

# Big Chicas Don't Cry PDF (Limited Copy)

Annette Chavez Macias



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# **Big Chicas Don't Cry Summary**

Empowering friendships in the face of life's challenges.

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## About the book

In "Big Chicas Don't Cry," Annette Chavez Macias masterfully weaves a heartfelt narrative that explores the complexities of friendship, identity, and resilience among a group of young Latina women navigating the challenges of adolescence in a vibrant urban backdrop. As they confront personal struggles—ranging from family pressures to cultural expectations—these fierce and spirited characters learn that strength comes not only from individual bravery but also from the unwavering support of sisterhood. With a blend of humor and poignant moments, Macias invites readers into a coming-of-age tale that captures the essence of growing up while honoring the rich tapestry of their heritage. This delightful story is sure to resonate with anyone who has ever faced the bittersweet journey of self-discovery.

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## About the author

Annette Chavez Macias is a talented author and storyteller known for her engaging narratives that explore themes of identity, culture, and resilience. Born and raised in the vibrant and diverse landscape of Southern California, she draws on her rich Latino heritage to craft relatable characters and compelling plots. With a background in creative writing and a passion for connecting with young adult audiences, Macias's work often reflects her experiences growing up in a bicultural environment. Her debut novel, "Big Chicas Don't Cry," has garnered acclaim for its authentic representation of female friendships and the challenges faced by contemporary young women, affirming Macias as a significant voice in modern literature.

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# Chapter 1 Summary: ERICA

## ### Chapter One Summary: Erica - Fifteen Years Earlier

In the nostalgic setting of their grandparents' backyard, fifteen years prior, a young Erica sits under a lemon tree with her cousins, Mari, Gracie, and Selena. Their carefree summer afternoon is disrupted when Mari reveals she plans to run away because her parents are divorcing, which deeply troubles her. Mari's emotional turmoil causes an unexpected shift in the mood, prompting her cousins to rally around her, each responding to her pain in their own ways.

They discuss how her father is moving out, and Mari is left feeling abandoned as she faces the prospect of relocating to Whittier with her mother. Collectively, the girls grapple with their summer plans falling apart and the fear of losing their cousin. Amidst urges to distract Mari, Erica concocts a plan for a great escape to the beach, leading them into a whirlwind of juvenile rebellion. The girls fantasize about running away as they gather supplies, all the while drumming up a sense of camaraderie and hope amidst their fears.

However, the scheme fizzles when reality intrudes—Welita, their great-grandmother, catches them in the act. Rather than punishment, she

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imparts a lesson about family being everlasting, reminding them that staying close is their responsibility. Despite the day's earlier anguish, the cousins reaffirm their bond under the lemon tree, carving their initials and promising to be "Best Cousins Forever." Unbeknownst to them, this promise will be tested as life unfolds, marking a poignant moment of innocence before the inevitable complexities of adulthood begin to surface.

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### ### Chapter Two Summary: Erica - Present Day

Fast forward to the present, Erica grapples with her own heartbreak as her boyfriend, Greg, breaks up with her just days before Christmas, leaving her reeling. Seeking solace, she contacts her cousins Gracie and Selena, bypassing Mari, who has increasingly distanced herself from the family. Erica's anger is palpable as she processes the betrayal, exacerbated by the heartbreak narrative—a familiar theme in their family dynamics.

Gracie and Selena provide their unique forms of support; Gracie, with practical concern for Erica's safety, and Selena, attempting to lighten the mood with humor. They discuss how moving on from Greg could be an opportunity for Erica to refocus on herself, despite the emotional aftermath of the breakup.

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As the trio arrives at their grandparents' house to prepare for Christmas festivities, Erica is half-heartedly greeted by their bustling family preparing for the holiday. Amid poking fun, joy in banter, and poignant snatches of conversation among the cousins, an undercurrent of sadness lingers due to Mari's absence, highlighting the fractures in their family. The chapter underscores the enduring bonds of sisterhood amidst the backdrop of personal struggles and family strife, posing the question of whether their childhood promises of closeness can withstand the trials of adulthood.

As they brainstorm creative gifts amidst laughter and shared history, tensions resurface over Mari's ongoing estrangement, leaving Erica anxious for resolution even as her heart is heavy with regret and loss. Here, the cyclical nature of their familial connections is vividly illustrated, emphasizing that while some ties may loosen, others—though tested—can sometimes hold firm through life's storms.

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## Critical Thinking

**Key Point:** The importance of familial bonds

**Critical Interpretation:** You may find yourself, like Erica and her cousins, navigating life's complexities and emotional upheavals. This chapter reminds you that, despite individual struggles, familial bonds can provide comfort and strength. When the world feels overwhelming and the weight of heartache bears down, it's the connections with loved ones that can inspire resilience and hope. Embracing these relationships, nurturing them through both the joyful and challenging moments, can be a powerful source of support as you create your own path forward.

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## Chapter 2 Summary: ERICA

### ### Chapter Two Summary: Erica

In the wake of a shocking breakup with her boyfriend Greg just days before Christmas, Erica is engulfed in anger and disbelief. As she drives, she vents to her supportive cousins, Gracie and Selena, on the phone. They reassure her and provide comic relief, which helps to lighten the mood despite her raw emotions. Erica struggles with the suddenness of the split after two years together, feeling abandoned and hurt, especially knowing one of her cousins, Mari, hasn't been there for her lately.

Arriving at her grandparents' house to help with Christmas tamale preparations, Erica notices the contrast between her emotional turmoil and the festive chaos inside. The warm scents of her Welita's cooking provide a hint of comfort, as she tries to mask her puffy eyes from the tears she fought back. Her family's jovial interactions bring back some lightheartedness, although the pressure of familial expectations and her own unresolved feelings about Greg linger in the background.

Over breakfast, the banter between her cousins provides a temporary distraction from her distress as they joke about relationships and the absence of Mari, who tends to drift away from family gatherings. Amid discussions

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of gifts and holiday traditions, Erica finds herself swearing off men and alcohol, determined to reclaim her sense of self.

As the conversation shifts, reminders of Mari's absence cast a shadow over the festivities, and Erica's anger resurfaces. Despite the bustle of the day, the unresolved family dynamics weigh heavily on her — particularly her complicated feelings toward Mari's inconsistency in their relationships.

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### ### Chapter Three Summary: Selena

The chaos escalates when Tía Espy accidentally implies that Erica is pregnant, triggering shocked reactions from everyone in the room.

Quick-thinking Selena intervenes, clarifying that Erica is simply hungover, which dissipates the tension. Laughter ensues as family members return to their tasks, excitedly preparing tamales.

With the bustling assembly line set up, Erica's family carries out their annual tradition of making tamales together. Despite her own thoughts clouded by Erica's breakup, Selena finds joy in the familiar chaos of family life. Joined by her younger sister Rachel, the celebration is a reminder of the importance of their family bonds — yet a deep-seated worry about Erica's emotional state remains.

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Selena reflects on her own career struggles and the constant comparison with her cousins, particularly regarding love lives. The pressure to date and settle down weighs on them, igniting familial debates. Consequently, Selena hopes to shield Erica from unwanted attention, though as the gossip releases, it sows seeds of worry for those close to her.

However, the atmosphere lightens again with humorous jabs and memories, although thoughts of Mari's absence still cast a shadow. Bonding over their shared cynicism about family dynamics, the cousins navigate their holiday together, engaging in playful banter and maintaining an outward façade of cheerfulness amidst deeper underlying emotional currents. Amid the laughter, Selena senses the unraveling of familial relationships and the looming absence of Mari, a reminder that while they can enjoy the moment, unresolved issues linger beneath the festive surface.

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# Chapter 3 Summary: SELENA

### Summary of Chapters Three and Four

## Chapter Three: Selena

The story opens in the enclosed, family-centered atmosphere of Selena's home during a Christmas Eve tamale-making tradition. The mood shifts from lighthearted fun to shocking rumors when a comment suggests that her cousin Erica is pregnant. The reaction from family members is instant: shock, disbelief, and a flurry of whispers. In an effort to diffuse the situation, Selena shouts that Erica is merely hungover, not pregnant, which restores some peace amid the chaos.

As the family returns to their tamale tasks, the scene highlights their roles in a long-standing tradition. The tamale assembly line has been established over the years, with the elder women preparing the masa, filling the husks, and the younger generation wrapping them up. This tradition is more than just about food; it symbolizes unity and heritage.

Amid the pleasant commotion, family dynamics unfold as questions about Selena's job arise. The conversation quickly turns to her frustrations

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regarding her demanding boss, Kat, and the weight of her family's expectations regarding her personal life and career. Selena's annoyance escalates, but before she can dwell on it, Erica announces her breakup with Greg, drawing the family's attention and shifting the focus away from Selena. This reprieve provides Selena an opportunity to check on Erica later, adding a layer of compassion and support within the family narrative.

The chapter illustrates the contrasting personalities and pressures of Selena, her mother, and her cousins as they navigate family expectations, personal aspirations, and the dynamics of relationships. It closes with a bittersweet reflection on love and family, hinting at deeper undercurrents of longing and unresolved emotional conflicts.

## **Chapter Four: Mari**

In Mari's section, we witness a rather intimate and somewhat uneasy Christmas morning with her husband, Esteban. After a romantic gift exchange, including a beautiful diamond necklace, the atmosphere reflects both love and tension; Mari yearns for deeper emotional connection, feeling pressured by Esteban's wishes for children. Although he proposes they start trying for a baby soon, she feels unprepared and fabricates an excuse about needing a doctor's appointment to delay the process.

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As Mari struggles with her commitment to her evolving role as a wife and potential mother, her mind drifts back to simpler times—her childhood Christmas memories are contrasted against her current reality, where her mother-in-law, Blanca, dominates family interactions. Mari feels overshadowed and disregarded, longing for Esteban to recognize her contributions and feelings.

The dynamics shift subtly when Chris, Esteban's best friend and partner, arrives. Their interaction reveals a familiarity and tension that Mari isn't fully comfortable with but can't ignore. When Chris compliments her *buñuelos*, the conversation becomes a brief escape from her familial pressures. However, an accidental near-kiss under mistletoe ignites confusing feelings within her. Mari grapples with inquietude about her marriage and her attraction to Chris, reflecting on what might have been if fate had been different.

The chapter emphasizes the complexities of Mari's emotions: the undercurrents of longing, the frustrations with her marriage, and the unexpected connection she shares with Chris. Ultimately, as strong familial ties entwine with personal desires, Mari is left wrestling with her choices and the implications they bring—casting her into further introspective conflict.

Together, these chapters weave a narrative about familial love, the struggles

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of self-identity, and the intricate dance between tradition and personal aspirations, setting the stage for potential revelations and transformations for both Selena and Mari.

Chapter	Summary
Chapter Three: Selena	<p>The family gathers for a Christmas Eve tamale-making tradition, which is disrupted by shocking rumors about Selena's cousin Erica being pregnant. The family dynamics reveal Selena's frustrations with work and family expectations. Erica's breakup shifts focus back to her, allowing Selena to support her. The chapter highlights themes of unity, heritage, and underlying emotional conflicts within family relationships.</p>
Chapter Four: Mari	<p>Mari experiences a complicated Christmas with her husband, Esteban, feeling pressured about having children while yearning for a deeper connection. A visit from Esteban's friend Chris brings tension, as Mari grapples with her feelings and reflects on what her life could be. The chapter explores her struggles with marriage, family pressures, and a budding emotional connection, culminating in a clash between personal desires and familial expectations.</p>

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## Critical Thinking

**Key Point:** The importance of compassion and support within family dynamics.

**Critical Interpretation:** As you navigate through the ups and downs of life, remember the significance of compassion and support that family can provide. Just like Selena shows concern for her cousin Erica in a moment of distress, you too can foster deeper connections by being present for your loved ones. These acts of kindness not only help to ease burdens but also strengthen the bonds you share. This chapter inspires you to embrace your role as a pillar of support, reminding you that while life may be filled with challenges, genuine compassion can create a foundation of love and unity amidst chaos.

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## Chapter 4: MARI

### ### Chapter Four Summary: MARI

On Christmas morning, Marisol, nicknamed Mari, finds herself still in bed with her husband, Esteban. After a sweet exchange, he gifts her a beautiful diamond heart pendant to match her earrings. As he expresses a desire to start a family soon, Mari hesitates, revealing her anxiety about becoming a mother. Although she fabricates an excuse about needing a doctor's appointment, her feelings stem from a desire to enjoy her child-free life a bit longer.

As their intimate moment turns to a different kind of closeness, Mari reflects on her childhood and past Christmases filled with warmth and family traditions. Unlike her own experiences, she struggles with her mother-in-law, Blanca, who often undermines her efforts to create a festive atmosphere as the couple prepares for the day ahead. Despite understanding the family dynamics, Mari feels overshadowed by Blanca's influence.

When she finally makes her way downstairs an hour later, Esteban and Blanca have already eaten, leaving Mari to enjoy her coffee and buñuelos, a traditional holiday treat she made. Her husband's close friend, Chris, arrives. Their friendly banter offers a reprieve from her tensions with Blanca and

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sparks an unexpected moment when Chris leans in for an innocent kiss near the corner of her lips, impelling Mari's inner conflict. Despite being aware of the boundaries between them, her heart stirs with feelings she wishes to dismiss, pondering on the 'what-ifs' of life had she met Chris first. As the day unfolds, a voice from her past warns her to be cautious of her wishes.

### ### Chapter Five Summary: GRACIE

On another Christmas morning, Gracie expresses her gratitude in a prayer during Mass, reflecting on her family dynamics, including her sometimes tumultuous relationship with her teenage sister, Rachel. A humorous incident involving a little boy disrupts her moment of reverence but adds levity to the day.

At church, Gracie reconnects with familiar faces in her close-knit community, reminiscing about her own time as a first grader at St. Christopher's, where Sister Sheila inspired her to teach. However, her tranquility is interrupted when Sister Catherine, the strict principal, informs Gracie she must relinquish the multipurpose room she had worked hard to improve for after-school sessions, replacing it with folding chairs for homework support.

Frustrated by this unexpected shift, Gracie confides in her friend Selena, who encourages her to stand up for herself and explore new job

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opportunities that might enable her to gain independence from her family's financial support. Rachel's aspirations to emulate Selena's condo lifestyle prompts eye-rolling and worry in Gracie regarding her continued impact as a nurturing older sister.

As the chapter concludes, Gracie grapples with her feelings of being hopelessly marginalized in her teaching role, feeling guilty as she prays for patience and acceptance of the changes in her work environment. Her determination to welcome the new PE teacher with grace highlights her striving nature, even amid mounting pressures.

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# Chapter 5 Summary: GRACIE

### Summary of Chapters Five and Six

## Chapter Five: Gracie

On Christmas Day, Gracie expresses her gratitude in prayer at Mass, amidst humorous distractions, including a little boy's antics. Afterward, she interacts with her family, particularly her sisters Selena and Rachel, while catching up with familiar faces from her close-knit community at St. Christopher's school. Gracie reflects on her fond memories as a student there, particularly influenced by her first-grade teacher, Sister Sheila, who inspired her aspiration to become both a nun and a teacher.

However, her day takes a turn when Sister Catherine, the school principal, delivers disappointing news: Gracie must vacate the multipurpose room, which she organized into a usable classroom, to accommodate a new PE teacher. Gracie's frustration mounts as she feels overlooked and unwelcome, especially as Selena encourages her to consider a new career path that might afford her independence away from her family. Despite the pressure and her self-doubt, Gracie decides to embrace the change and approach her new colleague with an open heart, hoping to cultivate a positive work

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environment for her students.

## **Chapter Six: Erica**

Meanwhile, Erica struggles on her first day back at the Inland Valley News-Press, feeling overwhelmed by her recent breakup with Greg, accentuated by the unexpected arrival of a jacket she bought for him. Regrettably, she spends New Year's Eve with him, leaving her feeling regretful and embarrassed about her choices. As she prepares for a mandatory staff meeting to meet the new city editor, Adrian Mendes, known for his Pulitzer Prize-winning work, Erica is anxious about the implications of having a highly successful journalist as her boss.

Upon arriving at the office, Erica's day quickly escalates into chaos when she confronts a stranger in the coffee shop over the last raspberry streusel bar. This stranger turns out to be Adrian Mendes, her new boss, leading Erica to feel humiliated and frustrated at how she has made a poor impression. When the time comes for Adrian to introduce himself during the staff meeting, the reality of their earlier encounter surfaces, adding to Erica's embarrassment.

After the meeting concludes, she seeks out Adrian to apologize for her earlier behavior, only to find him dismissive. His curt responses leave her

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feeling unsettled, and his cryptic remark about the pastry implies he may not have forgotten her outburst. Despite her feelings of inadequacy, Erica resolves to prove herself, vowing that she will not be intimidated by his presence or his accolades. She humorously resigns herself to the idea that he will now be labeled as "Pinche Asshole Number Two," mirroring her emotional journey of frustration and empowerment as she navigates challenges in her personal and professional life.

The two chapters connect themes of family dynamics, professional insecurity, and the complexities of personal relationships, setting the groundwork for further character development and conflicts.

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## Critical Thinking

**Key Point:** Embracing Change and New Opportunities

**Critical Interpretation:** Gracie's decision to embrace unexpected changes in her life encourages you to also approach challenges with an open heart. When faced with situations that seem daunting or unfair, remember that these moments can be catalysts for personal growth. Gracie's commitment to creating a positive environment, despite her frustrations, inspires you to see change not as a setback but as an opportunity to redefine your path, foster resilience, and cultivate connections in unfamiliar territories.

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## Chapter 6 Summary: ERICA

### ### Chapter Six Summary: Erica

Erica arrives at her workplace, the Inland Valley News-Press, with reluctance as she faces a mandatory staff meeting just days into the New Year. Struggling with the emotional fallout from a recent breakup with her ex-boyfriend Greg, she feels particularly vulnerable, especially since she received the black leather jacket meant for him just as the year turned. Instead of going out with her friend Selena to celebrate, she spent New Year's Eve at Greg's, leading to a night that left her feeling degraded and regretful.

As she prepares for the meeting, Erica talks to her cousins, sharing her anxiety about the new city editor, Adrian Mendes, a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist known for exposing major political scandals. His arrival raises questions among staff about why someone of his caliber would join a local paper like theirs and sparking speculation about his intentions and background.

When she enters the building, Erica heads to the coffee shop for her usual stress fix. There, she encounters a surly man who tries to take the last of her favorite pastry, triggering her frustrations. Despite an awkward



confrontation, she ultimately claims the pastry, savoring the triumph as she heads to the meeting. Unfortunately, her victory turns into embarrassment when she discovers that the rude customer was, in fact, Adrian Mendes, her new boss.

Throughout the meeting, he addresses the team, and Erica realizes she's made a fool of herself in front of him. When given a chance to apologize, Adrian seems dismissive, but she can't shake off the feeling that he might use her earlier outburst against her. Disheartened yet determined, she commits to maintaining her professionalism and proving herself capable—a promise to herself as she mentally labels Adrian as another “pinche asshole” in her life.

### ### Chapter Seven Summary: Selena

Selena finds herself in a meeting at Umbridge & Umbridge, the firm where she works as an assistant account manager, wondering how she became the go-to expert on Latino culture, a role thrust upon her due to her ethnicity. Her boss, Alan Umbridge, unexpectedly asks for her opinion on travel rates to Mexico, revealing assumptions about her background. Despite feeling frustrated by his ignorance, she tries to maintain professionalism but feels the weight of expectations as the “token Latina” in the agency.

After the meeting, she calls Erica to vent about the encounter, revealing her

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ongoing struggle with identity and being pigeonholed. During the conversation, she inadvertently mentions her ex-boyfriend, Seth, stirring up painful memories of her past relationship marked by condescension and racial insensitivity. Selena recalls her heartbreak when Seth described her as a “toned-down Latina,” highlighting her feelings of inadequacy and the pressure of cultural expectations.

Erica encourages Selena, reminding her that the prejudiced assumptions from her workplace are a reflection of their ignorance, not a failing on her part. As they talk, Selena expresses her discontent with her job but acknowledges that while she might not completely hate it, she feels the need for change soon. Selena resolves to persevere for now, supporting herself in the hope of better opportunities while keeping her frustrations at bay.

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## Critical Thinking

**Key Point:** Face your vulnerabilities and strive for professionalism

**Critical Interpretation:** In Chapter 6, Erica's journey through feelings of embarrassment and vulnerability highlights the importance of grace under pressure. This serves as a powerful reminder for you to confront your own insecurities head-on. Instead of shying away from challenging situations, draw inspiration from Erica's determination to maintain her professionalism despite awkward encounters. By embracing your vulnerabilities and striving to showcase your capabilities, you not only set a precedent for growth but also inspire those around you to do the same—even in the face of uncomfortable circumstances.

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## Chapter 7 Summary: SELENA

### ### Chapter Seven: Selena

Selena, an assistant account manager at Umbridge & Umbridge Company, is caught off guard when her boss, Alan Umbridge, asks for her opinion in a meeting. While she initially thinks he values her input, it's soon clear he only wants her perspective on bus ticket purchases to Mexico, sending her into a frustrating spiral. Despite her Latino heritage, she finds it exhausting to navigate the company's expectations to act as the “expert” on all things Latino, which she feels reduces her identity to a stereotype.

Selena reflects on her role as the company’s token Latina—a position she was explicitly told she would fill during her interview. This often involves answering questions about her cultural background that are based on broad assumptions. After the meeting, she confides in her friend Erica, who encourages her to embrace her identity and assert her perspective more firmly at work.

The conversation shifts to Selena’s past, revealing her hurtful relationship with her ex, Seth. He made dismissive remarks about her Latinidad, leading to a painful breakup that made her vow never to let anyone hurt her that way again. Still grappling with feelings of inadequacy—both too white and not

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Mexican enough—she navigates her complex identity. Selena and Erica discuss their shared frustrations about their jobs, and Selena expresses dissatisfaction with her work situation, hinting at a potential search for a new opportunity if things don't change soon. With a hint of defiance, she realizes she can continue playing the game at work while secretly waiting for the right moment to reclaim her agency.

### ### Chapter Eight: Mari

In this chapter, Mari is in her kitchen, preparing a sandwich when her husband Esteban unexpectedly arrives home. Although his visit is brief, he reveals he has volunteered her to chair the firm's charity gala—a role she dreads because it requires her to be a gracious hostess rather than engage in meaningful work. Mari grapples with feelings of resentment towards Esteban for making decisions without considering her wishes. This dynamic reflects a broader theme in their relationship, where Esteban's ambitions overshadow Mari's desires.

As she reminisces about how they met during a catering event, Mari reflects on how her life has shifted since marrying Esteban. Once eager to start her own catering business, she has stepped back to accommodate his needs, slowly losing her independent voice. Despite her attempts to take on more hands-on community roles, Mari feels a lack of fulfillment.



The arrival of Chris, Esteban’s colleague, disrupts her thoughts. They share a moment where he admires her homemade sourdough bread, a rare compliment that stirs feelings in Mari she hadn’t anticipated. As they step into the backyard to view a new fountain that Esteban insisted upon, Mari feels a mix of dissatisfaction and nostalgia for how her home and life should feel.

In a poignant conversation, Chris encourages her to reconsider settling for what does not bring her joy—symbolized by the extravagant fountain. His words resonate, challenging her to reflect on her complacency in life and marriage. As Chris leaves, Mari is left contemplating whether she is truly living or merely existing in a façade crafted by her spouse’s expectations. The chapter closes with her internally questioning the choices that led her to this point, setting the stage for her potential awakening.

Chapter	Character	Summary
Seven	Selena	Selena, an assistant account manager at Umbridge & Umbridge, feels frustrated as her boss seeks her opinion only on a trivial issue related to her Latino background. She struggles with being the token Latina at work and reflects on the painful impact of her past relationship, pushing her to reconsider her identity and future at the company.
Eight	Mari	Mari is confronted when her husband, Esteban, volunteers her to chair a charity gala, disregarding her feelings. This event stirs resentment and reflects her loss of independence since marrying him. A conversation with Chris highlights her dissatisfaction with her current life and marriage, prompting her to question her choices and the façade she has created.



## Critical Thinking

**Key Point:** Embrace your identity and assert your perspective

**Critical Interpretation:** In Chapter Seven, Selena's journey highlights the importance of embracing one's identity and asserting one's perspective in both personal and professional realms. Just like Selena, you may sometimes feel reduced to a stereotype or caught in a role that doesn't define the entirety of who you are. This chapter inspires you to recognize the power of your unique voice and heritage, nudging you to stand firm in your beliefs and contributions, regardless of how conventional expectations might try to pigeonhole you. By doing so, you can reclaim your agency, challenge stereotypes, and navigate spaces with both authenticity and confidence.

