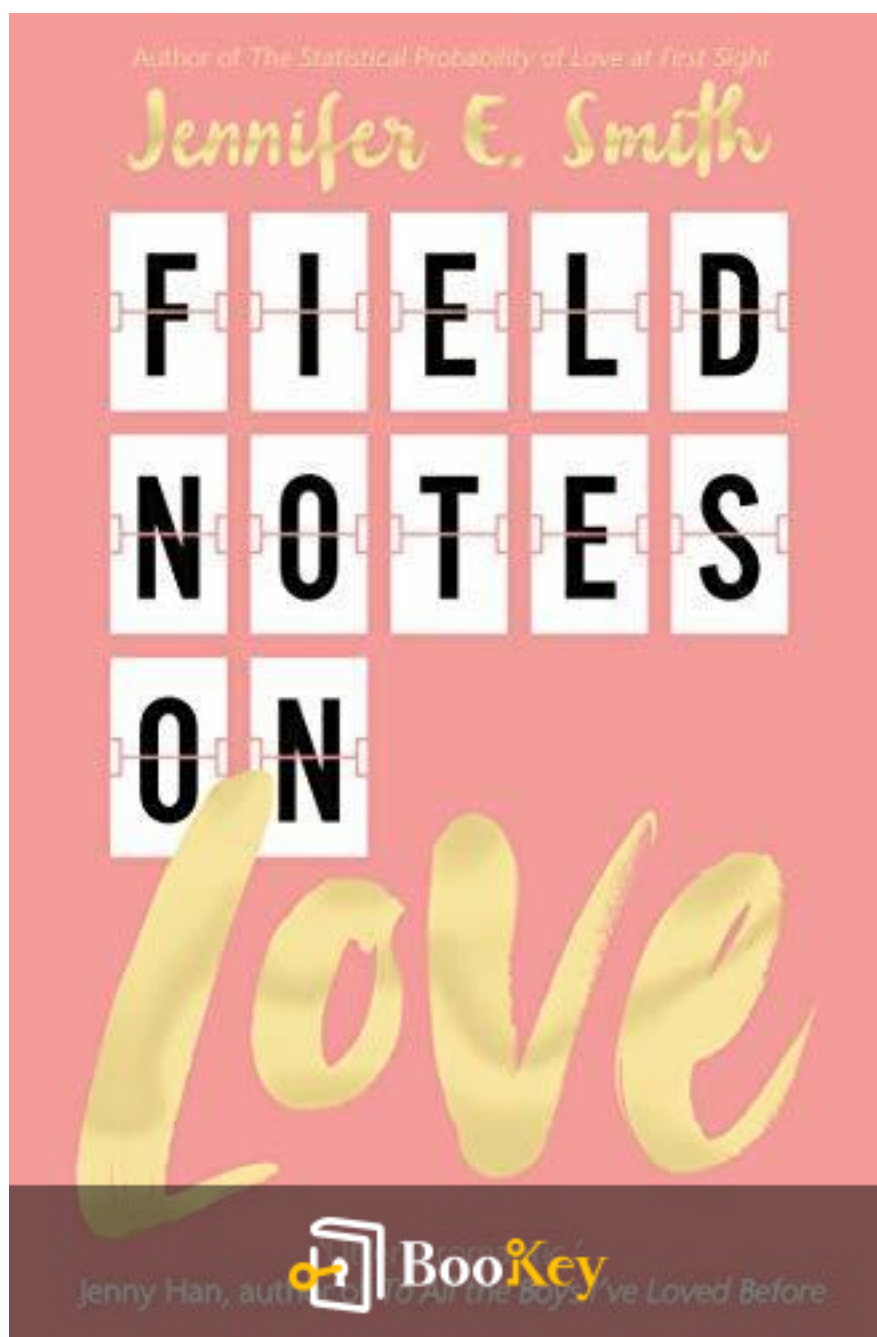


# Field Notes On Love PDF (Limited Copy)

Jennifer E. Smith



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## **Field Notes On Love Summary**

Exploring love's journey through unexpected adventures.

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## About the book

In "Field Notes on Love," Jennifer E. Smith takes readers on a poignant journey through the complexities of first love, self-discovery, and the power of connection, all set against the backdrop of a cross-country train trip. The story follows a heartwarming adventure as two teenagers, bound by their intersecting personal histories yet worlds apart in experiences, meet by chance and embark on an unforgettable journey filled with laughter, heartbreak, and revelations. Through their shared misadventures and honest conversations, Smith delicately explores how love can transform us and the significance of taking risks in the pursuit of finding one's true self. As the characters navigate the vibrant landscapes of their hearts and the challenges that come with growing up, readers are invited to reflect on their own dreams, desires, and the unexpected paths that lead to love.

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## About the author

Jennifer E. Smith is an acclaimed author known for her engaging young adult novels that often explore themes of love, adventure, and self-discovery. With a background in publishing and a passion for storytelling, she has captivated readers with her charming narratives and relatable characters. Smith's work, including notable titles like "The Statistical Probability of Love at First Sight" and "Windfall," has garnered praise for its heartfelt prose and relatable exploration of the complexities of relationships. Her ability to weave emotion and humor into her stories resonates with a diverse audience, making her a prominent voice in contemporary young adult fiction. In "Field Notes On Love," Smith continues to showcase her talent for crafting poignant love stories that blend romance with personal growth.

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## Chapter 1 Summary: Hugo

In an emotionally charged moment, Hugo grapples with the shock of his girlfriend Margaret Campbell breaking up with him after nearly three years. As she speaks, urging clarity about their relationship, Hugo struggles to find the right words in the whirlwind of emotions swirling within him. Margaret gently points out that they cannot stay together out of inertia, especially with her moving to California for university and him remaining in Surrey. While she expresses sympathy, it becomes apparent that they've drifted apart, and she insists on their need to face the truth together.

Margaret's departure to Stanford adds weight to her words, and Hugo reflects with discomfort on the scholarship he received to the University of Surrey, which he feels was based solely on the unusual circumstances of being one of sextuplets, further magnifying his feelings of inadequacy. The prestigious scholarship—gifted by a billionaire who wanted publicity for the "Surrey Six"—has always felt like a chain rather than an opportunity to Hugo, who yearns for agency over his own life.

Margaret reassures him that their breakup isn't merely due to the distance or his melancholy this summer; it's about timing. Despite his reluctance to accept their new reality, Hugo feels the truth in her words. As they sit together, their shoulders touching, he realizes he mistakenly believed everything was fine, highlighting a deepened sense of loss. When the



conversation shifts to their planned trip across America—initially a joyous adventure now tainted with sorrow—Margaret encourages him to go alone, seeing it as a chance for growth.

As she hands him the travel itinerary, Hugo is struck by the enormity of change. The trip, once a shared dream, now feels suffocatingly solitary. His mind races through the logistics of navigating a foreign country alone, a stark contrast to his chaotic life back home with his siblings, who have always kept him grounded.

Following Margaret's departure, Hugo's world seems eerily quiet. The thought of being alone settles heavy in his chest, contrasting with their shared life filled with laughter and camaraderie alongside his siblings—their dynamic a close-knit unit of six, always together.

Just when he starts to fall into despair, his twin brother Alfie and their siblings burst into his room, each reflecting varying degrees of concern. Their support attempts to lift Hugo's spirits, breaking the solemnity of his heartbreak with humor and mock disdain for Margaret, showing a facet of their sibling loyalty. They all try to reassure him, but beneath the laughter, Hugo is still processing his reality.

In this moment, a flicker of resolve ignites within him. Alfie's encouragement that "there are other Margaret Campbells out there" plants a



seed of possibility for Hugo's future. The chapter closes on an uncertain but hopeful note, as Hugo begins to contemplate navigating his next steps, both in life and in the adventure that awaits him across the ocean.

| Event          | Description                                                                                                              |
|----------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Breakup        | Hugo experiences a breakup with Margaret after three years, triggered by her upcoming move to California for university. |
| Inadequacy     | Hugo feels inadequate due to his scholarship situation tied to being a sextuplet, viewing it as a burden.                |
| Reality Check  | Margaret emphasizes their breakup is due to timing and not just distance, highlighting their emotional drift.            |
| Future Plans   | The once joyful planned trip across America turns solitary as Margaret encourages him to go alone for growth.            |
| Loneliness     | Hugo grapples with feelings of loneliness post-breakup, contrasting it with his lively life with his siblings.           |
| Support System | Hugo's siblings, led by twin brother Alfie, rally around him, trying to lift his spirits amid his heartbreak.            |
| Hope           | Alfie's encouragement about future possibilities begins to spark a sense of hope and determination in Hugo.              |



# Critical Thinking

**Key Point:** Change and Growth through Challenges

**Critical Interpretation:** Imagine standing at a crossroads where the familiar comforts of your life suddenly shift beneath your feet, much like Hugo faced when Margaret left for California. This pivotal moment teaches us that change is not just an ending, but an opportunity for growth. As Hugo learns to embrace his solitude and the daunting journey ahead, you too are reminded that facing the unknown can lead to personal discoveries and new adventures. Whether it's stepping outside your comfort zone or pursuing uncharted paths, every challenge is a chance to evolve, inviting you to navigate life's unfolding story with courage and hope.

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## Chapter 2 Summary: Mae

In this chapter, we follow Mae, a young filmmaker full of passion and ambition, as she grapples with her rejection from the film program at the prestigious University of Southern California School of Cinematic Arts. Despite receiving an acceptance letter, it comes with the crushing news that she was not selected for the highly coveted film program, a lay of disappointment that leaves her feeling uncertain about her artistic talents and future.

The chapter opens with Mae hesitating to watch her own film, which she once viewed with pride. It represents years of hard work and creativity, beginning with her early childhood projects and evolving into her most ambitious work to date. The film's creation involved fervent dedication, collaboration with friends, and numerous learning experiences. Unfortunately, now it serves as a bitter reminder of her perceived failure to gain admission to the program she dreamed of attending.

Just as Mae musters the courage to confront her film again, her father interrupts her by asking for help in the kitchen. This moment allows for some lighthearted exchanges that reveal the close bond Mae shares with her dads. Her family dynamics are further explained; her other dad, Pop, stands in contrast to her biological father with his tall and athletic build, but Mae shares more in common with her Dad, including physical traits and a passion



for the arts.

Their conversation shifts to Mae's struggle to understand the rejection from USC, particularly when she's confronted with a critique from Garrett, a charming but somewhat pretentious boy she's been dating over the summer. Garrett's assertion that experiencing life is vital for creating great art unnerves Mae, leading her to question her worth as an artist and the validity of her experiences thus far.

Pop and Dad offer varying perspectives on art and rejection, emphasizing the subjective nature of creativity. They encourage Mae to not discard her past achievements merely because someone else's opinion doesn't align with hers. The heartwarming moment culminates in Mae agreeing to watch her film again with her fathers. Although the viewing is met with a heavy silence once it concludes, a glimmer of hope begins to crystallize. Mae realizes she hasn't lost her passion for the film, even if she recognizes areas for improvement.

