburn, a town known for its prison labor, where inmates made clocks among other things. The juxtaposition of labor and control explored here is starkly illustrated by Auburn's history as the site of the first electric chair execution.

The dinner party at Nobu's apartment brings Alice into an intricate scene, filled with thematic discussions. The woman sitting next to Alice introduces



an app that plants trees corresponding to undistracted time commitment, growing the theme of time management. Meanwhile, Nobu—in his characteristic absurdist demeanor—asks about growing virtual vegetables, adding whimsy to the deep undertone of control and labor through time.

The Artist's project, while intense, was not about suffering, as he insists, but rather pursuing pleasure in the connection with time. His exhaustion doesn't show in his face; instead, Alice observes a deliberate man threading himself into the fabric of time. After completing such projects, the Artist expresses melancholy, as finishing a piece means slipping back into the mundanity of everyday life, shedding his extraordinary identity only to become ordinary once more.

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Chapter 15 Summary: Keeping Time

In the chapter "Keeping Time," the narrative focuses on the Father's obsession with time following a fall that lands him in the hospital. Despite having nowhere specific to be, he constantly checks the time, leading to anxious moments when his phone is out of reach. This preoccupation is revealed to be an early sign of dementia, which robs individuals of their temporal awareness and subsequently their sense of self.

At night, the Father requires a caregiver because he wakes in a state of disorientation, screaming due to his loss of temporal bearings. His fixation on time began before his hospitalization, illustrated by his habit of carrying a wristwatch despite being unable to wear it due to limited dexterity. As his world shrinks to the few blocks around his home, time becomes one of the few constants in his life. The Father's reliance on precise timing extends to setting his alarm inexplicably for three a.m., compulsively seeking reassurance through the clock.

Alice reflects on her childhood habit of dialing POPCORN to listen to a voice recite the current time, an activity that provided a comforting sense of connection. Now, she scours thrift stores for a suitable digital alarm clock for her father, knowing his limited ability to operate complex devices. Her search takes her to Savers, a thrift store filled with remnants of others' lives—items similar to those her family had once used during their



immigrant journey to the United States. While her mother moved on to new things as their financial situation improved, Alice and her father maintained an appreciation for these old treasures.

Alice discovers a superstition surrounding gifts of clocks and watches in Chinese culture, equating them to attending funerals. Although not superstitious herself, this information ties into her memories of gifting a solar-powered watch to her nephew Ezra, who eventually outgrows both the watch and the need to tell time.

As Alice navigates the complexities of her father's condition, she unearths a still-packaged digital alarm clock in his house, equipped with features that once seemed innovative. The clock, with its nature soundscapes, becomes a nostalgic keepsake for Alice, echoing her father's whimsical nature despite its outdated sound quality. The chapter paints a poignant picture of how time, both as a concept and a tangible measure, weaves itself into the fabric of relationships, memory, and identity.

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Chapter 16: Zombies

In the months following her father's fall, Alice finds herself reflecting on his gradual decline while organizing old photos. One photograph, taken during his hospital recovery, captures a disturbing image: a large, dark bed sore on her father's back, a visible testament to his frail condition. The doctors believe it resulted from prolonged immobility. Despite his assurances that it doesn't hurt, Alice and her father are both astonished by the sight.

Throughout his hospital stay, the father experiences moments of improvement. Alice manages to coax laughter from him, and he shows a fondness for a particular nurse, reminiscent of his former self. However, underlying cognitive issues persist, with doctors speculating on various diagnoses—vascular dementia, stroke, and Wernicke-Korsakoff syndrome—likely exacerbated by his history of heavy drinking. After exhaustive research, Alice suspects her father suffers from frontotemporal dementia (FTD), a condition affecting language, motor skills, emotions, and judgment. His progressive deterioration becomes evident as he struggles with daily tasks and increasingly inappropriate outbursts.

Alice draws parallels between her father's condition and Edwidge Danticat's reflections on her mother's death in "The Art of Death." Danticat describes the notion of embracing even a zombified version of her mother, highlighting the universal struggle of holding on to loved ones despite their



altered states. Alice, however, acknowledges the harsh reality of dementia, where a person becomes a shadow of their former self. Her father's fear of ending up like his father, who succumbed to Alzheimer's, looms over their interactions, underscoring his preoccupation with assisted suicide to avoid a prolonged decline.

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Chapter 17 Summary: Crash

Crash

In the wake of losing his job, James finds himself navigating the challenges of unexpected unemployment. His company, which specialized in transcribing videotaped speeches, had shifted to AI, retaining only the most precise human transcribers. Unfortunately, James did not make the cut. Despite reassuring Alice, a close friend, that he was relieved, James confides that the tedious nature of his work had drained his energy and creativity.

Alice and James share a history, having met during a temp job amidst a recession, forming a bond over shared smoke breaks and casual evenings that briefly ventured into romance. Despite their brief romantic interlude fizzling out, their friendship endured, proving more lasting than other aspects of their temporary lives.

Following his job loss, James's situation worsens when he discovers his roommate in Flatbush has absconded to South Korea after failing to pay rent for months, leaving James homeless. His roommate had always glorified Seoul as a land of opportunity, particularly for an American like himself, but James privately doubted his success there, especially with the roommate's grandiose plans to dominate the K-pop scene.



With nowhere else to turn, James has been staying with Alice, an arrangement that is temporary but tense. Alice, while offering support, secretly longs for the return of her solitude and familiar habits, like indulging in guilty pleasures without having to consider another person's presence.

Alice suggests James use this time between jobs to pursue something he's passionate about, but James feels constrained by the supposed freedom. Eventually, he moves on to a cat-sitting job on the Upper West Side, leaving Alice both relieved and unexpectedly lonely. She realizes that James's presence, while disruptive, had filled a certain void, prompting imaginary conversations about everything from movies to diet. In a moment of reflection, she begins writing a message to James but decides against sending it, leaving her thoughts unspoken.



Critical Thinking

Key Point: Embrace Unexpected Changes

Critical Interpretation: In Chapter 17, James confronts the unpredictable nature of life when he unexpectedly loses his job and his living situation becomes precarious. Yet, through these challenges, there's a powerful reminder: embracing change can lead to growth and new opportunities. While initially daunting, these periods of transition force you to take a step back, reevaluate your path, and inspire innovation and resilience. In life's unexpected turns, there lies a chance to pursue passions you may have long ignored, foster deeper connections with people like Alice, and ultimately rediscover what truly matters to you. Let James's experience be a reminder that when you lose what you thought defined your day-to-day living, you gain the freedom to redefine it anew, opening doors to possibilities you've yet to imagine.

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Chapter 18 Summary: Almanac

Alice's encounter with an unusual chicken in Red Hook sets the stage for a narrative woven with themes of Americana and the search for knowledge. This isn't just any chicken you'd see in a simple ABC book; it's oddly speckled and seems out of place in the dreary city environment. As Alice continues on to the bookstore where she volunteers, she reflects on this disoriented creature as a symbol of loss and displacement, much like the society she navigates.

In the basement of the bookstore, Alice joins a group of regular volunteers who sift through requests for specific books. These letters often come from prisoners, highlighting prisons as isolated pockets of society hungry for information and connectivity. Among the requests, Alice frequently encounters calls for almanacs—specifically, "The World Almanac and Book of Facts," though she mistakenly fixates on "The Old Farmer's Almanac."

Driven by curiosity, Alice purchases "The Old Farmer's Almanac" from a nearby Barnes & Noble. This book echoes elements of Americana from Alice's past, such as holiday gift baskets and other culturally nostalgic items that merge with the image of a simpler, idealized Middle America. The Almanac, published since George Washington's era, stands as a testament to American history, cultural memory, and tradition—its enduring aspects signified by the signature hole through which it can be hung.



The almanac originally served as an "analog internet," providing information on weather, social trends, and advertisements. Today, it remains relevant mainly to those without internet access—rural populations and prisoners. However, Alice's attempt to fulfill the prisoners' letter actually misses their true interest. They crave up-to-date global information found in "The World Almanac and Book of Facts," not the rustic charms of "The Old Farmer's Almanac."

Alice reflects on the layers of American culture, the forgotten facets of social history, and the peculiar spaces where these outlines intersect, ultimately realizing the true demands of the community she serves and the complex tapestry of Americana that encompasses even its missteps and misunderstandings.

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Critical Thinking

Key Point: Rediscovery of Cultural Memory

Critical Interpretation: In Chapter 18, as you journey with Alice through the mundane yet profound act of selecting an almanac, you're encouraged to explore the depths of cultural memory that shape your understanding of tradition and identity. Alice's initial oversight—choosing the nostalgic 'Old Farmer's Almanac'—serves as a gateway to rediscovering the fragments of Americana that resonate within each of us. This act inspires you to look beyond the surface of cultural artifacts, questioning the narratives they tell and their relevance in today's world. It's a call to bridge the gap between the comfort of familiar traditions and the pressing realities of contemporary society, inviting you to engage more deeply with the heritage that surrounds you. Through this reflection, you begin to see the inherent beauty and complexity of cultural heritage, urging you to embrace both the missteps and the misunderstandings in your own tapestry of experiences.



Chapter 19 Summary: Witness

Alice found herself standing on a crowded subway train in New York City, overhearing two fashionable women discussing something unsettling that one of them couldn't bear to watch since becoming a mother. Intrigued but unable to make out the details due to the noise of the train and the women's hushed tones, Alice felt a twinge of annoyance. This feeling was compounded by her own hypocrisy because she, too, had been avoiding watching a distressing video.

The subway rumbled across the Manhattan Bridge, offering a stunning view of the East River, but most passengers, like Alice, were lost in their own thoughts or devices. Recently, Alice had been avoiding a viral video depicting a starving polar bear. Although she had seen a still image of the emaciated animal and knew its dire condition, she could not bring herself to watch the full video. Yet a part of her felt compelled to face the discomforting reality it presented.

Later that evening, unable to shake the nagging thought, Alice finally resolved to watch the video. The footage revealed a tormented polar bear dragging its frail body across a barren landscape once covered in sea ice. As the bear rummaged hopelessly through a trash barrel and chewed on an old snowmobile seat, Alice felt the weight of the bear's suffering. Despite knowing the video would be painful to watch, she endured it till the end.



Afterwards, staring at the prompt to watch it again, Alice leaned back, feeling the expected sense of despair. She had forced herself not to look away, determined not to become desensitized like so many others. Yet, sitting in front of her laptop, she questioned what her act of witnessing had achieved. Feeling a mix of helplessness and responsibility, she shut her laptop, pondering the complex interplay of action and inaction in the face of global issues.

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Critical Thinking

Key Point: Courage to Confront Discomforting Truths

Critical Interpretation: Alice's journey to face the distressing video of a starving polar bear serves as a poignant reminder of the importance of confronting uncomfortable realities. In a world where pressing issues often lurk behind the veil of conveniently ignored headlines, choosing to witness painful truths is an act of courage. By not averting her gaze, Alice exemplifies the internal struggle many of us face when exposed to external problems. Her determination reflects an inspiring resolve to stay informed, even when it means stepping out of one's comfort zone. This chapter challenges you to adopt the same fortitude in your own life, encouraging you to face harsh realities head-on, acknowledging them as catalysts for awareness and change rather than allowing ignorance to prevail.



Chapter 20: Last Time

After Amy successfully sells their Father's house to a young family from San Francisco, Alice and Amy prepare for their father's final visit to his long-time home. Prior to the visit, the Father had settled into a care home in San Jose. Their mother voiced concerns about potential emotional distress affecting Amy while driving, while Alice worried he might refuse to leave once he returned to his familiar environment.

On the day of the visit, Alice, who had arrived from the East Coast, finds herself nostalgic for Berkeley's foggy mornings while getting coffee at a local café. The Father, upon entering his home of over twenty years, remains remarkably calm, hardly acknowledging the environment that was once his sanctuary. The house, filled with sunlight filtered through dusty blinds, still carried the scent of stale tobacco.

Initially, the Father appears to seek cigarettes and toiletries, rummaging through the living room and bathroom. As he shifts to the kitchen, where a bottle of Jim Beam whiskey is stored, Alice watches him pour a shot but is unable to intervene due to a mix of empathy and hesitation. Amy, however, courageously pours the whiskey down the sink, reminding him that he must refrain from drinking if he wishes to return to the care home with her.

The Father's lack of resistance surprises Alice, who sees him as a subdued



bear, capable of great strength but now resigned. He refrains from a final tour of the house, indifferent to the accumulated possessions that had lost meaning due to his deteriorating mental health. This indifference stirs a poignant mix of gratitude and sorrow in Alice. She later comes to realize that his emotional distance and detachment from his life's belongings were signs of his growing dementia, an estrangement from the world that left her feeling both sad and understanding.