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## Chapter 8: MARI

### ### Summary of Chapter Eight: MARI

In this chapter, Mari is home alone when her husband Esteban unexpectedly arrives to retrieve some files. He casually mentions that he's told a colleague that Mari will chair the upcoming charity gala, much to her dismay. Mari reflects on her diminishing voice in their relationship, feeling overwhelmed by her role as a supportive wife while sacrificing her own ambitions, such as her dream of starting a catering business. The chapter explores her backstory, recalling how she and Esteban's relationship began, leading to their rushed marriage. As Mari attempts to find joy in baking, her thoughts are interrupted by Chris, Esteban's colleague, who stops by to return a container of buñuelos she gave him. Their casual interaction is tinged with discomfort due to Mari's realization of her attraction to him, ignited by memories of his previous kiss on Christmas. As Chris admires the fountain in her backyard, a symbol of Esteban's choices overshadowing Mari's desires, they discuss the disparity between what she wants versus what is already done. Chris encourages her to rethink her compromises, but Mari hesitates, caught between societal expectations and her floundering independence.

### ### Summary of Chapter Nine: GRACIE

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In the cafeteria of St. Christopher's Academy, Gracie battles with her anxiety as she realizes that Tony Bautista, her longtime crush from childhood, has returned to the school as a faculty member. Her internal turmoil escalates at the thought of having to reintroduce herself. Gracie

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## Chapter 9 Summary: GRACIE

### Chapter Nine Summary: Gracie

Gracie Lopez sits in the cafeteria of St. Christopher's Academy, anxiously awaiting her turn to introduce herself to a new staff member, Tony Bautista, who is a blast from her past. Once the charming "prince" of their school, Tony was her long-time crush, and the thought of facing him now as an adult fills her with dread. The staff meeting kicks off with colleagues warmly welcoming Tony, and as each introduces themselves, Gracie is taken back to her awkward middle school days.

Her mind wanders to a memorable seventh-grade incident where she overheard gossip that led to a humiliating misunderstanding with him, leaving her mortified, a scenario that stuck with her for years. As Tony's gaze finally meets hers, she introduces herself, fumbling over her words. In an effort to downplay their history, Sister Catherine inadvertently reveals that both she and Tony graduated the same year, and the dreaded recognition dawns on him.

Tony awkwardly recalls her as the "chubby, drab girl" from school, and Gracie wishes to disappear. The chapter encapsulates her embarrassment, nostalgia, and desire to avoid any further interaction with him, setting the

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stage for her emotional turmoil in a situation she long thought was behind her.

## **Chapter Ten Summary: Erica**

Erica Garcia grapples with the pressures of her job as a journalist at the News-Press, particularly due to her new editor, Adrian, whose relentless criticism hovers over her like a storm cloud. Their uncomfortable dynamic worsens when Adrian critiques her latest article for starting with a woman's personal story rather than the factual context of a school board vote on start times for high school. Erica argues that providing a human connection is crucial, but Adrian insists on a strict adherence to journalistic guidelines.

Frustrated by his dismissive attitude, Erica's emotions boil over, heightened by her recent breakup with her boyfriend, Greg. Seeking a moment of respite, she attempts to escape for coffee but finds herself in a chaotic situation as her wallet spills on the floor. Overhearing Adrian disparage her professionalism further ignites her anger, prompting a breakdown in the restroom where she allows herself to grieve both her relationship and her professional challenges.

Supported by a conversation with her friend Deanna, who encourages her to blow off steam during soccer, Erica resolves to confront her issues at work

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head-on. The chapter concludes with Erica submitting her revised article, only to encounter Adrian's veiled criticism again. Despite his supposed justification as her editor, Erica is determined not to be undermined. She questions whether she wants to remain in an environment that feels increasingly hostile, hinting at her internal struggle for confidence and self-worth.

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## Critical Thinking

**Key Point:** Embracing Vulnerability

**Critical Interpretation:** This chapter highlights the importance of embracing vulnerability, as Gracie confronts her past embarrassment and emotions when faced with Tony. It's a reminder that our authentic selves emerge when we allow our fears and insecurities to surface. By recognizing and embracing our vulnerabilities, we can transform challenging experiences into opportunities for growth and connection, inspiring us to face our own pasts and embrace who we are in the present.

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## Chapter 10 Summary: ERICA

### ### Chapter Ten Summary: ERICA

The chapter opens with Erica, a reporter, feeling frustrated as her new editor, Adrian, criticizes her writing process. Since Adrian joined the paper two weeks prior, he has been relentlessly critiquing her work, particularly her claim that she 'buried the lede'—meaning she did not prioritize essential facts in her story about the local school board voting on later school start times. This tension is heightened by Erica's annoyance at the proximity of their desks, which allows Adrian's criticism to feel personal.

Adrian insists that she rework her article to lead with concrete details rather than a personal narrative about a mother's challenging morning routine. Erica argues that her choice makes the story relatable but ultimately backs down when he demands immediate changes, leaving her feeling overwhelmed as she juggles multiple deadlines.

In a fit of irritation, Erica nearly lashes out at Adrian, and in an attempt to calm herself, she heads for coffee only to realize she's forgotten her wallet. On returning, she spills its contents while overhearing Adrian voice his frustration about her to their mutual boss, Charlie. He labels her performance as “mediocre,” igniting a wave of emotion in Erica. This moment connects



deeply to her feelings about her recent breakup with Greg, deepening her sense of inadequacy.

After a cathartic moment in the restroom, where she fights back tears, Erica resolves to confront the situation differently. With newfound determination, she decides to take proactive steps to showcase her value as a journalist. A call from her friend Deanna lightens the mood, suggesting a fun soccer match later in the week, reinforcing Erica's love for the sport and her coping mechanisms outside work.

As the day wraps up, Erica submits her revised article and is met with more of Adrian's mixed signals. He claims to offer "constructive criticism," but Erica challenges this, responding to his earlier jabs. Leaving the newsroom, she reflects on whether she truly wants to stay at the News-Press and recognize her self-worth amid the conflicts with Adrian.

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### ### Chapter Eleven Summary: SELENA

Selena finds herself in a post-intimate moment with Nathan, a charming and enticing man from her past. Their passionate reunion, marked by intense physical connection, is contrasted with Selena's inner thoughts about her resolve to keep things casual to avoid emotional complications akin to those

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she faced with her ex-boyfriend, Seth. Though Nathan ignites an undeniable spark in her, Selena is cautious to not let her feelings for him overshadow the boundaries she has set.

As they regain their composure after a night of fervor, Selena playfully banter with Nathan about his work and travel schedules, illuminating their familiarity and connection. However, beneath her flirtation lies a sense of apprehension; she is painfully aware that Nathan is not Seth and is determined not to fall into old patterns of emotional dependency.

Their playful exchange transitions into serious territory when Nathan mentions a job opportunity at the highly respected Kane Media in New York. Selena immediately grapples with self-doubt regarding her qualifications, despite Nathan's insistence that she possesses the talent to thrive in such a prestigious role. This offer represents both an exciting possibility and a daunting risk for Selena, who fears failure in such a high-stakes environment.

Although Nathan's encouragement makes her consider the leap, she hesitates, wanting to weigh the implications of switching jobs to a larger agency. After some discussion and exploration of the opportunity, they return to their playful intimacy. The chapter balances the magnetic chemistry between them with Selena's internal conflict about her career aspirations and emotional boundaries, setting the stage for her dilemma between comfort in

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the familiar and the enticing lure of new challenges.

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## Critical Thinking

**Key Point:** Confronting challenges with determination can lead to self-discovery and growth.

**Critical Interpretation:** Erica's journey in Chapter Ten serves as a powerful reminder that facing criticism and feeling overwhelmed in your professional life can actually be the catalyst for self-empowerment. Just as Erica stood up to Adrian's relentless critiques and ultimately decided to acknowledge her worth, you too can transform moments of frustration into opportunities for growth. Embracing her challenges not only allowed her to refine her skills as a journalist but also equipped her with the confidence to assert her value. This chapter inspires you to confront your own setbacks with resilience, shedding doubts and discovering your true capabilities.

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# Chapter 11 Summary: SELENA

### Summary of Chapters Eleven and Twelve

## Chapter Eleven: Selena

In this chapter, the narrative centers around a passionate encounter between Selena and Nathan, who share a physical connection ignited by Selena's pent-up desires during Nathan's absence. Their chemistry is electric, leading to an intense experience that leaves Selena breathless. Despite their deepening intimacy, Selena struggles with lingering thoughts of her ex-boyfriend Seth, who left her emotionally scarred. Nathan, in contrast, is eager and carefree, embodying qualities that Selena appreciates but also makes her cautious about fully committing her feelings.

After their encounter, Nathan suggests that Selena consider applying for a job at Kane Media, a prestigious New York advertising agency, where he believes she could find significant career growth. This proposal elicits mixed feelings in Selena; she is tempted by the chance of advancement but worries about her qualifications and the potential repercussions if she fails. This pivotal moment presents a dilemma for Selena—whether to risk everything for a chance at her dream or remain in her comfort zone. The chapter ends

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with them preparing for another round of intimacy, setting the stage for both personal and professional exploration.

## **Chapter Twelve: Mari**

The spotlight shifts to Mari, who plans a surprise lunch visit to her husband Esteban at his law firm, Delgado & Ramos. However, her excitement quickly turns to disappointment when she learns that Esteban is still busy in court and doesn't return her calls. The emotional buildup leads Mari to reflect on her feelings of neglect and loneliness, especially as Esteban's demanding career continues to take precedence over their relationship.

As she grapples with her frustration, Mari crosses paths with Chris, Esteban's friend, who notices Mari's distress and invites her to lunch. Over their meal, Chris provides a listening ear and gently prompts her to open up about her struggles. Mari confesses feelings of unfulfillment and the pressure of Esteban's expectations regarding their family planning. Chris encourages her to pursue her passion for baking as a means of finding purpose, recognizing that she possesses untapped potential.

The chapter culminates in a surprising confession from Chris, who reveals his romantic feelings for Mari, a revelation that catches her off guard. Just as tensions peak, Esteban calls Mari, interrupting the moment and further



complicating her emotions. Feeling torn between her husband and Chris's affections, Mari struggles to reconcile her feelings, ultimately convincing herself that Chris's declaration can't be real. The chapter ends with Mari determined to push away any romantic notions Chris may have, illustrating her internal conflict between loyalty, self-actualization, and the implications of love.

These two chapters intertwine themes of passion, ambition, and emotional vulnerability, exploring the complexities of relationships and the challenge of personal growth against the backdrop of deep-seated fears and past traumas.

Chapter	Summary
Chapter Eleven: Selena	The chapter focuses on Selena's intimate encounter with Nathan, who suggests she apply for a job at Kane Media. She is torn between the opportunity for career growth and her fears about qualifications and failure.
Chapter Twelve: Mari	Mari's surprise visit to her husband Esteban ends in disappointment as he's too busy. She confides in Chris about her unfulfilling marriage and feels torn when Chris expresses his feelings for her, complicating her emotions.

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## Critical Thinking

**Key Point:** Embracing Opportunities Despite Fear

**Critical Interpretation:** Imagine standing at the edge of a cliff, gazing at the vast ocean of possibilities before you. Chapter Eleven of 'Big Chicas Don't Cry' beautifully encapsulates this moment through Selena's journey as she grapples with the decision to apply for a prestigious job. This pivotal point in her story inspires us to embrace opportunities even when fear of failure looms large. Like Selena, you might feel tempted to stay within the comforting confines of what you already know, but the real magic happens when you dare to leap into the unknown. By taking risks, you open doors to growth, adventure, and self-discovery, proving to yourself that you are capable of achieving your dreams, no matter what scars the past may leave.

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## Chapter 12: MARI

### ### Chapter Twelve: Mari

Set in the bustling atmosphere of Old Town Pasadena, Mari Delgado has set out to surprise her husband, Esteban, with lunch at his law office, Delgado & Ramos. Recently, feeling neglected by Esteban's long hours and preoccupation with work—an issue that has been causing her emotional distress—Mari has decided to take the initiative and reconnect with him.

As she arrives at the office, her excitement turns to disappointment when she learns that Esteban has yet to return from court. In her frustration, she cannot help but feel a sense of embarrassment and rage—that her husband, in his usual trial mode, had left her without a word. When Chris, an old friend from Esteban's circle, finds her in distress, he encourages her to take a break from her worries and join him for lunch instead.

During their meal at a nearby bistro, conversation flows easily, revealing the cracks in Mari and Esteban's relationship. Chris's concern for her well-being leads Mari to open up about her feelings. She shares her dreams of starting a catering business and her fears about not feeling fulfilled in her life, especially regarding her husband's desire to start a family—a desire she does not share. Chris suggests that she channel her passion for baking into

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something meaningful, which resonates deeply with Mari.

Feeling a mixture of gratitude and guilt, Mari is apprehensive about burdening Chris with her problems. Their conversation takes a more serious turn when Chris confesses his feelings for her, stating that he believes he's in love with her. Just as they navigate this complicated emotional territory, Esteban calls, cutting through the tension entirely. His explanation for the delay, though innocent, comes off as dismissive, igniting Mari's annoyance again.

After an awkward interchange filled with unspoken words, Mari reunites with Esteban, stifling the revelation of Chris's feelings deep down. As she wrestles with the implications of Chris's confession and her responsibilities to her marriage, she braces herself for the challenges ahead.

### ### Chapter Thirteen: Gracie

Meanwhile, the narrative shifts to Gracie, a dedicated schoolteacher dealing with the chaos of the classroom, particularly with a challenging student, Arnold Carter. His antics, from claiming to have swallowed a bug to insisting the classroom goldfish, Mr. Bubbles, is dead, only add to her growing migraine. Desperate for peace, Gracie swiftly sends the children to lunch and realizes with horror that her tuna sandwich has gone foul, prompting her to dispose of it far away.



Despite her efforts to avoid social butting heads with Tony—a fellow teacher from her past—Gracie decides to risk entering the teachers' lounge, knowing that cake awaits due to Mrs. Gosling's birthday celebration. The delicious scent lures her in, but she finds herself seated next to Tony by coincidence, igniting old feelings and memories of their shared past.

After a moment of awkwardness, Gracie chokes on her cake and Tony comes to her aid, briefly breaking down the barriers she has erected to separate herself from him. The encounter, however brief, deepens their connection within the chaotic school environment.

The following day, Gracie is called into Sister Catherine's office, where to her surprise, she finds Tony already present. They learn they have been volunteered to help with the fall fiesta—a crucial fundraising event for the school—by providing fresh insights to rekindle its former popularity. While Sister Catherine is enthusiastic, Tony seems reluctant, fearing potential scheduling conflicts.

As they leave the office, Gracie feels a mix of anxiety and excitement at the prospect of working closely with Tony once again. The reality of being on a committee with him looms over her, bringing back the memories of their young friendship and the upheaval of emotions tied to it. She reflects on her past, warding off the urge to retreat. With a comedic twist, Gracie realizes

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she can no longer evade her middle school nemesis, as new challenges await during their collaboration on the fiesta.

Together, these chapters navigate the complex emotional landscapes of relationships—whether in personal struggles or burgeoning friendships—highlighting how individuals cope with unfulfilled dreams, pressures, and the difficulties of communication.

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## Chapter 13 Summary: GRACIE

### ### Chapter Thirteen: Gracie

It's a chaotic morning in Gracie's classroom, where an incessant headache mirrors the turmoil she faces with her students. Little Arnold Carter's peculiar antics—insisting he swallowed a bug and declaring their classroom goldfish, Mr. Bubbles, dead—add to her stress. As Arnold's complaints lead the class into a spiral of panic, Gracie realizes that the unpleasant smell in the room is, in fact, emanating from her own neglected tuna sandwich. To restore calm, she airs out the room and bids her students early to lunch.

Torn between hunger and the desire to avoid awkward encounters with Tony, a fellow teacher, Gracie considers skipping the staff lounge for her classroom. However, upon remembering it's Mrs. Gosling's birthday, she ventures into the teachers' lounge, where the sweet aroma of cake entices her. She swiftly finds herself seated next to Tony, leading to an embarrassing moment where she nearly chokes on the delicious dessert. His concern for her health stirs a flurry of emotions, as memories from their past loom large.

The next day, an unexpected summons from Sister Catherine catches Gracie off guard. To her surprise, Tony is also present. Sister Catherine reveals that due to scheduling conflicts within the fall fiesta committee, both Gracie and



Tony—familiar with the tradition from their own childhoods—are being recruited to help plan the upcoming event. Despite Tony's initial hesitance due to packed schedules, Sister Catherine insists on their involvement, solidifying an unwelcome collaboration between them. Gracie feels a wave of anxiety wash over her; this situation is reminiscent of awkward encounters from their past—a nostalgic yet uncomfortable reminder of their shared history.

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### ### Chapter Fourteen: Erica

Erica's day begins on a sour note when she discovers her favorite water bottle is missing, prompting a frustrating phone call to her friend, Selena. The conversation shifts to Erica's cousin Rachel's impending quinceañera, an event that captivates family and stirs mixed feelings for Erica, especially regarding the attendance of her estranged cousin, Mari. As Erica drives to the soccer field, she battles growing resentment about Mari's presence at the event.

Upon arrival, Erica receives a troubling text from Charlie, her boss, indicating that he wants to meet her and Adrian—the colleague complicating her life—first thing in the morning. The weight of her simmering anger flares as she spots Adrian practicing nearby, the revelation that he's on her

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team adding further stress. Deanna, her teammate, nervously insists she was unaware of Adrian's involvement, but Erica remains in disbelief.

During practice, Adrian's performance as a forward becomes a source of frustration for Erica. His ball-hogging tendencies disrupt team dynamics, driving Erica to confront him about sharing the game equally. But instead of acknowledging her concerns, Adrian remains dismissive. This interaction only exacerbates Erica's frustration, both with Adrian as a teammate and the simmering tension from their past.

With the game underway, the stakes are high, and when a corner kick goes awry, leading to a tying score, Erica's frustration boils over. Adrian eventually scores the winning goal, but Erica remains bitter about his gameplay and their unresolved animosity. As teammates discuss celebrating their win, Erica opts out, overwhelmed with annoyance.

Unfortunately, her escape isn't easy. Adrian approaches to compliment her performance, escalating her ire when he critiques her kicking skills. Their confrontation devolves into a heated argument charged with unresolved personal issues. Erica's frustration culminates in a mutual dismissal, emphasizing her resolve to quit the team.

The following morning, in the conference room at the News-Press, Erica anticipates the fallout from their argument. To her surprise, Adrian

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apologizes and admits fault regarding his management style. This unexpected admission opens an opportunity for Erica to reflect on her defensiveness. Their conversation pivots toward collaboration, prompting a fragile truce between them. As they leave the meeting, a slip of the tongue regarding Adrian's new clean-shaven look adds a moment of unexpected warmth to their interaction, abruptly stirring feelings Erica struggles to compartmentalize.

In a rush of anxiety and newfound emotion, she escapes the conference room, unsure of what lies ahead but reconsidering the complicated dynamics that define her relationship with Adrian.

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## Critical Thinking

**Key Point:** Embrace collaboration despite past complications

**Critical Interpretation:** Reflecting on Gracie's chaotic morning and her unexpected collaboration with Tony, we see that life often presents us with opportunities to reconnect and work alongside those we have complicated histories with. This reminds us that growth can often come from uncomfortable situations and that embracing collaboration, even with past grievances, can lead to meaningful outcomes. By stepping out of our comfort zones and engaging with others, we not only grow personally, but also foster cooperation that can pave the way for reconciliation and new beginnings.

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# Chapter 14 Summary: ERICA

### Summary of Chapters Fourteen and Fifteen

## Chapter Fourteen: Erica

The day begins poorly for Erica when she can't find her favorite water bottle, a crucial item for the upcoming soccer game. After a brief phone conversation with her friend Selena, who informs her that she accidentally left it in her car, they discuss the looming family event of Rachel's quinceañera. Erica feels pressure about the event and the possibility of her estranged cousin Mari attending.

Another source of anxiety surfaces with a text from Charlie, her boss, about wanting to meet with her and Adrian the next morning. Memories of a recent confrontation with Adrian, whom she disdainfully calls "Pinche Asshole," weigh heavily on her mind. As Erica arrives at the soccer field, she is shocked to discover that Adrian is now on her team. This unexpected development complicates her feelings, as their previous interaction had been deeply negative.

During practice, Adrian's selfish playstyle, characterized by him hogging the

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ball, further frustrates Erica. After an underwhelming first half, she confronts him, insisting that soccer is a team effort and that he needs to pass the ball. The tension only escalates, resulting in a game where Erica feels undermined and ultimately blames Adrian for their poor coordination.

In a heated exchange post-game, Adrian criticizes Erica's skills, which intensifies her frustration. Their argument turns personal, revealing underlying issues of trust and judgment in both their roles as teammates and colleagues. Erica feels defensive, lamenting that Adrian's attitude is apparent in the newsroom as well. Eventually, they reach a boiling point, and Erica drives away, vexed at both her day and Adrian's presence.

The following day at work, Erica prepares for the expected confrontation with Charlie about their disagreement. Both Adrian and Erica are surprised when Charlie tries to mediate the situation, revealing that he hopes for a collaborative resolution. Surprisingly, Adrian admits his faults during the discussion, and Erica reciprocates, expressing her desire to work together moving forward. This moment of growth leaves Erica feeling conflicted, especially when Adrian's newly shaven look unexpectedly unnerves her.

In a humorous yet precarious situation, she quickly escapes the conversation, keeping her feelings for her teammate at bay.

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## Chapter Fifteen: Selena

Selena's day at Umbridge & Umbridge is punctuated by her boss, Katherine "Kat" Martin, taking an unusually lengthy lunch. Kat, the senior vice president of marketing, exudes a demanding presence that makes Selena tread carefully around her. Selena keeps track of Kat's whereabouts with some trepidation, aware of the consequences of being unprepared.

As the day progresses and Kat remains absent, Alan, Kat's superior, questions Selena about her whereabouts. Selena pretends to have seen her heading to the copy room just before Kat unexpectedly reappears looking disheveled. This sets off a series of interactions that highlight Kat's domineering management style, which often belittles Selena.

Things take a turn when Kat hands Selena a folder containing stock photos for a client and orders her to choose images based on racial stereotypes—a task that disgusts Selena. When Kat mentions a meeting with a client named Scott Anderson from Cup of Sugar, Selena realizes her boss is using her as a scapegoat should anything go wrong in the presentation.

During the meeting, Kat presents a generic PowerPoint, but when it's Selena's turn to speak, she impresses Mr. Anderson with an impromptu



pitch, showcasing her expertise in social media strategy. This wins her praise from Mr. Anderson and a sense of pride as she watches Kat's attempt to overshadow her ultimately fail.

However, the elation is short-lived when Kat decides to assign the account to another colleague, Rebecca, dismissing Selena's contributions despite Mr. Anderson's interest. This apparent betrayal leaves Selena feeling frustrated and undermined, prompting her to text Nathan about potentially visiting New York for a fresh start, defying Kat's control in her career.

Together, these chapters explore themes of conflict, professional rivalry, and the struggle for identity and respect, both in the competitive workplace and within personal relationships.

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## Critical Thinking

**Key Point:** Teamwork and Collaboration

**Critical Interpretation:** In life, much like in sports, we often find ourselves in situations where collaboration is vital for success. The chapter highlights Erica's struggles with Adrian, showcasing how individual selfishness can undermine team efforts. This encourages you to reflect on your own relationships, whether at work or in personal settings, reminding you that true growth stems from collective efforts rather than solitary pursuits. By embracing open communication and being willing to confront conflicts, you can foster stronger bonds and achieve shared goals, proving that working together often leads to a triumph greater than personal victories.

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# Chapter 15 Summary: SELENA

## Chapter Fifteen Summary:

In this chapter, we delve into the complex dynamics of office life through the perspective of Selena Lopez, an employee at Umbridge & Umbridge, where she works under the intimidating Katherine “Kat” Martin, the senior vice president of marketing. Despite her excitement over a new Apple Watch, Selena finds herself navigating the challenges of Kat's demanding personality, which is marked by her condescending attitude and lack of appreciation. Over time, Selena has learned to cope by keeping her head down and pretending to be aware of Kat’s whereabouts, often lying to protect herself.

When Alan, a colleague, inquires about Kat’s whereabouts during a lengthy lunch break, Selena instinctively misleads him, aware that not knowing could reflect poorly on her. After Kat reappears, she throws Selena into the deep end by inviting her to an important client meeting with Scott Anderson from Cup of Sugar, a start-up with potential connections to Selena’s personal life through her partner Nathan, who previously met with the company.

In an unexpected turn, Kat sabotages Selena's chance to shine by springing the meeting upon her without any preparation. However, Selena seizes the

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moment, showcasing her expertise in social media strategies, resulting in a positive response from Scott. Despite delivering a strong presentation and gaining confidence from Scott's approval, the chapter concludes with Kat undermining her by assigning someone else to the account, leaving Selena frustrated and questioning her position, prompting her to reach out to Nathan with thoughts of visiting New York.