The chapter ends with Mae confronting the uncertainty of her future while feeling lighter, knowing her journey in filmmaking is just beginning. Though the academic requirements of college may distract her from her film aspirations, she recognizes that life experiences will eventually contribute to her growth as an artist. Mae heads into the kitchen to assist with dinner, feeling a renewed sense of purpose and the support of her loving family at



her back.

| Key Elements     | Description                                                                                                                  |
|------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Main Character   | Mae, a passionate and ambitious young filmmaker.                                                                             |
| Conflict         | Mae is rejected from the film program at USC, making her doubt her artistic talents.                                         |
| Initial Reaction | Mae struggles to watch her film, which is a reminder of her hard work and recent disappointment.                             |
| Family Dynamics  | Mae shares a close bond with her two dads, who provide support and contrasting perspectives.                                 |
| Date             | Her relationship with Garrett leads her to question her worth as an artist.                                                  |
| Advice from Dads | Encouragement to appreciate her past achievements despite external criticism.                                                |
| Climax           | Mae watches her film again with her dads, leading to introspection and hope.                                                 |
| Resolution       | Mae feels lighter and renewed in her filmmaking journey, recognizing that life experiences will aid her growth as an artist. |
| Closing Scene    | She heads to the kitchen with a renewed sense of purpose, supported by her family.                                           |



## Critical Thinking

**Key Point:** Rejection is not the end, but a stepping stone to growth and self-discovery.

**Critical Interpretation:** This chapter illustrates that the sting of rejection can cloud our vision, making us doubt our talents and worth. Yet, like Mae, when faced with setbacks, we can choose to lean into our experiences, remembering that each disappointment is merely a pathway to greater understanding and creativity. Life may not always go as planned, but it's these unexpected moments that often shape our artistic voices and resilience. Embracing our past achievements, despite critiques, empowers us to move forward, find renewed purpose, and transform our struggles into the fuel for our passions.



## Chapter 3 Summary: Hugo

In this chapter, eighteen-year-old Hugo finds himself grappling with the fallout of a recent breakup with his girlfriend, Margaret Campbell. Left with a nontransferable train ticket from New York City to San Francisco, he devises a quirky plan to find another Margaret Campbell to join him on the journey. Despite his brothers, Alfie and George, being skeptical about the idea—questioning why he would want to travel with a stranger—Hugo feels the urge to escape familial chaos and embrace a brief adventure before starting university with his five siblings.

Compelled by his desire for independence, Hugo and his brothers come together to compose an unusual online ad, inviting any Margaret Campbell to join him on the trip. The ad humorously outlines the travel details, along with three questions to gauge potential travel companions' personalities. Despite his initial hesitation to post the ad, Hugo's brothers encourage him to go through with it, with Alfie playfully labeling the plan as "mad," a sentiment echoed by George.

After dinner, the atmosphere shifts as the family discusses their day, and Hugo faces the challenge of addressing his breakup. His mother's concern during the meal only heightens his anxiety about breaking the news to his family and the impact it has on them. Their warmth, blended with the tension of the news, creates an uneasy yet profound moment.



Hugo expresses his wish to travel independently, a sentiment complicated by the realization that everyone else will be attending university together, forming a tight-knit group that he feels the need to separate from, even if just temporarily. The siblings struggle to understand his desire for independence, their reactions a mix of hurt and confusion. However, when Hugo articulates his longing to experience life beyond their shared existence, his father ultimately supports him, affirming his need for self-discovery.

As the chapter concludes, the family dynamic remains loving yet strained, showcasing Hugo's internal conflict between familial attachment and the quest for personal growth. In the end, his parents offer encouragement, with his mother reminding him to keep track of his passport—a tender but humorous reminder of the risks of travel. This moment highlights the underlying themes of family, independence, and the complexity of relationships in the face of change.



## Critical Thinking

**Key Point:** The importance of embracing independence

**Critical Interpretation:** Imagine standing at the crossroads of life, just like Hugo, where you feel the weight of familial bonds coupled with an intense yearning for self-discovery. This chapter teaches you that embracing your independence is not just about breaking away from your family; it's about understanding yourself and what you truly want. When you heed the call to adventure, even if it's quirky or unconventional, you give yourself permission to explore new horizons and to grow beyond what you know. Just as Hugo's decision to travel with a stranger represents a leap into the unknown, so too can your own moments of bravery lead you to revelations about who you are and who you want to become. It's a reminder that taking risks, however small, can pave the path to personal growth, allowing you to forge your identity while carrying the love of your family with you.

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## Chapter 4: Mae

In the morning, a lively breakfast unfolds as Mae's Nana shares a nostalgic story about a past romance with a boy who had royal lineage. She reminisces about attending glamorous parties in New York and a romantic rainy kiss, prompting friendly banter with her son and husband at the table. Their playful exchanges indicate the din of family life, transforming meal times into a battleground of wits. Since Nana has moved in after a tough bout with cancer, the atmosphere is a mix of chatter and affectionate jibes, revealing the close-knit nature of Mae's family. Mae, feeling a mix of excitement and trepidation, indicates she'll be leaving to meet Garrett, her summer fling. Her parents and Nana support her plans, emphasizing the importance of adventure at her age.

Mae's departure leads her through familiar streets to a cheese shop where Garrett awaits. Their relationship has been passionate yet tumultuous, characterized by heated debates and moments of intimacy. Their conversation quickly shifts to Mae's recent film project, which Garrett expresses curiosity about. He offers to watch it to provide feedback, despite Mae hesitating at the thought of sharing something so personal. The film, centered on a girl with two fathers, is deeply significant to Mae, but Garrett's critique reveals that while technically sound, it feels too impersonal. This stings, challenging Mae's self-perception and forcing her to confront her reluctance to share her true self in her work.



The vivid dialogue between Mae and Garrett touches on their artistic differences, reflecting broader themes of vulnerability and honesty. As they sit by the river, Garrett challenges Mae to embrace introspection and authenticity in her filmmaking. Despite her initial defensiveness, Mae

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## Chapter 5 Summary: Hugo

In this chapter, Hugo is grappling with his decision about who to live with during an upcoming adventure, freshly aware that he has just broken up with his girlfriend. Despite knowing he shouldn't complicate things, he finds himself captivated by a video from Mae Campbell, a girl from Hudson, New York. Mae's introduction reveals her longing for adventure, and her passion resonates deeply with Hugo, prompting him to replay the video multiple times before his father interrupts.

The scene shifts as Hugo's father enters with laundry, initiating a heartfelt discussion about familial connections. Hugo's father reflects on his own childhood, sharing memories of longing for siblings and the importance of family dinners. This nostalgic moment highlights the tight-knit nature of Hugo's family, which consists of six children. The father-son exchange reinforces the theme of family bonds and the complexity of growing up, particularly as they discuss Hugo's impending departure for university.

Alfie, Hugo's brother, bursts in dramatically, bringing the conversation back to reality. He teases Hugo about his potential choices in living arrangements and expresses skepticism about strangers, hinting at the possible disapproval from their parents. Despite Alfie's lightheartedness, he too feels the weight of change as he probes Hugo about his longing for independence.



Hugo reviews the emails from potential roommates, and when he receives an email from an 84-year-old woman, Margaret P. Campbell, who dreams of traveling by train, the siblings engage in playful banter about the unconventional choice. Margaret’s heartfelt motivation to pursue the adventure resonates with Hugo and reinforces his desire for exploration.

Reflecting on their circumstances, Hugo confesses to Alfie that he seeks a sense of autonomy, feeling confined by their familial expectations. Although he cherishes their family dynamic, he craves the opportunity to carve out his own path. Their conversation reveals the complexity of sibling relationships, highlighting both affection and the struggles of growing apart.

As the chapter closes, Alfie gifts Hugo a carefully chosen leather passport case, showcasing his thoughtfulness amid their playful rivalry. This small gesture represents the love and support of their family, symbolizing Hugo's emotional connection to them as he prepares to embark on his journey. The chapter masterfully intertwines themes of family, adventure, and the bittersweet process of growing up, setting the stage for Hugo's impending journey while deepening the reader's understanding of his character and relationships.

| Key Elements | Summary                                                                |
|--------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Character    | Hugo is at a crossroads, dealing with a breakup and considering living |

| Key Elements            | Summary                                                                                                                                        |
|-------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Analysis                | arrangements for his next adventure.                                                                                                           |
| Initial Conflict        | Hugo feels conflicted by family expectations and his desire for independence, prompted by a video from Mae Campbell that inspires him.         |
| Father-Son Relationship | Hugo's father shares nostalgic childhood memories, emphasizing family bonds and the importance of connections as Hugo prepares for university. |
| Sibling Dynamics        | Alfie provides comic relief but also expresses his own anxiety about the changes ahead as he questions Hugo's choices.                         |
| Roommate Choices        | Hugo considers unconventional roommates, including an 84-year-old woman, which sparks humor and deeper reflection on adventure.                |
| Thematic Elements       | The chapter explores themes of family, adventure, independence, and the bittersweet nature of growing up.                                      |
| Emotional Symbolism     | Alfie's gift of a leather passport case symbolizes familial love and support as Hugo embarks on his journey.                                   |



## Critical Thinking

**Key Point:** Embrace the complexity of family bonds while pursuing independence.

**Critical Interpretation:** As you stand on the brink of new adventures, remember the importance of your family connections. Like Hugo, who grapples with his desire to explore the world while cherishing the love from his family, you too can find inspiration in balancing your quest for autonomy with the nurturing roots that have shaped you. Embrace the tension between seeking your own path and holding on to the cherished relationships that provide support and grounding. Let the heartfelt moments with your loved ones encourage you to bravely step into the unknown, knowing that those bonds will always serve as a safety net as you navigate life's journeys.

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## Chapter 6 Summary: Mae

In the weeks following her emotional breakup with Garrett and her impending move to college, Mae receives an unexpected encore email from Hugo W., the man who previously passed her over for a train trip. He explains that his original travel companion is sidelined due to surgery, and he extends an invitation to Mae to take the vacant spot. Initially, she grapples with excitement and a flood of reservations: the impulsiveness of the decision, her lingering doubts about being a second choice, and her parents' likely objections weigh heavily on her mind. However, Mae reflects on the encouraging words of her supportive grandfather, Pop, about living life fully, and she recognizes that deep down, she craves adventure.

As Mae navigates her feelings, she spends time with her best friend Priyanka for a poignant farewell before they leave for college. The two share playful banter over lunch at their favorite pizza place and discuss Priyanka's long-distance relationship with her boyfriend, Alex. Mae challenges Priyanka's romantic optimism, dismissing the notion of love as anything more than fleeting, likening it to pizza—temporary yet enjoyable. Priyanka, however, asserts that love is deeper than mere enjoyment; it's about taking risks, something Mae has a tendency to avoid.