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Chapter 21 Summary: Entering and Exiting Outdoor Piece

In "Entering and Exiting Outdoor Piece," we are introduced to an Artist who undertakes an unconventional project—surviving outdoors in Lower Manhattan. This venture requires him to forgo time management and spend his days observing urban life, capturing the essence and struggle of living without shelter. The narrative begins with the Artist, now bald and with only a rucksack, stepping from his loft into the city's constant motion. His goal is to exist entirely outdoors, immersing himself in the vibrant yet indifferent Lower Manhattan.

In the early stages, the Artist finds himself lingering around familiar spots near his old loft. He notes the silver mannequins in a boutique window and witnesses odd scenes, such as men receiving peculiar spa treatments while the health-conscious city folk mill around, sipping their trendy juices. His endurance is tested during this endeavor, as he only manages to last outdoors for four hours initially.

As the days pass, he revisits locations imprinted in his memory, such as the corner of Beach and Greenwich, once a favorite haunt now replaced by a modern glass building. He frequents the derelict public pool on Thompson Street and relives the moments spent getting pizza from a sidewalk vendor. Here, the individual stories of the city's residents weave into the larger,

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bustling urban tapestry—their interactions echo the Artist's own experiences from years past.

Archival footage reveals the Artist's repeated actions, like throwing a ball against a handball court wall. At first glance, it appears repetitive and mundane, but upon closer inspection, his swift pacing and animated movements suggest a struggle against the cold, each gesture a calculated effort to stay warm.

The narrative backdrop highlights the year of the Artist's outdoor existence, marked by an influx of people sleeping on streets, subway stations, and parks. Simultaneously, Wall Street saw unprecedented trading figures, contrasting starkly with the growing number of people living in poverty. The brutal cold of that winter, captured in photographs showing the Artist warming his hands by a fire near the icy East River, underscores the harshness of street survival.

One cannot help but draw parallels to the reference room of the New York Public Library, where a researcher examines the exhibition catalogue of the "Outdoor Piece." From its pages, the changing seasons of New York unfold, each image encapsulating the Artist's decision to embrace the city's temporal rhythm. This evokes a personal contemplation on the invitation of New York, with its defined seasons, compared to the constancy of the West Coast and its illusion of timelessness.



The account further touches on everyday struggles akin to the Artist's, as seen through a mother and child on a subway platform grappling with hunger and financial constraint. Their dialogue mirrors the underlying theme of this venture—a poignant reflection on survival and resilience.

Responding candidly, the Artist remarks on cleanliness being the year's greatest challenge, citing how winter left him with hands resembling those of a miner—a testament to the hardships of life outdoors. This segues into a philosophical musing inspired by Julien Green, suggesting that the soul of a big city is truly understood only through shared experiences of boredom and suffering.

The culmination of the "Outdoor Piece" chronicles more significant societal shifts. Terms like Reaganomics and AIDS become ingrained in public consciousness, and social perspectives shift, with The New York Times altering its style guide to replace terms like "vagrants" and "transients" with "homeless." This encapsulates the broader transformation—both for the Artist, whose project comes to a close, and for society, adapting to new truths and challenges.

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Critical Thinking

Key Point: Embracing the Transient Nature of Life

Critical Interpretation: In Chapter 21 of 'Activities of Daily Living,' the Artist's unconventional project of living outdoors in Lower Manhattan serves as a profound reflection on embracing life's transient nature. This endeavor challenges you to step out of the familiar, to navigate the unpredictable rhythm of urban life without the constraints of time management. By immersing himself in the city's indifferent vibrancy, the Artist confronts the harsh realities of outdoor existence, ultimately highlighting the capacity for adaptability and resilience in the face of adversity. His experience of navigating through locations imprinted with personal histories, contrasted against the backdrop of societal shifts in perspectives, invites you to recognize the impermanence that defines the very essence of your journey. As seasons change and structures evolve, this narrative encourages you to find meaning and beauty in the unexpected transformations of life, urging you to cherish each fleeting moment and the growth it inspires within you.



Chapter 22 Summary: Fifteen Hours

Summary of "Fifteen Hours"

"Fifteen Hours" chronicles a critical incident within the broader artistic endeavor known as the Outdoor Piece. Over the course of this long-term performance art project, the Artist voluntarily lived outdoors, devoted to exploring themes of visibility, survival, and the human condition. His Outdoor Piece totaled eight thousand seven hundred and sixty hours, during which he spent only fifteen hours indoors, against his will.

The narrative unfolds when the Artist, who regularly performed in public spaces, faced an unexpected confrontation south of Houston Street. While enjoying a hot cup of tea in a doorway, a man aggressively demanded that he leave the area. Despite having the option to retreat, the Artist decided to hold his ground. The confrontation escalated when the man returned with a metal rod, prompting the Artist to prepare for self-defense using nunchucks he carried in his rucksack. This tense standoff was abruptly interrupted by the police, who intervened, leading to the Artist's arrest.

A friend documenting the day's events captured footage of the Artist's arrest. In this footage, his distinctive long hair, grown over months of outdoor living, contributes to an untamed appearance. Hearing his pleas, "I can't go



inside," viewers witness the Artist's commitment to his art, as well as his fear of deportation due to his undocumented status. Additionally, New York City's classification of nunchucks as an illegal weapon further complicated his legal situation—a remnant of past anti-kung fu hysteria tied to Bruce Lee's rise to fame.

Fortunately for the Artist, during his subsequent court appearance, the presiding judge recognized him from a Wall Street Journal article. This article came to be after his boss, who was involved with the reporter, shared the Artist's unique story. The judge viewed the case through a lens of contemporary art critique, freed the Artist based on a guilty plea for disorderly conduct, with a sentence of time served.

In this chapter, the Artist's 15-hour detainment underscores the unpredictable and precarious nature of performance art. In breaking the continuity of his piece, the experience somehow contributed to the essence and integrity of his overall work, illustrating how obstacles can themselves morph into integral elements of artistic expression.



Chapter 23 Summary: The Ticket

Summary of "The Ticket":

Alice recalls her last encounter with James, her close friend, at their go-to diner on Twenty-Third Street. They sat in a cozy booth, indulging in nostalgia as they guessed the flavors of pies on display, all while being serenaded by music from their past. These small moments were a brief escape from the chaos that had punctuated their lives, such as a recent homemade bomb explosion that had significantly disrupted their neighborhood, causing local businesses, like the diner, to adapt by making deliveries to nearby residents, including those in a nearby apartment for the blind.

James was noticeably anxious during their meeting. The brief reunion revealed he had checked into a homeless shelter, despite having other options like staying with friends or family. He seemed drawn to experiencing the harshness of hitting rock bottom, a decision that puzzled both him and Alice. James's fellow travelers in misfortune included a kind social worker with striking Toni Morrison-like dreads, who discreetly offered him a one-way ticket to anywhere in the country — a peculiar opportunity that hinted at a potential escape or fresh start.



When Alice inquired about the ticket, James deflected, turning the conversation to lighter topics, such as their fathers' well-being and shared gossip about a mutual friend's dull new boyfriend. This tactic masked his uncertainty and indecision about the offer.

A few weeks later, James texted Alice to inform her of his spontaneous move to Troy, upstate. Alice, perplexed and concerned, quickly responded, seeking more details about his well-being. Yet, her message went unanswered, leaving her to ponder James's journey and state of mind. The narrative captures a poignant moment of transition, highlighting themes of uncertainty and the search for belonging against the backdrop of change and upheaval.

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Chapter 24: Hudson Street Loft Rental Listing

The provided content outlines two distinct topics: a real estate listing for a luxurious apartment in Tribeca and a description of an art performance planned by Linda Montano and Tehching Hsieh.

Hudson Street Loft Rental Listing

The Tribeca apartment listing offers a detailed description of a lavish one-bedroom loft, which can be converted into a two-bedroom unit. Situated in a key-locked elevator condo building, this residence has been thoroughly renovated to exhibit modern luxury. Notable features include black oak flooring, a sophisticated home control system, and high ceilings that contribute to its openness. The living room is notably bright, highlighted by original Corinthian columns and large windows that provide expansive views of the surrounding architecture.

Adjacent to the living area, the kitchen is a chef's dream, equipped with high-end Viking stainless steel appliances and elegant white Calcutta Gold marble surfaces. The newly updated bathroom matches this marble finish and features a steam shower for a spa-like experience. French doors from the bathroom lead to a bedroom that boasts two closets and additional overhead storage.

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In addition to its aesthetic and functional appeal, the loft includes practical amenities such as a new washer/dryer, overhead fans, eco-friendly LED lighting, and ample storage options. Situated in the highly coveted neighborhood near N Moore Street in Tribeca, this apartment is ideal for anyone looking to establish a stylish home base in one of New York City's

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Chapter 25 Summary: What Was Rope Piece

Summary of "Rope Piece"

What Was Rope Piece

"Rope Piece" is a conceptual art project exploring complex interpersonal dynamics through the artist's decision to be physically tied to a stranger, Linda Montano, for an entire year. The duo engaged in everyday activities together, such as commuting, shopping, dining, and even trivial tasks like playing pinball or reading newspapers. This immersive, full-time interaction aimed to dissect the essence of human connections and the balance between independence and interdependence.

Where You Went

Initially, the duo avoided more popular areas like SoHo to minimize being recognized due to their unusual project. They found solace in the artistic, vibrant atmospheres of Tribeca and Chinatown, enjoying local activities such as dining and watching kung fu films. They consciously downplayed the project's classification as "art" to diminish potential resistance or misinterpretation, framing it instead as an experiment to explore coexistence and human nature.



One notable outing was to a trendy nightclub called Area, characterized by its eclectic themes and celebrity attendance. Even amidst flamboyant fashion and live displays, the pair's outdated clothing drew attention, highlighting their portrayal of ordinariness.

What the Project Is and Isn't

The artist emphasized that "Rope Piece" was not a commentary on personal relationships or marriage. He described it metaphorically, suggesting everyone becomes each other's confinement in some form due to mutual dependence. Montano perceived the project as an opportunity for mindfulness and egolessness, likening it to a meditative practice. The artist, however, saw it more as a revealing reflection of human vulnerabilities and base instincts.

Why Strangers

Choosing a stranger over a partner for the project arose from the artist's interpersonal communication struggles. He believed that the intense pressure of such proximity would inevitably lead to a breakup if one performed it with a romantic partner.

How the Project Breaks Down

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Initially, the constant interaction included lengthy discussions. Over time, communication deteriorated, eventually becoming tedious and fraught with argument. They set a rule allowing either to veto the other's actions, leading to disputes and immobilization. The daily conflicts turned their living situation into one marked by resentment, as seen in Montano's fantasies of violence and the artist's aggressive outbursts. Marin during which she noted the strained atmosphere and wall scratches, confirmed the toll on their relationship.

Communication degenerated to basic gestures and sounds, highlighting their strained coexistence while contradicting the mundane nature captured in photographs of the project.

How "Rope Piece" Might Be Performed Today

If recreated today, "Rope Piece" might exploit numerous digital platforms like 24-hour webcams, social media, or personalized playlists to engage a global audience, presenting a dated yet intriguing view of intimate life.

Why You Made Recordings

The daily operation involved recording their activities on audiocassette tapes, totaling around 700. With differing views on their purpose, Montano

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felt they provided a means for self-awareness, while the artist claimed they were purely symbolic. Both agreed the recordings were private, highlighting a commitment to authenticity over performance.

How It Was Dangerous

The project entailed emotional and physical risks, exemplified by an elevator incident that almost severed their connection. Montano likened these risks to other life experiences, such as marriage or parenting, suggesting that despite the dangers, the experimentation was a voluntary exploration of chosen boundaries.

What of It

Looking back, the artist reflected that self-imposed solitude was easier than the relentless interaction with Montano—a testament to the challenges of intrinsic human connection and the insightful strain revealed through "Rope Piece."

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Chapter 26 Summary: Cassette Tapes

In this chapter, "Cassette Tapes," we delve into the intriguing world of audio recordings, memory, and personal connections through the experiences of Alice, Warhol, and others. Alice, for a project, learns that audiocassette tapes have an average lifespan of thirty years, after which their sound quality deteriorates, similar to how memories fade with time. This realization raises questions about the deteriorated tapes from the Rope Piece project, representing memories or experiences never meant to be revisited.

The chapter draws a parallel with Andy Warhol, a pivotal figure in the art world known for his fascination with recording life. Warhol, whose work blurred the lines between art and everyday life, treated his tape recorder, a constant companion, as a means of capturing experiences. His recordings were seen as an emotional buffer, allowing him to transform negative experiences into something productive and artistic, much like his approach to art itself. This philosophy is echoed in the narrative of Samuel Beckett's play, "Krapp's Last Tape," which Alice watches online. In the play, an elderly Krapp listens to tapes of his younger self, confronting a life filled with regrets and small pleasures, ultimately accepting his past without wishing to change it.