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### **Chapter Sixteen Summary:**

The focus shifts to Mari, who finds solace in her heated backyard pool on a quiet Sunday. Swimming brings back memories of her childhood, especially the moments she spent with her father, who instilled her love for the water. Though she had once excelled in swimming, her childlike passion waned over time, a narrative that reflects her evolving identity in adulthood.

Mari's peaceful swim is interrupted by her husband, Esteban, who expresses admiration for her but soon reveals he has to leave for a work dinner. Their brief interaction is charged with unresolved intimacy, emphasizing a distance that has grown between them. As she reluctantly prepares to stay behind, Mari reflects on how she can no longer depend on him for emotional fulfillment, hinting at a need for deeper connection.

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Later that night, Esteban returns, and they quickly resume a passionate connection. Intimate moments lead to Mari revealing an opportunity to cater a baby shower, a venture that excites her but also conjures Esteban's protective instincts. His reaction contrasts sharply with Mari's desires for independence and personal achievement, leading to a heated confrontation. Esteban's insistence that she not pursue the opportunity stems from his protective nature but clashes with Mari's yearning for self-actualization.

The chapter concludes with an argument that lays bare the underlying tensions in their relationship—desires for professional fulfillment versus traditional expectations—culminating in Esteban's reminder of Mari's promise to prioritize motherhood over her career aspirations, leaving their future uncertain.

Chapter	Key Points
Chapter Fifteen	Focus on Selena Lopez at Umbridge & Umbridge under the challenging leadership of Kat Martin. Selena navigates a high-pressure work environment marked by Kat's condescension. She lies to protect herself and maintain her position during an unexpected client meeting. Selena performs well despite Kat's sabotage but is ultimately sidelined by Kat's decision to assign another person to the account. Frustration leads Selena to seek support from Nathan with thoughts of New York.



Chapter	Key Points
Chapter Sixteen	<p>Focus on Mari, who finds joy in swimming and memories of her father. Her relationship with husband Esteban reflects distance and unfulfilled emotional needs.</p> <p>Discussion arises over Mari's desire to cater a baby shower, causing tension due to Esteban's protectiveness.</p> <p>The couple's argument highlights conflicting desires: Mari's professional aspirations versus traditional marital expectations.</p> <p>Ends with uncertainty about their future as Esteban reminds Mari of her commitments to motherhood.</p>

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## Critical Thinking

**Key Point:** Seizing opportunities amid adversity

**Critical Interpretation:** In Chapter 15 of 'Big Chicas Don't Cry,' Selena's experience under Kat's oppressive management teaches you the invaluable lesson of resilience. Despite being caught off guard during an important presentation, you realize that embracing unexpected challenges can lead to personal growth and unexpected victories. When you seize the moment to showcase your skills, you inspire yourself to push beyond the limitations set by others, reminding you that your abilities can shine through, even in adverse situations. This sparks a motivation within you to face challenges head-on, pushing you to take risks that may lead to personal accomplishments and a redefined sense of self.

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## Chapter 16: MARI

### ### Chapter Sixteen Summary: Mari

On a relaxing Sunday, Mari takes a dip in her heated backyard pool, reminiscing about her swimming history and her father, who was a talented swimmer himself. Despite her early accomplishments on the swim team, Mari had quit halfway through her first season to avoid confronting her father's expectations. While swimming, her husband Esteban arrives to tell her he's home but has to leave again for a dinner meeting with a client named Chris. Feeling neglected, especially since they haven't been intimate in days, Mari tries to seduce him before he leaves, but he ultimately departs.

Later that night, Esteban returns home, and they share an intimate moment that rekindles their connection. Mari excitedly mentions that Julissa, a neighbor, has asked her to cater a baby shower with her famous lemon scones. However, Esteban reacts angrily, suggesting that Mari's involvement would disrupt the social dynamics with a group of women who previously belittled her. Despite understanding his concerns, Mari insists on pursuing this opportunity for herself, feeling the need for personal fulfillment beyond their marriage. The conversation escalates, revealing deeper tensions between them, especially regarding Esteban's expectation for Mari to have a child, contrasting with her desire for independence and professional identity.



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### ### Chapter Seventeen Summary: Gracie

After school, Gracie faces Sister Patricia, who questions her about the new PE teacher, Tony. While the students appreciate him, Sister Patricia has reservations. This prompts Gracie to reflect on her interactions (or lack thereof) with Tony, depicting her apprehension about making friendly conversation with him, driven by an internal struggle and guilt over avoiding him.

When Gracie is outside later, she learns Tony is coaching a basketball game, prompting her to confront her hesitation and seek a professional connection regarding an upcoming committee meeting for an event. She observes other parents fawning over Tony, only to discover he has a girlfriend, which complicates her feelings. After a basketball victory, Gracie intends to avoid him but is called out by Tony, sparking a brief conversation that reveals his desire to collaborate on the fiesta committee. Gracie grapples with her insecurities and judgments but ultimately agrees to meet with him to discuss their plans. They arrange to meet the following Monday, hinting at the potential for a closer relationship shaped by professional collaboration rather than personal attraction.

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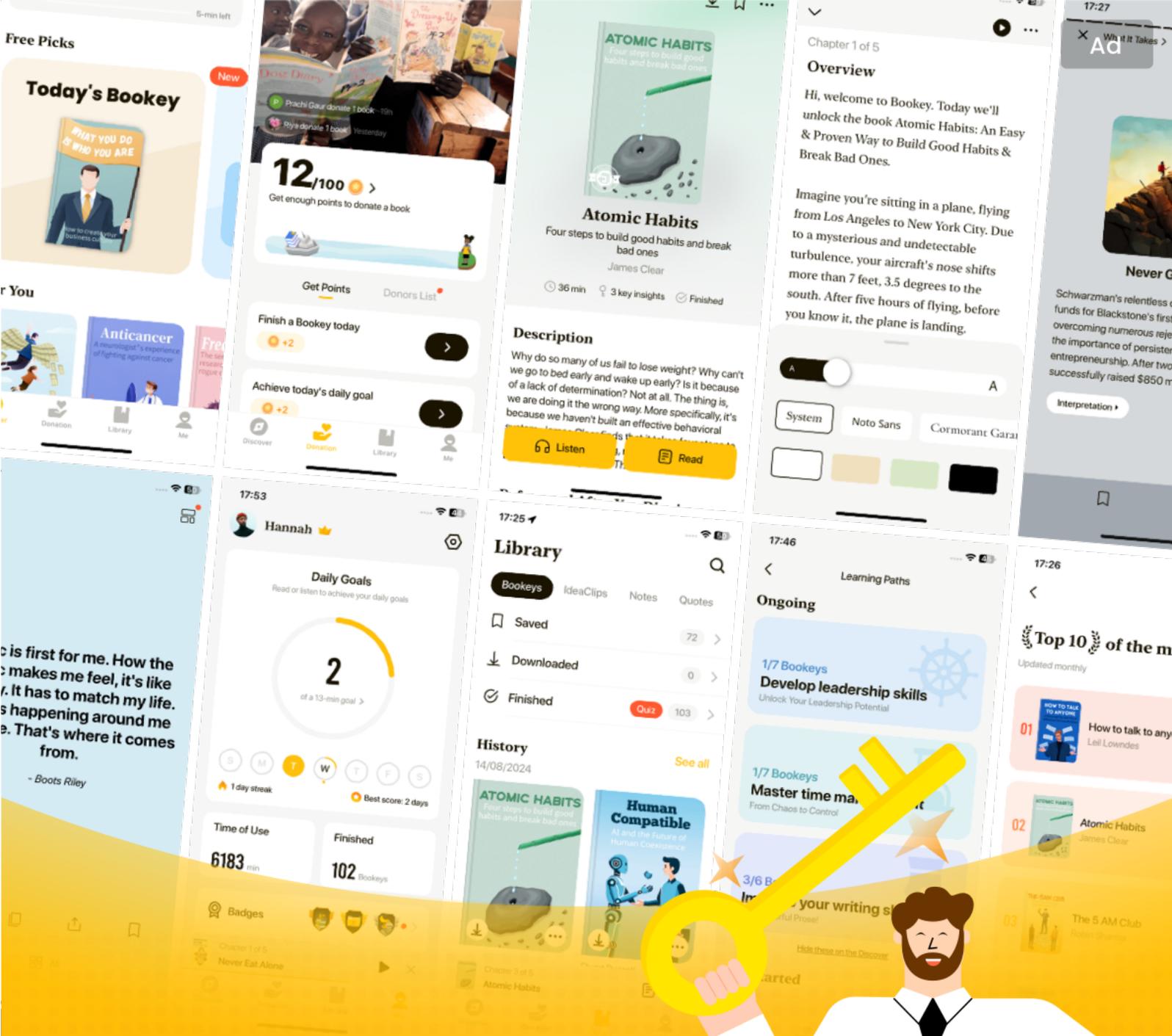
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Together, these chapters explore the themes of intimacy, personal ambition, and the complexities of new connections, reflecting the characters' struggles with expectations in their personal and professional lives.

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## Chapter 17 Summary: GRACIE

### ### Chapter Seventeen: Gracie

In this chapter, Gracie finds herself reflecting on her interactions with the new PE teacher, Tony, while on parking duty with Sister Patricia. Despite hearing positive feedback from her students about Tony, Gracie feels an inexplicable distance from him, as she has never engaged in a meaningful conversation with him. Sister Patricia encourages Gracie to be more open and friendly, prompting Gracie to question her avoidance of him and whether she is being unfair.

As the chapter unfolds, Gracie contemplates reaching out to Tony about their upcoming fall fiesta committee meeting but hesitates, fearing it may come off as forced. While at the basketball courts watching Tony coach, she overhears some women gossiping about him having a girlfriend. This news unsettles her and makes her withdraw from approaching him even more.

When Tony finally catches up to her after the game, Gracie's nervousness is palpable. He expresses a desire to discuss the fiesta committee, but she deflects, feeling pressured by the looming need to impress Sister Catherine. Despite her instinct to shy away, Gracie agrees to meet Tony the following week, realizing she must confront her feelings and the misunderstandings



surrounding him. Their conversation ends on a hopeful note, suggesting a start to a friendly partnership.

### ### Chapter Eighteen: Erica

The scene shifts to Erica, who is now at a birthday party for Mark, where she is keen to enjoy the festivities while seeking out drinks. Her coworker, Adrian, unexpectedly joins her, having improved their working relationship since their previous confrontation. Although he remains somewhat aloof, he tries to engage Erica in conversation while she privately rolls her eyes at his formal demeanor.

As the night unfolds, they share moments together among partygoers, and Erica is forced to confront her past with her ex, Greg, when Kyle asks about him. Here, we see her vulnerability concerning the breakup, just before the discussion about children and family life unfolds, further complicating her evening.

Adrian, who had followed Erica around the party, begins to reveal personal details about his life, including past relationships and familial tensions. This surprise connection challenges Erica's initial judgment of him as just an arrogant colleague. The conversation deepens as they discuss family dynamics and career changes, allowing Erica to view Adrian in a new light.

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By the chapter's end, Erica realizes that beneath Adrian's seemingly rude exterior lies a complex individual dealing with the implications of his past decisions. In this moment of shared vulnerability, they both acknowledge the worth of moving on from past relationships and recognize that they might actually find camaraderie in each other's presence. This realization marks a potential shift in their relationship, hinting at new avenues for connection and personal growth.

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## Critical Thinking

**Key Point:** Confronting personal fears and misunderstandings can lead to growth in relationships.

**Critical Interpretation:** In Chapter 17, Gracie learns the importance of overcoming her reluctance and misconceptions about Tony, realizing that reaching out can pave the way for meaningful connections. This key point serves as a reminder that when we confront our fears and open ourselves up to others, we create opportunities not only to understand them better but also to grow as individuals. Whether in friendships, family, or professional relationships, taking that first step toward communication can break down barriers and foster deeper bonds.

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# Chapter 18 Summary: ERICA

## Chapter Eighteen: Erica

At a lively birthday party for Mark, Erica finds herself navigating through a crowd to refill her beer. She unexpectedly bumps into her coworker Adrian, who has been trying to improve their previously strained relationship.

Despite his still-disdainful demeanor, he shows an effort to be sociable, even joining Erica in conversation. Their interaction is a mix of awkwardness and camaraderie, as they take drinks from a beer bucket together, and Erica attempts to initiate more fun interactions with her friends.

As they mingle, a well-meaning question about her ex-boyfriend Greg from a friend catches Erica off guard. Feeling the sting of recent heartbreak, she diverts attention and focuses on the cute twins that a couple has just adopted. Adrian remains by her side, trying to engage in the conversation, even though his confusion over jokes amplifies Erica's frustration with his social skills.

They eventually find themselves seated on a porch swing together, where their conversation deepens. They discuss exes, personal history, and family, revealing a surprising level of comfort and connection between them. Erica learns that Adrian's second book didn't succeed, which forced him into a job

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he didn't want. He shares his complicated relationship with his father, who disapproves of his career choice.

Their shared revelations lead to mutual respect as Adrian demonstrates a surprising depth beneath his aloof exterior. Erica recognizes that she may have misjudged him; he is more relatable and genuine than she initially thought. Their night ends with newfound appreciation for one another, suggesting a shift in their dynamic.

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## **Chapter Nineteen: Selena**

Selena is at the Inland Valley Civic Center helping prepare for her sister Rachel's quinceañera with family. The arrival of Nathan, a handsome friend who offers help, stirs curiosity and approval from her relatives. As they wrap utensils and bond over family duties, Selena is torn between her feelings for Nathan and the watchful eyes of family members, which makes for an entertaining yet stressed atmosphere.

Interactions with Nathan lead to light teasing, setting an informal and playful tone to the gathering. He surprises everyone by showing enthusiasm about the quinceañera, which further endears him to Selena's family, leading to

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affectionate and joking exchanges. However, Selena's attempts to define their relationship as "just friends" only seem to complicate her own feelings.

The celebration continues with various traditional elements, like the dance between Rachel and her court. Selena grapples with the bittersweet feelings stirred by the celebration—regretting not having her own quinceañera, while also enjoying the moment with Nathan, who engages well with her family, even showcasing a surprising knowledge of Spanish. As they dance and enjoy the festivities, Selena begins questioning the nature of her connection with Nathan, realizing the depth of her feelings when he flirts with her.

Despite entertaining thoughts of a deeper relationship, Selena's practical side reminds her that Nathan's visit is temporary. Intending to remain just friends, she tries to ignore the growing flutter within her heart, reassured by the notion that they only share a sexual relationship. However, as the night unfolds, it becomes clear that her feelings for Nathan are much more complex than she is willing to admit.

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## Critical Thinking

**Key Point:** Understanding and appreciating others can lead to meaningful connections.

**Critical Interpretation:** In Chapter Eighteen, Erica's unexpected interaction with Adrian illustrates the power of empathy and second chances. Despite their past misunderstandings, as they share personal stories on the porch swing, Erica realizes that she misjudged Adrian. This poignant moment inspires us to look beyond first impressions. In our own lives, when we take the time to understand others—listening to their stories and challenges—we open the door to deeper relationships and mutual respect. Embracing this key point can transform our connections, reminding us that everyone has layers of complexity waiting to be discovered.

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## Chapter 19 Summary: SELENA

### ### Chapter Nineteen Summary

In this chapter, the focus is on Selena and her preparations for her sister Rachel's quinceañera, a traditional Latin American celebration marking a girl's transition into womanhood at the age of fifteen. The setting is the Inland Valley Civic Center, where the family gathers to wrap cutlery while balancing excitement and family dynamics.

Selena's handsome friend Nathan unexpectedly shows up with pizza and beer to lend a hand. His presence generates a mix of surprise, curiosity, and approval from her family, especially among her younger cousins. Their banter brings out playful teasing, but it also highlights the tension of Selena's feelings towards Nathan, who she insists is "just a friend," even though there's an undercurrent of attraction. As they work on the preparations, they navigate familial expectations and the underlying theme of relationships, both familial and romantic.

At the church service prior to the fiesta, Nathan is keen to learn about the quinceañera traditions, which Selena finds amusing, especially compared to her previous reluctance about such celebrations. Selena reflects on past family dynamics, particularly the absence of her cousin Mari, who has



drifted away since her parents' divorce, creating a poignant undercurrent of loss during what should be a joyful time.

The chapter culminates in a vivid portrayal of the quinceañera celebration; the music, dancing, and familial warmth briefly distract from personal challenges. However, the chapter ends on a note of introspection as Selena acknowledges her feelings for Nathan while reminding herself of the limitations of their relationship due to his impending departure. Despite the fun and familial connections, Selena grapples with her emotions about Nathan and the complexities of love, friendship, and family loyalty.

---

### ### Chapter Twenty Summary

In contrast, Chapter Twenty centers on Mari, who is grappling with her complex relationship with her husband, Esteban. She is dressed for Rachel's quinceañera, but when Esteban comes home late from work, it's revealed that he forgot about the event. Their conversation quickly escalates into frustration as Mari expresses feelings of neglect and a longing for Esteban's emotional availability. His repeated assurances that his work is all for her only serve to deepen her sense of isolation within their marriage.

As Mari confronts Esteban about his absent-mindedness, she reflects on her

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own desire for companionship and support, especially during family gatherings. Historically, family events have been a source of joy, but now they serve as painful reminders of the distance growing between them. She feels torn between wanting to connect with her loved ones and her aching disappointment in Esteban's lack of presence in her life.

Feeling hopeless, Mari sees no immediate solution, and her thoughts drift towards her friends at the party. Yet, she hesitates, fearing she's not ready to face them in her current emotional state. Mari's attempt to distract herself with baking quickly turns into a moment of introspection, as she realizes that the friendships she once cherished now seem distant due to her struggles.

Ultimately, instead of reaching out or joining the festive gathering, she chooses to channel her restlessness into cooking, selecting a recipe for spinach-and-bacon quiche—symbolizing her need to take control in a situation that feels increasingly out of her reach. The chapter concludes with a somber air; Mari's isolation contrasts sharply with the celebration of family and connection happening mere moments away at the quinceañera, highlighting her internal conflict and the complexities of her life and relationships.

Chapter	Summary
Nineteen	Selena prepares for her sister Rachel's quinceañera, managing family dynamics and her feelings for her friend Nathan, who helps with the

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Chapter	Summary
	preparations. Tension arises as she deals with her attraction to him while coping with the absence of her cousin Mari. The celebration is joyful but prompts Selena to reflect on her emotions and the complexities of love, friendship, and family loyalty.
Twenty	Chapter Twenty focuses on Mari's struggles with her husband Esteban's neglect. Despite being dressed for Rachel's quinceañera, Mari feels isolated as Esteban forgets the event. Their conversation reveals her longing for emotional support, deepening her feelings of isolation. She hesitates to join the festive gathering, channeling her feelings into cooking instead. The chapter highlights her internal conflict and the growing distance in her relationships amid the celebration surrounding her.

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## Critical Thinking

**Key Point:** Navigating relationships requires understanding and honesty.

**Critical Interpretation:** Imagine standing in the midst of a vibrant celebration, surrounded by family, laughter, and the bittersweet stirrings of your own heart. Just like Selena, who juggles the joy of her sister's quinceañera with the emerging feelings for her friend Nathan, you too may find yourself at the crossroads of love and friendship. This chapter teaches us that being truthful about our emotions, even in the face of traditional expectations, can lead to deeper connections and the courage to embrace what we truly feel. It's a reminder that in our lives, as we handle the thrill and chaos of relationships, being open-hearted and honest is the key to forging authentic bonds that honor both our friends and ourselves.

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## Chapter 20: MARI

### Chapter Twenty Summary: Mari

In this chapter, Mari is in the tense aftermath of a misunderstanding with her husband, Esteban, who walked in just as she finished dressing for her cousin's quinceañera. After a long struggle at the salon to achieve the perfect look, Mari is disappointed to learn that Esteban forgot the event was today instead of next week. She shoves the invitation at him and reveals her frustration over having to remind him about events and feel overlooked in their marriage.

Esteban tries to appease her, offering a shopping trip and dinner date as a means of making it up to her, but Mari realizes that material gestures cannot replace her need for emotional connection. She expresses her feelings of being unimportant in their relationship, hinting at a deep-seated resentment that stems from Esteban's focus on work and the ongoing pressure of a significant trial.

Frustrated and feeling unheard, Mari decides to leave to bake something, attempting to distract herself. As she contemplates calling friends, the emotional weight of the situation hangs over her, revealing her isolation and longing for deeper connections, even as she chooses to focus on making a



quiche instead of dwelling on her current turmoil.

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## **Chapter Twenty-One Summary: Gracie**

Gracie navigates her busy life and her budding professional relationship with Tony, a former classmate and now colleague at St. Christopher's school. They meet at a diner before their committee meeting to brainstorm ideas for a school fiesta. Gracie prepares meticulously, albeit anxiously, to impress Tony but ultimately decides to embrace her natural self rather than succumb to trying too hard.

Once at Denny's, Gracie quickly settles into conversation with Tony, who shares nostalgic memories from their school days while they eat. They both update each other on their lives post-high school, revealing breaks and disappointments along the way—Tony's knee injury forced him back home, and Gracie's path has been steady but uneventful.

Their conversation flows with ease, despite Gracie's insecurities. They discuss viable ideas for the fiesta, and Tony shows enthusiasm for the event, suggesting live music to draw more visitors. After their mutually supportive discussion, they attend the committee meeting, where they receive acclaim

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for their ideas. Tony's wink at Gracie suggests a growing camaraderie, and she leaves feeling uplifted, suggesting that the beginning of a potential friendship, and more, might be blossoming between them.

In these chapters, the juxtaposition of Mari's emotional struggle in her marriage and Gracie's emerging connection with Tony highlights themes of longing and the quest for meaningful relationships within the framework of personal and professional challenges.

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## Chapter 21 Summary: GRACIE

### ### Chapter Twenty-One Summary

In the lead-up to a committee meeting, Gracie and Tony, two former classmates reconnected as they brainstormed ideas for a school fiesta while catching up at a local Denny's. Gracie was initially nervous and self-conscious about her appearance, reflecting her insecurities. After a tense wait for Tony, who arrived late, they slipped into a conversation filled with nostalgia about their high school days. Tony shared updates about former classmates, hinting at past loves and the hurdles he faced in his career since returning to Inland Valley.

Their dialogue grew deeper as they discussed their lives post-high school. Tony revealed his struggles with knee surgery and the end of an athletic scholarship, leading him to take a job at St. Christopher's, where they both now worked. Gracie shared her modest career path, revealing she had remained in education and at the same school all these years. As they talked, the chemistry between them grew, further highlighted by their banter about relationships.

They then dove into planning the fiesta, brainstorming ideas to elevate its appeal. Tony was enthusiastic about incorporating live music, reflecting his

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passion for making the event successful. That evening, they presented their ideas during the committee meeting, where their contributions were well-received, sparking camaraderie and excitement for the upcoming event. Gracie left, buoyed by their teamwork and the hope of a rekindled friendship.

### ### Chapter Twenty-Two Summary

Erica, a spirited and competitive character, celebrated a recent victory with her soccer team at their usual hangout, the Scoreboard. Despite feeling exhausted from three games, she was animated and ready to dance, delighting in the joyful atmosphere. Her camaraderie with Adrian Mendes, her former adversary now turned friend, became central to her story. Erica's playful nature shone through her antics, as she playfully teased Adrian while they shared a beer, a surprising turn of friendship that had blossomed over a couple of months.

As excitement filled the air, Erica's friend Deanna scrutinized her interactions with Adrian, pressing on possible feelings between them. Erica, eager to maintain their friendship without romantic implications, brushed off Deanna's assumptions while becoming hyper-aware of her actions around Adrian. Determined to keep things platonic, she danced with another guy when presented with the opportunity, yet it remained clear that her attention lingered on Adrian.

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When a slow song played, Adrian surprisingly took the lead and joined her on the dance floor, igniting an intimate moment between them. The chemistry was palpable, as Erica found herself enjoying dancing with him more than she anticipated. After the song ended, a wave of heat washed over Erica, and feeling dizzy, she stepped outside for some air.

Adrian followed, expressing genuine concern for her well-being. Their honest conversation further deepened their bond, revealing the growth in their relationship. In this vulnerable moment, they shared a light-hearted exchange about supporting each other through uncomfortable experiences, solidifying their friendship. In essence, this chapter not only highlighted their playful banter but also explored their evolving intimacy, hinting at potential deeper connections brewing beneath the surface.

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## Chapter 22 Summary: ERICA

### Chapter Twenty-Two Summary

In this chapter, Erica revels in the exhilaration of winning a soccer match, showcasing her abundant enthusiasm and tendency to celebrate wins in an over-the-top manner. Celebrating at their favorite bar, The Scoreboard, she shares a moment of camaraderie with her teammates, including her unexpected friend Adrian Mendes, whom she initially saw as an adversary. Their developing friendship is marked by playful banter and shared drinks, highlighting a mutual respect that has grown over two months.