Their conversation veers towards Mae's potential train trip. Mae teases about her impulsive idea but secretly relishes the thought of the adventure. As they



wrap up their heartfelt moments, Mae promises Priyanka to remain open to love and its possibilities.

Back at home, Mae shares a moment with her Nana, who, despite her challenging health history, provides surprising wisdom about love and adventure from her own youth. Nana's nostalgic recollections encourage Mae to pursue her desire for exploration, creating a bridge between Mae's uncertainties and aspirations. Inspired, Mae reveals her thoughts on the train trip, receiving surprising encouragement from her grandmother.

Later that night, Mae gathers the courage to discuss her plans over dinner with her dads, presenting a well-thought-out story to gain their approval. While initially hesitant and protective, her fathers, evidently concerned for her safety, eventually come to support her adventurous spirit after she assures them of her commitment to safety and responsibility. Their final agreement marks a significant turning point for Mae, allowing her not only to embrace this journey but also to take a bold step forward into her future while reflecting on her past. This newfound sense of freedom promises to redefine her relationships and her artistic perspective as she embarks on a journey towards self-discovery and growth.

| Element                | Details                                                                          |
|------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Post-Breakup Situation | Mae is coping with her emotional breakup with Garrett and preparing for college. |

| Element                | Details                                                                                                                                 |
|------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Unexpected Invitation  | Mae receives an email from Hugo W., inviting her to join him on a train trip after his original companion can't go.                     |
| Initial Reactions      | Mae feels excited yet hesitant, battling with feelings of being a second choice and concerns about her parents' reactions.              |
| Encouragement from Pop | Mae remembers her grandfather, Pop's, advice about living life fully, which motivates her desire for adventure.                         |
| Farewell with Priyanka | Mae spends quality time with her best friend Priyanka, discussing love and their upcoming college journey.                              |
| Views on Love          | Priyanka believes love involves risks, while Mae is more skeptical, likening it to a fleeting experience like pizza.                    |
| Support from Nana      | Mae's Nana shares wisdom about love and adventure, encouraging her to pursue her desires despite health challenges.                     |
| Discussion with Dads   | Mae presents her travel plans to her fathers, who are initially protective but ultimately support her after expressing safety concerns. |
| Personal Growth        | Mae's journey signifies a movement towards self-discovery and a redefined perspective on relationships and adventure.                   |



## Critical Thinking

**Key Point:** Embrace the adventure of life and love

**Critical Interpretation:** As you stand on the brink of new experiences, remember Mae's journey of accepting an unexpected invitation to adventure. This chapter teaches you that stepping out of your comfort zone, despite fears of being a second choice or facing parental concerns, can open doors to personal growth and self-discovery. Embracing the spontaneity of life and love not only enriches your own narrative but also challenges you to take risks that may lead to profound connections and memorable experiences. Just like Mae found her courage to pursue what she truly craved, you too can learn to prioritize adventure, allowing moments of joy and unexpected twists to shape your path.



## Chapter 7 Summary: Hugo

In the bustling chaos of Penn Station, Hugo finds himself overwhelmed. It is a starkly unwelcoming venue, dark and noisy, contrasting sharply with the excitement of his journey. As he navigates the crowd, his thoughts drift to the warnings he's received from both his parents—especially his dad, reminding him of the added caution necessary as a half-black young man in America. The weight of these warnings heightens his anxiety as he waits for Mae, his travel companion, who has not yet arrived.

After spending an anxious night in a cheaply located hotel on the edges of Times Square, Hugo wakes up early, filled with jet lag yet also a burgeoning sense of liberation. With neither parent nor girlfriend accompanying him, he feels a thrilling sense of freedom. He decides to stray from the planned itinerary set by Margaret—his host, a family friend—and explores the High Line instead. He revels in the novelty of eating street food and attempting to enjoy a pint at a pub, though he is denied by the bartender, who reminds him of the stark difference between London and New York.

Amid his wandering, Hugo exchanges texts with his mother, who expresses concern about his well-being, playfully questioning whether he has gotten a tattoo. He reassures her, lightening the mood in their conversation. As the train departure time approaches, panic begins to set in for Hugo as he realizes Mae is now late. Just as worry creeps in, she unexpectedly appears,



looking for all the world like the partner he hoped she would be.

Mae, dressed casually yet purposefully, brings a certain confidence to their meeting. Hugo reflects on their previous correspondence, where he'd carefully curated his identity, not wanting her to find out too quickly about his sextuplet background. Their friendly yet slightly formal introduction shifts their relationship into the realm of partnership. She builds a connection through light-hearted banter about her travel preparations, hinting at her determination and practicality.

As announcements for boarding echo around them, time begins to slip away, yet both feel the significance of the moment. For Mae, this trip is not merely an escape but a step toward something larger—perhaps independence or self-discovery. With Hugo sensing a shared ambition, he feels a surge of hope. As Mae moves purposefully toward the train, Hugo, reinvigorated, knows that this journey is just the beginning of an adventure that may profoundly shape both their lives. Together, they step into this new chapter, leaving the uncertainties of their past behind as they embark on their journey across the country.



## Chapter 8: Mae

In this chapter, Mae steps onto a train with a bubbling sense of excitement about her trip to California. Despite having lied to her dads and the complications of the situation involving Hugo—who she views as merely a ticket to her destination—she can't ignore the dynamic between them. Upon meeting him, she discovers that he is a tall, strikingly handsome biracial Brit and part of a famous sextuplet family, which adds to her mix of emotions.

As they enter their cozy compartment, Mae and Hugo share a moment of light-hearted banter about the space and its sleeping arrangements. Mae is charmed by Hugo's earnestness when he jokes about being a potential murderer, and they find themselves laughing together, hinting at a budding friendship. Their conversation reveals a growing comfort with each other, illustrated through playful exchanges about spiders, illustrating their light rapport.

Once the train departs, Mae receives a text from her best friend, Priyanka, checking in on her. She considers Hugo's offer for privacy, but chooses to step away to call Priyanka, suggesting a need for both independence and connection that reflects her ever-evolving relationship with Hugo. As she settles into a café cart with coffee, she finds herself thinking about Hugo's eyes, a contrast to her earlier dismissal of him as just a means to an end.



While gazing at familiar landmarks from the train, Mae feels an unexpected pang of homesickness, even though her family is not present. This bittersweet moment is compounded as she contemplates the journey ahead, feeling the pull of her roots while simultaneously being excited about venturing into the unknown. The chapter closes with Mae's anticipation for the unfolding adventure, seamlessly blending her feelings of nostalgia with the thrill of new experiences ahead.

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Alex Walk

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## Chapter 9 Summary: Hugo

In this chapter, Hugo finds himself on a train, traveling alone, and gazes out at a river that shifts colors, reminiscent of the river Wey back home where he played with friends. While initially relishing the solitude, a wave of loneliness creeps in, and he misses the companionship of his friends, particularly Margaret, who was supposed to share this journey with him. To alleviate his feelings of isolation, he texts his friends back home, engaging in playful banter that highlights their close-knit relationship despite the physical distance.

As he waits for dinner in his compartment, he interacts with Ludovic, the train attendant, who helps him with arrangements for his bedding. After their brief exchange, Hugo feels the weight of time as he realizes he still has hours until bedmaking. Sleep overtakes him, and he awakens to an announcement for the dinner seating, prompting a moment of self-consciousness as he assesses his attire—worn jeans and a fraying yellow shirt—against the swanky dining car atmosphere he imagines.

Upon reaching the dining car, a crowded space filled with waitstaff and elegant diners, Hugo spots Mae, a girl he had a fleeting connection with earlier. Although they've only spent a short time together, her presence brings him a sense of comfort that he had been longing for during his quiet moments on the train. This chapter captures Hugo's transition from the thrill



of travel to the pangs of solitude, ultimately leading him to seek connection in an unfamiliar place.

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## Chapter 10 Summary: Mae

In the bustling café, Mae finds herself caught up in a tide of patrons ordering snacks and drinks as she waits for someone to arrive. After a few hours of expectation, she realizes that she is waiting for Hugo. When the waiter signals her, she navigates the narrow space to meet him, and they exchange shy greetings before being seated at a table with an elderly couple, Ida and Roy.

Ida introduces herself warmly while Mae and Hugo inadvertently try to say their names simultaneously, adding a note of awkwardness to their meeting. As the conversation flows, Ida and Roy assume that Mae and Hugo, who appear to be in sync, are involved in a long-distance relationship due to the backdrop of England and New York. Mae quickly dispels the myth, leading to a lighthearted exchange about traveling and the romance of train journeys.

Throughout dinner, the couple recounts their adventures on various train trips, including a bittersweet recollection of a journey taken after the loss of their son, which draws a moment of reflective silence around the table. As the conversation shifts back to lighter topics, they share playful banter, revealing that Mae and Hugo have only just met hours earlier.

This sudden honest premise – two strangers embarking on a week-long train



trip together – generates amusement for Mae but mystifies the older couple. They tease one another about their families' fictitious assumptions regarding their travels, and the absurdity of their current situation starts to sink in, bonding them over their shared adventure.

As their dessert arrives, Hugo's admiration for the apple pie prompts a discussion about American culture that leaves him a bit confused yet intrigued. Mae and Hugo raise their forks in a series of playful toasts with the elder couple, celebrating their newfound camaraderie and an adventurous spirit. They toast to being young, adventurous, and to the beloved apple pie, encapsulating a moment of lighthearted unity amid the whimsical chaos of the unexpected journey they have begun together.

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## Chapter 11 Summary: Hugo

In this chapter, Mae's curiosity about an elderly woman named Ida prompts her to seek out an interview, which surprises her companion, Hugo. As they settle into their train compartment, Mae retrieves her camera, excitedly discussing her aspiration to create a film about Ida. She explains that, despite feeling lost after being rejected from film school for a project she was proud of, she still longs to develop her filmmaking skills. This desire is fueled by a vague but compelling idea that emerged during her conversation with Ida, combining inspiration and a need to prove her talent before the next application deadline.

The chapter reveals Mae's vulnerability as she reflects on her rejection and her determination to create something impactful. The dialogue captures their budding camaraderie, marked by playful banter about their pajamas—a humorous, light-hearted interlude that contrasts the deeper themes of ambition and disappointment. Mae opens up about her drive to elevate her artistry, while Hugo, feeling an unfamiliar connection, grapples with his own feelings of uncertainty and heartache resulting from a recent breakup.