Alice's personal reflections intermingle with these narratives, reflecting her observations of her father in a rehab facility. The Father, a representation of



loss and acceptance, faces his own life choices with a mix of clarity and resignation. His emotional reckoning symbolizes a fire extinguished, paralleling Alice's journey of understanding and reconciling with her memories.

Alice's past relationship with a boyfriend who had a fondness for cassette tapes adds another layer to her exploration of memory and emotion. The boyfriend's car, an old Honda Civic, becomes a metaphor for holding onto the past, with its outdated tape player representing a connection to bygone days. Their eventual breakup is anticipated, as Alice reflects on her penchant for preserving pieces of her past, including a collection of cassettes from various exes, even without a way to play them.

Throughout, the chapter intertwines these stories and characters to explore the themes of memory, regret, and the passage of time, using cassette tapes as a compelling metaphor for the recordings and recollections that shape our lives.



Chapter 27 Summary: Not Talking

In the chapter titled "Not Talking," Alice grapples with the notion of interviewing the Artist, a task she initially considers but soon decides against pursuing. This internal conflict reflects a broader theme explored by Pico Iyer, who contrasts his admiration for writer Graham Greene with the man himself. Iyer reveres Greene as a kindred spirit in wanderlust, yet never seeks a personal interaction, realizing that the version of Greene he has constructed in his mind is more significant than any real-world encounter could be. This hypothetical meeting likely would have been a disillusionment, offering nothing more than superficial pleasantries rather than the profound connection Iyer cherished.

Echoing these sentiments, the Artist acknowledges meeting a variety of people, noting that true communication can be elusive. He expresses a desire to engage seriously with each individual, yet admits that the multitude of diverse interactions can leave him feeling vulnerable. Alice speculates that the Artist's reluctance to improve his English might serve as a convenient escape from having to explain himself. It shields him from repeated inquiries, to which he often resorts to predetermined responses. For instance, when questioned about the meaning of his work, he often says, "Life is a life sentence. Life is passing time. Life is free thinking." Such statements are typically sufficient to placate his audience.



Alice herself harbors questions, fueled by curiosity about the Artist's personal life. She wonders about his past marriages, leisure activities, and closest companions, yearning for an unfiltered glimpse into his world. However, she acknowledges the futility of expecting any revelatory answers. Her curiosity extends to deeper inquiries about his motivations—why he chooses to perform the way he does. These unanswered questions drive Alice to introspection, pushing her to confront her own ambitions and uncertainties.

Ultimately, the chapter underscores the dichotomy between public personas and the inner lives of artists, highlighting how the stories we construct about others—and ourselves—serve as both a refuge and a barrier in truly understanding one another.



Chapter 28: The Possibility of Love and Projects

In "The Possibility of Love and Projects," the narrative explores the intersections of personal relationships and creative pursuits through the experiences of two characters: Alice and a renowned Artist. Alice, reflecting on the life of the Artist, speculates about his past marriages and how his intense devotion to his projects may have impacted his relationships. The Artist, a prolific figure in the art world, had announced at the age of forty-nine that he would stop creating new works. Without data on his earlier marriages, Alice hypothesizes that his commitments to his projects might have strained or even broken those unions. Such pressures on relationships are not uncommon, particularly when the demanding nature of creative work is considered.

Alice, herself, has navigated the complexities of relationships and art. In her twenties, like many young women, she had encountered a mix of both unsuitable and ostensibly good partners. The unsuitable ones mirrored her own youthful naiveté, while the older ones wielded their experience manipulatively, often making her feel at fault. When good men weren't quite right, Alice often found reasons rooted in self-growth and the pursuit of her own projects to justify ending relationships. She used the all-consuming nature of her projects as a reason to break ties, likening the conclusion of these relationships to the end of a creative endeavor. One particular breakup ended with the man accepting her rationale without confrontation,



highlighting the power of using a creative endeavor as an excuse.

Alice's reflections suggest a broader theme: that some individuals are more adept at managing projects than they are at nurturing intimate relationships. More than once, especially during moments of solitude, she finds solace in her projects when the world outside seems filled with opportunities for connection that she feels unable to seize. The chapter underscores the complex interplay between personal ambitions and the quest for meaningful relationships, posing the question of whether the dedication to creative work inevitably shapes, and sometimes limits, personal connections.

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Chapter 29 Summary: The Protest

Alice arrived at a protest where her friend Julia, feeling uneasy in the cold, offered her a Xanax. Alice declined, both understanding the anxiety that came with protests—crowds, chants, and a sense of loneliness—yet knowing that those feelings were secondary to the cause at hand. The protest was set against the backdrop of the Brooklyn waterfront, near a federal jail notorious for allegations of sexual assault, poor food, and inadequate heating. It coincided with a national prison strike marking the Attica uprising's anniversary, a significant moment in prison reform history.

As darkness enveloped the area, about twenty protesters gathered, their voices and actions a defiant response to the injustices reported at the jail. A man in a black hoodie forcefully punctuated their chants by striking a warehouse door with a bat. Within the jail, the occupants communicated with the protesters by flickering lights, a poignant and silent dialogue signaling solidarity and desperation.

Despite the dreary weather, the protesters' resolve remained unbroken. Alice and Julia joined the march around the jail's perimeter, their cries reverberating against the stark concrete, echoing the cries of those imprisoned. The march escalated into a more chaotic scene as it moved onto the street, with objects thrown and set alight, actions that seemed less like anger and more like a somber, silent tribute to the cause.



Julia eventually left, leaving Alice to continue until the group dwindled. As the protest disbanded, Alice found herself alone, the rain intensifying around her, underscoring the gravity and isolation inherent in such acts of resistance. She tucked in her collar, acknowledging the persistence needed to keep moving forward, despite the daunting circumstances.

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Critical Thinking

Key Point: Perseverance Amidst Adversity

Critical Interpretation: The chapter delves into the power of continuing to stand firm for a cause even when faced with personal discomfort and daunting circumstances. You are drawn into the scene where Alice, feeling both isolated and present amidst the crowd, chooses to face her anxieties rather than succumbing to an offered escape. As the protest unfolds against a chilling backdrop, the determination of those involved speaks volumes. It's about embracing discomfort to stand united against injustice—building a narrative where individual action merges into collective strength. This resilience exemplified by Alice and the protesters can inspire you to embrace perseverance in your own life, reminding you that even during solitary or overwhelming times, your determination to uphold what you believe is right may serve a higher purpose and foster broader change.



Chapter 30 Summary: The Encounter

In "The Encounter," Alice embarks on a pursuit to find a mysterious Artist, a figure from the art world whose work and aura have captivated her imagination. Her quest begins with a piece of information from an old news article, suggesting that the Artist owns a loft above a dollar store in a specific Brooklyn neighborhood. Driven by curiosity, Alice methodically investigates the area, riding her bike through the neighborhood multiple times before identifying a possible location near a Thai restaurant and a fried chicken joint.

Initially, Alice is puzzled by the structure she finds; it's not the standalone live/work unit she expected. Instead, it's a multifaceted building, complicating her search. Her persistence pays off when she notices a nondescript and boarded storefront under renovation. Upon closer inspection, she discovers the Artist's name on a mailbox, confirming her suspicion.

For months, Alice passively observes the area, waiting for an opportunity to catch a glimpse of the enigmatic figure. She watches the unit above with heightened attention, once spotting a figure at the window but unable to determine their identity. Her patience is rewarded in the spring when she sees that the renovations are complete, and a new café-restaurant offering Taiwanese dishes has opened on the ground floor.



Upon entering, Alice is engulfed in an unassuming, utilitarian space. As she scans the room, her eyes land on a man deep in conversation. There's an immediate recognition; the man with silver hair and deep-set lines is unmistakably the Artist. The sight of him in person evokes a visceral response in Alice. She's unprepared for the sudden proximity to someone she's long admired from afar and finds herself paralyzed by a wave of unexpected emotions, as if the moment had been plucked out of a well-curated art installation.

Alice experiences an internal conflict—despite her physical presence, she is incapacitated by the possibility of interaction, caught in the tension between anonymity and the desire to connect. The Artist inadvertently acknowledges her presence with a polite, reflexive "Thank you," which further anchors her awkwardness. Overwhelmed by the encounter and the fear that her hero might transcend the enigma she's built around him, she acknowledges his thanks with a smile and quietly exits, unable to seize the moment as she retreats to the safety of distance.

Alice's hesitation is reminiscent of Pico Iyer's imagined encounter with the reclusive author Graham Greene. Iyer reflects on the paradox of seeking intimate knowledge about someone who thrives in solitude. The quest to know the Artist leaves Alice in a precarious position of wanting more, yet fearing that exposure might diminish the allure of her subject—a cost that



might leave her stranded and disillusioned in the end.

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Critical Thinking

Key Point: The allure of the unknown and its impact on personal growth

Critical Interpretation: In your own life's journey, remember that the allure of the unknown can be both exhilarating and daunting. Much like Alice, who was captivated by an enigmatic artist, you too might find yourself drawn to mysteries that spark your curiosity. However, as you navigate these encounters, it's crucial to embrace the tension between knowing and unknowing. Allow yourself to be inspired by the possibility that some unknowns, much like works of art, hold a powerful space for wonder and imagination. Engaging with mysteries in your life can open up avenues for growth and self-discovery, subtly transforming your perspective and enriching your personal experiences without necessarily culminating in absolute understanding. Embrace these moments, not necessarily to seek definitive answers, but to appreciate the beauty of unresolved questions and how they contribute to a more profound narrative of your own life story.



Chapter 31 Summary: Project for a Trip to China

"Project for a Trip to China" is a reflective narrative that intricately intertwines personal aspirations, cultural identity, and familial history, explored through the imagined and unfulfilled journey of the unnamed narrator, inspired by Susan Sontag's short story of the same title. The protagonist muses over an invitation from the Chinese government to embark on a trip to China, a potential journey that morphs into an exploration of dreams, memories, and cultural observations.

Central to the narrative is the echo of the narrator's deceased father, who—similar to Sontag's real-life father—died in China, leaving behind an enigmatic legacy as vast as the country itself. This journey to China, both Sontag's and the narrator's, becomes symbolic of a deeply personal quest for understanding and closure. Alice, the story's main character, reflects upon this as she contemplates her own elusive connection to China—a land she imagines visiting but never has.

Imagery paints modern China as a land of stark industrial contrasts and cultural myths. Alice's perception is tinted by vivid scenes of women in factories, smoking farmers, and exploding urban landscapes. Her anticipation of a trip not only connects her with her father's past but also becomes a homage to familial ties, represented by memories of her own parents' dreams of exploring China's ancient landscapes.



The narrative further reveals Sontag's own experience of being invited to China, envisioning a book that reflects more than just travel log entries. The book, intended to encompass a wide spectrum—from cultural revolutions to philosophical inquiries—is a testament to Sontag's expansive intellectual curiosity. Despite the project's unfulfillment, Sontag's reflections become a metaphorical scaffold, inspiring Alice's thoughts.

Amidst these reflections, the cultural nuances of China surface, illustrated through stories like imperial delicacies and rumors that circulate within its society. Alice's own attempts to feel Chinese, like buying a jade bracelet that turns out to be fake, underscore the challenge of genuinely connecting to a cultural identity perceived but not directly lived. Similarly, her son's imaginative portrayal of Disneyland as a realm where unseen things become visible emphasizes the discord between imagined and real experiences.

The narrative then pivots to address the haunting specters of the past, symbolized by unfinished familial business. Alice learns of her father's death in Shanghai after decades of estrangement and contemplates attending his funeral—an act of cultural and familial obligation. Despite her apprehensions and the tense relationship with her father, the prospect of this journey awakens thoughts of Chinese funeral customs and mythologies of the afterlife.



In the tale, the theme of time and memory is explored through references to historic films like Chris Marker's "Dimanche à Pekin" and the semi-fabricated narratives found in Marco Polo's travels. These stories reflect on how the allure of China is perpetually reinvented through the eyes of outsiders.

Alice's hesitation to travel to China eventually mirrors Sontag's project—a conceptual journey of intention rather than action. Her eventual decision to send a condolence card instead of traveling to the funeral resonates with the broader theme of how imagined journeys shape one's perception of reality and identity.

Throughout, the story poses a poignant reflection on the ambivalence of imagined versus lived experiences, the weight of family legacies, and the elusive nature of cultural connections anchored in the depths of personal and collective memory.

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Chapter 32: Linda Montano

The chapters explore the art and life of Linda Montano and Tehching Hsieh, offering insights into performance art and the personal dimensions of their work.

Linda Montano is portrayed as a highly candid artist known for her unconventional and sometimes humorous performances. She rose to prominence through projects like living locked in a room with her varied personalities and impersonating Mother Teresa in public. Her 14-year project, "14 Years Of Living Art," utilized chakra-themed colors for each year, blending performance with New Age elements.