As she dances and enjoys the atmosphere, her friend Deanna's teasing about her close friendship with Adrian ignites Erica's self-awareness. Despite her claims of merely being friends with Adrian, she begins to question the nature of their relationship after sharing a hug with him. When another guy asks Erica to dance, she eagerly accepts to distract herself from her burgeoning feelings but quickly realizes she doesn't have a romantic interest in him. The chemistry between her and Adrian becomes evident when he unexpectedly takes her to the dance floor for a slow song, leading Erica to feel a mixture of comfort and nervous excitement in his arms.

After the dance, Erica experiences a wave of dizziness that prompts her to

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excuse herself for fresh air. Adrian's genuine concern for her well-being during this moment is touching, and they share a light-hearted conversation, revealing a deeper connection. This chapter emphasizes the complexity of friendships that can blossom unexpectedly, as well as Erica's struggle to navigate her feelings amidst the backdrop of her celebratory spirit.

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### **Chapter Twenty-Three Summary**

In the following chapter, Selena arrives in New York for an important job interview while reconnecting with Nathan, a man she has had a casual relationship with over the past year. Their interaction is warm and intimate, revealing a shift that has occurred in their relationship as they engage in deeper conversations beyond physical encounters. Despite her happiness with Nathan, Selena grapples with uncertainties about her feelings and the prospect of their future.

The next day, Selena faces the highly competitive interview process for an account manager position at Kane, navigating challenging questions from a stern vice president, Leo Markham. Undermined by Leo's initial skepticism about her qualifications, Selena rises to the occasion with a passionate defense of her skills and experience. This confrontation reveals her

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determination and capability, even if it leads to a potentially explosive end to the interview.

Surprisingly, after her perceived disaster, Nathan informs her that the interviewers were impressed, placing her at the top of their candidate list, which leaves her conflicted and elated yet anxious about the prospect of moving to New York. As she finds herself excited by the idea of her new job, she also grapples with the idea of leaving her life in Los Angeles behind and what that all means for her family relationships, especially with Erica.

Later, while shopping at Bergdorf Goodman, Selena encounters her cousin Mari, sparking nostalgia but also reflecting on the altered dynamics of their relationship. Their brief reunion highlights the gulf that has formed between family members, enhancing Selena's sense of longing for deeper connections. Ultimately, this chapter paints a portrait of professional ambition clashing with personal relationships, as Selena stands at a fork in her life, contemplating the weight of her choices ahead.

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## Chapter 23 Summary: SELENA

### ### Chapter Twenty-Three: Selena

Selena arrives at LaGuardia Airport in New York City late at night, greeted by Nathan, a man she's enjoyed a complicated yet intimate relationship with over the past year. Their dynamic has shifted from a one-time encounter to frequent communication, although she is hesitant to classify it as dating. As they share a lighthearted moment, Selena reflects on her family's incessant inquiries about Nathan, revealing her uncertainty about their future together, especially with an important job interview for an account manager position weighing on her mind.

Nathan invites her to stay at his apartment, which she accepts, and after a late dinner, they share an intimate night together. The next day, she feels prepared for her interview with Kane, a prestigious firm, only to be met with the daunting presence of Leo Markham, the VP of Marketing. Unlike the initial interviewers, Leo is critical and dismissive, questioning why she is even considered for the position given her résumé.

Despite the pressure, Selena defends her experience passionately, pointing out that her versatility at a smaller agency offers unique advantages that could benefit Kane. Their confrontation culminates in an empowering

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moment for Selena as she walks out of the interview, feeling both proud and anxious about the outcome.

Later, feeling guilty and fearing Nathan might be disappointed, she prepares for dinner with him. Expecting the worst news from the interview, Selena is surprised to learn from Nathan that the feedback was indeed positive, with Leo having praised her capabilities. This unexpected twist fills her with a mix of joy and apprehension, particularly as it dawns on her that accepting the job would mean a significant life change, including leaving Los Angeles and her family.

Facing her thoughts, Selena indulges in shopping at Bergdorf Goodman, where she runs into her cousin, Mari. Their interactions expose the strain in their relationship and highlight the emotional distance that has grown among family members. After a brief, awkward encounter, Selena exits the store, uncertain, not only about her potential new job but about rekindling connections with her family.

### ### Chapter Twenty-Four: **Mari**

Meanwhile, Mari is reflective as she prepares to meet her husband, Esteban, for dinner in New York. She's aware of her strained connection with Selena and regrets not inviting her to spend time together, especially after the

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awkwardness of their last meeting. Mari contemplates her complicated feelings surrounding cousinhood and her past experiences with Selena. She feels pressured by her own desire to showcase her successes, as evidenced by her impulsive purchase of a luxurious handbag that Selena had admired.

Esteban, who is in New York for professional reasons, reassures Mari with promises of a romantic evening despite his busy schedule. Yet, unbeknownst to her, tensions in their own relationship linger below the surface, and Mari senses they've drifted apart. Though they share tender moments, the dinner is overshadowed by discomfort, especially when a familiar face—Chris—enters the scene. Chris's attention to Mari and the casual flirtations intensify her inner conflict about her marriage.

As the evening progresses, Mari struggles with a mounting anxiety about her unspoken ambitions, particularly her interest in starting a catering business. Chris's encouragement makes Mari question her choices, yet she remains silent about her aspirations, feeling trapped in her current role.

After a brief, heated moment alone with Chris, Mari asserts that nothing can happen between them, reaffirming her commitment to her marriage. However, the emotional tension remains palpable. When Esteban later reveals a casual interaction with Chris, Mari brushes it off with humor, but deep down, she knows that her tangled feelings towards Chris and her dissatisfaction with her marriage remain unresolved.

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Both Selena and Mari grapple with relationship anxieties—Selena with Nathan and a possible move to New York, and Mari with Esteban and her unfulfilled dreams—setting the stage for further exploration of their intertwined lives.

Chapter	Summary
Chapter Twenty-Three: Selena	Selena arrives in NYC and reunites with Nathan, reflecting on their complicated relationship and her upcoming job interview with Kane. After a night together, Selena faces a critical interviewer, Leo Markham, but stands up for her experience. Despite initial discouragement, she learns that the feedback was positive, leaving her with mixed emotions about accepting the job and leaving Los Angeles. Later, she encounters her cousin Mari during a shopping trip, highlighting the emotional distance in their family.
Chapter Twenty-Four: Mari	Mari prepares for dinner with her husband Esteban in NYC, reflecting on her strained relationship with Selena and her own ambitions. Despite Esteban's reassurances, tensions in their marriage surface, particularly when Chris enters the scene, triggering Mari's insecurities about her unfulfilled desires. After a moment alone with Chris, Mari reaffirms her commitment to her marriage while remaining anxious about her aspirations, indicating unresolved issues in both her personal and professional life.



## Chapter 24: MARI

### ### Chapter Twenty-Four Summary

Marisol is feeling a mix of emotions as she prepares for dinner with her husband, Esteban, in New York. She reflects on her cousin Selena, who is visiting but whom she awkwardly declined to meet up with. Marisol recalls the uncomfortable dynamics of her past family gatherings, where she often felt inadequate compared to her more affluent cousins. A sense of regret lingers, particularly over a handbag she purchased and how her actions might have inadvertently hurt Selena.

The dinner is supposed to be a chance to reconnect with Esteban amid his busy schedule in the city, where he is meeting a film director named Tuck Hunter. Despite her anticipation for romance and the idea of seeing a Broadway show, Esteban's late arrival and the need to meet business associates dampen Marisol's spirits.

At the restaurant, Marisol meets Tuck, along with his manager and assistant, including Chris, a man from her past who greets her with surprising familiarity. As Esteban boasts about her achievements, Marisol feels a wave of anxiety about her own unaddressed ambitions, particularly regarding her desire to start a catering business. Chris's flirtation adds to her discomfort,



causing her to excuse herself to the restroom to gather her composure.

In a moment of unexpected tension with Chris, she asserts her boundaries, reinforcing that nothing can happen between them since she is married.

Despite their conversation ending without further incident, Marisol senses a shift in Chris's attention toward Darcy, Tuck's assistant, and she chooses to push her unease aside. The evening culminates in mixed emotions as images of Esteban's interactions with Darcy later haunt her thoughts.

### ### Chapter Twenty-Five Summary

Gracie embarks on a “research” outing with Tony to see a cover band called Come On, Jolene. This is their third time hanging out, and while they are evaluating bands for an upcoming fiesta, Gracie feels like she is experiencing new life in their company. Tony compliments her, igniting butterflies of both excitement and anxiety within her, as she struggles with finding her voice and interests outside of her family obligations.

As they share stories, Gracie opens up about her family, her grandmother's activity, and heartfelt memories, something that surprises her as they arrive at the bar. The atmosphere is lively, and as they listen to the band, Tony takes the lead in their flirtation, inviting Gracie to dance. Memories of her past dances stir in Gracie, leading to a complex swirl of emotions.

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Deeply enjoying their time together, Gracie feels anxious moments slip away, but it's not until they are back at her home that the conversation turns unexpectedly deep. Tony reveals his observation that she had seemed to avoid him in high school, prompting her to confront an old memory that had lingered too long. She admits overhearing his intentions to take advantage of

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## Chapter 25 Summary: GRACIE

### Summary: Chapters Twenty-Five and Twenty-Six

### Chapter Twenty-Five: Gracie

Gracie embarks on her third outing under the guise of "research" with Tony, visiting a bar to check out an '80s cover band, Come On, Jolene. Excited yet nervous, Gracie feels a youthful energy alongside Tony, who compliments her a lot, making her blush. Their conversation flows easily as they share stories about their families, with Gracie opening up about her fond memories of her great-grandmother, Welita, showcasing her family-centric values.

At the bar, a comfortable vibe encompasses them as they share drinks and physical closeness. When Tony pulls her to dance, Gracie recalls her hesitant experiences with boys, particularly a painful first kiss that tainted her view of intimacy. Nonetheless, dancing with Tony feels different—a sense of rightness envelops her. His confidence and ease only heighten her emotions, igniting a budding attraction.

As they leave the bar, Tony inquires why Gracie was reserved in school, prompting her to confront an old memory about a group project where she

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felt undervalued. Tony admits his previous behavior and offers a sincere apology, signaling a potential new friendship. Gracie feels warmth from his remorse and agrees to start fresh. As she goes home smiling, she contemplates sharing the evening's revelations with her friend, Selena.

## **Chapter Twenty-Six: Erica**

The scene shifts to Erica's experience during Welita's birthday and Easter Sunday. She brings her grandmother lilies, honoring the family tradition of gifting flowers, despite her cousin Marisol's earlier visit and lavish gift seeming to overshadow her own efforts. Erica's discomfort with Marisol's absence at the family gathering underscores deeper familial tensions.

Welita's fatigue alerts Erica to possible deeper worries, compelling her to promise to reconnect with Marisol. This mirrors her own frustrations with familial relationships, particularly concerning her cousin's estrangement from the family. Despite her irritation, Erica engages with her relatives, sharing lighter moments while internally grappling with her priorities regarding family unity.

Meanwhile, over a potluck meal, Erica's commitment to Weight Watchers grates against her desire to indulge during this festive occasion. Gracie joins in this effort, but both find themselves comically lamenting about their diets

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amid the delicious spread. Their banter, especially with Selena's teasing over Gracie's feelings for Tony, reveals a close-knit, playful dynamic among the cousins.

The chapter converges with heartfelt discussions about love, intimacy, and personal growth. They encourage Gracie to embrace her feelings for Tony while illuminating their own understanding of relationships, hinting that a romantic future may be waiting not just for Gracie, but also for Erica. The chapter playfully ends with Erica joking about her culinary fantasies, lightening the mood and maintaining the tight connection with her cousins.

These two chapters encapsulate the blend of romance and familial bonds, exploring themes of self-discovery, the importance of relationships, and the light-hearted struggles of young adulthood amidst societal norms and personal aspirations.

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# Chapter 26 Summary: ERICA

## Chapter Twenty-Six Summary

On a sunny Easter Sunday, Erica visits her abuela, Welita, to celebrate her birthday and presents her with a bouquet of lilies, a customary gift that reflects Welita's joy and gratitude in receiving flowers. This tradition has become a family joke, as everyone brings flowers, much to Welita's amusement. Erica also gifts Welita a CD of the \*Jersey Boys\* soundtrack, which excites her because the family plans to attend the musical together.

However, Erica's mood is clouded by mixed feelings about her cousin Marisol, who had visited Welita the day prior to drop off a cake and flowers, rather than attending the family gathering on the actual day. Erica reminisces about their once-close relationship as children and expresses her desire for a tighter family bond. Welita, sensing Erica's unease, encourages her by saying, "Nunca es demasiado tarde," implying it is never too late to mend relationships.

Later, Erica's thoughts turn as she interacts with her family members. Despite the festive atmosphere, her irritability grows from thoughts concerning Marisol and her perceived indifference. Erica feels a weight on her heart as she grapples with the changes in family dynamics and her worry



over Welita's health, especially since Welita appears tired and mentions feeling under the weather.

Compounding her mood is Erica's decision to start a weight-loss program just before the holiday, which makes her feel deprived of the delicious food that is typical of their potluck celebrations. As her cousins engage in light-hearted banter over their diets, Erica succumbs to temptation, sneaking bites of desserts. While they walk and discuss Gracie's unvoiced feelings for a boy, she finds herself in a moment of self-realization about the complexities of relationships and their impact on her state of mind. The chapter closes humorously with playful teasing amongst the cousins.

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## **Chapter Twenty-Seven Summary**

In the office of Umbridge & Umbridge, Selena senses a shift in the atmosphere when senior leadership convenes behind closed doors. Her concerns mount as she learns that Kat, her boss, is mysteriously absent from the meetings. Rumors circulate about the fallout from a recent disastrous Twitter campaign led by Kat for a client, which had resulted in significant backlash and a viral frenzy online. The situation escalated when Kat attempted to manage an emerging crisis involving accusations against the

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company's leadership during a live Twitter chat.

Subsequently, Selena is called into a meeting with Henry, the boss, who informs her that Kat has been terminated due to her pivotal role in the debacle. Devastated by the news yet compelled to assist Kat in packing up her office, Selena grapples with mixed feelings. During their brief time together, Kat reveals that she had masterminded a revenge plot against Darren George, a colleague who was cheating on her—a shock revelation that leaves Selena reeling. Kat's admission uncovers a level of bitterness and personal turmoil that shatters Selena's previous perceptions of her.

Despite the gravity of the moment, Kat offers Selena a piece of advice: never compromise her career for a man, a warning shaped by her own regret. As Kat drives away from the office, Selena is left in a contemplative state, aware that significant changes loom within her workplace. This chapter underscores the unpredictable nature of professional environments and the personal entanglements that can complicate them.

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## Chapter 27 Summary: SELENA

### ### Chapter Twenty-Seven Summary

At Umbridge & Umbridge, tensions rise as Selena notices the senior leadership team convening in a closed meeting, while her boss, Kat, is conspicuously absent. After learning that Kat was involved in a recent Twitter debacle during a social media campaign for George & Sons—a real estate company that imploded when allegations against their VP surfaced—Selena's curiosity piques.

Inside Henry's office, the shocking news unfolds: Kat is terminated due to her involvement in the incident, which had turned the agency's reputation into a target for scrutiny. Henry informs Selena of Kat's termination and asks her to assist Kat in clearing out her office. Despite her complex feelings about Kat, Selena obeys and helps pack her belongings. As they work, Selena is taken aback when Kat reveals that she set up a fake Twitter account to lash out at Darren, the VP, as revenge for his infidelity.

Kat's confession leaves Selena stunned; Kat implores her to not let a man distract her from her career. Their brief moment together concludes with a handshake, and Kat drives away with her belongings, leaving Selena to grapple with the impending changes at work.



### ### Chapter Twenty-Eight Summary

On the third Wednesday in May, Mari finds herself in a familiar yet uncomfortable setting: a conference room at Delgado & Ramos for a charity gala planning meeting. Amidst the discussions, she is blindsided by the unexpected presence of Chris, a man with whom she shares a complicated past. Chris's involvement in the committee is thrust upon her when their colleague, Alicia, suggests his participation would elevate the event's significance.

As the meeting proceeds, the socialite Dawn Beck enters the picture, eager to glean gossip and assert her presence over the plans. Tension mounts as Dawn tries to pry into Chris's relationship status, to which Mari withholds information, knowing how Dawn thrives on scandal. Mari reflects on past interactions where Chris turned down Dawn's advances, prompting her to shield her emotions regarding Chris's presence.

After the meeting, the anxiety Mari feels regarding Dawn and Chris culminates in her repressed anger. In an attempt to find solace, she loses herself in baking, a longstanding hobby that serves as her escape and creativity outlet. However, as she navigates personal insecurities and the insatiable expectations from her social circles, she reflects on the importance of recognizing boundaries while also confronting meddling figures like

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Dawn.

Letty, Mari's supportive friend, intervenes, helping Mari redirect her frustration into rejuvenation through cooking. Through the simplicity of baking, Mari wrestles with larger themes of control and the complexities of her life while grappling with distractions that threaten her ambitions. Ultimately, it becomes clear that the entanglements of her professional and personal life require careful navigation, mirroring the delicate craft of baking—requiring adjustments but also offering forgiveness through second chances.

Chapter	Summary
Twenty-Seven	Selena notices tension at Umbridge & Umbridge as senior leadership holds a closed meeting. She learns Kat was fired due to a scandal involving a Twitter campaign gone wrong for George & Sons. While helping Kat pack her office, Kat reveals she created a fake account to retaliate against Darren, the VP, for his infidelity. Kat advises Selena to focus on her career instead of men. After their brief interaction, Kat leaves, leaving Selena pondering workplace changes.
Twenty-Eight	Mari attends a charity gala planning meeting at Delgado & Ramos, where she is unexpectedly confronted by Chris, a man from her past. Tension rises when gossipy Dawn Beck enters the meeting, keen on uncovering Chris's relationship status. Post-meeting, Mari feels overwhelmed and channels her emotions into baking, which offers her an escape. Letty, her friend, encourages her to redirect frustration into cooking, highlighting the need for personal boundaries amidst external pressures while also drawing parallels between baking and life's challenges.

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## Chapter 28: MARI

### ### Chapter Twenty-Eight - Summary (Mari)

In the conference room of Delgado & Ramos, Mari, the firm's charity gala planner, dreads another meeting for the upcoming fall event. She's brought homemade cranberry-orange muffins, which Alicia, the community partnerships manager, appreciates. The atmosphere becomes tense when Chris, a charming and somewhat complicated figure from her past, enters as the newest committee member, raising Mari's annoyance and curiosity alike.

Amid the meeting, socialite Dawn Beck expresses her excitement about Chris's participation but seems to be fishing for personal gossip regarding him. Mari recalls Dawn's inappropriate behavior during a previous party, where she shamelessly flirted with Chris, making Mari uncomfortable at the thought of a potential relationship between them. Ultimately, Mari focuses on the meeting, which discusses crucial aspects like the menu and charity details for the gala benefiting a shelter for abused women.

As the meeting concludes, Chris compliments Mari on her efforts, and a moment of tension reveals his attempt to apologize for his past behavior, specifically for sleeping with another woman, Darcy, as a way of coping with his anger toward Mari. However, Mari remains guarded, redirecting the

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conversation and making it clear that his history with Darcy is not her concern.

Later, at home, frustration about Dawn's probing leads Mari to seek comfort in baking, an escape that has always provided her with solace. She kneads dough for a traditional Mexican dessert, reflecting on her deep-rooted love for baking, learned from family traditions with her grandmother. In a light-hearted exchange with her friend Letty, Mari attempts to conceal her emotional turmoil regarding Chris and Dawn's interactions. Letty's insight about mistakes that can't be undone serves as a reminder of Mari's own confusing feelings for Chris, as she acknowledges the complexity of her emotions while making a fresh batch of her baked goods.

### ### Chapter Twenty-Nine - Summary (Gracie)

As summer begins, Gracie finds herself still attending committee meetings for the St. Christopher Fiesta, not just out of obligation but for the chance to spend time with Tony, a fellow committee member who has sparked her interest. Keeping her interactions with Tony secret from her inquisitive sister, Selena, leads to playful suspicion that escalates into Gracie's eventual confession about their connection. Despite insisting that they are "just friends," Gracie cannot fully suppress her feelings for Tony, adding a layer of tension to her family dynamics.

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During a family visit to their grandparents' home, Gracie faces her mother's challenge to explain her secretive behavior. While trying to maintain that her relationship with Tony is platonic, Gracie's family expresses hope that it could evolve into something more. Her grandmother shares a romantic story from her past to illustrate life's unpredictability, hinting that love can emerge

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## Chapter 29 Summary: GRACIE

### ### Chapter Twenty-Nine: Gracie

Summer break usually brings an end to school activities, but for Gracie, it means continued involvement with the fiesta planning committee—a commitment she secretly enjoys because it allows her to spend time with Tony Bautista, a fellow committee member. She finds herself juggling her family obligations and her budding feelings for Tony while fending off her sister Selena's suspicious questions about her late-night meetings.

Despite her attempts to keep her time with Tony under wraps, Gracie can't help but spill some details to Selena, who quickly realizes there's something more than a simple committee meeting happening. Gracie firmly insists that they are just friends and colleagues, despite Selena's playful teasing about her clear crush on Tony. This ongoing conversation among the sisters reveals Gracie's internal conflict about potential romantic feelings and her reluctance to admit them.

When Gracie visits her family at her grandparents' home, her mother's curiosity further emphasizes her secret. As they listen to stories from their grandmother, Welita, about love and loss, Gracie contemplates her situation with Tony and the complexities of life and relationships. She reflects on the



pain of lost love—illustrated by her grandmother's tragic past—as the family dynamic shifts to tenderness.

Suddenly, this reflective moment is shattered when Gracie's family faces a crisis: Welita collapses. Gracie's world becomes frantic as her mother calls for help, forcing her to confront not only her feelings of vulnerability regarding Tony but also the fragility of life in that moment.

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### ### Chapter Thirty: Erica

Erica finds herself in a hospital—a place she truly dreads due to its sterile atmosphere and unsettling sounds. She is there to visit her grandmother, Felicidad Martinez, who has just suffered a major heart attack. As she navigates the hospital, her anxiety grows, but family support is available in the form of her parents and cousins, though she can feel their shared sorrow in the atmosphere.

The family surrounds Dr. Jonathan Tang, who informs them of Welita's condition: she is stable but has suffered substantial heart damage. The doctor explains that surgery would be too risky at her age and with her health issues. His prognosis—that Felicidad might only have a year left—sinks heavy in the room, contrasting against the hope they cling to.

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After listening to the distressing news, Erica is emotionally overwhelmed, and the reality sinks in as she looks for a moment of comfort with Welita. However, when she approaches the room, she finds a cousin, Mari, praying silently—an image that signifies the deep emotional ties and family bonds within the room.

The difficult day takes its toll on Erica as she heads home, burdened by exhaustion. Upon arrival, she encounters her friend Adrian, who has brought her a care basket from coworkers at the reception desk. Their conversation reveals a camaraderie that comforts her in this dark time.

Adrian can sense Erica's distress over Welita's condition and offers to help relieve her headache with a gentle massage—something reminiscent of fond memories with her grandmother. As Adrian comforts her, their bond deepens, and Erica realizes she may be developing feelings for him. Despite the tumult of emotions surrounding her family crisis, a budding romance begins to take shape, hinting at a potential new start amidst the chaos of family hardship.

In these chapters, themes of love, familial bonds, and the fragility of life create a poignant exploration of relationships as the characters navigate their hearts through moments of both crisis and connection.

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## Chapter 30 Summary: ERICA

### Chapter Thirty Summary

Erica's dread of hospitals is palpable as she makes her way to the Cardiac Intensive Care unit to see her grandmother, Felicidad Martinez, after a major heart attack. The atmosphere is heavy with sorrow as family members gather to receive news about Felicidad's condition from Dr. Jonathan Tang, the cardiologist. He informs them that Felicidad has suffered significant heart damage, necessitating a stent placement. While she is stable for now, her age and health complications make surgery risky, and there's a grim prognosis indicating she may only have a year to live.

Devastated by the news, Erica grapples with her emotions but chooses to be strong. When she finally seeks solace, she finds her cousin Mari praying by Felicidad's bedside. The visit leaves Erica shaken, and she leaves the hospital feeling exhausted and hungry. She encounters Adrian, a colleague, who brings her a care basket from their workplace. Despite her physical pain and anxiety about Felicidad's health, their interaction brings her a moment of comfort.

As they share food and conversation, Adrian offers to ease her headache by massaging her temples, and in that moment of vulnerability, Erica reflects on

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her childhood memories with her grandmother. The weight of her anguish leads her to realize her deepening feelings for Adrian as he comfortingly holds her.