As they lie in their makeshift beds, the rhythmic rocking of the train invites introspection. Both characters ponder their motivations for embarking on this journey—Mae's quest for self-discovery in filmmaking and Hugo's attempt to navigate the emotional fallout of his previous relationship. This



intimate exchange sets the stage for a developing friendship, hinting that both Mae and Hugo are seeking not only creative fulfillment and direction but also understanding and support from one another. The chapter concludes with the promise of deeper conversations ahead, as they hint at their personal stories—one yearning for artistic expression and the other searching for a sense of purpose amid personal turmoil.

| Key Elements             | Description                                                                                                        |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Characters               | Mae, Hugo, and Ida                                                                                                 |
| Mae's Aspirations        | Curiosity about Ida leads Mae to pursue a film project, despite setbacks from being rejected by film school.       |
| Hugo's Role              | Surprised but supportive companion, grappling with his own emotions from a recent breakup.                         |
| The Setting              | On a train, providing a context for introspective discussions between Mae and Hugo.                                |
| Themes                   | Ambition, disappointment, self-discovery, friendship, and emotional struggles.                                     |
| Relationship Development | Playful banter and deeper conversations hint at a growing friendship as they share their personal stories.         |
| Emotional Undertones     | Mae's vulnerable reflection on rejection and her desire for artistic expression, contrasted with Hugo's heartache. |
| Conclusion               | Sets the stage for deeper conversations about personal ambitions and emotional support.                            |

## Chapter 12: Mae

Late into the night, Mae shares a deep and unexpected connection with Hugo, a boy she met just hours ago on a train to university. As they talk, she realizes she has confided more in him than with her former boyfriend, Garrett. The darkness of the night seems to facilitate their openness, leading to introspective conversations about their future.

Hugo reveals that he holds a scholarship to the University of Surrey but admits he is not particularly excited about attending it. When Mae presses him for details, he lightheartedly explains that the scholarship wasn't awarded for his academic prowess but rather because of his background as one of six sextuplets. Despite the fact that they are minor celebrities due to their family notoriety in England, this designation doesn't bring him joy.

Their playful banter about family names takes a serious turn as Hugh discusses the burden of being part of a sextuplet. While he loves his siblings, he expresses a feeling of being trapped in his hometown, especially as others, including his ambitious sister Margaret, embark on exciting new adventures elsewhere. He grapples with the idea of staying close to his family or seeking his own identity and ambitions.

Mae, having left her family for her own pursuits, believes in the importance of following one's dreams, even if they involve challenging choices. She



recognizes Hugo's struggle isn't just about loyalty to his siblings but also a lack of direction in his own life. Their dialogue flows naturally, with Mae encouraging him to consider that desire for change can also be a valid aspiration.

As they share laughter and stories, a newfound electric chemistry forms between them, intertwining themes of family, ambitions, and personal identity. Mae challenges the notion that his current feelings of restlessness don't count as legitimate dreams, urging him to reevaluate his potential for a future beyond the familiar comforts of home. Their late-night discussion illustrates the complexities of growing up—the transition from familial bonds to individual aspirations—highlighting the struggles and uncertainties faced by young adults on the brink of significant life changes.

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## Chapter 13 Summary: Hugo

In the serene morning light, Hugo awakens not to the rhythmic sway of the train but to its stillness, signaling that they've stopped in Toledo, Ohio. His foggy mind slowly clears as he recognizes the familiar presence of Mae, who is diligently writing notes for an interview. The two are traveling together, and while Hugo grapples with the remnants of sleep, Mae is already dressed and immersed in her creative pursuits.

As Hugo teasingly critiques her handwriting, they engage in lighthearted banter that reveals Mae's ambitious plan to create a documentary about love stories observed on the train. She expresses her fascination with how the shared experience of travel intertwines people's lives. Mae's idea encapsulates the diverse narratives and emotional connections present in the scurry of the train's passengers, contrasting her previous filmmaking experiences, which were confined to her small town.

Throughout their conversation, Hugo learns that Mae seeks to explore the concept of love—how it manifests across different lives and backgrounds. Their playful dialogue takes a deeper turn as they discuss the challenge of encapsulating love in a single word. Despite Hugo's initial struggle to define it, Mae encourages him to think spontaneously, contrasting their perspectives on creativity; she is spontaneous whereas he prefers reflection.



Opting for a simpler breakfast, they indulge in doughnuts instead of the dining car's formal offerings, while their conversation deepens. When Hugo questions Mae's focus on love stories, she passionately explains that they are profoundly personal, unlike anything she's done before. She reflects on her previous works, highlighting the limitations imposed by her small town, and revels in the possibilities that this journey presents.

Inspired by Mae's sentiments, Hugo recalls the impactful video she made for their trip, expressing that it held depth beyond its brevity. As they share mutual recognition of the significance of their conversations and experiences, a budding connection begins to form between them.

Mae concludes their conversation with a smile that hints at new beginnings, suggesting they extend their exploration of meaningful stories to the other passengers. The chapter emphasizes the emergence of a shared purpose between Hugo and Mae, driven by their intertwining lives, the quest for personal stories, and the enchanting backdrop of the train journey.

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## Chapter 14 Summary: Mae

In this chapter, Mae and her friend Hugo conduct interviews on a train, starting with a deeply emotional conversation with Ida. Ida reveals that her greatest dream has always been to marry Roy, the kind boy who comforted her with ice cream during their childhood. This answers Mae's first question, and the heartwarming history unfolds, illustrating a love that has stood the test of time. Mae, intrigued, contrasts Ida's certainty about love with her own experience, where she often feels like an outsider watching her friends Priyanka and Alex express affection.

As the interview continues, Mae sees Ashwin, the dining attendant, and Roy, Ida's husband, eavesdropping with barely concealed interest. Ida candidly shares her fears, admitting that the thought of never seeing her son again is her greatest dread; it's a poignant moment that casts a shadow over the otherwise light-hearted mood. Despite this heaviness, Ida's greatest hope remains to reunite with her son one day, infusing the conversation with optimism. The tenderness of the moment is highlighted as Hugo reaches out to hold Ida's hand, offering her comfort.

Mae subtly navigates the conversation to explore Ida's love for the world and her interpretation of love, which she defines as "peace." This prompts Mae to reflect on the complexity of love and how it feels like a lofty expectation. After the interview, Mae expresses her gratitude, and Ida cheerfully heads



off to freshen up, leaving Roy to share his own whimsical take on love through humor and tales of fishing.

The narrative then transitions to Ashwin, who shares his childhood memories of cooking with his grandmother in Mumbai, revealing his aspirations to honor her by opening a restaurant. His depiction of love, expressed through culinary traditions, resonates deeply with Mae, who is overwhelmed by the richness of these personal stories.

As lunch approaches, Ida returns with new interview subjects, the Chens, her neighbors on the train, who are eager to share their own experiences. The interviews accumulate, painting a vibrant tapestry of love described in diverse terms, from togetherness to joy, further enriching Mae's understanding.

Afterward, they encounter Ludovic, who excitedly anticipates being interviewed. This playful engagement continues to build on the theme of shared human experience, as the group explores the connections formed on the train.

Following an exhausting but exhilarating morning of storytelling, Mae and Hugo return to their compartment, where Hugo expresses a desire to be interviewed himself. Mae initially declines, caught in a moment of introspection as she grapples with her evolving feelings toward him. She



hesitates to explore such intimacy, recalling her recent past with Garrett and acknowledging that Hugo has a girlfriend. Ultimately, she suggests postponing the interview until after they reach Chicago, hinting at the complexities of budding emotions amid fleeting connections.

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## Chapter 15 Summary: Hugo

In this chapter, Hugo and Mae arrive in Chicago, greeted by the city's towering skyline hidden in clouds, a stark contrast to the low-rise architecture of Hugo's home. As they descend into the city's underground tunnels, excitement builds within Hugo, enhanced by playful banter with Mae, who is a bit disorganized yet carefree. Their chemistry is palpable as they help each other navigate the cramped spaces of the train, igniting a flutter of romantic tension between them.

Upon reaching the station, they are inundated with playful messages from friends, teasing Hugo about his burgeoning relationship with Mae, which adds a humorous backdrop to their adventure. As Hugo contemplates their shared future and the unexpected connection he has formed with Mae, he surprises himself with a desire to stay close to her rather than retreat into solitude.

Once outside, they realize they forgot to bring an umbrella, prompting a playful exchange that leads them to sprint through the pouring rain towards a hostel. Their camaraderie grows even stronger as they laugh off their soaked clothes and the unexpected adventure of navigating a new city.

At the hostel, however, chaos ensues when Hugo realizes he cannot find his wallet, a sinking feeling of panic washing over him. An audience of fellow



travelers begins to watch as he frantically searches through his belongings. Mae, ever supportive, comforts him and suggests alternatives, offering to help him instead of letting him stay alone in a hostel room. As they confront the situation together, Mae’s invitation to stay at her hotel for the night signifies a deepening bond and a commitment to navigating the challenges ahead as a team.

By the end of the chapter, a subtle shift in their dynamic occurs; Hugo, once in need, is now allowing Mae to take the lead, setting the stage for further adventures to come, while humorously negotiating the consequences of his earlier oversight by jokingly implying that their dinner must now be on her.

| Key Elements       | Summary                                                                       |
|--------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Setting            | Chicago, with towering skyline contrasts to Hugo's low-rise home.             |
| Characters         | Hugo and Mae, showcasing chemistry and romantic tension.                      |
| Initial Activities | Arrival in the city and navigating underground tunnels; playful banter.       |
| Interactions       | Teasing messages from friends about their relationship, adding humor.         |
| Event: Rain        | Forgotten umbrella leads to a sprint through the rain, enhancing camaraderie. |
| Conflict           | Hugo loses his wallet, leading to panic and comic relief.                     |
| Resolution         | Mae offers help and a place at her hotel, deepening their bond.               |

| Key Elements      | Summary                                                                                    |
|-------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Character Dynamic | Shift from Hugo needing help to allowing Mae to lead.                                      |
| Conclusion        | Hints at future adventures and emphasizes the consequences of oversight in a humorous way. |

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## Chapter 16: Mae

In the bustling, rain-drenched city of Chicago, Mae and Hugo seek refuge from the downpour by wandering into a shop filled with local memorabilia. Amidst Chicago-themed souvenirs, Hugo humorously tries on a football-shaped hat, playfully asking Mae if it makes him look American. Mae, teasing him in return, picks out a delicate snow globe for her fathers, illustrating her close relationship with them. Their conversation exchanges reveal the unique way Mae communicates with her parents through light-hearted texts that show both love and a touch of humor amidst the chaos of their travels.

As they stroll through the city, they eventually enter a quaint pizza restaurant where an uncomfortable moment arises when the hostess mistakenly assumes there are four people, failing to recognize Hugo's presence as part of their group due to his race. This moment of misjudgment leaves Hugo feeling isolated, prompting Mae to attempt comforting him by discussing the frequency of such experiences in his life. Despite her efforts, Hugo admits he misses the understanding of his friends, such as Alfie and Margaret. Their conversation deepens their emotional connection, highlighting Hugo's complexity beneath his calm exterior.