Alice, initially skeptical of Montano's work, stumbles upon "Dad Art," a poignant project Montano began after returning to her hometown in New York to care for her aging father. This marked a personal transformation for Montano, who transitioned from her teaching career to deeply connecting with her father while documenting their relationship on film. "Dad Art" evolved into an interactive performance that dealt with themes of life, death, and impermanence.

In later years, Montano faces Parkinson's and explores themes of caregiving, inspired by the support her father received. Committed to reducing the burden on future caregivers, she practices living in a way that minimizes



their strain, embodying her authenticity in her art.

Meanwhile, Tehching Hsieh's "One Year Performance 1985–1986" presents a conceptual art piece where Hsieh organizes a relay of participants to pass a torch, symbolizing continuity and connection, without directly engaging himself. This project emphasizes Hsieh's unique approach to art—spanning endurance and interaction—while solely observing from the sidelines.

Both chapters delve into the essence of performance art, highlighting the intricate ways artists express life's profound truths through personal and communal narratives.

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Chapter 33 Summary: The Project That Wasn't

In the chapter "The Project That Wasn't," we explore the unrealized Torch Piece by an unnamed Artist, delving into the blend of ambition, solitude, and the reality of creative endeavors. The torch, meant to be an iconic symbol lit by a butane cartridge, symbolizes the grand scale of the Artist's vision. However, the project never comes to fruition as the anticipated thousands of volunteers do not materialize, leaving the Torch Piece undocumented.

The narrative is set against the backdrop of the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics, where notable events included the Olympic torch relay from New York to L.A. and a curious closing ceremony featuring a faux extraterrestrial encounter. This contrast emphasizes the scale and spectacle that may have partly inspired the Artist's vision. The questions ponder whether the Artist's ambition was influenced by the Olympic fervor, aiming to counteract isolation or rival the grandeur experienced during the games.

Alice, a character presumably engaging with the Artist's work, shares a conversation with Nobu, who appreciates the Artist's solitude, likening him to Sisyphus—a solitary figure from Greek mythology condemned to roll a boulder up a hill for eternity. Nobu sees the Artist's solo struggle as intrinsic to his identity.



At a picnic in New York's Prospect Park, Alice meets an experimental filmmaker acquainted with the Artist. This filmmaker recounts the Artist's quiet demeanor amid a bustling artistic community of the 1980s. Despite his solitary reputation, the Artist was part of a social orbit that included nights out at iconic downtown venues like Puffy's Tavern and potentially Club 57. Nevertheless, his reluctance to accept offers of help, even during harsh winters, underscores his preference for isolation or independence.

Despite the ostensible solitude, the Artist did attract over a hundred volunteers for Torch Piece, although he ultimately concluded the effort was too overwhelming for one person. His reflections on loneliness share thematic similarities with Andy Warhol's "Andy-mats"—conceptual restaurants designed for solitary dining—and the musings of Édouard Levé, who chronicled hundreds of unfulfilled creative projects in "Oeuvres."

Alice, inspired by the notion of unrealized projects, considers creating a meta-project compiling all her abandoned ideas, drawing from Levé's work. Yet, Nobu advises caution, suggesting some ideas might be best left unexplored or unexposed.

The chapter weaves a narrative about the complexity of creativity, ambition, and the sometimes insurmountable gap between grand visions and tangible reality, all while exploring themes of isolation, community, and the beauty of unfinished art.



Chapter 34 Summary: A Partial List of Volunteers

The chapter titled "A Partial List of Volunteers" provides a snapshot of various individuals who signed up for the art initiative known as Torch Piece. These volunteers are a mix of artists, activists, and enthusiasts from diverse backgrounds, each contributing to the vibrant art scene during a dynamic era. Notable among them is Dick Bellamy, an influential art dealer known for showcasing avant-garde artists like Yayoi Kusama and Claes Oldenburg at his Green Gallery. Bellamy's gallery was a crucible for unconventional art, turning the spotlight on unique expressions that challenged traditional boundaries.

Other volunteers include Robert Attanasio, who creatively engaged with architecture by filming himself in motion near iconic structures, and Buster Cleveland, a mail artist who cleverly used small collages to convey big ideas, selling them in unexpected urban settings. These figures, while now deceased, were integral to the art movements of their time.

The chapter also mentions sound artists inspired by John Cage, and Barbara Held, who pushes musical boundaries as an experimental flutist. Rip Hayman, actively managing a historic venue, and Jeanette Ingberman, a key figure in establishing innovative art spaces, are noted contributors. Ingberman's work with Exit Art was pivotal in championing unorthodox artists like David Wojnarowicz and Adrian Piper, contributing to the



inclusion of marginalized voices in art.

Contemporary artists like "Cowboy" Ray Kelly and Vernita Nemec, also known as N’Cognita, are highlighted for transforming urban spaces and showcasing artwork from societal detritus. The chapter includes references to influential figures like Pauline Oliveros, a pioneer in "deep listening" music, and Ai Weiwei, an artist and dissident who chronicled life in the East Village while chronicling the lives of Chinese expatriates.

This list of volunteers points to a wider network of creatives, many of whom have left indelible marks on the artistic and cultural landscape. The chapter briefly acknowledges individuals whose current whereabouts are less documented, such as a clinical social worker or a dancer now residing in Santa Cruz, hinting at the fascinating but sometimes obscured trajectories of those who once moved within these influential art circles. Through these profiles, the chapter paints a vivid picture of a community that was both diverse and dynamic, constantly pushing the boundaries of what art could be and mean.

Name	Role/Contribution
Dick Bellamy	Influential art dealer, showcased avant-garde artists like Yayoi Kusama and Claes Oldenburg at his Green Gallery, promoting unconventional art.
Robert Attanasio	Engaged creatively with architecture by filming himself in motion near iconic structures.



Name	Role/Contribution
Buster Cleveland	Mail artist known for using small collages to convey big ideas, sold in urban settings.
Sound Artists	Inspired by John Cage, contributed to the evolution of sound art.
Barbara Held	Experimental flutist pushing musical boundaries.
Rip Hayman	Manager of a historic venue contributing to the preservation and promotion of art.
Jeanette Ingberman	Key in establishing innovative art spaces; pivotal work with Exit Art promoting unorthodox artists.
"Cowboy" Ray Kelly and Vernita Nemec (N'Cognita)	Transformed urban spaces and showcased artwork from societal detritus.
Pauline Oliveros	Pioneer in "deep listening" music.
Ai Weiwei	Artist and dissident who chronicled life in the East Village, highlighted the Chinese expatriates' experience.
Various individuals	Includes a clinical social worker or dancer from Santa Cruz whose contributions remain less documented yet exemplify the dynamic art community.



Chapter 35 Summary: The Life and Death of Projects

The chapter "The Life and Death of Projects" explores the introspective journey of Alice's father during his stay at a skilled nursing facility in Oakland. Once, while visiting him, Alice found her father deeply lost in thought, staring at the ceiling. He recounted a restless night where, unable to sleep, he roamed the silent corridors of the facility. It felt like a quiet town buried under snow, devoid of the usual activity. During his walk, he stumbled upon a room where a man was sobbing, his head resting against his knees. This encounter, significant yet potentially a figment of his imagination given his recent experiences with hallucinations, seemed to have struck a chord with Alice's father, drawing him momentarily out of his solipsistic tendencies.

After this late-night exploration, the father expressed a renewed interest in photography, a hobby he had abandoned for years due to the deterioration of his motor skills. This rekindled passion, however, was met with a practical barrier: privacy laws prevented him from photographing the residents and staff at the facility. Furthermore, at his request, Alice had already sold all his camera equipment, most of it outdated and of little value. Despite these setbacks, the father was able to find a glint of inspiration in simply observing the world around him with his eyes, even without a camera.

Reflecting on the past, Alice recalled the expansive camera collection her



father once owned—an array of analog cameras, lenses, and photographic accessories that he accumulated more as collector's items than tools for artistic endeavors. It symbolized the unrealized dreams of her father's many projects, from opening a bar or gallery-café to crafting automobile and movie ideas, all of which remained in a perpetual state of inception, much like unhatched plans full of potential yet never actualized.

Ultimately, the chapter communicates the transient allure of projects and the poignant realization that for Alice's father, and perhaps many others, the dream of a project shines brightly as a yet untouched ideal, a glimmering aspiration eternally glimpsed from afar.

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Chapter 36: The Return

In "The Return," we encounter James, who has recently come back to New York City after a period away. He finds himself in an unfamiliar rhythm, struggling to adjust to life in Troy, despite initially securing a part-time job at a medical billing office with the help of his younger cousin. Nevertheless, the city's calm surface belies a sense of unease for James, who often feels like he is being watched.

James' return to New York City marks a significant transition. He navigates the urban landscape with a keen perception, or what he calls a "third eye" for the city. His current lifestyle involves sleeping in unconventional places such as bank kiosks and a McDonald's in Midtown that operates 24/7. He ingeniously manages his hygiene and meals by frequenting certain libraries and soup kitchens throughout the city, each with its own unique amenities and requirements.

Despite the hardships of living without a home, James experiences an unexpected sense of freedom. He relishes living outside societal norms and systems, drawing inspiration from an enigmatic figure he refers to as the Artist, who advocates for living on one's terms in the city's urban wilderness. This newfound lifestyle holds a mix of satisfaction, absurdity, and challenges, which James finds increasingly addictive.



Alice, a concerned yet composed presence in James's life, meets him at a sunlit Whole Foods on the Bowery. She notices subtle changes in him: a grown-out beard and a more laid-back demeanor. Their conversation reveals the practical difficulties of James's lifestyle, including its impact on his love life and physical well-being. Despite this, James maintains a witty outlook,

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Chapter 37 Summary: Cameo

In the chapter set against the bustling backdrop of Chinatown, Alice experiences a surreal encounter with a man she knows as the Artist. She sees him in a more mundane setting, sitting on milk crates and reading a newspaper near a freezer full of frozen goods. This unexpected sight prompts Alice to reflect on the nature of reality and perception. The Artist, typically seen in the context of his work, appears unexpectedly in Alice's everyday life, much like a cameo in a film.

This chance meeting stirs memories of a psychiatric case Alice once read about, akin to Jim Carrey's character in "The Truman Show"—a man convinced that his entire life was a television show with everyone around him as actors. The delusion led him to New York City to verify the aftermath of 9/11 in a quest to distinguish reality from illusion.

Alice is pulled back to the present by the bustling activity around her, observing the Artist as he casually attends to his errands. His unassuming presence, in contrast to his work's performative nature, reminds her of the legendary silent film actor Buster Keaton, known for his serious on-screen demeanor and remarkable stunts, performed without doubles as a testament to authenticity. Both Keaton and the Artist blur the lines of fiction and reality in their art, supported by undeniable proofs and their adherence to genuine expression.



The Artist's philosophical inspiration from Camus's "The Myth of Sisyphus" intrigues Alice, especially the notion of finding happiness in endless yet authentic toil. This brings to mind Sisyphus's momentary rest in the myths when Orpheus's music even charms him to pause his eternal labors.

Alice's thoughts also drift to Buster Keaton's cameo in "Sunset Boulevard," symbolizing the faded glory of silent film stars amidst the changing times. Similarly, Alice considers the fleeting nature of identity, drawing parallels with dementia, where brief lucid moments can act as cameos of an old self in a changing mind.

Her reflections turn theatrical as she likens these cameo appearances to dreams, where her late father recently appeared, not as the sickly man she remembers from his later years but as the vibrant person of her childhood. This dream, though comforting in its familiarity, underscores the cruel truths of reality upon waking.

As Alice navigates the grocery store, her encounter with the Artist lingers in her mind like a puzzling but profound scene in the narrative of her day, leaving her pondering the thin veil between the ordinary and the extraordinary in life's continuous play.



Chapter 38 Summary: The Project That Was the Father

Alice visits her stepfather, referred to as "the Father," at a residential care home. Unlike past visits with her sister, Amy, Alice is alone this time. The sisters have strategically alternated visits to maximize their time with him, much like nurses swapping shifts. They meticulously communicate to ensure that the Father's needs are met, from supplies to emotional support. During her visit, Alice observes that the Father, surprisingly, does not miss Berkeley and appears content in his new environment. His routine remains unchanged, primarily revolving around television, and he's less isolated thanks to his living situation and the presence of Kenny, his caregiver.

Alice reflects on her relationship with her Father as she prepares to return to Brooklyn. The backdrop of their relationship is one of politeness and mutual convenience rather than deep emotional connection. Despite his history of drinking and their infrequent communication, Alice still feels a bond with him. This relationship contrasts sharply with the intense and often fraught connection she shares with her mother, who actively engages with her and shows more concern for her well-being.

As Alice boards her flight back to New York, she contemplates the dual existence she leads—one life associated with caring for the Father and another awaiting her in Brooklyn. Despite the strain and occasional desire to escape, she finds purpose in her role as his caregiver. Inspired by Simone de



Beauvoir's reflections on her own mother's care, Alice realizes the singular importance of the Father's well-being in her life. Once home, she often feels a void until it's time to return to California.