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## **Chapter Thirty-One Summary**

The harsh reality of Welita's situation lingers as Selena and the family leave the hospital, filled with uncertainty. Choosing to stay at her parents' home rather than traveling back to Los Angeles, Selena shares a restless night with her sister Gracie. As dawn breaks, she prepares coffee for the family, finding her mother already at the table, weary from worry. They share a tender moment, offering each other comfort and reassurance about Welita's strength.

Overwhelmed by emotion, Selena's mother breaks down, prompting Selena to comfort her, reaffirming their hopes for Welita's recovery. When Selena's phone rings, it disrupts their moment. Nathan, a recruiter from her job, calls to inquire about Welita and delivers good news—Selena is a final candidate for a significant job opportunity in New York. However, the timing complicates things for her, as she feels torn between family obligations and her career aspirations.

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Despite Nathan's enthusiasm about their potential relationship, Selena struggles to reconcile her burgeoning feelings and the upheaval within her family due to Welita's health crisis. The chapter closes on her desire to prioritize family in the face of impending changes, leaving the future uncertain.

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# Chapter 31 Summary: SELENA

## Chapter Thirty-One Summary

Late one night, Selena and her family leave the hospital after her grandmother, Welita, suffers a heart attack. With the emotional weight of the day, Selena decides to stay at her parents' home instead of heading back to Los Angeles. Sharing a bed with her sister Gracie, she struggles to find rest, aware that a midnight phone call could summon them back to the hospital at any moment.

As dawn breaks, Selena makes her way to the kitchen where she finds her mother, also visibly drained. They share tender moments reminiscing about Welita's strength, discussing an upcoming family birthday party, and comforting each other as tears flow. The connection to their grandmother reinforces the bond they share, even amidst the uncertainty of her health.

Just then, Selena receives a call from Nathan, a colleague who shares both concern for her grandmother and some unexpected news: she is one of the final candidates for a coveted job position in New York. This revelation leaves Selena torn, as she grapples with her family's needs and her professional aspirations. Nathan suggests they could coordinate things if she were to move, inadvertently hinting at a deeper relationship between them.

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However, overwhelmed by recent events, Selena cuts the conversation short, leaving her feelings unaddressed.

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## Chapter Thirty-Two Summary

In another part of the narrative, Marisol (Mari) finds herself lost in thought, attempting to concentrate on small details to avoid confronting the harsh reality of her grandmother's potential passing. She admires the infinity patterns on her silverware, but her moment of distraction is interrupted by Esteban, her partner, who is agitated because he needs her car keys to move his vehicle.

Their exchange reveals cracks in their relationship, as Esteban often treats her like a child, belittling her needs and concerns. The earlier night spent in emotional support after visiting the hospital contrasts sharply with his impatience now. After a frustrating exchange, Marisol feels isolated in her large home, which amplifies her feelings of despair and regret, particularly regarding her neglect of Welita.

Letty, their housekeeper and a motherly figure, enters and senses Marisol's sorrow. She offers empathy born from her own experiences of loss, sharing

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insights about the importance of family and the pain of holding onto past grievances. As they converse, Mari reflects on her complicated relationships with her own parents, particularly the emotional distance stemming from past trauma and neglect.

Flashbacks of her father trying to re-establish contact during the hospital visit haunt her thoughts. Their strained exchange—the anger, past hurt, and her father’s attempt to justify his absence—adds to her turmoil. Ultimately, Mari recognizes that despite her material comforts, she would trade them all for her grandmother’s recovery, cementing the theme of familial love amidst personal struggles.

Chapter	Summary
Chapter Thirty-One	Selena stays at her parents' home after her grandmother Welita's heart attack. She shares a bed with her sister Gracie but struggles to rest, fearing another hospital call. In the kitchen at dawn, Selena and her mother reminisce about Welita's strength and comfort each other. She receives a call from Nathan, who informs her she's a candidate for a job in New York. This news leaves Selena torn between family needs and career aspirations as she cuts the conversation short, overwhelmed by emotions.
Chapter Thirty-Two	Marisol is lost in thought, distracted by details to avoid accepting her grandmother's potential passing. Her partner Esteban's impatience highlights cracks in their relationship, leaving her feeling isolated. Letty, their housekeeper, connects with Marisol over her sorrow and past grievances with family. Flashbacks of her father’s attempts to reconnect further complicate her feelings as she recognizes that despite her material comforts, she values her family's love more than anything else.



## Chapter 32: MARI

### ### Chapter Thirty-Two: Mari

In a moment of distracted reflection, Mari finds herself fixating on the intricate patterns of her silverware, specifically noticing that both her spoon and fork bear a triple infinity symbol. This trivial detail distracts her from the weightier emotional issues weighing on her after her grandmother, Welita, suffers a heart attack.

As she sits in the backyard with her cold espresso, her quiet moment is interrupted by her husband Esteban, who is visibly frustrated over her misplaced car keys. The tension reveals the foundation of their relationship—Esteban's tendency to treat her like a child places strain on Mari, who feels overshadowed and exhausted by the weight of recent events. After retrieving the keys, Esteban rushes off, leaving Mari feeling invisible and alone in their expansive home.

When Letty, the family helper, returns, she offers her sympathy about Welita's condition. Mari opens up about her guilt over not visiting her grandmother often enough, fearing she might lose her. Letty, who has suffered considerable loss herself—losing her daughter and husband—offers wisdom about the importance of family and forgiveness. Their heartfelt



conversation deepens Mari's introspection on her own fractured relationships with her parents. Memories of a painful encounter with her father exacerbate her feelings of abandonment, reinforcing her desire for connection yet reflecting on her past hurts.

As she gazes at her home's beauty for the first time, Mari realizes she would trade everything for the chance to heal her grandmother.

### ### Chapter Thirty-Three: Gracie

Gracie arrives at Tony's house with a myriad of unanswered prayers for her grandmother Welita, who remains in the hospital six days post-heart attack. Despite her worries, Gracie pushes forward with planning for the upcoming fiesta, a commitment that helps distract her from the emotional turmoil she feels.

Upon entering Tony's apartment, she is greeted warmly, and they quickly settle into discussing plans for the event, showcasing a deepening connection between them. As they review contracts for the mariachi trio, Gracie is suddenly struck with sadness upon seeing a song that resonates with memories of Welita.

Tony offers comfort, and in a tender moment, he expresses genuine admiration for Gracie, highlighting her kindness and beauty. Acknowledging

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the chemistry between them, they share a passionate kiss, which escalates into an intimate exploration of desire. Reclaiming agency in their dynamic, Gracie expresses her interest with confidence, leading to them both crossing the threshold into a shared moment of physical intimacy.

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## Chapter 33 Summary: GRACIE

### ### Chapter Thirty-Three: Gracie

In this chapter, Gracie arrives at Tony's home feeling emotionally drained from the stress of her grandmother Welita's health issues following a heart attack. After six days in the hospital, Gracie is exhausted from pleading with God for her grandmother's recovery but is now ready to focus on organizing a community fiesta with Tony. Their relationship, built through working together on event logistics, includes hints of deeper feelings, which surface during their meeting.

When Gracie arrives, Tony's warm welcome and genuine affection spark a moment of emotional honesty between them. As they discuss their plans, Gracie finds herself overwhelmed by a song list, reminding her of Welita. In a vulnerable state, Gracie allows herself to be comforted by Tony. What begins as a professional partnership gradually shifts into emotional and physical intimacy, revealing a mutual attraction.

Their connection deepens as they share a passionate kiss, leading to a moment of spontaneity where Gracie explores her newfound desires. As the scene unfolds, the intimacy escalates, and they eventually share a consensual sexual experience for the first time. Despite initial nervousness, Gracie

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learns more about herself and her feelings in the process, feeling empowered rather than regretful afterward.

However, Gracie is left with a mix of emotions post-encounter, grappling with the implications of her actions but ultimately reveling in the moment, feeling a sense of relief and happiness she hadn't experienced in days.

### ### Chapter Thirty-Four: Erica

In the following chapter, Erica, Gracie's cousin, grapples with her own relationship challenges. She finds herself in a mundane conversation with her mom, who urges her to consider a new haircut. The playful banter serves as a distraction from the underlying tension in their family, notably concerning Welita's health, which remains a significant concern for both women.

The conversation shifts to Erica's job at the local newspaper, where changes are being implemented to compete with online news sources. Erica expresses dissatisfaction with the demands placed on her workload, reflecting on the challenges of journalism in a changing market, while her mother suggests looking for opportunities elsewhere. Ultimately, Erica remains hesitant to leave her familiar role, finding comfort in the stability of her work environment.



Erica's feelings escalate further when she attends a family event with Adrian, her editor and love interest. Unbeknownst to her, Adrian comes from a wealthy family, revealing a wealth disparity that makes Erica feel out of place at his parents' anniversary party. Overwhelmed by the lavish setting, she feels an internal struggle as she navigates her new feelings for Adrian, which have grown since they began spending more time together.

The tension rises as Adrian's ex-girlfriend arrives, introducing an element of competition that shakes Erica's confidence in her place at the event. Despite moments of connection with Adrian, Erica grapples with doubts about her belonging in his world and the evolving nature of their relationship. This chapter intricately weaves the complexities of family dynamics, love, and self-identity, amplifying the emotional stakes as the characters confront their feelings and connections.

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# Chapter 34 Summary: ERICA

## Chapter Thirty-Four: Erica

In this chapter, Erica finds herself in a familiar yet mundane scene at her mother's hair salon, where her mom offers to make a big change to her hairstyle. Erica, a creature of habit, prefers to maintain her status quo with her curls instead of experimenting with something new. Their dialogue subtly reveals deeper familial connections and anxieties, particularly surrounding Erica's ailing grandmother, Welita, who remains hospitalized. The atmosphere shifts from haircuts to work as Erica discusses her job at the News-Press, where she feels overworked and underappreciated amidst a changing media landscape. Her mother suggests exploring new opportunities, but Erica is hesitant, feeling a sense of loyalty to her current job and an undeniable connection to her co-worker, Adrian, which she struggles to confront.

Later, Erica is caught in a whirlwind of emotions as she prepares to attend Adrian's parents' anniversary party. Her growing affection for him becomes apparent, highlighted by her apprehension at being introduced to his family. The lavish party reveals Adrian's wealthy background, a fact that surprises and intimidates Erica, making her feel out of place. The narrative captures her deepening feelings for Adrian within the context of familial expectation



and societal class — complexities that weigh heavily on her self-worth and belonging.

As she navigates introductions with Adrian's parents, she finds both comfort and uncertainty in her rapport with Adrian. In a moment of reflection, Erica grapples with her insecurities about fitting into Adrian's world, closing the chapter with internal conflicts about love, class, and her own identity.

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## **Chapter Thirty-Five: Selena**

Selena is immersed in paranoia regarding her workplace, which she attributes to the lingering presence of her former boss, Kat. Though Kat is no longer with the company, Selena feels haunted by her spirit, which adds a layer of guilt to her professional life. Gracie, her sister, suggests that Selena's worries might stem from her own guilty conscience, especially as she secretly interviews for a new job in New York, a step that would take her away from her current role.

Selena's angst is exacerbated when she's called into her boss Alan Umbridge's office, leading her to fear the worst. However, to her surprise, she learns that she has impressed her superiors by stepping into Kat's

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responsibilities. Alan offers her a promotion, but not the title and salary she expected, leaving her feeling undervalued.

Throughout this exchange, nuances of workplace dynamics and the struggles for recognition in a competitive environment come to light. While the promotion signals trust in her abilities, it also positions Selena in a difficult dilemma where she must balance her current role with potential new opportunities that could change her life.

As she contemplates her options, Selena recognizes the value of taking the time to make the right decision, firmly asserting her agency amid the pressures of her employer. Her internal battle highlights themes of ambition, loyalty, and the complexities of professional advancement. The chapter ends with Selena feeling the weight of choices ahead, making it clear that her journey is just unfolding.

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## Chapter 35 Summary: SELENA

### Summary of Chapters Thirty-Five and Thirty-Six

### Chapter Thirty-Five - Selena

In the tense atmosphere of her workplace, Selena feels the lingering presence of her former boss, Kat, who was recently let go from Umbridge & Umbridge. While her sister Gracie believes Selena's feelings are merely guilt-induced paranoia, Selena is preoccupied with a recent interview she's had for a new job in New York—news she hasn't shared with anyone except her boyfriend, Nathan. As tension builds, she fears that her possible new opportunity might be leading her into a subtle self-sabotage.

When summoned to Alan Umbridge's office, Selena is apprehensive, expecting criticism but instead receives praise for successfully taking over Kat's responsibilities. Alan proposes promoting her to project manager, though Selena quickly realizes it's not the senior vice president role she hoped for. Discouraged by the lack of a substantial title or salary, she resists the urge to immediately accept the position. Alan warns her about the timeline for the role, emphasizing that hesitation could lead to her running the risk of losing her current role to someone new. Yet, Selena is determined

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to weigh her options, especially as decisions loom regarding both the new job in New York and her future at Umbridge.

## **Chapter Thirty-Six - Mari**

Mari visits her grandmother, Welita, in the hospital, alarmed by the visible signs of her declining health. Accompanied by her husband Esteban, Mari grapples with her emotions, feeling a mix of worry and fear as she approaches her beloved grandmother's bedside. Their heartfelt interaction revolves around family updates, with Welita expressing her desire for Mari to be happy—her recurring wish hangs heavily on Mari's heart, especially as she struggles with her own feelings of discontent in her marriage.

As the visit unfolds, Mari reflects on her childhood memories with Welita, feeling an immense weight of nostalgia and regret for not having been completely open about her struggles in the past or the present. On the way back home, Esteban rests a comforting hand on her knee, but Mari's truth remains unspoken. Despite his attempts to lighten the mood by suggesting their favorite Italian restaurant for dinner, Mari's spirit is deflated. She feels emotionally drained and wishes only to retreat to her own space, wishing for Welita's health to improve while grappling with her own unhappiness.

Through these chapters, both Selena and Mari battle their internal fears and

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uncertainties. Selena faces professional crossroads, questioning her commitment and ambitions, while Mari confronts familial pressures and personal despair, struggling to balance her happiness with her loyalty to her grandmother. The chapter highlights themes of guilt, the complexity of family relationships, and the search for personal fulfillment amid adversity.

Chapter	Summary
Chapter Thirty-Five - Selena	Selena is haunted by her former boss's departure and feels guilty about pursuing a job in New York. She receives unexpected praise from her current boss, Alan, who offers her a promotion that falls short of her expectations. Torn between the new opportunity and her current role, she weighs her options carefully, fearing self-sabotage.
Chapter Thirty-Six - Mari	Mari visits her ill grandmother in the hospital, reflecting on family connections and her own marital unhappiness. She feels a mix of nostalgia and regret for not sharing her struggles with Welita. Despite attempts by her husband Esteban to lighten the mood, Mari remains emotionally drained, hoping for her grandmother's recovery while grappling with her own discontent.
Themes	Both chapters explore themes of guilt, family relationships, and the quest for personal fulfillment amid challenges. Selena faces professional dilemmas, while Mari confronts familial obligations versus her own happiness.



## Chapter 36: MARI

### ### Chapter Thirty-Six Summary: MARI

In this emotionally charged chapter, Mari visits her ailing grandmother, Welita, in the hospital. As she enters the room, she's taken aback by the drastic changes in Welita's appearance, which trigger a wave of fear and worry. Despite her initial hesitation, Esteban, her supportive husband, encourages her to approach her grandmother. Their heartfelt reunion is filled with love and nostalgia, as Welita expresses her deep desire for Mari's happiness, a sentiment that resonates painfully within Mari, who feels far from content in her current life.

Their conversation touches on family, with Welita inquiring about Mari's cousins, eliciting mixed feelings from Mari, who struggles with honesty about her own emotional state. After their visit, while driving home, Mari reflects on Welita's insistence on her happiness. She recalls her complicated past, shaped significantly by her parents' divorce, and reflects on her inability to fully open up as a teenager. This inability to share her burdens weighs on her during the drive, especially because she feels unable to reassure Welita amidst her own internal struggles.

When Esteban asks why she is so quiet, Mari admits her lack of happiness

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but refrains from divulging the full extent of her marital dissatisfaction. Esteban misunderstands her sadness as stemming solely from worry over her grandmother, while Mari feels exhausted and trapped in her emotions. They briefly discuss dinner plans at a restaurant, a choice driven more by Esteban than Mari's own desires. This highlights Mari's growing disconnect from her marriage and foreshadows the emotional turmoil she continues to experience.

### ### Chapter Thirty-Seven Summary: GRACIE

In this chapter, Gracie reflects on her budding relationship with Tony Bautista, whom she is still getting to know. Although they have not officially labeled their relationship, their frequent dinners, outings, and physical intimacy suggest a deepening bond. As they enjoy a cozy evening together on the couch, Gracie wrestles with a pressing question she wants to ask Tony, but her nerves are heightened by the romantic atmosphere.

After some playful banter, Gracie requests a shoulder massage, seeking comfort before introducing her question about attending her mother's birthday barbecue. However, just as she brings this up, Tony reveals a potential life-changing decision: he has been invited to interview for a coaching position in Texas, a prospect that casts uncertainty over their connection.



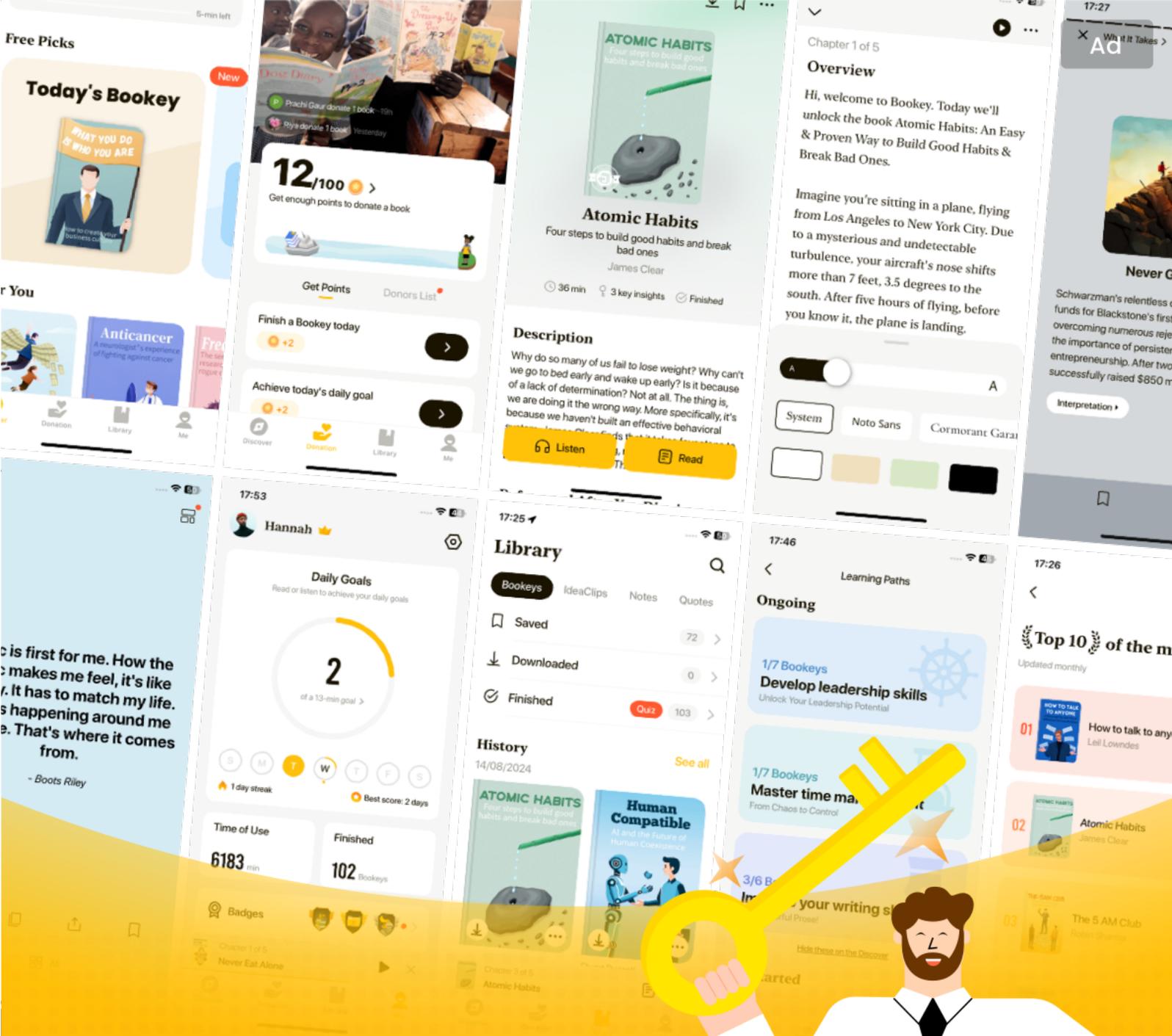
Tony's admission shakes Gracie, who struggles to conceal her disappointment. He acknowledges her value and expresses his care but emphasizes his inability to provide the stability she deserves at this moment in his life. Gracie, fighting to maintain her composure, agrees to his assessment, but the unspoken tension indicates the emotional weight of their situation.

The chapter ends with Gracie driving home, feeling conflicted and burdened. Despite her reliance on faith during difficult times, she finds herself at a loss for words, grappling with the harsh reality of potential separation from Tony, a relationship that had once brought her so much joy.

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## Chapter 37 Summary: GRACIE

### Summary of Chapter Thirty-Seven and Chapter Thirty-Eight

### Chapter Thirty-Seven: Gracie

Gracie reflects on her developing relationship with Tony Bautista, feeling a mix of gratitude and uncertainty. Though they haven't officially labeled each other as boyfriend and girlfriend, their frequent dinners, weekends together, and physical intimacy suggest they are indeed a couple. During dinner, Gracie struggles to voice her thoughts about the future, eventually mustering the courage to invite Tony to her mother's birthday barbecue. However, her plans are derailed when Tony reveals a potential job opportunity that requires him to move back to Texas, leaving her stunned and heartbroken. He reassures her of his feelings but admits he cannot commit to a relationship given his uncertain future. Gracie masks her distress with a smile while leaving, feeling conflicted and alone. On her drive home, she instinctively turns to God for comfort but finds herself unable to engage in prayer during this crisis.

### Chapter Thirty-Eight: Erica

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In a stark contrast to Gracie's emotional turmoil, Erica is engulfed in frustration as she awaits her boss, Adrian, who is late for a meeting. Her feelings of jealousy surge due to Adrian's rekindling connection with his ex-girlfriend, Isela, which complicates her secret romantic feelings for him. Erica is eager to discuss an important investigative article about a school construction scandal but feels sidelined by Adrian's focus on Isela's advice regarding the article's sources. Their discussion escalates into a heated confrontation, where both express their frustrations about their professional and personal boundaries. Just as the tension peaks, Tristan enters with devastating news: Erica's grandmother, Welita, has passed away. Overwhelmed, Erica rushes to the hospital, finding family gathered in mourning. She experiences a poignant moment of goodbye with Welita, feeling her emotional defenses crumble. In her moment of grief, Gracie appears, and they embrace, reminding each other of the fragility of life and the importance of their bond. Erica feels the weight of her earlier argument with Adrian dissipate, as grief takes precedence over everything else.

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These chapters intricately weave both Gracie's and Erica's emotional challenges, touching on themes of love, loss, and the complexities of personal relationships as they navigate life's unexpected changes.

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## Chapter 38 Summary: ERICA

### ### Chapter Thirty-Eight Summary

In this chapter, Erica grapples with her emotions as she waits for her boss, Adrian, who is late to a crucial meeting. Frustration simmers within Erica as she realizes Adrian has prioritized spending time with his ex-girlfriend, Isela, over their work commitments. This incident feeds her jealousy and insecurity, particularly because she harbors romantic feelings for Adrian, knowing full well that their professional relationship complicates any personal feelings she might wish to pursue.

Erica has been diligently working on a groundbreaking article about mismanaged funds halting the construction of a new high school, with a looming deadline to get it ready for publication. Adrian, however, is hesitant to run the story without a third confirmation from an additional source, a point of contention between them. Their meeting devolves into a heated exchange as Erica argues the urgency of their work versus Adrian's cautious approach, which she perceives as influenced by Isela and dismissive of her dedication.

The tension escalates until Tristan enters, bearing tragic news: Erica's beloved grandmother, Welita, has passed away from complications

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following a stent procedure. This devastating blow shifts the focus from the workplace drama to a sudden and profound personal loss, leading Erica to leave the office in a daze to be with her family.

### ### Chapter Thirty-Nine Summary

Selena's perspective in this chapter reveals her own grief as she reflects on visiting her grandparents' home instead of the hospital. Caught in LA traffic and unable to say goodbye to Welita, Selena feels a deep sense of loss as family members gather, each navigating their own sorrow. Overwhelmed by her emotions, she contemplates the impact of death on familial bonds, recalling her close relationships and the life lessons imparted by her grandmother.