Later, back at their hotel, a storm brews over Lake Michigan. They find themselves captivated by the lightning, which prompts Hugo to reflect on



the uniqueness of this moment, suggesting there are experiences that can never be replicated. In this intimate environment, Mae becomes increasingly aware of Hugo—their closeness charged with an unspoken tension despite their fleeting time together.

As Mae thinks about their situation, she grapples with the reality of their circumstances. She and Hugo both carry emotional baggage, having recently gone through breakups and recognizing the time constraints posed by their distinct lives across the ocean. In the midst of this internal conflict, they share a light moment as they discuss Hugo's missing wallet and the awkwardness of being roommates.

The evening takes a cozy turn as Hugo suggests they change into pajamas and watch a movie together. Despite their initial hesitation, they navigate the intimacy of the situation and bond over laughter and playful banter about their differing tastes in films. Mae introduces Hugo to classic cinema, while he jokingly admits to not being a movie enthusiast. This shared experience gradually brings them closer, and eventually, they resettle on the bed to watch a film.

As they shift closer, Mae's awareness of her carefully constructed boundaries fades, and she grapples with the newfound intimacy. They engage in lighthearted conversation about the absurdity of hotel pillow quantities, breaking down the invisible walls between them. The atmosphere of the



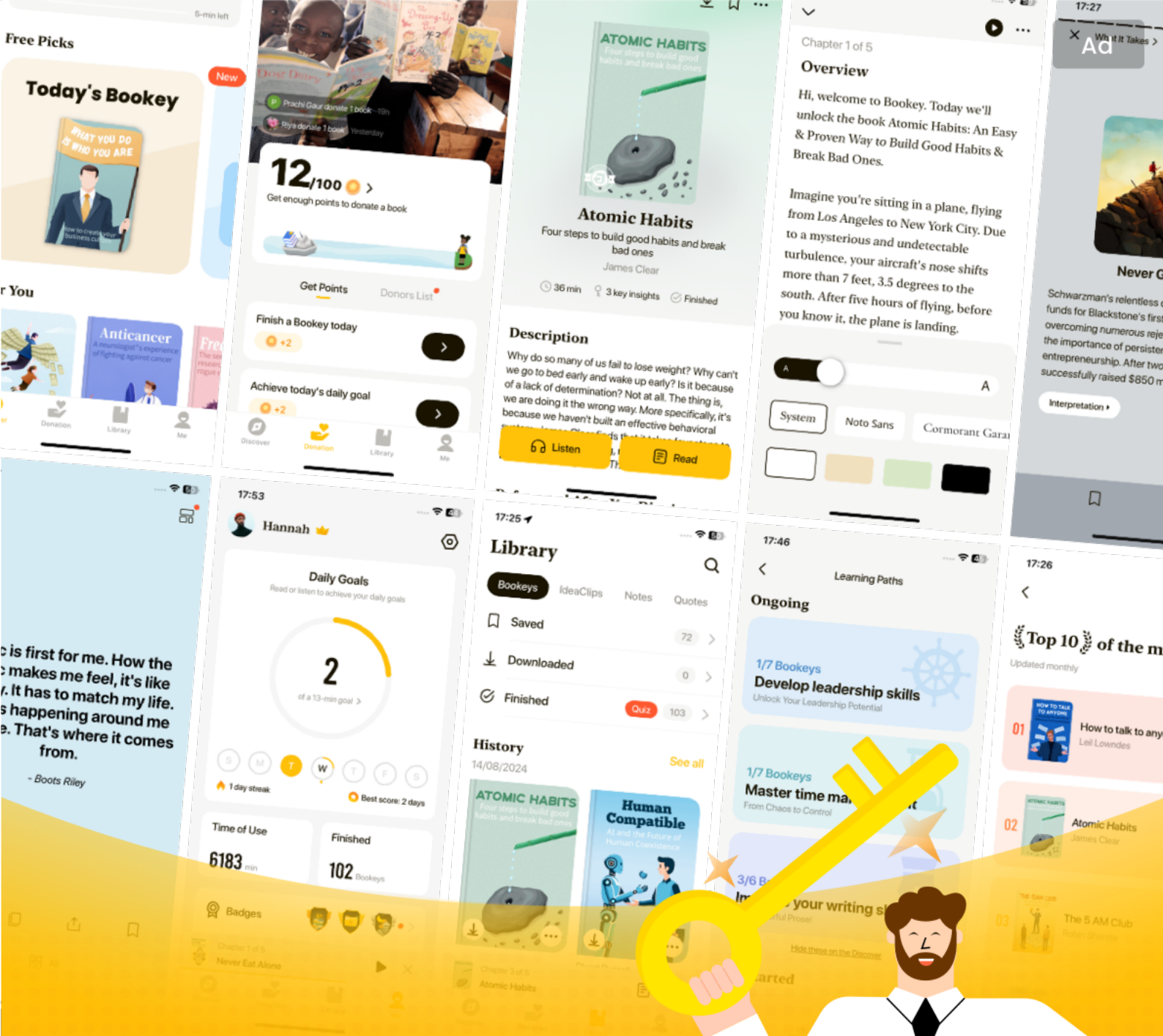
storm outside, paired with the tender moments shared, creates an enchanting environment that leaves them both unusually vulnerable.

As the night progresses, Mae eventually drifts into sleep, only to awaken later to find their hands intertwined. In this moment, she is uncertain if it was real or a dream, but it signifies a shift in their relationship—an unexpected connection formed amidst the chaos of their road trip adventures.

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## Chapter 17 Summary: Hugo

In this chapter, Hugo awakens in the middle of the night to the sound of his mobile phone ringing, a stark contrast to the comforting presence of Mae, with whom he was holding hands. It occurs to him that it's early morning back home, leading to a wave of nostalgia as he recalls family gatherings around the kitchen table, highlighted by his father's bacon frying and his mother's coffee consumption. However, the revelation that the call is from his parents brings a sense of dread as he prepares to face their disappointment over his lost wallet—a careless mistake from his first days abroad.

During the video call, Hugo's parents express their concern and disappointment regarding his wallet, with his dad teasingly suggesting he owes his mum and brother some money, further amplifying Hugo's sense of shame. His mother's worried inquiry about his well-being tugs at his emotions, revealing the depth of his homesickness. Their conversation reveals the dynamics of their family life, as his younger brother Alfie provides comic relief, joking about Hugo's misfire on his travel budget.

As the conversation unfolds, Hugo learns that he is paired with George for university accommodation, a situation that makes him uneasy given his complicated feelings about leaving home and his recent break-up with another girl named Mae. His mother provides reassurance, indicating that



George is open to switching rooms if Hugo desires, heightening the tension within him as he contemplates the implications of this news.

After the call, Hugo wrestles with feelings of isolation and longing for his family's presence, while simultaneously grappling with the newfound independence he craved. He yearns for the companionship of another presence—Mae, who has begun to occupy a special place in his heart. As he returns to the dimly lit room, he finds himself hesitant but drawn to her warmth.

The chapter culminates in an intimate moment between Hugo and Mae. Despite his internal struggles, they share a tender embrace that deepens their connection. The moment escalates into a heartfelt kiss that encapsulates the blend of fear and hope Hugo feels about his evolving relationships, both with Mae and with the idea of truly embracing his new life abroad. Outside, the storm has ceased, yet inside, Hugo's heart races, mirroring the chaotic mix of emotions that come with new beginnings.



## Chapter 18 Summary: Mae

In the morning, Mae is abruptly awakened by a call from her fathers, Pop and Dad. Initially apprehensive, she smiles as she answers, feeling an overwhelming sense of love and nostalgia. Their playful banter reveals their close familial bond, but Mae can't shake the feeling of guilt as she speaks to them while lying next to Hugo—a boy with whom she shares an already charged connection. The conversation continues with questions about her roommate, Piper, and Mae cautiously reassures them that things are going well, despite the complexities of her feelings as she lies in bed next to Hugo.

Reflecting on her relationship with Hugo, Mae realizes that their connection is unlike anything she has experienced before. With past crushes, she always felt a layer of awareness, but with Hugo, their kiss felt natural and inevitable, causing both of them to laugh in surprise. In this moment of intimacy, they choose to sleep, with Mae ultimately inching closer to him, feeling a powerful electricity between them that seems to change everything.

As they wake, Mae's thoughts drift back to her romantic notions influenced by her grandmother's old films, previously dismissed as unrealistic. Yet, she finds herself caught in a similar narrative, recognizing the joy of letting reality slip away. This perception is interrupted when Hugo wakes up abruptly, leading to a fun, playful moment between them as they admire the beautiful view of the lake outside their hotel window.



Eager to explore the city, the couple sets off for breakfast at a diner, where Mae enjoys every little physical touch between them, each brush of knees sends her heart racing. Over waffles, Mae finds herself texting her best friend Priyanka, sharing her excitement with a flirty emoji for the first time. Meanwhile, she messages her Nana, revealing that she used her grandmother's romantic advice, confirming the sparks between her and Hugo.

As they continue their breakfast, Mae can't help but ask about Hugo's past relationship with Margaret, in which he admits they were once very much in love, but the relationship faded over time. The conversation flows, highlighting both their inexperience with relationships, leading to a playful exchange about their previous romantic history. Hugo's admission that Margaret was his first kiss surprises Mae, making her realize how unique their connection is. Feeling bold, they candidly discuss how different their kiss was for both of them, and the chemistry between them grows stronger with each shared smile and nervous laughter.

Overall, this chapter highlights Mae's evolving feelings for Hugo and the thrill of new romantic possibilities, juxtaposed against her memories of family and past relationships. The interplay of deep emotion and lighthearted moments encapsulates her journey of discovery, affection, and the exhilarating tension of young love.



## Chapter 19 Summary: Hugo

Following a leisurely brunch, Mae and Hugo stroll down Michigan Avenue, with Mae equipped with her ever-present camera. As they walk, she frequently stops to capture interesting footage—what she refers to as “B-roll”—which she intends to use to complement the interviews for her documentary. When Hugo inquires about the term, Mae explains it, and Hugo playfully engages with her enthusiasm for film, teasing her about the focus of her project being solely on the interviews rather than their experiences as companions.

Despite Hugo's light-hearted banter, Mae expresses a deeper hesitation, feeling unprepared to be both the filmmaker and subject of her work. This moment of introspection highlights her dedication to telling the stories of others, revealing her struggle to think of her own journey as part of the narrative. She feels torn but ultimately brushes the subject aside when Hugo tries to delve deeper into her feelings.

As they continue walking, they come across a remarkable building adorned with stones sourced from famous landmarks around the world. Hugo, completely captivated, excitedly identifies pieces from the Great Wall of China, the Colosseum, and even the Berlin Wall, feeling a profound sense of connection to the broader world. Mae, initially surprised by his exuberance, laughs and acknowledges the unique treasure of history they have stumbled



upon.