Her contemplation is interrupted by a fellow passenger absorbed in a mobile game, a metaphor for the distractions people create to evade reality. Upon arriving at JFK late at night, Alice hails a taxi driven by a man from Uzbekistan. Their conversation serves as a reminder of the immigrant experience and the perceived success story tied to life in America, which contrasts with the cab driver's own reflections on his life choices after 20 years in the country. His story mirrors Alice's own internal dialogue, highlighting the gap between perception and reality, both in terms of personal relationships and broader life aspirations.

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Chapter 39 Summary: Quality of Life

In the chapter titled "Quality of Life," we follow Alice through a difficult time as she navigates the declining health of her cherished cat. For three days, the cat has refused to eat and has withdrawn into the closet, further alarming Alice. Consulting the vet, she learns that the situation is serious: the cat's liver and spleen are enlarged and his pancreas is inflamed, suggesting either cancer or an inflammatory bowel disorder. While the treatment—daily steroids—is the same for both conditions, the prognosis greatly differs, with cancer significantly shortening the cat's life expectancy.

Crippled by the stress of uncertain outcomes and impending veterinary bills, Alice finds herself emotionally tangled. Her surroundings, characterized by the antiseptic, windowless exam room and walls adorned with sympathy cards from other grieving pet owners, amplify her anxiety. Her focus is unswervingly on her cat, whose vulnerability underscores the solitude they both feel. As she attempts to coax him to eat, the cat remains uninterested, merely sniffing at the offerings on paper plates.

Amidst this personal turmoil, Alice is simultaneously aware of the broader societal upheaval. Her phone offers a window into the outside world, ablaze with social activism as protests erupt at JFK Airport against the President's Muslim travel ban. The din of chants and updates from friends at the protest juxtaposes her isolated vigil, highlighting a world grappling with issues



much larger than her own yet intimately connected through the shared fabric of emotional upheaval and compassion.

Anticipating the worst-case scenario, Alice asks the vet how to recognize when her cat's quality of life might deteriorate to the point where euthanasia becomes the humane option. The vet advises her to monitor for signs such as a decline in the cat's favorite activities and labored breathing, indicators that would suggest he is struggling.

In this narrative of personal struggle and larger societal discord, Alice is acutely aware of her cat's small fate and her singular responsibility for his well-being, a poignant reflection of love and empathy amidst life's unpredictabilities.

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Chapter 40: Lives of Monster Stars

Alice boarded the subway, maneuvering herself into a seat between a man dressed in a security uniform and an elderly woman engrossed in her Bible. Settling into her space, she opened a link sent by her friend Nobu with a playful suggestion to read it "only if you have time." The link led her to a fascinating article about the recent discovery by astronomers of a lost generation of "monster stars." These massive celestial bodies, in their heyday, were hundreds of thousands of times more massive than our sun. The article explained that these stars shone brightly before dying in cataclysmic explosions hundreds of millions of years after the universe's inception.

Modern astronomers, using cutting-edge telescopes, have found evidence of these stars through the elements released during their explosive demise, which then contributed to the formation of new stars and planets. The age of these ancient stars is determined using a concept called red-shifting. This phenomenon describes how the light wavelength stretches over time, shifting toward the red end of the spectrum, much like how an ambulance siren sounds lower as it moves away. The light from these long-gone stars has been journeying to Earth for over twelve billion years.

As Alice contemplated the vastness of cosmic history, she observed her fellow commuters—various individuals engrossed in their own worlds,



gadgets in hand or earbuds firmly in place. Among them sat a mother with her young son, who leaned comfortably against her in a display of childhood innocence, along with a pair of construction workers and a woman wearing a humorous T-shirt partially obscured by her jacket.

Alice reminisced about an Artist she admired, who described his prolonged art projects as environments he could inhabit, where he could freely exist and ponder. This resonated with Alice, as she, too, yearned for a project that could envelop her completely. Immersing herself in the Artist's works, she started to perceive time differently, experiencing and interpreting it through the lens of artistic expression. The notion of time became a central theme in her life, much like the ancient stars she had just read about—both embodying the passage and perception of time across vast expanses.

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Chapter 41 Summary: Travel Ban

In the bone-chilling cold of February, Alice navigates the bustling streets of Brooklyn, setting the scene in a climate marked by stark contrasts—a metaphor for the tension of current events. February is depicted as a transitional space, a metaphorical landscape between the icy permanence of January and the anticipated thaw of March. Alice, an editor for the online series "Bring On the Feels," finds herself weary after hours of monotonous video editing, transforming repetitive pet heroism stories into engaging content.

The narrative shifts to highlight the impact of recent political actions as Yemeni business owners across New York City's boroughs unite in protest against the new travel ban, shuttering their shops in solidarity. A notable aspect of the protest is its spontaneity, with Yemeni immigrants, an integral part of the city's fabric, voicing their dissent. This ban has touched a nerve in the community, compelling them to visibly disrupt daily commerce to assert their presence and contributions to American society.

As Alice joins the gathering at Brooklyn's Borough Hall, the atmosphere is charged with energy and camaraderie. Protestors fill every inch of space, their excitement palpable as they capture moments of resistance through selfies and shared chants. Alice observes the diverse assembly and reflects on the sense of belonging these events engender. The protest's climax



features a community organizer who passionately critiques the President's restrictive policies, highlighting the immense contributions of immigrants to America's greatness and urging unity through chants.

However, the formal chant fails to sustain momentum, replaced by an organic, unified anthem of "U-S-A!" from the crowd—a powerful reclamation of identity and belonging amid exclusion. Despite the biting cold penetrating her coat, Alice is drawn into the protest's celebratory spirit, resonating with its message of resilience. As the event winds down and participants drift back to their everyday lives, she observes their continued commitment to their livelihoods, mindful of the day's tangible economic impact. The balance between protest and pragmatism underscores the community's resilience and determination to both fight for justice and maintain their hard-earned stability.

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Critical Thinking

Key Point: Unity through Adversity

Critical Interpretation: The narrative of Yemeni business owners uniting in spontaneous protest against political actions teaches you the power of collective resistance and community strength. It highlights how, in the face of adversity, standing together not only amplifies your voice but also reinforces a shared identity and purpose. The protestors' ability to transform political exclusion into a vibrant affirmation of belonging exemplifies resilience and the capacity to reclaim one's place within society. In your life, this key point inspires you to embrace solidarity, even during challenging times, and find strength in coming together with others to advocate for justice and uphold a sense of community and belonging.

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Chapter 42 Summary: Translation

In this chapter, Alice visits her father's care home, concerned about his declining mental state. As she sits with him in his sparsely decorated room, she is surrounded by the mundane sounds of the facility, like the faint roar of a baseball game on TV and the gentle whirring of a standing fan. These details create a backdrop for the poignant conversation she hopes to have with her father.

Alice reflects on how her father's initial move to the home came with suggestions of activities and outings that he, in reality, had little interest in pursuing. As a result, his life in the facility is relatively isolated, apart from the visits he receives and the personal care he gets from staff like Kenny, who doubles as his barber.

With the small talk behind them, Alice seizes the opportunity to delve into her father's past—specifically, his time serving as a translator in the Vietnam War. She is curious about his role in Phu Bai, where he was tasked with translating intercepted civilian communications. The father describes how his division focused on intercepting radio transmissions between Viet Cong soldiers and their families.

In response to Alice's questions, he recounts a vivid memory of transcribing a heated exchange between a Viet Cong commander and an African madam,



whose workers had been mistreated by the commander's soldiers. This anecdote provides Alice with a glimpse into the unexpected and complex scenarios her father encountered.

The chapter closes with Alice momentarily lost for words, staring out at the rose bushes as they bloom, symbolizing the harsh yet colorful memories of her father's experiences and the complicated history he carries with him.

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Critical Thinking

Key Point: Embracing Uncomfortable Conversations

Critical Interpretation: Navigating through Chapter 42, you're transported into a pivotal moment where Alice chooses to engage in an uncomfortable yet necessary dialogue with her father. Amidst the quiet ambiance of his care home, Alice delves into his past, uncovering stories wrapped in the complexity of his wartime experiences. This key point underscores the invaluable lessons of courage and empathy that accompany confronting difficult conversations. By embracing these dialogues, as Alice does, you open the door to greater understanding, healing, and connection.

Approaching sensitive topics with patience and an open mind has the power to transform relationships and allows you to honor the intricate histories that have shaped your loved ones' lives. Through Alice's journey, you're inspired to look beyond the immediacy of the present, contemplating the profound impact of your family's past on the tapestry of your shared future.

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Chapter 43 Summary: Project for a Trip to the Rockaways

In the chapter "Project for a Trip to the Rockaways," Alice embarks on a journey to uncover the undocumented history and stories of Chinese migrants from the ill-fated Golden Venture shipwreck, despite feeling unsure about her decision. The Golden Venture, a freighter carrying over 280 Chinese migrants, ran aground off the Rockaway Peninsula, and its passengers faced a desperate plight, plunging into icy waters. This event, lacking any formal commemoration, remains etched in the ambiguous memories of news articles and eyewitness accounts.

Alice's trip is driven by her ongoing Project aimed at documenting undocumented artists and exploring the Chinese immigrant experience in New York City. Her exploration is also a personal escape from mental isolation, a chance to recharge the Project with new sights and senses.

The migrants from the Golden Venture, after a perilous journey from China to Kenya, and then around the Cape of Good Hope, landed in U.S. custody, sent to a Pennsylvania prison. There, they started creating intricate paper sculptures as a way to pass time, an activity that brought them a sense of purpose. Using materials like discarded magazines, Styrofoam, and even toiletries, these detainees crafted elaborate creations, ranging from pineapples to American symbols like bald eagles. The sculptures became



means of expression, gifts, and fundraising tools for their legal battles, eventually catching the attention of outsiders.

Alice reflects on this art when she sees some of the sculptures at a museum exhibit, where she also learns of the two competing groups of creators within the prison. This reminds her of Kazuo Ishiguro's novel "Never Let Me Go," where clones use art to prove love and soulfulness in a futile attempt for a chance at life—a story echoing the detainees' own struggle for freedom in an unwelcoming system.

As Alice reaches the Silver Gull Beach Club, closed for the season, she tries to visualize the historical shipwreck's possible location. The solitude and vastness of the ocean contrast with the chaotic events that unfolded years ago. The symbol of freedom and confinement emerges with the Artist's history, who, similar to the migrants, entered the U.S. undocumented but navigated to citizenship through changing laws.

Alice seeks definitive answers about the wreck's location and engages with those connected to the migrants' story, revealing the broader implications of such migrations and the enduring legacies they leave behind. The journey is not just about reclaiming lost narratives but understanding the flux of societal attitudes toward immigrants, a theme mirrored in the ongoing struggles depicted in various artistic and historical contexts.

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Lastly, she reflects on the outcomes for the Golden Venture migrants: some were granted asylum later, while others faced deportation or uncertain legal status. The parallel narrative of Ishiguro's clones serves to underscore the migrants' plight, illustrating the transient concern society holds for such marginalized groups. Their experience, like the headmistress's words to the clones, signifies how reality often shifts with time and perception, leaving those caught in its tides to grapple with their fates.

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Chapter 44: Incident

In May, a few months after Alice's previous visit, an unfortunate incident occurred involving her Father at his care home. Unlike prior incidents which often involved falls, this time he found himself unable to stand up from his recliner to have his routine smoke. The event marked a significant decline, as he became unable to walk and fully incontinent. The coordination issues between his brain and hands also worsened, leaving Alice and her sister Amy to navigate this new phase together. Alice returned to California for three weeks to be with him and determine future steps with Amy.

Now living in New York, Alice had let her driver's license expire, making her reliant on an infrequent bus service to travel from Amy's condo to the skilled nursing facility where their Father was moved post-hospitalization. The bus route was a typically lonely one, populated by a handful of teenagers, seasoned men in sports attire without cars, and Asian grandmothers on their errands. A routine traffic jam ensued when the bus approached the congested Stevens Creek Boulevard, obstructed by construction activities of the new Apple mega-campus, a five-billion-dollar architectural marvel designed in a ring shape.

During her stalled journey, Alice exchanged texts with her friend Julia, who was undergoing the trials of teaching at a high-achieving but demoralized charter school in Brownsville. The conversation briefly touched upon Julia's



recent encounter with a cab driver who had immigrated illegally to America—a striking anecdote that resonated with Alice's own journey to the United States with her family. After their arrival from Taiwan, Alice's Father had secured a modest studio in Berkeley and juggled night shifts as a security guard while both her parents pursued education in Oakland. Amidst their struggles and aspirations, their marriage eventually disintegrated.