Welita is the first close relative Selena has lost, evoking thoughts of how her younger cousins will internalize this loss and how memories fade with time. The family gathers in their familiar surroundings, a stark reminder of joyous times that now feel distant in the shadow of grief. Selena acknowledges how vital her family is to her identity and stability, recognizing that despite their flaws, their presence is essential to her sense of self.

In a poignant moment of reflection, Selena attempts to distance herself from job pressures and heartbreak as she calls Nathan to decline a job opportunity, claiming it's not the right time. She also shares the heartbreaking news of

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Welita's death, underscoring the profound sorrow and disconnection that have arisen from such a loss. Burdened yet surrounded by family, she returns to them determined to support one another in shared grief.

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## Chapter 39 Summary: SELENA

### ### Chapter Thirty-Nine Summary

Selena found herself grappling with the recent loss of her beloved Welita, her grandmother, as she gathered with family at her grandparents' house. The devastating news had struck her hard, leaving her feeling disoriented, grief-stricken, and overwhelmed by the chaotic mix of emotions that came with mourning. As family members arrived, she reflected on the deep sense of loss and the pain of potentially forgetting the small joys Welita had brought into their lives.

While sitting on the patio—a place once filled with laughter—Selena's thoughts wandered to the fragility of life and the permanence of death. Having lost her close relatives early in life, she worried about younger cousins potentially forgetting who Welita was. The weight of realizing that their family dynamics could change forever was almost too much to bear. Despite their noisy, meddling ways, her family was a pillar of support she couldn't imagine living without.

Seeking an escape, she stepped outside to call Nathan, expressing her decision to turn down a job opportunity, as the timing felt wrong in the wake of her grandmother's passing. As she wiped her tears away, she returned to

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the embrace of her family, feeling the comfort of their collective grief.

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### ### Chapter Forty Summary

Mari was also reeling from the shock of losing her Welita. After receiving the news from Tía Marta, she found herself frozen in the kitchen, grief becoming paralyzing. Despite her urge to reach out to her family, loneliness engulfed her; she was home alone with her sorrow.

The arrival of her husband Esteban shattered her silence, as he burst into the room celebrating a legal victory. However, upon discovering her distress, his concern cascaded into a tender moment, leading to tears and unspoken pain as Mari lamented the loss of her grandmother. Their shared emotions briefly connected them, yet the underlying fractures in their marriage loomed large.

As Esteban answered a work-related call, Mari retreated to their bedroom, anticipating the cycle of disappointment that always followed his work obligations. When Esteban returned, her muted emotions erupted. In a rare moment of candidness, she expressed her unhappiness and the deteriorated state of their relationship. The conversation spiraled into a confrontation about their future, revealing their deep-seated issues.

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Mari proposed seeking counseling, yet Esteban’s resistance highlighted his refusal to acknowledge the problem. As the argument escalated, Mari felt disheartened but resolute that change was necessary. After Esteban stormed out for space, Mari was left alone, consumed by the grief of losing her Welita, while her husband, who was meant to be her partner, made everything seem more complicated. Returning to her solitude, she sought solace in a quiet cry, determined to confront her grief and seek clarity in the midst of heartbreak.

Chapter	Summary
Thirty-Nine	Selena mourns the loss of her grandmother, Welita, feeling grief and disorientation. She reflects on family dynamics and the importance of remembering Welita's small joys. Despite the chaotic emotions, her family provides support. She decides to turn down a job opportunity, feeling the timing is wrong, and finds comfort in her family's collective grief.
Forty	Mari struggles with her own grief after losing Welita, feeling lonelier at home. Tía Marta's news leaves her frozen until her husband, Esteban, arrives celebrating a victory. Their shared sorrow leads to a confrontation about their strained marriage, with Mari suggesting counseling. However, Esteban resists, leading to further tension. Mari is left alone again, grappling with her grief and relationship struggles.



## Chapter 40: MARI

### ### Chapter Forty Summary

The chapter begins with Mari in shock after receiving the devastating news about her grandmother, Welita's death. Alone in her large, empty house, she struggles with feelings of numbness and sadness, unable to take action or reach out for help. Her husband, Esteban, returns home in a celebratory mood after a successful trial, only to find Mari on the kitchen floor, overwhelmed with grief. As they embrace, the tension between their emotional states becomes palpable—Esteban's joy starkly contrasts Mari's sorrow.

Esteban tries to comfort her, but Mari's grief transforms into a yearning for intimacy, compelling her to suggest they go upstairs. However, Esteban's responsibility as a lawyer pulls him back when his phone rings, leading to Mari's sense of abandonment. When Esteban eventually returns home, the mood shifts; Mari, now filled with anger and resentment, confronts him about the state of their marriage. She declares that they are "broken" and need counseling, revealing her deep unhappiness and unfulfilled desires for personal growth, which Esteban dismisses.

Their ensuing argument forces both to confront issues they've avoided for

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too long. Mari feels trapped in a cycle of defensiveness and disappointment, while Esteban struggles to understand her needs. As the discussion escalates, Esteban storms out to clear his head, leaving Mari alone with her grief for her grandmother and her unfulfilled marriage.

After Esteban leaves, Mari receives a text from Chris, a friend, who is taking care of a drunken Esteban. Indifferent to the situation, Mari's overwhelming sorrow about Welita's passing holds her attention, leading her to retreat into her emotions as she goes to bed, cries, and reflects on her loss.

### ### Chapter Forty-One Summary

The narrative shifts focus to Gracie, who recalls a childhood incident involving her mother, Selena, and a visit to the circus, an experience marked by her intense fear and disappointment. In this memory, Gracie learns of the comfort brought by her grandmother, Welita, who empathized with her feelings. However, in Gracie's present, despite being surrounded by family, she feels isolated in her grief.

She desperately wants her sister Selena to spend the night with her following their grandmother's death. Though Selena has work commitments in Los Angeles, Gracie's emotional turmoil compels her to plead for her sister's company. Ultimately, Gracie confesses to Selena her growing suspicion that she might be pregnant, a revelation that weighs heavily on her.



In the bathroom, they wait for the results of a pregnancy test. The air is thick with uncertainty and anticipation as they sit in silence. When the test reveals two positive signs, Gracie acknowledges the reality of her situation: she is going to have a baby. The moment deepens their sisterly bond, as Selena

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## Chapter 41 Summary: GRACIE

### ### Chapter Forty-One Summary: Gracie

In a poignant moment of reflection, Gracie recalls a childhood trip to the circus with her sister, Selena, which ended in tears. Despite feeling alone then, she finds support from her grandmother, Welita, who comforts her with milk and shares her own dislike for the circus, creating a bond of understanding.

Now an adult, Gracie is overwhelmed with emotions as Selena prepares to leave for Los Angeles. In a desperate plea, Gracie expresses her need for her sister's presence, breaking into tears. Despite Selena's reassurances, Gracie struggles to control her feelings, tears flowing over even trivial matters. This emotional turmoil culminates in her revelation to Selena: "I think I'm pregnant."

With urgency and anxiety, the sisters head to the bathroom for a pregnancy test. The atmosphere is tense as they wait for the results, reinforcing their support for one another. When the test reads positive with two pink lines, Gracie's world shifts dramatically. She and Selena share the news, which signifies the daunting yet transformative journey that lies ahead for Gracie.



### ### Chapter Forty-Two Summary: Erica

Erica grapples with grief on the day of her grandmother Welita's funeral, seeking solace in the backyard after feeling overwhelmed by family dynamics during the luncheon. Welita's room, where memories linger, has been stripped bare by her mother's grief, which adds to Erica's emotional turmoil as she discovers a box of cherished keepsakes.

Distance between her and her cousin Mari becomes apparent when they confront each other in the backyard. Mari, who has changed significantly since their childhood, initiates awkward conversation but is met with Erica's bitterness regarding their past. Erica feels betrayed by Mari's estrangement from the family following her parents' divorce—a topic that ignites anger and frustration between them.

As they argue, deep childhood wounds surface. Mari accuses the family of abandoning her, while Erica asserts that Mari walked away herself. Tensions escalate into accusations regarding their parents and accusations of blame, revealing underlying resentment that has festered over the years.

The confrontation escalates, leading to a slap from Mari, sparking even more rage and a searing exchange of hurtful words. Family members, including Selena and Gracie, witness the fallout, but their presence does little to mediate the escalating conflict.



Suddenly, Tía Espy intervenes, claiming that the real story behind Mari's grievances lies not with their father but with the truths hidden by their mother. Her revelation hints at unresolved family issues, pushing Mari to confront deeper truths about the past. Just when it seems reconciliation is possible, Mari chooses to walk away, leaving lingering tensions in the wake of the family's loss. Gracie's plea for unity on such an important day echoes the sentiment of togetherness that Welita would have desired, but it remains unattainable as the conflict festers.

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## Chapter 42 Summary: ERICA

### Summary of Chapters Forty-Two and Forty-Three

In Chapter Forty-Two, titled "Erica," we are taken into the emotional aftermath of Welita's funeral. Erica finds herself overwhelmed, seeking solace in her grandparents' backyard after the chaotic ceremonies. To cope, she reflects on her grandmother's decision to clear out Welita's room as a means of grieving, which serves as a painful reminder of promises left unfulfilled, particularly the one to take her grandmother to see the "Jersey Boys" show.

Erica is abruptly confronted by her cousin Mari, who has grown distant from the family since her parents' divorce. A strained conversation between them emerges, revealing deep-seated tensions. Erica's anger boils over as she accuses Mari of abandoning the family; Mari retaliates, highlighting her own feelings of betrayal. Their exchange escalates into a heated argument about familial ties, loyalty, and Mari's perception of her father, Tío Ricardo, that leaves everyone, including other cousins Selena and Gracie, shocked.

Amidst the tension, Tía Espy intervenes, suggesting that Mari's anger should be directed toward her mother for the narrative she has been told about her father. The confrontation leaves Mari defensive, and she ultimately decides



to leave, unable to reconcile during such an emotionally charged time. The chapter leaves a sense of unresolved conflict and emotional fallout hanging in the air, particularly related to familial duties and accusations of betrayal.

In Chapter Forty-Three, titled "Selena," the focus shifts to Selena, who grapples with the burden of keeping Gracie's pregnancy a secret while also trying to navigate her feelings about a job opportunity in New York. A conversation with Erica at a sushi restaurant illustrates the stress Selena feels—between the heavy family dynamics surrounding the funeral and her own career decisions. Erica encourages Selena to seize the job opportunity, seeing it as a chance for growth, but Selena hesitates, caught between her loyalty to family and her aspirations.

Later that night, Selena receives a call from Nathan, who informs her that the New York job is still available and expresses his own desire for her to succeed. This complicates Selena's feelings, as she wrestles with her fear of commitment and the implications of pursuing a new life without overly relying on Nathan. The chapter encapsulates Selena's internal struggle as she contemplates her future, her relationship with her sisters, and the weight of personal secrets that threaten to surface. As modernization and family expectations clash, Selena is left with a decision that could alter her path forever.

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## Chapter 43 Summary: SELENA

### Summary of Chapters Forty-Three and Forty-Four

### Chapter Forty-Three: Selena

Selena struggles with keeping her sister Mari's pregnancy a secret, wrestling with her desire to share the news and the pressure to remain silent.

Conversations with her friend Erica reveal deeper layers of her confusion about her own life choices, especially regarding a once-in-a-lifetime job opportunity in New York. Despite initially deciding against it, she finds herself contemplating the significant life change that a move to New York would entail.

During a lunch outing with Erica, incited by Erica's persistence, Selena mentions that she had told Nathan to withdraw her application for the New York position. Erica challenges her decision, suggesting that the move could lead to greater opportunities for her. Selena feels torn—she wants to support family, especially her sister, yet is hesitant to turn down a chance that could elevate her career. That night, Nathan calls to inform her that the job is still available if she wants it, despite her previous decision to step back. His understanding and encouragement remind her of the feelings she has for

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him, but she remains conflicted about her future, grappling with both her familial obligations and her own aspirations.

## **Chapter Forty-Four: Mari**

Mari finds herself in turmoil as she grapples with unresolved issues from Welita's funeral and her deteriorating marriage to Esteban. She has been trying to arrange couples counseling, hoping to address the challenges in their relationship, which had come to a boiling point after Esteban's initial willingness to improve their situation. However, he has continuously postponed making a firm commitment to counseling, complicating Mari's efforts to reconnect.

As she prepares dinner, hoping to spark intimacy with Esteban, Mari receives a call from Chris, an old flame. She instinctively wants to distance herself from him while attempting to mend her marriage. After a brief conversation where they make tentative plans to meet for coffee, Esteban arrives home. Despite a seemingly pleasant dinner atmosphere, underlying tension and resentment simmer. Mari initiates a discussion about counseling, but Esteban dismisses the idea, insisting he doesn't need help and that Mari is the one with problems.

The conversation escalates, revealing Esteban's refusal to change or seek

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assistance, leading Mari to a breaking point. She makes a desperate ultimatum: attend at least one counseling session, or she can't remain in the marriage. Esteban's silence and subsequent exit from the dining room mark a chilling conclusion to their evening, indicating deep-seated issues that threaten their relationship and prompting Mari to question the viability of their marriage.

Together, these chapters highlight the personal struggles and relational conflicts faced by both sisters, navigating life-altering decisions amid emotional upheavals and expectations from family and loved ones.

Chapter	Summary
Forty-Three: Selena	Selena grapples with keeping her sister Mari's pregnancy a secret while contemplating a job opportunity in New York. Although she initially tells Nathan to withdraw her application, a conversation with Erica makes her reconsider. Nathan's call later affirms the job is still available, creating a conflict between her family obligations and personal aspirations.
Forty-Four: Mari	Mari deals with unresolved issues from Welita's funeral and her troubled marriage to Esteban, who resists couples counseling. After a call from an old flame, she tries to reconnect with Esteban by preparing dinner, but their conversation escalates into conflict regarding counseling. Mari gives Esteban an ultimatum to attend at least one session, leaving their relationship hanging by a thread.



## Chapter 44: MARI

### Chapter Forty-Four Summary: MARI

In this chapter, Mari wrestles with her emotions following Espy's frank remarks at Welita's funeral, and she's still trying to make sense of the turmoil in her own marriage. Despite having prepared a special dinner of lasagna and Esteban's favorite wine, Mari is growing increasingly anxious about their relationship. Esteban, who had initially expressed a desire to work on their marriage, has become distant and evasive, failing to commit to couples counseling sessions they had previously discussed.

As Mari attempts to reach out to her father, she finds herself hesitating, grappling with her emotions. During a phone call with Chris, a friend who seems to harbor deeper feelings for her, she decides it's best to meet him for coffee rather than dinner, as her priority remains to resolve her issues with Esteban.

When Esteban arrives home, tension is palpable. Though they share a meal together, it quickly becomes apparent that he is unhappy and uncommunicative. As Mari tries to bring up counseling again, Esteban abruptly refuses, claiming he feels that the issues are hers to resolve. This leads to a painful confrontation where Mari, feeling cornered by Esteban's



stubbornness, declares she may not be able to stay in the marriage if he refuses to try counseling. Frustrated and disconnected, Esteban leaves the table without any further discussion, marking a significant turning point in their relationship.

### **Chapter Forty-Five Summary: GRACIE**

In this chapter, Gracie struggles with the overwhelming fatigue of early pregnancy while working on lesson plans for her students. She reflects on her new circumstances, revealing to the reader that she is about six weeks pregnant—a secret known only to her friend Selena. Despite her feelings of joy and disbelief about the baby, Gracie is hesitant to share the news with anyone else, especially Tony, whom she is still unofficially dating. She enjoys their current dynamic and fears that revealing the pregnancy might change everything.

As Gracie tries to concentrate, she is interrupted by Joshua Davila, Celina's father, who visits her to introduce himself. He expresses appreciation for her work with his daughter, which embarrasses Gracie. Their conversation hints at a growing friendship, but the moment is complicated by the unexpected arrival of Tony, who seems to sense a chemistry between Gracie and Joshua.

After Joshua leaves, tension arises between Gracie and Tony when he

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suggests that Joshua was flirting with her. Initially defensive, Gracie confronts Tony about his jealousy. In a sweet, revealing moment, Tony claims Gracie is “his girl,” delighting her and shifting their relationship into a more defined territory. This exchange revitalizes Gracie, alleviating her fatigue with the promise of new emotional connections and deepening intimacy with Tony.

These chapters illustrate Mari's emotional challenges in her marriage and Gracie's evolving relationship, setting the stage for potential breakthroughs or further complications as they navigate their intertwined lives.

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## Chapter 45 Summary: GRACIE

### ### Chapter Forty-Five: Gracie

Gracie struggles with overwhelming fatigue now that she is back at school after summer break. The source of her exhaustion is her recent pregnancy, which she has only confided in her friend Selena. She's grappling with her feelings about becoming a mother, feeling guilty and unsure about how to approach the situation, especially regarding her relationship with Tony, who remains unaware of her pregnancy. They are seeing each other regularly but avoiding public knowledge of their nighttime meetings, partly due to Tony's aspirations for a job in Texas.

As Gracie attempts to focus on creating lesson plans, she is interrupted by a visit from Joshua Davila, the father of one of her students, Celina. Their interaction is friendly, with Joshua expressing appreciation for Gracie's impact on Celina's adjustment to their new school. Their conversation leads to an awkward moment when Tony enters the room, causing Gracie to feel flustered and guilty, especially when Tony suggests that Joshua was flirting with her.

Confident in her unique connection with Tony, Gracie confronts her feelings of attraction to Joshua but is delighted when Tony declares, "you're my girl,

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Gracie,” which fills her with joy and dissipates her tiredness.

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### ### Chapter Forty-Six: Erica

Erica experiences a rare moment of happiness while attending an LAFC soccer game with her friend, Adrian. Following a period of grief and withdrawal after her grandmother Welita's funeral, this outing revitalizes her spirit. The thrilling energy of the match and the delicious tacos they share afterward provide a welcome distraction from her lingering sadness and frustrations regarding her cousin, Mari.

Over dinner, they enjoy each other's company, and Erica feels a growing warmth towards Adrian, who has become an endearing support in her life. This realization of her affection for him complicates things as Adrian is both her boss and her best friend—a situation that makes her hesitant to acknowledge her feelings.

The conversation shifts to family dynamics, where they discuss how parental expectations can be overwhelming. Erica's anger towards Mari resurfaces when Adrian reminds her that despite the slap Mari gave her after a recent incident, perhaps it's time to address their issues. This realization, though she resents it, leads Erica to recognize the need for resolution as she battles

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conflicting feelings about Mari while struggling to manage her newfound affection for Adrian.

Throughout both chapters, Gracie and Erica navigate the complexities of relationships, personal growth, and the transitions that accompany significant life changes, revealing deep-seated emotions and the hesitance to confront them.

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## Chapter 46 Summary: ERICA

### ### Chapter Forty-Six: Erica

In this chapter, Erica reflects on her unexpected joy from attending an LAFC soccer game with Adrian, who surprised her with tickets. Since the passing of her grandmother, whom she called Welita, Erica has become a recluse, avoiding social interactions and opting for lonely days in sweatpants. However, Adrian's thoughtful gesture lifts her spirits and allows her to momentarily escape from her grief regarding Welita's death and her resentment towards her cousin Mari.

As they enjoy tacos post-game, Erica expresses her gratitude, feeling a rush of warmth and affection towards Adrian, which reveals her growing romantic feelings for him, complicated by their friendship and his role as her boss. They share light-hearted banter about their families and their personal relationships, notably her tumultuous situation with Mari, who recently slapped Erica at Welita's funeral in a fit of drama. While Adrian encourages her to reconcile with Mari, Erica feels hesitant, not wanting to let go of her anger yet.

Despite her internal conflict about her feelings for Adrian, she recognizes that she must take charge of her life and the decisions that lie ahead,

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including potentially surprising her father with tickets to an LAFC match. The chapter closes with Erica grappling with the reality that her feelings for Adrian are becoming harder to ignore and accept.

### ### Chapter Forty-Seven: Selena

Selena comes home after a grueling day, longing for a peaceful evening of relaxation, but is surprised to find Nathan waiting for her on her porch. He has traveled from San Diego to discuss her job offer in New York, creating tension as their relationship dynamics intertwine with her career aspirations. Selena has been avoiding Nathan because she fears that moving to New York for him, rather than for herself, would undermine her independence.

During their conversation, Nathan probes her on her decision, and Selena struggles with her emotions as the gravity of potentially ending their relationship becomes clear. Despite his affection and support, she feels the need to prioritize her career and make decisions devoid of romantic influence. The emotional weight of the moment overwhelms her as she acknowledges the deep connection they share but insists she needs space to think.

Nathan's frustration surfaces, leading to a painful exchange. He expresses his hurt over her hesitation, and Selena finds herself crying, recognizing the heart-wrenching decision she has made. They part ways with unresolved

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feelings, and Selena ends her night in despair, longing for comfort. In a moment of distress, she reaches out to her friend Erica, suggesting that her emotional turmoil requires immediate support and perhaps a distraction, hinting at the strong bond they share.

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## Chapter 47 Summary: SELENA

### ### Chapter Forty-Seven Summary: Selena

On a difficult Friday evening, Selena returns home hoping for relaxation, but instead finds her ex-boyfriend Nathan waiting for her. He has driven up from San Diego to talk about her potential job offer in New York, sensing her indecision about moving. While she acknowledges their connection, Selena feels overwhelmed by the life-altering implications of the job and is determined not to let her relationship with Nathan influence her decision. They have an emotional conversation where Selena ultimately decides to end things with Nathan to ensure her choice is for the right reasons—her career, not a romantic relationship. This heartbreaking separation leaves her in tears, leading her to call her friend Erica for comfort.

### ### Chapter Forty-Eight Summary: Mari

Amidst marital turmoil and emotional distress, Mari finds herself struggling to cope with the fallout of her impending divorce from Esteban. Living separately in the same house is taking a toll, leaving her feeling lost and disconnected from her family. After the arrival of her confrontational mother-in-law, Blanca, who comes to “help” Esteban, tensions rise. Despite Esteban's anger towards Mari—stemming from a misunderstanding

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involving Chris, a friend who apparently confessed his feelings for her—Mari tries to defend herself and clarify that she is not leaving Esteban for Chris. The confrontation escalates, revealing deep-seated resentment as Esteban accuses Mari of wanting a divorce without understanding her struggles.

Esteban’s rejection of Mari's attempts to explain her loyalty leaves her feeling isolated; he demands that she vacate the house, intensifying her sense of loss and despair. The chapter closes with Mari experiencing emotional numbness, caught in a tumultuous moment where her marriage disintegrates, leaving her to grapple with the reality of her new life.

Chapter	Summary
Forty-Seven: Selena	Selena returns home and finds her ex-boyfriend Nathan waiting to discuss her job offer in New York. Despite their connection, Selena feels pressured by the decision and ultimately chooses to end their relationship to prioritize her career over romance. This decision leaves her upset, prompting her to reach out to her friend Erica for support.
Forty-Eight: Mari	Mari is dealing with the emotional fallout of her impending divorce from Esteban while living separately under the same roof. Tensions rise with the arrival of her mother-in-law, Blanca, and misunderstandings between Mari and Esteban exacerbate their situation. Esteban's refusal to listen to Mari's explanations intensifies her feelings of isolation and despair as their marriage deteriorates.



## Chapter 48: MARI

### ### Chapter Forty-Eight Summary

In the midst of a tumultuous emotional phase, Mari finds herself living in a strained household dynamic. Her husband, Esteban, has relocated to the spare bedroom on the first floor, while Mari grapples with sleepless nights and the heavy weight of their impending divorce. This transition has affected both her and her cousin Letty, who has been visibly distressed.

Trying to reclaim some normalcy, Mari resolves to strengthen her bonds with her cousins and grandparents and considers confronting her father for clarity about her past. However, her introspection is interrupted by the unexpected arrival of her mother-in-law, Blanca, who comes bearing hostility and judgment, suggesting that Mari is to blame for the breakdown of Esteban's and her marriage. The confrontation reaches a peak when Esteban arrives and stands up to his mother for the first time, asking her to leave in order to protect Mari.

But the tension escalates when Esteban accuses Mari of planning to leave him for Chris, who has unwittingly stirred deeper issues by expressing his feelings for Mari to Esteban. Despite Mari's desperate denials, Esteban's trust has been shattered, leading to an exasperated ultimatum. Feeling

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distraught and numb, Mari faces the reality of her failed marriage as Esteban walks out, leaving her feeling isolated in the home they once shared.

### Chapter Forty-Nine Summary

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## Chapter 49 Summary: GRACIE

### Chapter Forty-Nine: Gracie

Gracie's visit to her cousin Mari comes unexpectedly while going through old photo albums. Fueled by an urgent impulse, she drives to Mari's house in South Pasadena, clearly feeling a divine purpose behind her unannounced arrival. The appearance of Mari surprises Gracie; she looks disheveled and sad, a stark contrast to the upbeat cousin Gracie remembers.