As their exploration continues, Hugo receives a series of texts from his siblings, filled with playful banter and sibling dynamics. Through these exchanges, he grapples with conflicting feelings of missing his family while relishing his time away from them. His internal struggle is amplified by a message from his sister Poppy, urging him to do what he truly wants, prompting Hugo to confront his feelings about returning home.

Their journey leads them to a serene beach setting, stark against the bustling city backdrop. Here, Hugo finds childish delight in the chilly water and the playful atmosphere as Mae captures their surroundings on her camera. They share moments of laughter and connection, lying in the sand and playfully discussing the reasons behind Hugo's decision to travel by train. He reflects on the lack of a driver's license and the romantic nostalgia he associates with train journeys, further revealing his character and vulnerabilities.

As they chat, Mae shares a sweet, sentimental story from her grandmother about love left behind on a train, prompting light-hearted teasing from Hugo. The conversation deepens, with Hugo opening up about how his sister Margaret organized this trip, suggesting there may be underlying complexities to her motivation—hinting at feelings of guilt over leaving him behind.

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In a moment of quiet reflection, each character contemplates the present—Hugo with a piece of sea glass symbolizing the day’s captured beauty and Mae with the understanding that, despite the past, they are experiencing something special together in this moment. Their journey together emphasizes parallels between their personal explorations and the broader narratives they both seek to uncover.

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## Chapter 20: Mae

In the bustling atmosphere of Union Station, Mae and Hugo prepare for their train journey. Just twenty-four hours have passed since their last station, yet Mae feels as though time has stretched. While waiting on a glossy wooden bench, Mae receives a video call from her grandmother, Nana, who insists on meeting Hugo via the screen. Bantering playfully over the phone, Nana offers Mae money and movie-picking privileges in exchange for an introduction, showcasing her warm, humorous demeanor. Once Mae relents and turns the camera around, Nana enthusiastically greets Hugo, offering playful advice about Mae's quirks, all the while expressing her affection for her granddaughter. Mae is simultaneously amused and embarrassed by the exchange but appreciates Nana's kind words about her character.

After the call, they board a larger train, where their compartment feels less awkward than before. With the attendant Duncan showing them to their seats and then leaving, the atmosphere shifts as Mae and Hugo share a kiss, caught in the thrill of their youthful romance. Mae is acutely aware that their time together is fleeting, but for now, they embrace the happiness of the moment, knowing they will eventually part ways.

Their joyful interlude is interrupted when Duncan returns, awkwardly clearing his throat to ask about dinner plans. Once settled and having made reservations, Mae receives an urgent message from her friend Priyanka,



prompting her to excuse herself for a call. Their conversation reveals Mae's newfound happiness and their recent romantic moments, though she tries to play it down as a mere fling. Priyanka, however, encourages her not to overthink things, emphasizing the excitement of Mae's current experience. Just as Mae agrees to enjoy her time, the call abruptly cuts off due to a lack of service, leaving her to follow through with that sentiment.

Upon reuniting with Hugo in the observation car, they share smiles and laughter, discussing their film aspirations. Hugo playfully claims the role of her "assistant director" while they contemplate potential interviews with fellow passengers. Mae prepares her camera, echoing their budding excitement. Their light banter flows seamlessly as they joke about various absurd film plot ideas, revealing both their playful personalities and the start of a deeper connection.

However, amid the fun, Hugh's curiosity turns personal as he inquires about Mae's unfinished film that had faced rejection from USC. Initially hesitant to divulge the details of her past project's failure, she finds herself caught between her irritation at the critique and a desire for connection. Although there is still a reluctance to share the specifics of her work, Mae enjoys Hugo's teasing distractions, even as a slight unease lingers in the background regarding why her previous film fell short.

As they journey through the landscape, the train transitions from urban



scenery to open fields, illuminating their current bubble of romance against the backdrop of an ever-changing view. Their playful banter becomes more intimate, with Hugo encouraging Mae to share her story, suggesting that perhaps her reluctance to involve herself in her own narrative may be the underlying issue. The journey thus unfolds as a metaphorical as well as literal exploration, revealing not only the beauty of their blossoming connection but also the hurdles Mae faces with her creative identity and self-acceptance.

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## Chapter 21 Summary: Hugo

As Hugo and Mae approach Iowa on their train journey, the landscape transforms into expansive flat cornfields, captivating Hugo with their undulating movement in the wind. Enthralled by the scenery, he finds himself increasingly reluctant to return home, stirring thoughts of adventure and the possibility of taking a gap year to explore the world. This idea ignites a hopeful excitement within him, especially as he considers deferring his college scholarship for a year to travel and experience life beyond the confines of his upbringing.

Hugo reflects on his recent revelations, feeling a profound change in himself after just a few days on the road. He yearns to share his newfound aspirations with Mae, who is passionately engaged in discussions with fellow passengers about her documentary film project. However, he hesitates, fearing that revealing his desire to travel might seem like an excuse to avoid responsibility, in contrast to Mae, who has a clear path ahead of her.

Throughout the afternoon, they interview a diverse array of travelers—a widowed professor, a family from Singapore, a mother-daughter duo on a pilgrimage—gleaning stories that resonate with their own experiences. One couple, Louis and Katherine, joyfully celebrate their retirement while embarking on a cross-country journey, demonstrating the thrill of embracing



change at any age.

Later, during dinner in the train's dining car, Hugo and Mae share a table with two sisters, Karen and Trish, who are visiting their mother in Iowa. The sisters' warm curiosity about Hugo's English background leads to lighthearted banter, with Trish teasing about the typical English stereotypes. As conversations flow, Hugo learns to navigate questions about his large family and his identity as a sextuplet—a unique experience that often draws attention and curiosity from strangers.

The initial delight of sharing his story quickly morphs into a sense of loss as Hugo realizes he is sometimes perceived not as an individual but merely a part of a larger entity. A waiter's quip about the challenges of their mother raises mixed feelings in him. Though proud of his family, the burden of being defined by his siblings weighs heavily on his heart.

As the evening progresses, Karen and Trish launch into pointed questions about Hugo and Mae's relationship, nudging at the vulnerability he feels about their uncertain future together. Their innocent inquiries unsettle him, forcing him to confront the complexities of potential separation once their travels conclude.

In a moment of introspection, Hugo and Mae lock eyes, silently acknowledging the weight of the sisters' questions. Mae's gentle touch on

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his knee simultaneously offers comfort and evokes a sense of foreboding about the unknowns that lie ahead. As the train speeds into dusk, leaving behind the vibrant Iowa landscape, the atmosphere shifts, underscoring the fragility of their journey and the complicated paths they must navigate beyond the confines of the train.

| Key Aspect                | Summary                                                                                                                                         |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Setting                   | Hugo and Mae are on a train journey approaching Iowa, surrounded by expansive cornfields.                                                       |
| Hugo's Feelings           | Hugo is captivated by the landscape and feels a growing reluctance to return home, considering taking a gap year to travel.                     |
| Mae's Focus               | Mae is engaged in discussions about her documentary film project, providing a contrast to Hugo's desire for exploration.                        |
| Interviews with Travelers | Hugo and Mae interview various passengers, gathering stories that resonate with their own experiences.                                          |
| Hugo's Background         | During dinner, Hugo shares about his large family and being a sextuplet, revealing a sense of identity and perception issues.                   |
| Sisters' Questions        | Karen and Trish ask about Hugo and Mae's relationship, prompting Hugo to confront feelings of vulnerability and uncertainty about their future. |
| Introspection             | Hugo and Mae share a moment of silent understanding regarding the uncertainties ahead, as the train journeys into dusk.                         |

## Chapter 22 Summary: Mae

In this chapter, Mae awakens in a darkened train compartment, realizing that they've halted somewhere in the night. The comforting sound of Hugo's snores overhead reassures her, as she reflects on her initial anxieties about snoring herself; her friend Priyanka's teasing memories resurface. After mustering the courage to get out of bed, Mae navigates through the dimly lit hall and encounters Duncan, a train employee leaning against a door, who informs her that they are currently in Nebraska due to a mechanical issue.

Their conversation reveals Duncan's familiarity with the train route from Chicago to Emeryville and his lighthearted perspective on the unexpected delay. Mae feels a sense of unreality as they stand still in the dark, disconnected from the outside world and without cell service, heightening the oddity of their situation. The two engage in friendly banter, during which Mae learns about Duncan's dream of a cabin by a lake—an idealistic vision of solitude and freedom from the burdens of work, which resonates with her.

As their chat turns personal, Mae is struck by Duncan's casual interest in her relationship with Hugo, the term “boyfriend” hanging awkwardly between them. Despite enjoying the lightness of their exchange, Mae grapples with her own feelings about her connection to Hugo, sensing uncertainty about their label and her emotional state. Though she appreciates the idyllic images shared, a deeper longing for a meaningful connection stirs within



her, prompting reflections on her defensiveness in matters of the heart.

Eventually, Mae returns to her compartment to find Hugo still asleep. She is drawn to him; she gently kisses him awake and ponders the dreamlike quality of their current pause in life. They share a moment of warmth as Hugo makes space for her in his bunk, where she settles in, comforted by his presence. The chapter closes as Mae finds solace in their quiet intimacy, enveloped in the familiar thrum of his heartbeat, which ultimately signifies a blend of comfort and ambiguity in her emotions.

| Element               | Summary                                                                                                                    |
|-----------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Setting               | Mae wakes in a dark train compartment in Nebraska due to a mechanical issue.                                               |
| Character Interaction | Mae speaks with Duncan, a train employee, who shares his familiarity with the route and lightens the mood about the delay. |
| Mae's Reflections     | She reflects on her feelings toward Hugo and the awkwardness of their relationship label "boyfriend."                      |
| Themes                | Connection, uncertainty in relationships, longing for intimacy, and the contrast between reality and dreams.               |
| Ending Moment         | Mae kisses Hugo awake and finds comfort in their closeness amidst the train's unexpected pause in their journey.           |

## Chapter 23 Summary: Hugo

In the early hours of the morning, Hugo awakens in a train cabin, feeling the warmth of Mae beside him, her presence both comforting and unfamiliar. As he disentangles himself, he checks his phone and sees a heart-wrenching text from his father back home, showcasing a breakfast table missing his plate. This elicits a wave of despair, prompting Hugo to contemplate an unconventional idea: what if he took a gap year instead of heading straight to university? In a conversation with his friend Alfie, he considers the implications of this decision, torn between his desire for adventure and the expectations of his family, particularly his overbearing brothers.

Despite not wanting to disturb Mae, their growing intimacy makes it easier for him to open up about his thoughts. He reveals his wish for more time to figure out his identity, feeling overshadowed by the expectations placed on him as one of sextuplets. Mae listens with understanding and encourages him, pushing back against his insecurities while validating his feelings about wanting to explore the world before settling into a conventional path.