Reflecting on the past, Alice recalled her teenage visits to her mother's workplace at the very site now transforming into the Apple campus. Her mother, who had worked there for most of her life, was unsentimental about its demolition. Alice pondered this pragmatic outlook as she and her mother once drove past the construction site on their way to a beloved noodle restaurant, marveling at the accelerating change and the burgeoning presence of new businesses.

As Alice considered her parents' distant but cordial reunion during their visit to the Father's care home, she mused on the nature of personal connections and responsibilities past and present. She wondered about her own emotional ties and realized that life tends to clarify who remains significant as time goes on. The ephemeral nature of physical spaces in Silicon Valley seemed to mirror the transient nature of relationships and memories, leaving her relieved to have moved away but appreciative of the vibrant culinary scene fostered by the diverse, tech-savvy population.



In essence, this chapter encapsulates a period marked by familial duties, reflection on personal history and identity, and an acute awareness of the constant flux inherent in both human and physical environments. Alice finds herself navigating through these layers of change, assessing her role in a rapidly shifting landscape.

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Chapter 45 Summary: Television

Alice's visit to her Father's room at a skilled nursing facility begins with the somber report from the morning nurse: he refused breakfast but managed a sip of Ensure. The facility, part of a network of healthcare centers, sits amidst well-maintained surroundings, a stark contrast to the grim realities faced within. Her Father lies teary-eyed, expressing a despairing desire to end his life. Alice tries to comfort him, mentioning the prospect of moving him to a new place soon, as he cannot return to his previous care home since he no longer meets its requirements for mobility.

This news leaves her Father quiet, tears ceasing, as he processes the reality that the care home had somehow become his sanctuary. He had cherished simple joys there, like discussions about roses with the wife of the couple who ran it or witnessing their kitchen dances. Alice shifts the focus to the television, poorly positioned from his bed, dragging it for a better view. They bond over a Clint Eastwood movie, with Alice relaying trivia that lightens the Father's mood. Their conversation drifts to movies with "brain-dead endings," igniting nostalgia from nights spent together watching classics when Alice was young, an experience rich with the idle joy he knew so well.

Her Father found pleasure in what others might regard as wasted time, a trait not shared by Alice's industrious mother, whose focus was always on



self-improvement. Whether driven by personal inclination or cultural pressures, her mother was unwavering in her pursuits, tending to her physical and mental health with rigor. Alice herself often grappled with balancing the two worlds, sometimes questioning whether projects served to fend off idleness or merely masked it.

As silence settles, Alice distracts herself with television, its chaotic flow offering a bizarre comfort. She channel-surfs through fragmented memories: an intense scene from "The Poseidon Adventure" gives way to Shelley Winters in a guest role on "Roseanne." This erratic storytelling mirrors grief, Alice realizes, an unpredictable mix of emotions and memories. Watching television, much like grieving, presents a jumbled journey through past and present, with familiar faces and moments reappearing, untethered by time.

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Chapter 46 Summary: Total Assist

In this chapter, we find Alice and Amy, two sisters, grappling with the reality of their father's deteriorating health. Their father is currently undergoing physical therapy at Solace Place, where a determined and efficient therapist is in charge of his regimen. This therapist is described as someone who has a commanding presence and a methodical approach to her work, which is essential for motivating their father, who often needs encouragement to even get out of bed.

During one particular session, the therapist informs the sisters that their father will eventually require "total assist," a term that sends a chill through Alice and Amy. The phrase signifies that their father will soon need complete care for all his daily activities, from dressing and feeding to moving around. This prospect is daunting for the sisters, who are already struggling with the emotional and logistical challenges of their father's condition.

Their father, meanwhile, is present at this conversation but remains mentally absorbed elsewhere, an indication of his detachment from his current reality. Despite being physically involved in therapy—using a harness and a walker with the therapist's support—it becomes clear that his ability to balance and walk independently is not improving. The therapist's candid assessment is consistent with what others have previously warned the sisters; their father's



care needs are escalating, and his prospects for recovery are dim.

As the therapist escorts their father back to his room, Alice and Amy are left to confront the harsh truth of his condition and what it means for their lives. The chapter ends with a grim foreshadowing, confirming the therapist's prediction: three months later, their father indeed requires total assistance for all aspects of his daily life, a reality that both sisters feared but now must navigate with courage and determination.

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Chapter 47 Summary: Basket Case

In this chapter, Alice grapples with her feelings about her father's deteriorating condition as he resides in a memory care unit. The phrase "basket case," which she associates with his current state, looms large in her thoughts. It was originally coined during World War I to describe soldiers who had suffered horrific injuries, specifically those who lost all their limbs and reportedly had to be transported in baskets, although the truth of this claim is widely disputed. The term has since evolved into a derogatory expression for someone who is emotionally or mentally incapacitated, reflecting a stigma that Alice finds both relatable and disturbing.

Alice reflects on how public figures, like the President, casually use "basket case" as a derogatory term, contributing to its ugly connotation. This mirrors her own shame and helplessness when asked about her father's well-being. When friends inquire about him, she suppresses her urge to describe him as such and opts for a polite, albeit vague, "He's doing okay," which barely disguises her uncertainty and emotional struggle.

Through this narrative, Alice's internal conflict highlights the clash between societal attitudes and personal turmoil, as she navigates her relationship with her father while digesting the historical and contemporary usage of a term steeped in pain and misunderstanding.



Chapter 48: Project for a Trip to Ground Zero

Summary: "Project for a Trip to Ground Zero"

When Alice arrives at Rector Street, she receives a text from her friend Nobu, apologizing for confusing their lunch date and suggesting they cancel. Instead, Alice decides to visit the 9/11 Memorial & Museum, a place she had never explored before, like many locals who often bypass such solemn sites. Upon moving to New York City, Alice was initially curious, exploring new neighborhoods randomly; however, over time, she slipped into the routine grid of familiarity.

The memorial plaza, stark and austere, is almost deserted, a testament to how people often avoid spaces reserved for commemorating catastrophe. Here, Alice reflects on the boundaries between life and remembrance, motivated by her interest in an anonymous Artist who once frequented the area during a project called 'Outdoor Piece.' His movements were mapped throughout Lower Manhattan, and she discovers she had misidentified the locations associated with him, realizing the piers he haunted were in a different part of the city than she thought.

Inside the museum, Alice experiences a sensory overload of digital memorials that honor the victims of 9/11. She reflects on how our memories



might persist in an ever-evolving digital landscape. Each commemorative piece—from interactive displays to quilts and audio narratives—paints a poignant picture of individual lives lost, while also feeling distant and abstract, much like outdated Civil War memorabilia.

A particularly powerful exhibit is the Survivors' Staircase, an artifact of hope and survival during the chaos, now relocated underground—an act that Nobu later critiques as missing the opportunity to be a profound Thomasson. Over lunch with Nobu at Ho Yip, a Chinese restaurant near his art studio, they discuss the concept of 'Thomassons,' identified by artist Genpei Akasegawa as urban structures rendered obsolete yet still present. Nobu relates a Thomasson to the recovering remnants from disasters like 9/11 or Hiroshima, and Alice perceives a parallel to both historical artifacts and human memory.

Their conversation meanders through these concepts, touching on Japanese culture and Shinto beliefs, where even abandoned objects may hold a spiritual essence, akin to the forgotten purposes of Thomassons. They draw analogies from creatures like Bulgaria's rescued dancing bears, symbolizing remnants of conditioned responses and unfulfilled purposes in both architecture and memory.

Alice's visit ends at the museum gift shop, which she sees as an ironic commercialization of sacred memories—an embodiment of Americana that



mingles tragedy with merchandise. The array of items, from children's books to necklaces, reflects on the complexities of remembrance and healing. Exiting the museum, Alice is greeted by the vibrancy of everyday life, underscored by the inescapable hum of the city, signifying the ever-present tension between memorial solemnity and the bustling present.

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Chapter 49 Summary: The Loneliness of the Project

In "The Loneliness of the Project," we witness Alice navigating the emotional landscape of caregiving and the reflections it prompts about aging and purpose. The narrative unfolds as Alice reluctantly leaves New York, filled with the vibrancy of late spring, and heads to California amid a persistent drought. Her journey is primarily to visit her Father, now residing in the memory unit of Solace Place, a care facility where time seems to stand still amidst the quietness of aging minds.

Once a man defined by his occupation and projects, Alice's Father is now a shadow of himself, grappling with memory loss and the fear of losing his identity. He mutters his name incessantly—a poignant symptom of his quest to hold onto the remnants of self. Despite years of hating his job, retirement brought an unexpected emptiness, a stark departure from the dream of indulging in photography and cooking.

This personal story intersects with Alice's readings of Simone de Beauvoir's reflections on aging in "The Coming of Age," which unveils the harsh awareness of irrelevance and social isolation that old age can bring. Through the lens of Jean-Paul Sartre's later years, Alice draws parallels with her Father's condition. Sartre, consumed by health issues exacerbated by a lifetime of excess, finds solace in his projects, a theme Beauvoir fervently advocates as essential for retaining purpose in later life. Despite Sartre's



absurd hallucinations—companionship he joked about with crabs born of isolation fears—it was Beauvoir's presence that prevented his profound loneliness.

Beauvoir herself exemplified the engagement with projects as a lifeline, meticulously working on manuscripts and maintaining a rigorous intellectual routine even in the shadow of Sartre's decline. However, when Sartre passed, Beauvoir faced intense criticism for "Adieux: A Farewell to Sartre," her candid memoir of their final years together. Despite backlash for its raw honesty, Beauvoir was driven by a commitment to truth, capturing not only Sartre's vulnerability but also the intricate layers of aging and companionship.

As Alice ponders whether her Father could have been saved by projects, she acknowledges the damage of alcohol and physical decline. Her Father's condition echoes Beauvoir's fears post-Sartre, where she too deteriorated, battling health issues and solitude, albeit under the care of her adopted daughter, Sylvie le Bon. Through this reflection, Alice perceives the immense strength in the dreams of projects, finding solace in moments where even the possibility of cooking lifts her Father's spirits.

The chapter eloquently intertwines personal narrative with philosophical insights, exploring how purpose and project can act as anchors against the existential drift of aging, while also acknowledging the limitations posed by



deteriorating health and the indispensable need for companionship.

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Chapter 50 Summary: Killing Time

In the memory unit at Solace Place, there is a daily ritual between breakfast and lunch where the residents are wheeled into the hallway. This is not in anticipation of an event; rather, it's simply passing time—quietly waiting for the next meal. The atmosphere is reminiscent of a receiving line, but it's primarily a way to fill the dead zone of the day. Among these residents is the Father, who, though younger and more energetic than most, shares in this pattern of waiting. Restlessly, he maneuvers his wheelchair in small circles, trying to fend off the tedium, while Alice, seated nearby, offers him saltine crackers.

The monotony is interrupted by the arrival of a tall, silver-haired man, likened to a cowboy leaning at the nurses' counter. The Father enthusiastically addresses him as "Rob," only to be met with cold confusion by the man, who does not recognize him and claims he's mistaken. Observing this exchange, Alice feels a poignant discomfort, seeing the Father through a stranger's eyes—his disheveled appearance, the vulnerability of his condition laid bare.

Later, Alice notices this man, Rob, speaking with his elderly mother in the activity room. She overhears his compassionate explanation that she won't be going home with him, but will stay at Solace Place. The moment highlights a universal theme of separation and loss, echoing Alice's own



experience with the Father.

In the slow hours spent together—time reminiscent of when they would talk over cigarettes in Berkeley—the Father often revisits the idea of moving back to Alabama. He dreams aloud about getting a small, simple house there, drawn by nostalgia and the affordable housing. But this dream clashes with reality—who would care for him there? His hope is tinged with the unlikely prospect that his siblings might help, or that he'd manage alone in a healthier, alternate life.

Despite the bleakness, Alice wonders about the Father's sense of belonging. Surrounded by a diverse group of caregivers and medical staff in a place far from his roots, does he feel a longing for a home long left behind? Alabama, for him, transcends geography; it's an emblem of a bygone era—a longing for a sense of home that no longer exists, except in memory.

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Chapter 51 Summary: The Old Man

In this chapter, Beauvoir reflects on the enigmatic nature of an old man referred to only as "the Father," who seems disconnected from the community due to his lack of participation in any active projects. This sense of detachment and transformation is vividly illustrated through the experiences of Alice, who regularly visits the Father at Solace Place, a care facility. Alice witnesses the daily struggle and resistance the Father exhibits when being moved from his bed to a wheelchair, a necessary adjustment for his lunchtime routine.

Despite the Father's initial loud protests, moments later he appears to return to a more peaceful state, commenting earnestly, "It's the old man. He's sorry." This duality in his behavior highlights the drastic change he has undergone—there is a clear Before and After in his personality, leaving those who met him only in his current state without a full understanding of who he once was.

Alice recalls a specific incident that signifies the transition phase In Between, where she had coordinated a meeting between the Father and a representative from a home care service. The young rep, dressed professionally and speaking in corporate language, details a care plan that involves visits to assist the Father with chores like light cleaning and meal preparation, while strictly adhering to company protocols.