After a moment of hesitation, Mari lets her in, revealing a home filled with packing boxes. Gracie's question about Mari's moving leads to the heartbreaking revelation that Mari and her husband, Esteban, are getting a divorce. The news hits Gracie hard, and she expresses her sympathy while grappling with her own tumultuous life—she is pregnant and the father is not involved.

Amidst their emotional exchanges, they embrace and share their pain, reconnecting in a moment of vulnerability. Gracie presents Mari with an old photograph from their childhood that she had stumbled upon earlier, hoping to uplift her. However, the photo seems to deepen Mari's sadness instead of brightening her mood. Gracie assures Mari that she is there for her, encouraging her to reach out whenever she needs support, hinting at the

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importance of family connections as they both face their respective challenges.

### ### Chapter Fifty: Erica

In a contrasting emotional state, Erica arrives at a restaurant feeling completely unprepared for the meal ahead, her stomach in knots amidst her concerns for Mari. Despite her anxiety, she manages to greet Mari warmly as she joins her at the table, grateful for the invitation. She recalls the troubling news that Gracie had shared about Mari's divorce, which explains Mari's earlier demeanor at their grandmother Welita's funeral, deepening Erica's worry.

The atmosphere is tense as they navigate the conversation; Mari ultimately confronts the divorce matter, which Erica had already anticipated. Mari's frankness initially stuns Erica, but it allows them to express unspoken feelings. As tears flow from Mari, Erica reassures her that no one deserves emotional hurt, combating the idea that Mari deserves this pain due to past grievances.

The conversation shifts to family dynamics, particularly Mari's fractured relationship with her father. Both cousins reflect on difficult past moments where misunderstandings prevailed. Erica admits to failing to support Mari and expresses her regret, while Mari also takes responsibility for distancing

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herself.

As they share tears and smiles, a mutual forgiveness emerges, suggesting a healing path forward for both. With a lightened mood, they discuss their menu options, reigniting a semblance of normalcy and hope as they embrace their renewed connection amidst personal struggles.

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## Chapter 50 Summary: ERICA

### ### Chapter Fifty Summary: Erica's Lunch with Mari

In a moment of confusion and emotional turmoil, Erica enters a restaurant feeling uncharacteristically disinterested in food. She's there to meet her cousin Mari, who she knows is going through a divorce—a revelation that had unsettled Erica since she'd first learned about it from Gracie. Searching for a connection over a lifeless menu, Erica tries to initiate small talk by mentioning the restaurant's potato chips, yet Mari cuts straight to the chase, confessing her impending divorce. This unexpected honesty lays bare the tension underlying their relationship.

Despite their shared history, there's a palpable strain in their connection. Erica suppresses her own emotions and masks her concern with her usual humor, but Mari's tears pull at her heartstrings, revealing the raw pain of her struggles. Erica gently confronts Mari about their past misunderstandings, building a bridge of forgiveness between them. They both express remorse for their previous failures to connect, acknowledging the distance that had grown during challenging times, specifically the fallout surrounding Mari's father's decisions.

The conversation takes a turn towards healing, with both women recognizing

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their shared culpability in their fractured relationship. After some heartfelt exchanges and promises of forgiveness, the mood lightens, allowing them to transition back into the comfort of family ties. The chapter closes on a hopeful note as they start to think about the future, bringing a sense of relief and warmth to their meeting.

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### ### Chapter Fifty-One Summary: Selena Hosts a Family Game Night

In the midst of familial chaos and anticipation, Selena prepares for the highly competitive and ritualistic event of a Phase 10 card game night at her abuela's patio. Equipped with supplies ranging from tequila to tortilla chips, she and Erica strategize over margaritas and the best ways to entertain the older generation of Garcia women—who are notoriously fierce players. The younger women understand that plying the older family members with drinks and carbs is crucial for a fair fight at the game table.

As the evening unfolds, excitement grows about the potential presence of their cousin Mari, who has recently endured a challenging divorce. Selena reflects on her disappointment that Mari hadn't reached out to personally share her struggles but recognizes the emotional weight Mari carried. Encouraged by Erica and Gracie's optimism about Mari's willingness to reconnect, Selena decides to extend an invitation, insisting Mari can join the

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game even if she arrives late.

Just as they begin to settle into the night's festivities, the sound of joyful screams interrupts Selena's thoughts. To her astonishment, Mari arrives, embraced by the warmth of family, carrying not just piña colada mix beloved by her tía but also freshly baked brownies—a sign of her eager participation. This unexpected turn resonates with hope, suggesting that while old rifts can linger, the bonds of family and shared experiences can foster a renewed sense of belonging and joy.

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## Chapter 51 Summary: SELENA

### ### Chapter Fifty-One Summary: SELENA

Selena prepares for an intense game night with her family, a tradition centered around the card game Phase 10—a game played with fierce competition, fueled by snacks and drinks. She sets up with alcohol, snacks, and the essential playing cards, and it's clear that the older generations of Garcia women have their own expectations regarding the evening's festivities. This gathering is strategic, aimed at pitting the younger women against the more seasoned players, who are notoriously competitive and skilled.

As family members arrive, Selena is joined by Erica, who suggests they should have piña colada mix for her mother, highlighting the importance of having the favorite drinks ready for the game. There's anticipation surrounding Selena's cousin Mari, who has been distant due to her recent divorce—a point of conversation that weighs heavily on their minds as they prepare for the night. Despite frustrations about Mari's absence, the atmosphere remains light as preparations unfold.

When Mari finally arrives, the excitement escalates as she brings much-needed piña colada mix and brownies, contributing to the evening's

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spirit of camaraderie. The chapter concludes with a sense of hope, hinting that their family bonds could mend in the face of personal trials as the game prepares to commence.

### ### Chapter Fifty-Two Summary: MARI

Upon entering her abuela's home, Mari feels a wave of warmth wash over her, dispelling the anxiety she carried from the car. Welcomed immediately by her Tía Marta and the rest of the family, Mari takes a moment to acknowledge Tía Espy, who remembers their recent emotional conversation at their late grandmother's funeral. Although apprehensive about potentially bringing up painful family issues, Mari is determined to reconnect with her family and has intentionally canceled plans regarding her new apartment search in Pasadena, focusing instead on this vital familial gathering.

As the game begins, laughs and playful banter echo around the room, reminiscent of previous gatherings. It's clear from the unfolding interactions that family dynamics remain intact despite the individual challenges each member faces. During a break, Tía Espy approaches Mari to express her concern regarding Mari's divorce, sharing her own experience with empathy. Despite the well-intentioned sentiment, Mari feels overwhelmed, having not yet processed her feelings about her situation.

With her drive home looming, Mari seeks refuge from the conversation and

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heads to the bathroom, mindful of the unresolved emotions and questions about her father that linger in her mind. The chapter closes on a note of uncertainty, as Mari recognizes she must confront her past before she can fully reclaim her place within the family.

Chapter	Summary
Fifty-One: SELENA	Selena prepares for a competitive family game night centered around Phase 10, with anticipation for her cousin Mari's arrival. Nadja's chosen drinks, including piña colada mix, and snacks help facilitate the gathering. Mari's recent divorce looms over the conversation, but when she arrives with drinks and brownies, the atmosphere shifts towards hope and friendship as the game is set to begin.
Fifty-Two: MARI	Mari arrives at her abuela's home feeling welcomed and ready to connect with her family, despite her anxieties. Laughter fills the room as they play games, but Mari is confronted with her unresolved feelings about her divorce. A conversation with Tía Espy about her situation overwhelms her, leading Mari to seek solitude as she grapples with her past and her place in the family.

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## Chapter 52: MARI

### Chapter Fifty-Two: Mari

Mari's anxiety about attending game night with her family melts away as she receives a warm welcome from her relatives, particularly Tía Marta and her abuela. While looking for a sense of connection, she feels a reminder of tension when she spots Espy, who could raise difficult topics after their conversation at the funeral. Mari is determined to rebuild her relationship with her family and is ready to confront her past, including her father. She has even sacrificed viewing an apartment in Pasadena to bring her abuela's favorite brownies and fulfill her cousin Selena's request for a drink, arriving just in time for the game.

Once the game begins, the familiar banter and playfulness among the family members wash over her, reminiscent of past gatherings. However, during a bathroom break, she encounters Espy, who expresses concern about Mari's wellbeing post-divorce. Mari's discomfort rises at the mention of her marital woes but she brushes it off, reminding herself it's just a night for family fun. The anxieties return as Mari realizes she has yet to address the weighty matters surrounding her family dynamics, particularly regarding her father's role. For now, she chooses to keep the questions at bay, feeling unsure about the truths she might uncover.

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## Chapter Fifty-Three: Gracie

At the annual fall fiesta at St. Christopher, Gracie navigates the bustling scene filled with carnival games and food booths, trying to keep up with the demands of her volunteer role. Despite her happiness in aiding the event, she feels a personal pressure weighing on her—the revelation of her unexpected pregnancy to her boyfriend, Tony. Tony has just landed a new job in Texas, and Gracie intends to delay the conversation until Sunday, wanting to avoid complicating their last-minute preparations.

As she checks in with vendors and volunteers, an accidental spill reveals the contents of her bag, including an ultrasound and a pregnancy guide. Sister Catherine's shock and probing questions heighten Gracie's anxiety, especially when Tony arrives and learns the news. The atmosphere shifts dramatically from lighthearted to heavy as Tony grapples with the reality of Gracie's situation, forcing her to affirm the truth amidst a flurry of questions and emotional turmoil.

Rejecting the notion that he should feel obligated, Gracie claims her autonomy in the decision to raise the baby, asserting that this pregnancy, while unplanned, has become something she cannot imagine foregoing. With a heavy heart, she hands Tony back the gift he brought—a stuffed



puppy—and leaves, feeling the breath of a new life alongside the weight of overwhelming uncertainty.

Back home, Gracie finds solace in the quiet of her father's recliner as she braves the confrontation with her parents. After a turbulent evening spent

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## Chapter 53 Summary: GRACIE

### ### Chapter Fifty-Three: Gracie

St. Christopher's annual fall fiesta was the highlight of the town, filled with carnival games, rides, and numerous food and craft booths. However, amidst the festivities, Gracie was burdened with personal news she had yet to share—she was pregnant, and the father was Tony, who had just accepted a job in Texas. Gracie planned to reveal her pregnancy to Tony on Sunday evening, but the day was hectic as she ensured everything was running smoothly at the fiesta.

During a conversation with Sister Catherine at the fish fry booth, Gracie's mind was racing and scattered, reflecting the stress she was under. A moment later, while retrieving an envelope of cash from her classroom, a slip resulted in all her belongings spilling out, revealing a copy of *\*What to Expect When You're Expecting\** and an ultrasound printout. Sister Catherine's shocked reaction forced Gracie to confront her unplanned pregnancy publicly, as Tony unexpectedly arrived just after the incident.

Tony confronted Gracie, needing reassurance about his paternity, which brought up Gracie's frustrations. She felt heartbroken that instead of discussing their situation as a couple, he was treating it as an obligation



when he asked what she planned to do. Gracie confirmed she would keep the baby and raise it alone, emphasizing that she did not want anything from him. After a painful exchange, she left him holding a toy puppy he had brought as a gift.

Returning home, Gracie sat quietly in her father's recliner, contemplating how to break the news to her parents after spending the previous night at her friend Erica's to avoid confronting them too soon. Gradually, she mustered the courage and awaited her parents' return from the market, intending to discuss her situation. After a while, she asked them to sit down together, sensing the severity of her revelation.

Through tears, Gracie finally shared the news, eliciting shock and despair from her mother and father. Although upset, her father reassured her that despite their disappointment, she would be okay. They shared an emotional moment of unity, with their sorrow intertwined. As the reality of the situation sank in, they agreed collectively that introducing the news of Gracie's pregnancy to her grandmother would fall to Selena, her close friend.

### ### Chapter Fifty-Four: Erica

Erica, navigating her own emotional turmoil, reflected on her life as a cliché when her friend Adrian arrived an hour late for their weekly Hulu night.

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Annoyed and feeling unappreciated, she had prepared an elaborate charcuterie board for the season finale of their favorite show, which heightened her frustration. Although Adrian's late arrival tested her patience, she allowed her feelings to soften as the night progressed and they planned for future watch parties together.

However, what started as casual banter soon delved into deeper discussions about love and relationships. Adrian's recent engagement with his ex, Isela, left Erica feeling vulnerable and questioning their friendship's limits. When Adrian described how asking someone out is straightforward, Erica's heart sank; she couldn't help but realize that Adrian may not have romantic feelings for her despite her hopes.

As their playful conversation turned serious, Erica confronted her growing frustrations about their relationship. Disappointed in Adrian's apparent commitment to family obligations over spending time with her, she felt isolated. After a heated exchange that ended in Adrian leaving, Erica felt an urgency to assert her independence. She promptly called her friend Selena, expressing a desire for a dramatic life change, including relocating to New York and finding a new job. Selena's enthusiastic support reassured Erica as she prepared to take the steps toward transforming her life, distancing herself from the weight of her current situation with Adrian.

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## Chapter 54 Summary: ERICA

### Chapter Fifty-Four - Erica

Erica finds herself grappling with frustration and confusion during her weekly Hulu night with Adrian, her coworker and romantic interest. As she lounges on her couch, awaiting his arrival for the much-anticipated season finale of their favorite series, she's plagued by anger over his tardiness. Adrian is over an hour late, unable to even text her an explanation due to a chaotic evening spent celebrating a family member's birthday. Erica feels the sting of disappointment especially after preparing a thoughtful charcuterie board, which he dismissively tries to approach upon arrival.

Once together, they settle into a relaxed atmosphere, but underlying tensions begin to surface when they discuss the future of their weekly ritual. While they fondly reminisce about the show, a more serious conversation unfolds about romance and love. Adrian expresses skepticism about grand gestures in romance, citing his straightforward approach with his ex-fiancée, Isela, which leaves Erica feeling insecure and questioning the depth of their connection.

As the night progresses, Erica's feelings spiral into frustration, compounded by her fear that Adrian doesn't share her romantic feelings. Overwhelmed,

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she suddenly decides she needs space and pushes Adrian to leave, feeling isolated in their friendship. After he exits, she calls her friend Selena, confessing her desire to escape her current life and move to New York, a decision fueled by her complicated emotions regarding Adrian.

### ### Chapter Fifty-Five - Selena

In her own reflections, Selena is taken aback to learn from Gracie that Erica has developed feelings for Adrian. Despite her usually outspoken nature, Erica has kept this affection under wraps, leading Gracie to express concern that it might negatively impact her mental health if she must face Adrian daily at work.

During this time with her family, Selena recalls the strength of their grandmother, Welita, who immigrated to the U.S. with her children and overcame significant challenges. This inspires her own ambitions and desires for a fresh start. After receiving a job offer at a prestigious advertising agency in New York, Selena wrestles with the implications of such a life-changing decision. She contemplates leaving behind her family—a significant con against the backdrop of an exciting opportunity.

Selena turns to her sister for guidance, but Gracie reminds her that the decision ultimately rests on her own feelings and values. Drawn to the possibilities in New York, she finds herself immersed in planning and

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weighing the decision. After an evening of soul-searching and reflection, she decides to accept the job offer, hoping to make a positive change in her life, irrespective of her previous romantic entanglements with Nathan, who facilitated the opportunity. With newfound resolve, she hits "send" on her acceptance email, embracing the journey ahead.

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## Chapter 55 Summary: SELENA

### Summary of Chapters Fifty-Five and Fifty-Six

### Chapter Fifty-Five: Selena

Selena is preoccupied with thoughts of her friend Erica, who has unexpectedly fallen for her boss, Adrian. This revelation surprises both Selena and her sister Gracie, as Erica typically expresses her feelings openly. Their conversation shifts to memories of their grandmother (Welita), who was a seamstress and faced enormous challenges after moving to the United States alone with five children. Selena admires Welita's strength and contemplates her own aspirations.

During a drive back home, Selena shares that she has been offered a significant job at a prestigious advertising agency in New York, with Nathan playing a key role in securing the interview. Despite the excitement, Selena feels torn about leaving her family behind, particularly as she reflects on Welita's bravery. She grapples with the decision, weighing her desire for independence against familial ties.

Later, Selena sends an email to Nathan to accept the job, making a choice for

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herself despite previous emotional turmoil surrounding their relationship. Her decision symbolizes a step toward her dreams, echoing the resilience embodied by Welita.

## **Chapter Fifty-Six: Mari**

Mari finds herself in a tense conversation with Chris, who has expressed his feelings for her amid her tumultuous relationship with her husband, Esteban. Although Chris intends to care for Mari, she feels frustrated that neither he nor Esteban acknowledges her strength to live independently. Mari eventually reveals to Chris her struggles with the situation, ultimately realizing that her unresolved feelings for Esteban remain unresolved.

The conversation shifts back to Esteban, with Chris admitting they must proceed with a divorce. Mari contemplates the complexities of her past, wanting closure about her relationship with her estranged father. She confronts her father, Ricardo, and, with the presence of Espy, learns painful truths about her childhood, including her father's struggles with alcoholism and misguided attempts to provide support.

As Ricardo recounts the hardships faced during and after his divorce from Mari's mother, Mari grapples with the emotional weight of revelations about her upbringing. Espy explains that Ricardo felt he deserved her disdain,



leading to a cycle of blame and miscommunication about the nature of their relationship. The conversation reveals that her assumptions about her father's absence were colored by misconceptions, prompting a wave of guilt that overwhelms Mari.

In a moment of clarity, Aching for understanding and connection, she rushes out, contemplating the impact of her judgments on her father and the missed opportunities for a more profound relationship. Now, Mari must confront her past and decide how to move forward in her future, recognizing the necessity of healing old wounds.

Through these chapters, both Selena and Mari navigate their individual journeys of growth, grappling with family complexities, romantic decisions, and the challenge of reconciling their pasts while seeking their own identities.

Chapter	Summary
Fifty-Five: Selena	Selena reflects on her friend Erica's newfound feelings for her boss, Adrian, and their memories of Welita, their resilient grandmother. Selena receives a job offer from a prestigious advertising agency in New York, thanks to Nathan, but struggles with the idea of leaving her family behind. She ultimately accepts the job, symbolizing a step towards her independence and dreams, akin to Welita's strength.
Fifty-Six: Mari	Mari has a tense conversation with Chris about her feelings amid her troubled marriage with Esteban. As they discuss divorce, Mari confronts her father, Ricardo, learning painful truths about his past struggles. This revelation leads her to grapple with feelings of guilt and the complexities of their relationship, pushing her to seek understanding and closure as she



Chapter	Summary
	considers her future.

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# Chapter 56: MARI

### Summary of Chapter Fifty-Six and Fifty-Seven

## Chapter Fifty-Six: Mari's Confrontation with Chris

In this chapter, Mari visits Chris after a period of silence, unsure of their friendship following the recent upheaval in her life. They engage in a difficult conversation where she confronts Chris about revealing his feelings for her to her estranged husband, Esteban. Chris apologizes, explaining his anger towards Esteban and his desire to take care of Mari. This tension reveals a deeper conflict: Mari struggles with her feelings for Esteban, grappling with the outcome of their marriage, which has been fraught with issues for some time.

As their conversation unfolds, Mari confesses that while Chris has been a good friend, she does not reciprocate his romantic feelings. She is determined to establish boundaries between herself and Chris, asserting her independence. After this emotional exchange, Mari announces her intention to confront her past, particularly her divorce from Esteban, and to seek closure with her father, Ricardo, whom she has not been in contact with for years. This marks the beginning of a pivotal journey towards self-discovery

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and healing as she realizes she must take charge of her future instead of continuing to run from it.

Arriving at her father's home, Mari must face her past, including the complex relationship with her mother, Vangie, and the painful memories that have lingered. It is evident that this confrontation is necessary for Mari to move forward in her life, especially as she grapples with the impact of her upbringing and the revelations about her father's struggles.

### **Chapter Fifty-Seven: Gracie's Stand at St. Christopher's**

Gracie finds herself in a difficult position, facing a meeting with Sister Catherine, Father Dominic, and the school board president regarding her unexpected pregnancy. The discussion quickly shifts to the morality clause associated with teacher contracts at St. Christopher's—a Catholic school with strict ethical guidelines. The pressure from the school officials makes Gracie feel cornered, especially since they are questioning her intentions regarding her baby's father and her future as a teacher.

This chapter showcases Gracie's internal struggle as she recalls her late grandmother, Welita, who encouraged her to stand up for herself. Gracie ultimately decides to break free from her timid nature and assert her rights, claiming that her personal life should not dictate her professional future.

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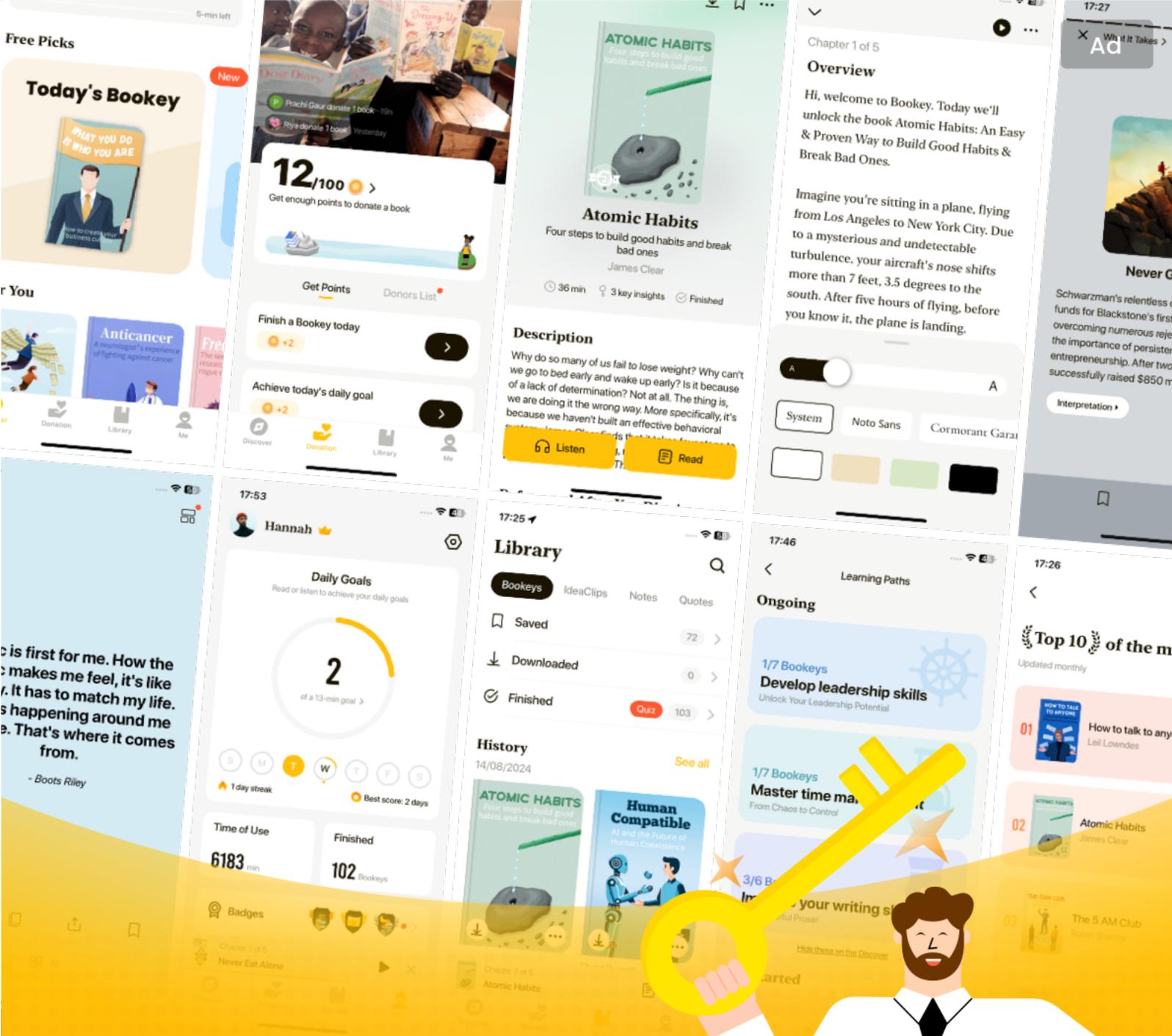
With newfound courage, she sets the terms for her maternity leave, emphasizing her commitment to her students and dismissing the implications of her situation on her job security.

Gracie's confrontation is a turning point, symbolizing her refusal to be

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## Chapter 57 Summary: GRACIE

### ### Chapter Fifty-Seven: Gracie

In this chapter, Gracie prepares for an intimidating meeting at St. Christopher's School, where she'll face Sister Catherine, Father Dominic, and the uncompromising school board president, Agatha Warner. The meeting centers around Gracie's unexpected pregnancy while working as a first-grade teacher, raising concerns about her employment due to the school's strict morality clause.