The atmosphere shifts when Mae receives alarming news about her grandmother, who has suffered a stroke. Despite her attempts to maintain composure, the gravity of the situation weighs on both of them. Struggling with her emotions, Mae steps away to call her dads. Hugo hesitantly approaches, wanting to offer comfort but unsure how to respond, given their



short acquaintance. He reassures her that it's alright to be vulnerable, leading to a moment of shared understanding between them.

As they stand together in the stark landscape of Fort Morgan, Colorado, their connection deepens despite the anxiety bubbling beneath the surface. Hugo instinctively rejects the idea of returning home, which he suddenly views as restrictive, while Mae acknowledges their unusual bond, realizing that even in just a few days, Hugo understands her better than most. The transient nature of their encounter hangs in the air as they hear the train's whistle, a call back to the safety of their journey while foreshadowing the challenges ahead.

Hand in hand, they board the train together, navigating the complexities of their emotions in a world that feels both expansive and confining. Their burgeoning relationship hints at the promise of new possibilities, as they seek to support each other through personal crises and life transitions, each gaining strength from the other in an unfolding journey of self-discovery.

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## Chapter 24: Mae

In Denver, Mae had just exited the train, nearly colliding with a metal post, when her companion, Hugo, deftly steered her clear of it using her backpack. Preoccupied with her phone, she was anxiously trying to reach her family—her dads and grandmother—since regaining cell service, but to no avail. This lack of communication was unnerving, augmenting her anxiety.

As they arrived at Union Station, a name shared with the famous train hub in Chicago, Hugo's playful musings about its origin distracted Mae momentarily. However, amidst the conversation, Mae expressed her need for some independence that afternoon. Though initially taken aback, Hugo supported her request, humorously warning her about her tendency to be clingy.

At their hotel, adorned with an impressive cow sculpture, Mae found herself straddling her identity, reminded that Hugo was supposed to be on this trip with his ex-girlfriend, a thought that continued to nag at her. When they checked in, Hugo inquired about any mail for himself, only to be met with disappointment. Despite Mae's offer to lend him money again, Hugo playfully provided a button as collateral, and they departed the hotel and ventured into the fresh Denver air.

Separated for the afternoon, Mae found herself in the vastness of Denver



streets, reflecting on previous conversations with her family, especially the contrasting life experiences of her Nana and dad in Manhattan. As she wandered, she tried to shake off her memories, assuring herself that Nana was doing fine.

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## Chapter 25 Summary: Hugo

In this chapter, we find Hugo, a young man grappling with the pressures of impending adulthood, seated at an Irish pub fixated on a football match. His excitement quickly turns to disappointment when he checks an email from Nigel Griffith-Jones, the Chair of Council at the University of Surrey. The university refuses to defer Hugo's scholarship, which requires that he and his five friends, collectively known as the Surrey Six, attend together. This news shatters his dreams of exploring life independently, forcing him into a future he's uncertain about—the familiar routines of university life back home.

Hugo chats with his friend Alfie about the news, which brings them momentarily closer in their shared disappointment. He muses about how things could be worse and manages to maintain a light-hearted tone with their banter, though the dark clouds over his future linger. He eventually texts George, another member of the Surrey Six, confirming his acceptance of their university plan despite his reluctance.

Afterwards, Hugo takes a contemplative walk along the river, absorbing the sights and sounds of his surroundings, a blend of nostalgia and anxiety. This leads him to a reminder of his financial constraints while trying on a cowboy hat in a shop. His ensuing communication with his family reminds him of home but also of his desire to carve out his own path.



When he returns to the hotel, he finds Mae, his friend who has been preoccupied with her grandmother's health issues. They share a moment of connection, with Mae revealing her emotional reaction to a video featuring a harpist, alongside her concern for Hugo and her understanding of his situation with the university. Their friendship deepens as Mae encourages Hugo to articulate his personal narrative in an email appealing for a deferment of his scholarship. She emphasizes the importance of expressing his unique journey and needs rather than simply accepting the status quo.

Spurred by Mae's advice, Hugo contemplates crafting a new email. However, he is distracted by an urge to explore Mae's filmmaking work, which she has kept private. In a moment of impulsiveness, he ventures into her rejected film folder but quickly shuts it down when interrupted, leading him to feel guilty for invading her privacy.

Returning to their room, he finds Mae in a relaxed state, and their conversation culminates in a tender moment—a kiss that draws them closer and temporarily eases the tension of Hugo's worries about his future. This chapter deftly intertwines themes of friendship, individual aspirations, and the complexities of growing up, showcasing the emotional landscapes characters navigate as they approach significant life transitions.



## Chapter 26 Summary: Mae

In the following chapter, Mae and Hugo are at a train station, highlighting the tension that lingers between them after their previous night together. The atmosphere is bright and comfortable, but Hugo's anxious demeanor starkly contrasts it. As they wait for a delayed train, they engage in light conversation, underscoring the shift in their dynamics since they've shared a bed. Mae's casualness about getting coffee reveals her ability to think past Hugo's unusual behavior, though she soon realizes he seems to be struggling with something deeper.

While Mae checks in with her family, particularly her Nana, about her health and well-being, she finds comfort in their connection. Despite this, she's uncertain about how to structure her documentary film, grappling with the realization that she wants to not only tell others' stories but also draw from her own.

When Hugo leans in to ask a question, their proximity and the intimate nature of their discussion amplify Mae's feelings for him. However, the conversation soon turns serious as he expresses his concerns about his future and his inability to articulate his ambitions—further reflecting the emotional turbulence both are experiencing. Mae encourages Hugo to chase his dreams, emphasizing the importance of vulnerability and commitment, suggesting that taking risks is essential for fulfilling one's passion.



The conversation shifts as Hugo encourages Mae to make her film more personal, which deeply unsettles her. It quickly becomes clear that he has watched her film without her permission, igniting a conflict rooted in trust and boundaries. Mae feels exposed and hurt not only because Hugo invaded her privacy but also because his critique suggests she didn't convey her own voice or emotions effectively, an introspection that she had hoped to avoid.

As Mae grapples with her feelings of betrayal and frustration, she is unexpectedly confronted by Hugo's admission of his feelings for her. Yet, just as the tension reaches a peak, an incoming call from Margaret interrupts their moment, forcing Mae to emotionally retreat and gather her belongings as she prepares for their impending train journey.

This chapter captures the complexities of their relationship—layered by vulnerability, unexpressed emotions, and the challenges of forging connections in the face of personal aspirations. The mix of humor, tension, and a hint of romance underscores the turning point in their dynamic, setting the stage for the unfolding of both their personal journeys and evolving relationship.



## Chapter 27 Summary: Hugo

In these chapters, the story follows Hugo as he embarks on an emotional journey aboard the California Zephyr train with Mae, following a tense conversation that reveals his complicated feelings about recent events, particularly his past relationship with Margaret. As they settle into their compartment, the atmosphere is thick with unspoken words, and Hugo grapples with regret after his conflict with Mae and their unresolved tension.

Mae takes charge by leading them to their compartment, trying to keep things moving despite the emotional weight between them. Hugo is preoccupied with texts from Margaret, which fervently reveal her desire to see him, further complicating his feelings as he questions the timing of her messages. Memories of their relationship flash through his mind, showcasing the fond yet tumultuous moments they shared, and Hugo becomes increasingly aware of the pressure weighing on him.

Once the train departs, Mae announces her intent to conduct interviews for her project, implicitly leaving Hugo behind. In her absence, he is left alone in the compartment, watching the daunting yet beautiful Rocky Mountain scenery pass by—a stark contrast to his internal struggles. Hugo reflects on his earlier plans with Margaret and realizes that their breakup seemed to open the door for something unexpected with Mae.



Prompted by a cherished video call from his siblings, Hugo finds solace and encouragement as they rally around him, offering support and reinforcing the idea that he should be honest with Mae about his feelings. Their conversation turns into a casual yet pivotal family discussion that showcases their strong bond. They express their plans to support Hugo's desire for a gap year, showing their commitment to keep the family together in a visible act of solidarity.

After the call, Hugo seeks out Mae in the observation car, making a brave attempt to apologize and express his true feelings about her. Their interaction is interrupted by Mr. Bernstein, an older man also on the train, who inadvertently pulls Hugo back into a moment of awkwardness. Despite the interruptions, a pivotal moment occurs when Mae subtly communicates her feelings, providing a flicker of hope for Hugo.

Ultimately, the chapter reaches a peak when Mae confirms her interest in Hugo, leading to a warm, shared smile that signals a newfound connection. As they both navigate their evolving relationship amidst the backdrop of the stunning mountain landscape, they seem ready to embrace the possibilities that lie ahead. The tension and uncertainty of their emotions give way to a moment of mutual understanding and affection, culminating in a light-hearted commitment to see where this journey takes them.

#### Chapter Summary

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## Chapter Summary

Hugo embarks on a train journey with Mae, grappling with feelings about his past relationship with Margaret. Tension arises after a conflict with Mae, leading to reflection on their unresolved emotions.

Mae takes the lead, while Hugo struggles with messages from Margaret, reminiscing about their tumultuous past.

After the train departs, Mae focuses on her project, leaving Hugo alone to confront his feelings against the beautiful Rocky Mountain scenery.

Encouraged by a video call from his siblings, Hugo receives support regarding his plans and is motivated to be honest about his feelings for Mae.

Hugo seeks Mae in the observation car to apologize, but their moment is interrupted by an older passenger, causing awkwardness.

Despite interruptions, Mae subtly shares her feelings for Hugo, signaling hope and connection.

The chapter concludes with both characters ready to explore their relationship, embracing mutual understanding and affection against the stunning landscape.

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## Chapter 28: Mae

In this chapter, Mae and Hugo find themselves in their train compartment after dinner, surrounded by the enchanting landscapes of Utah. The ethereal sky and silhouetted mountains set a serene backdrop as they cozy up together. At first, Mae seems hesitant about including Hugo in her documentary project, but she unexpectedly changes her mind, wanting to capture him and their moments together before they part ways. As she leans in to fix his collar, their closeness sparks an intimate kiss, establishing an emotional connection that deepens throughout their conversation.

As they sit shoulder to shoulder, they reflect on the remaining time they have together—twenty-one hours to San Francisco for her and eventually a goodbye that looms over both of them. Hugo, amused by their situation, acknowledges the interviews they've done, mentioning how tough it would be to follow Mr. Bernstein and the emotional June. Mae, lost in her thoughts, is filled with the excitement of piecing together many stories she's gathered from fellow travelers, yet she grapples with the bittersweet reality that her time with Hugo is limited.

Their dialogue shifts to their childhoods and personal lives. Mae shares her experiences growing up with two dads, revealing moments of approval and disapproval from their small-town community. Hugo offers a sympathetic ear, sharing that while his large family provided some protection from



teasing, he and his siblings still navigated harsh criticisms through a blog run by his mother. They connect over the challenges they've faced, but while Mae finds comfort in their shared experiences, she also confronts Hugo's reluctance to fully fight the academic challenges he faces back home.