The encounter takes an unexpectedly personal turn when the Father identifies the rep's Vietnamese heritage through his last name. This small interaction reveals a depth of knowledge and awareness in the Father, contradicting the image of a cranky old man falling apart. Alice feels proud at the Father's display of recognition, which momentarily bridges the gap between his past and present self.

After the meeting, the Father confides in Alice about his discomfort with having someone else handle his laundry, specifically due to the embarrassment concerning his underwear. Despite her reassurances about the professionalism of caregivers, Alice appreciates the trust implicit in this confession, recognizing it as a bond stronger than his shame. In years to come, Alice reflects on this moment—and the metaphor it represents when working on the Project—considering how ready she was to expose the Father's vulnerabilities so selflessly.



Chapter 52: Emotional Liability

In the quiet of Amy's living room at night, Alice often found herself unable to sleep, consumed by the endless information available about frontotemporal dementia (FTD). This type of dementia, affecting the frontal and temporal lobes of the brain, often leads to changes in personality, behavior, and language. With her phone casting a small glow, Alice scoured the internet repeatedly, searching for something new in the all-too-familiar list of symptoms, treatments, and the grim outlook of the disease's progression through its seven stages.

Her readings included a poignant blog by a Chicago businessman who was navigating life with FTD. Initially, his writings brimmed with defiance and determination to fight against the illness. However, as time passed, his entries revealed a downward spiral filled with anger towards his employer, a longing for understanding from his family, and a litany of frustrations—all indicative of the emotional rollercoaster brought on by FTD. The blog's abrupt end, three years ago, hinted at the progression of the disease rendering him unable to continue.

A particular term, 'emotional liability,' caught Alice's attention during her research. Emotional liability refers to rapid and intense emotional changes, a symptom often seen in FTD. Although the term means instability, Alice found herself mistakenly interpreting it as 'liability'—a source of



embarrassment or disadvantage. This misunderstanding seemed to reflect her father's own journey with the disease.

As Alice's father grew more detached from the external world, his explosive outbursts became less shocking to those around him. In the care facility where he lived, expressions like "Shut up, you moron!" were mundane. While his earlier outbursts might have shocked or embarrassed, Alice found herself more comfortable with his irritable moments compared to his times of vulnerability and tears, perhaps because they allowed a glimpse of the father she once knew.

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Chapter 53 Summary: The Mustache

Alice visits her father to say goodbye before her flight later that night, bringing with her a jar of Vaseline and baby oil. Upon entering his room, she notices something striking—her father, a man she'd always known to have a mustache, is now clean-shaven. The absence of his mustache unsettles her; it erases a key aspect of his identity, transforming his face into something anonymous and stark, reminiscent of a basic hotel room designed for efficiency, devoid of personality. The change strips him of a distinguishing feature, making him resemble his own father more than himself, which is jarring for Alice.

During this period, the news is flooded with reports about football players suffering from traumatic brain injuries due to the violent nature of the sport. A major article in *The Times* discusses a study revealing chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE) in the majority of brains of deceased NFL players. This neurological disease is characterized by symptoms like impulse control problems, depression, cognitive decline, and physical instability. Alice sees these symptoms mirrored in her father's behavior, especially his excessive aggression.

Alice and her sister, Amy, are particularly concerned about their father's aggressive outbursts. They fear that he might be expelled from Solace Place, the care facility where he resides, due to his behavior. The prospect of



having to find another facility is daunting, not only because of the effort involved but also the fear that he might end up in an even more remote and desolate location, disconnected from his family and the life he once knew. This possibility of exile is more terrifying than the thought of his death.

In an attempt to manage his condition, various medications are tried. The names of these drugs bring to mind natural or mythical elements, suggesting their elusive or grand promises. Alice is uncertain whether these medications are meant to root him in reality or shield him from it, and their effectiveness remains ambiguous. They seem to calm him, but Alice is left questioning whether this tranquility is genuine or a reflection of her own need to see him at peace.



Chapter 54 Summary: Ho Yip

In this chapter, Alice, a California native now residing in New York, struggles with the city's persistent summer humidity, a climate starkly different from her home state. She arranges a final lunch with Nobu, a fellow artist from Japan whose residency is ending. The original plan to meet at Ho Yip, a local restaurant they favored, is thwarted when they discover the establishment has closed due to a lease termination, a casualty of the building's sale.

Instead, they opt for a meal from the food trucks around Zuccotti Park, a bustling area during lunch hours with various food options. Among casual conversation, Nobu shares a glimmer of success—his grocery list portraits have garnered attention and sales at a Lower East Side gallery exhibition. Despite this, an air of melancholy surrounds him due to immigration uncertainties. His U.S. visa is nearing expiration, and he's facing increased scrutiny under the stringent immigration policies of the current administration. The legal battles and copious paperwork he faces to stay legally in the country weigh heavily on him, though he remains stoic.

Simultaneously, Alice reflects on her own artistic struggles. Her most recent endeavor feels stagnant; she's overwhelmed with materials but lacks a coherent structure. She considers a mixed-media installation approach but questions where and how it would be exhibited. This echoes her thoughts on



the Artist, who has also grappled with showcasing his life's work, famously spending thirteen years creating art without public display but with little to no interest from galleries to host a comprehensive retrospective.

Adding to her emotional burden is the fading connection with James, another person from her life. Their communication has dwindled to sparse and curt exchanges, and she wonders about his whereabouts and well-being. A fleeting incident causes her to question if she saw James in the street, his distinct movement recognizable despite the rain-obscured view. Her attempt to confirm it is thwarted by urban obstacles, leaving her uncertain if it was him or just a figment of her hopeful imagination.

Overall, the chapter delves into themes of transience and uncertainty, both in terms of geographic locations and personal connections, with Alice navigating her artistic journey amidst the broader chaos of city life and personal introspection.

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Chapter 55 Summary: The Enigma of a Background

The Enigma of a Background

This chapter opens with a striking photograph from the exhibition catalogue of **Outdoor Piece**, featuring an Artist appearing to gaze from what seems like a lifeguard chair amidst the iconic skyline of the Twin Towers in the background. As the narrative unfolds, it's revealed that the perceived chair is actually a wooden staircase, doubling as a sculpture by the artist Donald Lipski.

Installed in what is now known as Battery Park City, this area of Lower Manhattan has a unique history. At the time of the photograph, it was on reclaimed land formed from the excavated debris of the World Trade Center's construction and a vast water tunnel. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, amid an economic downturn and stalled urban development, this stretch became a canvas for artists. They transformed the barren landfill into a vibrant, albeit temporary, creative playground with performances and sculptures crafted from discarded materials.

Lipski had envisioned an ambitious project where colorful flags strung along ropes would stretch from his staircase sculpture to the World Trade Center's roof. Despite input from structural engineers and lengths of rope prepared



for this vision, city authorities ultimately denied the project. His sculpture ingeniously played with perspective; from its platform, one could experience the illusion of reaching the top corner of the North Tower. This offered an incredible imagined view, analogous to perfect selfie spots today. Though the physical sculpture is no longer present, climbing those steps would metaphorically lead one into the open sky—a concept akin to a "Thomasson," a term used to describe architectural remnants that have become curiosities or artworks without serving their original purpose.

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Chapter 56: The Future of the Father

In the chapter titled "The Future of the Father," Alice and her sister Amy confront the grim reality of their father's declining health. It begins with their father's doctor delivering a blunt prognosis through a speakerphone call to Alice, who is in Brooklyn: their father may only have six months to a year left to live. This announcement, dispensed nonchalantly amidst the bustling environment of a memory unit, comes as a shock. The absence of any telling symptoms or failing organs makes it even harder for Alice to grasp the impending loss, triggering reflections on past consultations about their father's future.

Earlier memories surface of when the sisters explored options for their father's care. They recall visiting an upscale assisted living facility when their father was recovering at a nursing facility in Oakland. The facility tour, led by a familiar-looking general manager, highlighted elaborate amenities and detailed a points system for additional care services. Despite the manager's reassurance of future cost savings with a move to the memory unit, Alice and Amy were uneasy about delegating their father's care to such an impersonal, calculated system.

The manager's confident prediction of a five to seven-year life expectancy contrasts sharply with the current prognosis. This inconsistency in professional opinions leaves Alice incredulous. Her father's resilience,



despite his unhealthy habits, had always defied expectations, leading to disbelief that he could deteriorate so swiftly. Yet, they are faced with the undeniable truth that time is running out.

Ultimately, this chapter reflects the emotional turmoil and disbelief faced by Alice and Amy as they grapple with the uncertain future of their father, navigating a series of medical forecasts that challenge their understanding of life, health, and mortality.

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Chapter 57 Summary: Project for a Trip to Venice

Alice's journey to Venice to witness the Artist representing Taiwan at the Venice Biennale is fraught with personal and financial dilemmas. Arriving through a fog-enveloped Alilaguna ferry from the airport, Alice is starkly reminded of the dichotomy between Venice's ethereal beauty and its reputation as a tourist trap. She grapples with the necessity of the trip for her Project, financing it with her credit card while convincing herself it is a research opportunity, not a vacation.

Venice, an island of timelessness, unveils its layers to Alice. From the sound of a public fountain to the quiet of the streets, she finds a stark contrast to the bustling urban noise she is accustomed to. The silence and the ancient ambience of Venice amplify her internal monologue, offering a momentary escape from the relentlessness of modern life. Watching children play or observing local life through the veneer of tourism, Alice reflects on the historical constructs that make Venice both unchanging and ever-evolving.

Despite seeing no drastic visual signs of protest, Alice acknowledges the local Venetians' struggle against the overwhelming influx of tourists. The city's population dwindles, and Alice immerses herself in a mini-exploration of finding businesses catering to the locals amidst a sea of tourist-centric shops, a nod to her yearning for authenticity amidst the artifice.



Alice attends the Artist's talk at the Fondazione Querini Stampalia. Here, each panelist unravels the Artist's work with varied perspectives—ranging from critiques of capitalism to philosophical musings on art and life's immanence. The discussions resonate with Alice, touching on themes of time and monotony, personal reinvention, and the transformative power of art. The Artist's minimalist, time-focused philosophy is juxtaposed against narratives of deserted islands and the historical abandonment Taiwan has faced, inviting Alice to ponder global and personal narratives of isolation and expression.

As the talk transitions to a Q&A, tensions flare when an outraged French woman likens the Artist's work to gladiatorial spectacle, questioning the validity of his art. Her criticisms are countered by other audience members, including a Taiwanese woman who recalls the Artist's early exploits, and a chemist appreciating the emotional impact of art—a testament to the diverse interpretations art can provoke.

In the aftermath, Alice explores the Biennale, experiencing the shifting moods and enduring charm of Venice's artistic offerings. At the Taiwanese Pavilion, among relics of the Artist's past performances, she briefly encounters the Artist himself. Their silent exchange speaks of mutual acknowledgment and the unspoken complexities of creativity and recognition.



The narrative reflects on historical and contemporary figures, like Marco Polo and Viktor Shklovsky, juxtaposing their experiences with Alice's own journey. Despite criticism, Shklovsky's concept of *ostranenie*—making the familiar strange to inspire change and awareness—parallels Alice's contemplation of time's sad inexorability, her singular thematic pursuit. Alice's Venice trip, fraught with introspection and encounters, ultimately becomes a lens to examine the intersections of time, art, and personal narrative, set against the backdrop of a city suspended in its own living history.

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Chapter 58 Summary: Suicide

In the chapter titled "Suicide," Alice grapples with the intellectual challenges she faces while delving into philosophy, particularly the works of Gilles Deleuze. Following a trip to Venice, she becomes determined to understand Deleuze, a renowned French philosopher known for his complex ideas about immanence and the nature of life. However, her struggles with comprehension lead her to consume simplified secondary sources, such as a podcast where the casual banter of the hosts only intensifies her self-doubt regarding her intellectual capabilities.

Alice learns about Deleuze's tragic end—his suicide by jumping from the window of his Paris apartment. His declining health and belief that life must be actively embraced and lived to its fullest potential informed his decision. Deleuze's philosophy suggested that life loses its value when one's ability to act and exert willpower fades.

This theme of suicide also surfaces in the life and work of Édouard Levé, a French writer known for his book, "Suicide." Levé envisioned a book that intertwined the author's life in real-time with a fictional narrative leading up to their death, divided only by the act of writing. Hauntingly, Levé took his own life mere days after submitting the manuscript of "Suicide" to his publisher, echoing his book's unsettling premise.



The chapter reflects on the intimacy and loneliness of these philosophical and literary figures and their struggles with the essence of life and death. It incorporates insights from Susan Sontag's writings, where she expresses a desire to keep her work and personal life distinct, noting, "My work is too austere," while calling her life "a brutal anecdote."