As the discussion begins, Sister Catherine implies that Gracie's pregnancy could violate this clause, which mandates that teachers embody Catholic values both in their personal and professional lives. Gracie feels cornered by their questioning regarding whether she plans to marry the father of her child and if she intends to continue teaching. The pressure intensifies as Sister Catherine, her former mentor, expresses disappointment, further exacerbating Gracie's guilt about how her situation might affect her students and the school community.

Remembering the strength of her late grandmother, Welita, who had always championed following one's own path, Gracie decides to stand her ground. Rejecting the notion that she needs to disclose personal details about her



relationship, she asserts her rights, declaring that she will take a maternity leave starting January 1 to ensure a smooth transition for her students without causing unnecessary gossip. She confidently states, "I'm a good teacher, and I care about my students," making it clear that her professionalism will remain intact.

The meeting ends with Gracie feeling empowered, having clearly articulated her terms, and she exits with a firm resolve, embracing a newfound strength that she associated with her grandmother's legacy.

### ### Chapter Fifty-Eight: Erica

In this chapter, Erica finds herself in the lobby of Above the Fold, a new online news startup, waiting for an interview with the managing editor, Natalie Dagmire. Rather than feeling excited, Erica is hesitant, as she struggles with her feelings for Adrian, her boss at the News-Press, whom she has developed strong emotions for, marking him as the source of her recent frustrations.

Her decision to apply for this job stemmed from a particularly tumultuous day when Adrian chose to visit his parents over spending time with her. Despite her insistence that she was fine with his decision, the truth is that she feels deeply hurt and torn due to her attachment to him. The tension between them escalated into a confrontation, leaving Erica feeling as if she



must escape the situation rather than confront her feelings directly.

In her interview, Erica discusses her aspirations to share different stories beyond what she has covered in her education beat, subtly hinting that her discomfort with the current job is related to her complicated emotions regarding Adrian. The interview goes well, leading to an invitation for a follow-up writing test and further conversations with the editorial team, reigniting her passion for journalism despite her internal conflict concerning her feelings for Adrian.

As Erica leaves the interview, Adrian unexpectedly calls. While she tries to maintain her composure, the conversation leads to tentative plans for them to get tacos together, signaling a fragile attempt to mend their relationship. Erica feels a bittersweet mixture of hope and apprehension about the future of both her career and her connection with Adrian, revealing the complexity of her emotions as she navigates professional aspirations intertwined with personal dilemmas.

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## Chapter 58 Summary: ERICA

### ### Chapter Fifty-Eight Summary: Erica

In the heart of downtown Los Angeles, Erica is seated in the lobby of **Above the Fold**, a new online journalism startup, waiting for her interview with the managing editor, Natalie Dagnire. Despite the appealing surroundings, Erica is conflicted; she doesn't genuinely want the job because she's afraid of disappointment. Her desire for the position stems mainly from frustrations regarding her complicated feelings for Adrian, her city editor at the News-Press, with whom she is hopelessly in love but can't confront due to their professional relationship.

The tension between them escalated when Adrian chose to visit his family over a planned movie date with her. Erica's anger is rooted in her unacknowledged feelings, causing her to lash out as a way to mask her deep-seated hurt. After a heated exchange, she decides to distance herself, leading her to seek new opportunities, like the interview at Above the Fold.

During her interview with Natalie, Erica expresses her desire to tell different stories, moving away from her current role of covering education. The conversation goes well, and Natalie invites her back for a writing test, sparking some hope in Erica. Once outside, she gets an unexpected call from

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Adrian, whom she hasn't spoken to since their argument. They agree to meet for tacos, indicating an attempt to mend their fractured relationship, but Erica knows that her real desire is to address their feelings for each other.

### ### Chapter Fifty-Nine Summary: Selena

Selena, feeling the tension in her relationship with her sister Gracie, decides to confront the issue head-on. After a difficult exit interview with the Umbridge brothers, she arrives at St. Christopher's, where Gracie teaches, determined to understand why Gracie has been avoiding her. The confrontation reveals deep-seated feelings of betrayal on Gracie's part. She is hurt by Selena's upcoming departure and feels abandoned as she embarks on a major life change—becoming a mother.

The emotional conversation escalates, with Gracie expressing her fears about being a single parent and Selena trying to reassure her sister that she won't be alone. Gracie's emotions boil over as she accuses Selena of not supporting her, which Selena passionately denies, insisting she is excited for the baby and will be there for Gracie through thick and thin.

Ultimately, their confrontation softens as they both recognize their love for each other. Gracie's fear of being abandoned conflicts with Selena's desire to pursue her own happiness in a new city. As Selena prepares to leave for New York, she reminisces about their childhood and the airport, where her family

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gathers to send her off. After a heartfelt exchange with Gracie, who rushes to give her a gift as a token of love and forgiveness, the sisters embrace, reaffirming their bond amidst the changes ahead.

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## Chapter 59 Summary: SELENA

### ### Chapter Fifty-Nine Summary

Selena is determined to confront her sister Gracie after feeling ignored, especially after their recent family tensions surrounding Gracie's pregnancy and their evolving relationship. Following an exit interview with the Umbridge brothers, Selena visits Gracie at St. Christopher's School, where Gracie appears overwhelmed and distant.

Upon entering the classroom unannounced, Selena attempts to connect with Gracie, who instead deflects and expresses frustration. The emotional standoff escalates when Gracie accuses Selena of abandoning her during this critical time, especially with the upcoming birth of Gracie's baby. Gracie feels betrayed by Selena's imminent move to New York, thinking that her sister, once a pillar of support, will no longer be part of her life.

Selena's attempts to reassure Gracie that she will always be there for her, including being present for the baby's birth, are met with skepticism. Gracie's fear and sadness pour out as she admits her anxieties about being a new mother. Their confrontation reveals deep emotional scars and a yearning for connection, leading to a moment of reconciliation as Selena promises to stand by Gracie despite the geographical distance.



The chapter transitions to Selena preparing to leave for New York, reflecting on how much has changed since her last departure from Inland Valley International Airport. This move signifies not just physical relocation but an emotional journey as well, laden with nostalgia about her bond with Gracie. Despite the tensions, a newly rekindled promise of family ties hangs in the air. Just before Selena departs, Gracie rushes in with a heartfelt apology and a small gift, symbolizing their renewed connection. They share a promise of love and support, specifically for the new baby, bridging the gap created by Selena's impending move.

### ### Chapter Sixty Summary

Mari finds herself volunteering at a Thanksgiving lunch organized by her cousin Gracie's church, serving meals to the homeless. Despite her initial reservations and feelings of sadness about her broken marriage, Mari embraces the opportunity to reconnect with her family. While serving, she reflects on how her life has changed since her relationship with Esteban ended, grappling with the guilt of his new lifestyle without her.

Gracie's supportive presence gives Mari a sense of comfort, reminding her that family still exists even after experiencing significant loss. Afterward, as they walk to Mari's car, they discuss the possibility of Mari finding a new place to live and the challenges she faces. Gracie reassures her that their

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family is there to support her, a sentiment that brings Mari to tears as she acknowledges the emotional rollercoaster she has been on.

While Mari contemplates the closure of her past relationship with Esteban, who seems to be moving on without her, she remains hopeful about the potential for reconciliation in the future. Her discussions with Gracie about volunteering highlight the importance of community and the need for connection, especially during difficult times. As they part ways, Gracie encourages Mari to reach out whenever she needs, fostering a newfound sense of belonging.

Overall, this chapter encapsulates themes of familial love and support, the challenges of personal growth, and the importance of finding purpose amid life's upheavals. There is a sense of optimism as Mari embraces the idea of volunteering again, suggesting that she is beginning to rebuild her identity and place within her family.

Chapter	Summary
Chapter Fifty-Nine	Selena confronts her sister Gracie to address feelings of being ignored amidst family tensions over Gracie's pregnancy. Gracie expresses frustration and feelings of abandonment due to Selena's move to New York. The emotional confrontation leads to a moment of reconciliation, with promises of support for each other despite the distance. Before Selena leaves, Gracie offers an apology and a small gift, reinforcing their renewed connection and commitment to family ties.
Chapter Sixty	Mari volunteers at a Thanksgiving lunch, reconciling her feelings about her broken marriage while reconnecting with her family, especially Gracie. As



Chapter	Summary
	they discuss Mari's challenges and potential new living arrangements, Gracie's support brings Mari to tears, highlighting the importance of family and community. The chapter emphasizes themes of love, support, personal growth, and optimism as Mari considers rebuilding her identity through volunteering.

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## Chapter 60: MARI

### ### Chapter Sixty Summary

In this chapter, Mari immerses herself in community service on Thanksgiving, serving homemade stuffing at her cousin Gracie's church event for the homeless. While Mari finds joy in her culinary efforts, she can't help but feel a sense of loss and sadness over her estranged husband, Esteban, who has begun a new life without her. Despite not speaking to him in months, Mari feels the weight of their broken relationship, particularly on a day meant for family. Gracie's support and invitation to join the family for dinner highlights the re-establishment of Mari's connections, even as she grapples with her uncertain future and still seeks a place to live.

As they finish the event, Mari confides in Gracie about her emotional struggles, acknowledging the hurt she caused Esteban and her desire for forgiveness. Gracie reassures Mari of her family's support, encouraging her to focus on her growth. Despite feeling apprehensive about joining the entire family for dinner later, Mari agrees, eager to reclaim a sense of belonging. Gracie also shares the positive impact of their Thanksgiving service, reinforcing the community's commitment to helping those in need throughout the year. Their hug signifies shared understanding, and Mari's promise to reach out suggests her journey towards healing is beginning.

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### ### Chapter Sixty-One Summary

This chapter shifts to Gracie, who faces a poignant moment when she receives a letter from Tony, the father of her unborn child, who has distanced

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## Chapter 61 Summary: GRACIE

### ### Chapter Sixty-One: Gracie

In this emotional chapter, Gracie is confronted by a letter from Tony, the father of her unborn child, who has reached out from Texas. Gracie's friend Rachel offers support as Gracie grapples with the pain of Tony's departure and the implications of his words: Tony regrets leaving her and their child but feels he can't come back, urging her to move on and find happiness without him. As Gracie reads the heartfelt yet remorseful letter, she is overwhelmed by a torrent of emotions, crying uncontrollably. This catharsis finally allows her to release her pent-up feelings of sorrow and frustration.

Rachel quietly steps in to comfort Gracie, offering kindness by brushing her hair, a gesture reminiscent of how Gracie used to soothe her sister Selena in similar situations. Rachel's compassion signifies the formation of a makeshift family unit around Gracie, who realizes she may be without a father for her baby, but she will not be alone. The chapter emphasizes themes of loss, family, and the power of friendship in times of crisis.

### ### Chapter Sixty-Two: Erica

Erica's chapter begins with a pivotal moment—she receives a call

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confirming her promotion to features reporter for \*Above the Fold\*, entitling her to a fresh start. Fueled by this career leap, she decides it's finally time to confess her feelings for her colleague Adrian. Her anxiety builds as she approaches him during a hectic time in the newsroom, knowing he will soon leave for a holiday with his family in Big Bear.

Just as she feels ready to speak her truth, Isela, Adrian's ex-girlfriend, unexpectedly appears, flaunting her relationship with Adrian and plans for their romantic getaway. The realization that Isela will be accompanying Adrian spurs deep feelings of jealousy and inadequacy within Erica. As Isela wraps Adrian in matching ski scarves, Erica can no longer contain her frustration, deciding to leave abruptly after an emotional confrontation.

When Adrian tries to understand her behavior, Erica snaps, declaring that she doesn't want to be friends anymore. As she escapes in the elevator, the weight of her confession—that she is in love with him—hangs in the air. Though she disregards his panicked pleas, it signals a drastic crossroads in their relationship. The next day, choosing to prioritize her career and independence, she hands in her two weeks' notice, embracing the uncertain future that lies ahead. Erica's story illustrates the challenges of balancing personal feelings with professional aspirations, highlighting her journey towards self-discovery.

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## Chapter 62 Summary: ERICA

### ### Chapter Sixty-Two Summary - Erica

Three days before Christmas, Erica receives the long-anticipated call that she has been promoted to features reporter at Above the Fold. Determined to embrace this opportunity, she resolves to confess her feelings for her colleague, Adrian, before she leaves for a two-week vacation. The urgency of her confession is heightened by the fact that Adrian plans to spend the holidays in Big Bear with Isela, his girlfriend.

In an effort to find the right moment, Erica waits until most of her coworkers have gone home, finally tapping on Adrian's cubicle wall to request a meeting. He is busy editing her article, and despite her insistence, he brushes off her request as he prepares for his upcoming trip. The situation worsens when Isela enters the newsroom, revealing that she is also going to Big Bear with Adrian and his family, and that they share a deeper connection than Erica realized—Isela implies that Adrian had proposed to her in that very cabin before.

Overcome with jealousy and frustration, Erica tries to discreetly withdraw from the situation, claiming she doesn't need to speak with Adrian after all. When confronted by him in the elevator, Erica lashes out, declaring she no

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longer wants to be his friend. In an emotional moment, she admits her feelings for him just as the elevator doors close, leaving Adrian stunned and her heartbroken.

Despite the flood of messages from Adrian that follow, she decides to disconnect from her phone and her emotions—turning down any chance of a rekindled connection for the moment. The next day, with newfound clarity and determination, she hands in her two weeks' notice, ready to start fresh in her career and navigate her feelings elsewhere.

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### ### Chapter Sixty-Three Summary - Selena

Selena, now adjusting to life in New York, grapples with feelings of loneliness despite being surrounded by millions. It's been just three weeks since she last saw her family, and with Christmas approaching, she longs to go home. However, Nathan, who had been instrumental in helping her secure her job, has not reached out since she relocated, leaving her anxious that he is hurt or upset with her.

Although she's making strides in her new life—familiarizing herself with the subway and hosting regular calls with her family—Selena's uncertainty about Nathan weighs heavily on her. One night, craving warmth and

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sustenance, she ventures out in the snowy cold to find a nearby Chinese restaurant.

To her surprise, she encounters Nathan there. Initial awkwardness fills the air, but he acknowledges her with a smile. Selena appreciates the small talk, thankful for the chance to express gratitude for his previous help, but as silence fills the space between them, it becomes clear there's unspoken tension—a rift between their past connection and the present.

Just as Selena is about to sink back into disappointment, Nathan reenters the restaurant to express his feelings candidly. He reveals that he misses her and hurts knowing she's been distant. In a moment of bravery, Selena counters his confession: she admits her own fears and how they pushed her away. She wants to pursue a real relationship, which lightens Nathan's demeanor. Their conversation culminates in a tender kiss, affirming both their feelings and marking a new beginning for them as they navigate their evolving relationship.

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## Chapter 63 Summary: SELENA

### ### Chapter Sixty-Three: SELENA

Amid the bustling anonymity of New York City, Selena grapples with a profound sense of loneliness, exacerbated by the silence from Nathan, whom she has not heard from since her move. Despite successfully settling into her new job and life, her thoughts linger on Nathan, feeling the sting of their unresolved feelings. She resolves to focus on building her life, reaching out to family, and navigating her new environment.

One evening, hungry and determined to brave the wintry streets, she ventures out to a nearby Chinese restaurant. However, her errand takes an unexpected turn when she spots Nathan sitting alone. The tableau of their chance meeting brings a rush of emotions; their initial greetings are cordial but laced with an underlying tension. Nathan reveals his hurt over her reluctance to embrace their relationship, expressing his feelings candidly.

In a pivotal moment of vulnerability, Nathan urges Selena to let him go if she doesn't want him, shaking her into action. Overwhelmed, she admits her mistakes and confesses her desire to be with him, finally acknowledging her feelings. Their authentic connection reignites hope, leading to a thrilling kiss that promises the possibility of rekindled romance.

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### ### Chapter Sixty-Four: MARI

Mari's sense of alienation grows stronger as she steps into her former home, now devoid of warmth and festivity. Recently moved into her own apartment, she feels like an intruder in what was once her sanctuary. The home is empty and unadorned, reinforcing the barrenness of her relationship with Esteban, who is still reeling from the fallout of their marriage.

Despite not being technically unwelcome, Mari struggles with the deceitfulness of her visit, needing to gather her belongings as they prepare to sell the house. After a hurried gathering of clothes, Mari encounters Esteban unexpectedly. Their interaction crackles with tension as they navigate unresolved conflict and misunderstandings.

Esteban's emotional exhaustion is palpable as they confront the issues that led to their dysfunction. Mari's admission of feeling unheard and unappreciated lays bare the cracks in their once vibrant relationship. Each accusation and defense exchanged reveals deep-seated pain, reflecting their inability to communicate effectively.

In a moment of raw honesty, Mari expresses her lingering love for Esteban yet acknowledges the need to rediscover herself outside of her role as his wife. Their admission of past mistakes and emotional neglect creates a



fragile space for reconciliation. Their shared longing culminates in an intense, passionate reunion, suggesting a possibility of healing after such turmoil.

However, Mari senses a shifting dynamic—she is no longer the same person, and she envisions a future that may not necessarily include Esteban. The chapter closes with uncertainty as they embrace physically and emotionally, reflecting both a nostalgic bond and the potential for new beginnings, albeit under a cloud of doubt.

Together, these chapters intertwine the themes of loneliness, longing, and the complexities of love, illustrating the characters' journeys toward self-discovery and the meaningful yet complicated connections they share.

Chapter	Summary
Sixty-Three: SELENA	Selena feels lonely in New York City, missing Nathan. They meet unexpectedly, where Nathan reveals his hurt over their unresolved relationship. After a heartfelt conversation, Selena admits her feelings, leading to a passionate kiss that rekindles hope for their romance.
Sixty-Four: MARI	Mari returns to her former home, feeling alienated and reflecting on her strained relationship with Esteban. Their confrontation reveals deep emotional wounds, leading to a passionate reunion. However, Mari acknowledges her growth and uncertain future apart from Esteban, leaving their relationship in doubt.

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## Chapter 64: MARI

### ### Chapter Sixty-Four Summary

In this chapter, Mari grapples with feelings of alienation as she heads back to her house, now filled with memories but devoid of holiday cheer. Having moved into her own apartment in Inland Valley, she wants to retrieve some of her belongings while her estranged husband, Esteban, is out. The atmosphere is heavy; he hasn't been responsive to her attempts to communicate, a reflection of the emotional rift caused by their troubled marriage.

Upon arriving, Mari feels the absence of Christmas decorations—Esteban, in his grief and anger, has forbidden Letty from putting up anything festive. Despite feeling like an intruder, she gathers her clothes quickly. However, she unexpectedly runs into Esteban in the kitchen, initiating a tense and emotionally charged conversation. Confronted by his presence, Mari struggles to express her feelings about their marriage.

Esteban's resentment is palpable; he blames his long hours at work for their lack of intimacy and connection, while Mari articulates her deep-rooted unhappiness—an unhappiness that can no longer be ignored. They both confront painful truths: Mari's feelings of being an inadequate wife and



Esteban's assumption that material success equates to emotional security.

As their dialogue unfolds, the raw emotions surface, culminating in a vulnerable moment when Esteban asks if she still loves him. Mari's affirmation of love is shadowed by her realization that she must also prioritize her own identity. After a heart-wrenching exchange, they share a passionate kiss that reignites their physical connection, culminating in an intimate moment that signifies both a longing for each other and the complexity of their evolving relationship.

While this encounter provides a temporary escape from their troubles, Mari acknowledges that the dynamics between them have shifted forever. The chapter closes with an ambiguous future, filled with uncertainty about whether a shared life still lies ahead for them.

### ### Chapter Sixty-Five Summary

Gracie steps into a chaotic Target store just two days before Christmas, mentally preparing herself to tackle the frenzied holiday shopping scene. She acquires items for her loved ones while navigating the overflowing aisles, but her focus shifts as she finds herself drawn to the baby department—the excitement of impending motherhood weighs heavily on her heart.

As she looks through baby items, Gracie encounters Mrs. Sarah Dawson, a

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pregnant mother from her class. Their conversation becomes a transformative moment, where Gracie reveals her own pregnancy, shifting from keeping it hidden to embracing it openly. Encouraged by Mrs. Dawson's warmth and excitement, Gracie receives a spontaneous tutorial on baby necessities—a practical yet lighthearted introduction to the new reality of her life as an expectant mother.

After their exchange, Gracie leaves the store with a mixture of holiday gifts and her first baby purchases. This chapter highlights her journey of acceptance and readiness to embrace her new role, representing a significant step in her character's development and reinforcing her commitment to preparing for the future as a mother.

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## Chapter 65 Summary: GRACIE

In **Chapter Sixty-Five**, Gracie embarks on a chaotic shopping trip to Target just two days before Christmas, navigating the crowds in search of holiday gifts for her family: slippers for her abuela and makeup brushes for her friend Rachel. While meandering through the store, she becomes emotionally drawn to the baby department, reflecting on her unexpected pregnancy. A chance encounter with Sarah Dawson, a former student's mother, leads to her first baby purchases and a crash course on baby essentials, including a Graco swing—an indication of the new chapter in her life as she prepares for motherhood.

**Chapter Sixty-Six** shifts to Erica, who wakes up feeling cold and shivery on Christmas Eve, already late for her family's traditional tamale-making festivities. Upon arrival at her grandparents' home, she finds a quieter set-up than usual, hinting at the lingering grief over the recent loss of her beloved grandmother, Welita. Erica's emotions surface when she discovers a missing ingredient—the jack cheese essential for their tamales. In an emotional confrontation with her mother, she expresses her fear of change in their holiday traditions, revealing her pain over missing Welita.

This moment of vulnerability leads to a heartwarming connection with her younger cousin, Araceli, who feels similarly left out by the older kids. This shared sorrow shifts as Erica takes the opportunity to reaffirm the

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importance of family unity to the younger girls. Just as she begins to find peace amid the holiday chaos, Adrian, her former boss, unexpectedly appears. Their lingering feelings for one another come to a head when he confesses his love for Erica. Their kiss rekindles hope and closure as they both embrace the future, with a side of tamales.

The chapter culminates in a poignant family gathering at the cemetery, where Erica and her cousins honor Welita's memory by laying roses at her headstone. They acknowledge their struggles throughout the year but confirm their unbreakable family bonds, echoing Welita's teachings. The celebration of Christmas becomes a symbol of resilience, love, and the enduring legacy of family.

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## Chapter 66 Summary: ERICA

### ### Chapter Sixty-Six Summary

Erica wakes up feeling cold and anxious, realizing she overslept on Christmas Eve—she's due at her grandparents' house soon to help with their traditional tamale-making. After a hasty breakfast, she arrives to find fewer family members than expected, as many have slept in. The family is preparing to make tamales, particularly a cherished recipe featuring las masa, known for its delicious taste and texture, a legacy from Erica's late grandmother, Welita.

As the family begins to assemble the tamales, Erica soon discovers that they forgot key ingredients, like the jack cheese, which is a staple in their chicken tamales. This oversight triggers an emotional response from her; Erica confronts her mother about the change to their tradition, claiming that it makes the tamales feel less authentic without all the ingredients that Welita would have wanted.

After a heated exchange, Erica leaves the kitchen to cry in the backyard, feeling the weight of her grandmother's absence. She finds her younger cousin, Araceli, who confides in her about feeling excluded by older cousins. Erica comforts her, noting the importance of family during difficult

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times. Her mother joins her shortly after, acknowledging how hard today is for everyone as they cope with Welita's passing.

In the midst of the chaotic emotions, Erica realizes the essence of their family traditions goes beyond just the food—it's about the connections and love shared among them. She gathers the younger girls and imparts wisdom about family bonds and support, reassuring them that despite changes, love remains constant.

As they return to the kitchen, Erica is caught off guard when Adrian—her former boss and love interest—arrives unexpectedly, wanting to know why she quit her job. They have a heartfelt conversation that leads to revelations about their feelings for each other, culminating in a passionate kiss. Adrian confesses he loves her, igniting a feeling of hope amidst the holiday chaos.

Later that day, Erica and her cousins visit Welita's grave, laying roses and reflecting on their struggles over the past year. They express their enduring connection to family and Welita's legacy, affirming that they will persevere together, celebrating the strength that family brings, especially during times of grief.

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### Epilogue Summary

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In the hospital, Gracie is in labor, surrounded by her family as they prepare for the arrival of her baby girl. Amidst the jovial chaos, her sister Selena bursts in, revealing her engagement with a giant diamond ring. While excitement fills the room, Gracie struggles through intense contractions, desperately requesting their attention back on her delivery. Her family's supportive camaraderie lightens the stressful atmosphere.

As Gracie nears the moment of giving birth, she draws strength from the presence of her sister and cousins, overcoming the fear of impending change in life as a mother. With love and support surrounding her, she embraces the moment and declares her readiness to bring new life into the world, embodying the loving legacy of her family.

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