Amid these contemplations, Alice recalls her fears related to her father's memory. She worries that if she doesn't incorporate her father into her creative projects, his existence might fade away. This is juxtaposed with the recollection of the Artist painting a portrait of his own father on his deathbed, underscoring the importance of preserving memory through art. The Artist philosophically remarks on the passing of time, suggesting that idly wasting it is how he copes with the absurdity of life.

The chapter closes with an echo of Levé's interview, where asked about art's role in his life, Levé serenely responded, "It lets me love life while preparing to die," encapsulating the entwined themes of creativity, mortality, and the search for meaning explored throughout the chapter.



Chapter 59 Summary: Asylum

In the chapter "Asylum," Alice encounters a distressing email from her neighbor, who complains about Alice's cat spraying around his home. Despite a previous assumption of cancer, the cat likely suffers from irritable bowel syndrome, managed with costly treatments. The veterinarian rules out incomplete neutering as a cause for the cat's marking behavior, concluding instead that it's a natural tendency in a minority of fixed cats. Alice speculates that the cat's imperialistic drive for territory and food may have spurred his unwelcome behaviors. This new pattern of behavior confines the cat indoors permanently, paralleling Alice's thoughts about her father, who is living in a nursing home due to his dementia.

Alice reflects on Erving Goffman's concept of "total institutions," places that isolate individuals from wider society, creating a controlled environment. Her father's facility embodies this idea. Prior to his worsening condition, Alice's father wished for a serene community simulating normalcy, but reality fell short. She compares his condition to the cat's, both confined and unable to pursue their natural behaviors—her father's drinking and her cat's territorial instincts lead to their loss of freedom.

Goffman's examination of asylums highlights the regimented and identical routines imposed on residents, with Alice's father's experiences exemplifying this. Daily activities transition seamlessly from one to another



under formal schedules. In this structured environment, Alice recognizes her father's resignation to the institutional routine, conflicting with his preference for solitude and quiet. Despite the asylum's intent to meet official objectives, it blurs the personal identities and freedoms of its residents, reshaping them as part of a collective routine.

Alice's father's changes mirror Goffman's concept of asylums as "forcing houses" for personal change. As his dementia progresses, Alice acknowledges he will not leave the institution. This loss of personal agency echoes with her father's once familiar life marked by watching favorite shows and smoking. Likewise, Alice's cat adapts to indoor life, foregoing its natural desires for safety and regular meals. Both transformations highlight the tension between institutional control and individual choice, ending with the cat, like her father, succumbing to a life marked by rest and gradual resignations of their former selves.



Chapter 60: Trace Evidence

In the chapter titled "Trace Evidence," the reader gains an insightful glimpse into the routines and emotional complexities faced by two sisters, Amy and Alice, as they care for their ailing father. Amy and Alice have been overseeing the daily care activities for their father, who resides at Solace Place, a nursing home. Over several months, the sisters have accumulated a series of surveillance reports chronicling their father's day—to monitor his well-being and ensure his safety.

The need for such close observation arose after their father exhibited troubling behaviors: threatening a nurse by raising his arm, biting attempts, and a fall resulting from attempting to get out of bed unassisted. These incidents compelled the staff at Solace Place to suggest the engagement of an external caregiver, subtly pushing the sisters toward hiring additional help through a private service to ensure proper care.

The sisters, understanding the gravity of the situation, acknowledged that although the law was on their side regarding the removal of a resident, making adversaries of the staff would be unwise, especially as their father's house money was designated for his care and safety. This understanding led them to embrace the assistance of a caregiver service whose employees were required to send daily reports on the father's condition and activities. These reports, detailing everything from meals to hygiene routines, served as



documentation of the care given.

Eventually, Elpidio emerged as their preferred caregiver, not only for his attentive care but also for the rapport he developed with the sisters. Elpidio, traveling daily from Fremont via UberPool, shared snippets of his life, telling the sisters of his nursing background in the Philippines alongside his wife and having daughters living abroad. Yet, every conversation ultimately returned to the sisters' father, whose care had intertwined their lives.

The daily reports, punctuated by entries detailing meals, snacks, hydration encouragements, and rest, became a fixture in Alice's life. Initially, she dreaded the notifications, swiftly skimming them for signs of mishap before gradually savoring the detailed accounts. The reports, much like the artifacts of an artist's work, offered a real-time account of activities without revealing deeper insights into her father's emotions or thoughts.

Alice's interaction with these reports evolved from a perfunctory check to a meticulous analysis akin to scientific observation, influencing care decisions and prompting timely interventions—such as ordering supplies or adjusting care instructions. The sisters even engaged in discussions about their father's day-to-day, finding themselves spectators of his life's unfolding narrative.

In this delicate dance of care and observation, the sisters grapple with the profound question of their father's inner life, his happiness, and his reason



for living, as they continue their dedicated oversight until the day's routine concludes.

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Chapter 61 Summary: The Oldest Living Polar Bear in America

The chapter titled "The Oldest Living Polar Bear in America" unfolds with Alice visiting her father at Solace Place, a care facility. The setting is tranquil yet somber, with the early November sun filtering through blue curtains, creating patterns in her father's room. On a nearby tack board, a collage of vegetable images and a chef over a frying pan hints at her father's past passion for cooking, possibly an initiative by the facility's memory unit activities director to spark a connection with his past.

As Alice settles in, she scrolls through her phone and comes across the story of Coldilocks, a polar bear who, at thirty-seven, became the oldest living polar bear in America, residing at the Philadelphia Zoo. This anecdote about Coldilocks highlights themes of aging, survival, and caregiving, subtly paralleling the lives of the father and the bear.

When her father awakens, Alice opens the curtains, inviting him to engage with the outside world. He remains uninterested, preferring instead to watch TV with Alice, where a reality show features two men preparing for a hunt. This show ignites something within him, and despite his deteriorated speech abilities, he animatedly communicates a survival plan that involves essentials like water, peanut butter, and roller skates. He envisions Alice and himself leading a team, gathering people, including his brother in Alabama,



for survival against an imaginary apocalypse, gesturing to a rifle supposedly hidden under his bed.

Alice listens and reassures him, reflecting compassion and patience in their interaction. The narrative then shifts back to Coldilocks, comparing her age to that of her deceased companion, Klondike, who lived to thirty-four. In captivity, Coldilocks receives a special birthday treat—a cake made of peanut butter, honey, raisins, and fish—drawing an ironic parallel to the father's fixation on survival items like peanut butter.

The chapter subtly prompts the reader to consider whether the father's continued existence, much like Coldilocks's, is due to the protective confines of his environment, raising questions about life, captivity, and the meaning of survival in contrasting contexts.

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Chapter 62 Summary: Face Time

Face Time

In the days following her trip to California, Alice becomes a recluse in her apartment, fueled by Diet Coke and pre-packaged Asian noodles, as she races against a deadline to edit the latest episode for her project, *Bring On the Feels*. This installment tells the poignant story of an organ donation, focusing on two main figures: an ex-Marine donor who died in a car crash, and the recipient, a cheerful young man battling advanced Type 2 diabetes. The young man's recording of his experiences makes up much of the episode, highlighting his struggles and triumphs, as well as the support of his devoted parents. The emotional core of the segment is a tear-jerking encounter between the organ recipient and the donor's widow, whose grief and the sensitive connection to the recipient underscore the narrative.

Alice, needing to finalize the edits, plans to meet Mona, her client contact and a mid-level account director, at the marketing firm's office. She hopes to regain the warmth that was once present in Mona's increasingly scarce emails. However, upon her arrival, Mona is tied up with another client's emergency. Alice receives apologies instead of a meeting, leaving her concerned about their professional relationship.

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As lunchtime rolls around, Alice opts for an impromptu, reflective walk along the East River to eat her sandwich, inspired by a street that she believes was a filming location for *Film*, a unique project written by Samuel Beckett and led by the legendary silent film icon, Buster Keaton. Beckett, fascinated by the Irish philosopher Bishop Berkeley's idea of "to be is to be perceived," crafted a story about perception. Although initially resistant, Keaton accepted the role in *Film*, resulting in a short movie where he portrays O, the perceived, opposite the camera as E, the perceiver. Keaton's involvement came at a time when his career was winding down, and he battled personal demons, including alcohol. Despite production challenges, Keaton's performance earned accolades during its screening at the Venice Film Festival, providing him with a moment of triumph in the twilight of his life.

Reflecting on this, Alice is struck by the parallels between her own search for human connection in her work and the themes of isolation and self-awareness explored in both the segment she edited and the film she pondered. As she stands by the water, she considers Beckett's portrayal of one's inescapable self and the ephemeral nature of life and relationships, drawn from the intersection of art, perception, and reality.



Chapter 63 Summary: Project for a Journey to Fat City

In "Project for a Journey to Fat City," Alice finds herself in a quieter New York City during the holiday season, immersed in personal projects and reflections on family, especially her father's declining health at Solace Place nursing home. Her days are spent absorbed in a memoir by George Norbert Kates, an American expat who lived in China before the Japanese invasion. This memoir, "The Years That Were Fat," recounts Kates' time in Beijing, his love for Chinese furniture, and the cultural richness of pre-revolutionary China.

Alice's father, a craftsman deeply influenced by traditional Chinese furniture, shares a similar fascination with Kates's work. The memoir serves as a bridge between Alice and her father's past passions, highlighting his apprenticeship and eventual work to recreate traditional Chinese furniture in America—a venture that never found its market. The connection between Kates and Alice's father, though indirect, illuminates their shared love of craftsmanship and Chinese aesthetics.

As the narrative progresses, it becomes evident that Alice's father is not improving. A visit from her sister Amy to the nursing home reveals worrisome signs—fluid in their father's lungs and his struggles with basic functions. Despite reassurances from their mother that he would recover, both sisters sense an impending decline. Alice plans to travel from New



York to California amidst chaotic weather conditions but is stopped by logistical difficulties and an untimely call from Amy announcing their father's passing.

Reflecting on the shared paths of her father and Kates, Alice recognizes the poignancy of their unfulfilled projects and dreams, of lives lived amid and through the creation of beauty and history. She imagines their father's last days, wrapped in solitude and unfinished ambitions, similar to Kates's uncompleted work on the archduchess.

In the wake of her father's death, Alice is left contemplating the connections tying past and present, the tangible and the imagined. Her father's last words to her were, "I think she loves me again," encapsulating a rekindled connection and acceptance as Alice prepares to say her final goodbye.

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Chapter 64: The New Millennium

The New Millennium: A Summary

On January 1, 2000, known as the dawn of the new millennium, an artist, who had crafted his reputation on groundbreaking performances and had notably entered the New York art scene by confining himself in a cage, ended a self-imposed silence of thirteen years. Having withdrawn from public view during this time, he reemerged at age forty-nine, hosting a press conference at the progressive Judson Church in Greenwich Village—a venue famed for its historical engagement with the arts. On stage with him was Martha Wilson, artist and director of Franklin Furnace, an avant-garde arts space with which he shared history.

Wilson read the artist's brief statement: "I kept myself alive." The room filled with a wave of confusion and questions. To some, the statement seemed self-evident; to others, it was a curiosity. The audience, likely exhausted from the Y2K hysteria that had gripped the world in anticipation of technological chaos, sought answers. What did these years mean for the artist, they wondered, and what had transpired during his time away?

The artist revealed he would share none of the art created in his absence, as it was personal. He further declared his intention to cease making art



entirely, a shock to those gathered. His journey, comprising radical performances—from literal bondage in his early work with Linda Montano to the radical act of making no art—culminated in relinquishing his audience, highlighting the passage of time itself as the ultimate landscape of his endeavor. By carving away everything else, even the audience, he isolated time as his sole medium.

This act of disappearance opened a reflection on the enigmatic life of Tehching, the artist. The narrator considers Tehching's journey to Alaska, a plan meant to exile him both from the art sphere and familiar surroundings. The journey itself, swapped for itinerant labor, represented both a physical and existential migration, away from expectation and notoriety, toward self-effacement and introspection. The trip offered an engaging yet uncharted experience, as vast and unfamiliar as America's landscapes were upon his departure from New York.

Years later, a chance sighting of Tehching cleaning a restaurant, unaware he was observed, evokes the notion of invisibility: the artist literally and metaphorically mopping away traces of his presence. The narrative parallels his disappearance within society with the author's personal reflections on their own project—sharing notes, fragmented memories, and a commitment to capturing time's passage itself.

Ultimately, despite Tehching's declared end to making art, the letter to him



underscores a shared existential pursuit: both writer and artist exploring the malleable and unresolved nature of passing time. Such musings on visibility, presence, and the importance of private endeavors culminate in an open-ended question: What defines an artistic project, and does it need an audience to exist? As the writer concludes, "Every time I think I've finished the Project it changes shape," acknowledging life's organic and continual formation shaped by its inevitable end: death. Tehching's journey, like the narrator's exploration, remains unfinished due to the ongoing nature of life itself.

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