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## Chapter 29 Summary: Hugo

In the early hours of their train journey, Mae and Hugo find themselves in a quiet moment of connection. After a failed attempt to film a nighttime interview due to the darkness, they enjoy a heartfelt experience watching \*Cinema Paradiso\*, which brings emotions to the surface. This shared intimacy fosters their bond, hinting at the burgeoning feelings between them—feelings that grow more complicated as their journey nears its end.

As morning breaks across the stunning Nevada landscape, the train shifts from a quiet retreat to a platform for Hugo's reflections. Mae prepares for their interview, and Hugo contemplates the forthcoming questions about his dreams and fears. For him, being interviewed by Mae feels significant; she represents a unique connection amidst the potentially superficial interactions he anticipates with professional journalists later.

When asked about his biggest dream, Hugo reveals that he has never before considered what he wants for himself, having lived much of his life with predefined expectations. This journey has opened his eyes to the possibility of a world beyond what he has known. In articulating his aspirations, he expresses a yearning for exploration and independence, contrasting with his comforting but sometimes stifling life as a sextuplet where individuality can feel diminished.



As MAE skillfully continues the conversation, Hugo's introspection deepens. He shares a fear that resonates deeply: the worry that he is not enough on his own, feeling defined by his familial ties. The week they have spent together has made his longing for a distinct identity clearer, and he reflects on the complexity of love extended to family, friends, and his growing affection for Mae.

Their banter turns playful, with Hugo jokingly likening love to pizza—a metaphor that allows him to express comfort, variety, and warmth. Mae's presence stirs greater emotions within him; she is becoming a central part of his experience in ways he struggles to articulate. The laughter shared nourishes their connection but also foreshadows the parting that looms on the horizon.

As they share pizza in the train's observation car, Hugo feels the weight of impending separation. Their conversation touches on what lies ahead—time spent together in San Francisco contrasted with the unavoidable paths they must take afterward. In a candid exchange, they acknowledge their uncertainty about the future, leading to a simple yet profound desire: to enjoy the moment.

While the world rushes by outside, implications of an unexpected call from Mae's father hang heavily over their newfound intimacy. As Hugo's mind spins with protective instincts and fear of impending change, the arrival of



the call indicates that their time together may soon be disrupted. Despite the light-heartedness that has defined their moments, a shadow of worry now tints their connection with vulnerability, creating an emotional climax that further deepens their bond—even as it hints at the heartbreak to come.

Ultimately, the chapter closes with an air of unease, as Hugo realizes that even amidst laughter and shared joy, the reality of their separate lives may intrude at any moment, altering the course of their relationships and experiences.

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## Chapter 30 Summary: Mae

In this poignant chapter, Mae emerges from a train, burdened not only by her backpack but also by the heavy news of her grandmother Nana's passing. The abruptness of the loss leaves her in a fog—her mind comprehends the event, but her heart struggles to process the reality. Fueled by a sense of urgency, Mae organizes her travel back to San Francisco, guided by her supportive friend, Hugo. Despite the whirlwind of activity—booking flights, ensuring Hugo has money—Mae finds herself resisting tears, mentally preparing for the grief that awaits her.

As they navigate the unremarkable train station, Mae is comforted by Hugo's steady presence. Their camaraderie shines through moments of silent understanding, laughter about the ridiculousness of their situation, and an emerging bond. Hugo's offer to accompany her home is tempting; it signifies comfort amidst impending sorrow. However, Mae recognizes that this is a journey she must undertake alone, even as she grapples with the bittersweet reality of parting ways.

Their farewell is charged with emotion, marked by tender moments that encapsulate their connection. Mae reflects on the intensity of young love and loss as she shares her gratitude for their time together, highlighting the depth of their relationship that has formed over an unexpectedly short period. The exchange of promises to stay in touch and share personal creations—the film



she plans to work on and Hugo's letter—underscores the hope for continuity despite the uncertainty that lies ahead.

As Mae departs in a cab, holding onto a keepsake from Hugo, she steels herself against tears. The journey across the Bay Bridge is marred by a surge of feelings, but she maintains her composure. Eventually, she boards a red-eye flight back to New York City, where she is greeted by her dads, who also wear the signs of grief and sleeplessness. Their embrace provides a sense of solace, although Mae's heart aches with regret about a goodbye that she never got to share with Nana.

The chapter's climax unfolds as Pop presents Mae with a small memento from Nana: an old train ticket, symbolizing journeys taken and those yet to come. This tangible connection to her grandmother becomes the catalyst for Mae's tears, marking the onset of a profound grieving process that she has kept at bay until now. In the face of loss, the realities of familial love and the bittersweet nature of remembrance intertwine, shaping Mae's path forward.



## Chapter 31 Summary: Hugo

In this chapter, Hugo finds himself in a taxi, clutching a bluish stone he collected in his travels. He stows it in his rucksack, which already holds other meaningful stones. As he enters the city, he feels a nagging sense of unease, exacerbated by the absence of Mae, despite being separated from her for only a short time. This feeling intensifies as he checks into a hotel, where he reflects on his missed opportunity to offer Mae support at the airport as she travels to New York for a funeral.

The hotel is themed around the nautical atmosphere of Fisherman's Wharf, complete with decorations of seagulls and buoys. Feeling restless, Hugo leaves his room and heads toward the bay. He should be excited to see well-known sights like Alcatraz and the Golden Gate Bridge, but he is weighed down by thoughts of Mae and the company he wishes he could share these moments with. It suddenly strikes him that he was actually meant to experience this adventure with Margaret, a friend he had a budding romantic relationship with, not Mae.

Hugo takes a moment to text Margaret, suggesting they meet for coffee the next morning. He also sends a message to his mother thanking her for sorting out his finances, signifying a longing for home and familial comfort as he navigates this chaotic moment in his life.



As he gazes over the bay, reflecting on his journey across America without money, he recalls a story about a zebra that escaped captivity, drawing a parallel to his own life—a sense of both freedom and the inevitable pull of home. Deciding against visiting the sea lions, he instead walks toward the beach, where he sits and watches the sunset transform the sky's colors, feeling the weight of loneliness.

Later that night, Hugo wakes up, longing for a message from Mae but instead receives a text from his friend Alfie. Their conversation reveals that Margaret has left due to her grandmother's passing, and Hugo's feelings become more complicated. Alfie's attempts to probe deeper into the situation lead Hugo to reflect on the significance of his experiences with Margaret, concluding that everything truly happened between them. As the chapter closes, Hugo grapples with the magnitude of his emotions, signaling that this journey is about more than just physical travel; it is also a painful exploration of connection, loss, and longing.



## Chapter 32: Mae

In the aftermath of Nana's passing, Mae, her father, and Pop navigate their grief during a stop at a diner on their way home from the airport. Over blueberry pancakes—Nana's favorite—Pop reflects on her last moments, suggesting that while the doctors say she likely felt nothing, he believes she had some sense of closure after her strokes. This intimate moment reveals the emotional support they give one another amid their shared sorrow. Mae feels a pang of guilt for not being there; she knows she should have been but had deceived them about her whereabouts.

As they drive home, they listen to the score from "Titanic," another of Nana's passions, stirring fond memories. At home, Mae feels the weight of Nana's absence as she wanders through her possessions. A light-hearted exchange with her father about Nana's overpowering perfume lightens the mood, allowing for bittersweet reminiscence. Later, at the kitchen table, they begin making arrangements for the funeral while Mae grapples with her own thoughts.

During this somber occasion, Mae opens up about her recent trip and the adventures it entailed. Her father and Pop display a mix of concern and disbelief as she recounts her journey with Hugo, a boy she had recently met, and the unexpected closeness that developed between them during their cross-country train journey. As she explains their living arrangements and



the accidental intimacy, her father's response reflects protective instincts, and tension builds as he processes what she shares. Mae feels the need to reassure them of her safety and insists that nothing inappropriate occurred, although the seriousness of her parents' concern is palpable.

After a wave of questions and some back-and-forth, Mae expresses remorse for her deception but emphasizes her need for independence. As her father begrudgingly accepts the situation, noting that while they wish she hadn't lied, they are glad she had a positive experience. The anecdotes shift from serious to humorous as Pop tries to lighten the mood, and the trio finds camaraderie amidst their shared bereavement.

Mae presents her evolving film project to them, featuring interviews that reflect on love, including her connection with Hugo. The emotional weight peaks when Hugo appears on screen, revealing a genuine affection for Mae and triggering a conflicting surge of emotions within her. As her father and Pop pick up on the nuance of Hugo's feelings, they jovially tease Mae about her own emotions, suggesting that she is also in love. This realization prompts Mae to confront her complex feelings about Hugo, bringing layers of nostalgia, longing, and self-discovery into the forefront amidst their shared grief.

Throughout the chapter, themes of love, loss, family bonds, and personal growth are woven together, capturing the complexities of Mae's journey as



she strives to navigate her emotions while honoring the legacy of her beloved Nana.

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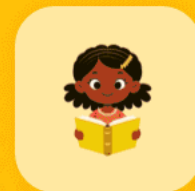
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## Chapter 33 Summary: Hugo

In the early morning light, Hugo wakes with a sense of anticipation mixed with anxiety. While he wishes to hear from Mae, he receives a message from his ex-girlfriend, Margaret, inviting him to a nearby coffee shop. As he walks there, he feels a strange mix of emotions—excitement akin to a first date, yet guilt as if he's being unfaithful to Mae. The small café is nestled on a quiet street, and upon seeing Margaret waving, he steels himself and steps inside.

Margaret greets him warmly, complimenting him on how travel suits him. She wears a beautiful blue dress that reminds him of their past together, and the familiar scent of her perfume triggers nostalgia. Their conversation shifts from polite small talk about travel to reminiscences about their lives. Margaret reveals that she learned about his trip from their mutual friend Alfie, further complicating Hugo's emotions as he struggles with the recent break-up.

As they talk, the subject of another girl surfaces, causing Hugo to awkwardly explain how he had to book under a different Margaret Campbell's name to secure their travel plans. This revelation shocks Margaret, leading to humorous yet serious misunderstandings about love and relationships, especially concerning an elderly woman Hugo mentioned in jest. Their banter is laced with tension as Margaret grapples with feelings of



jealousy and heartbreak.

Gradually, their conversation turns more serious as Margaret confesses to missing Hugo and contemplating the possibility of rekindling their romance. Despite Hugo's reservations and the reality of his feelings for Mae, who has changed his outlook, he finds himself responding to Margaret's affection with a mix of nostalgia and confusion. They share a moment of intimacy, reinforcing their past bond, though Hugo consciously acknowledges that things between them have fundamentally changed.

Margaret, however, senses the shift in Hugo and encourages him to embrace whatever new opportunities his travels or personal growth might afford him. As they part ways, the weight of their history hangs in the air—a bittersweet chapter closed, yet leaving both characters contemplating their futures. Hugo, though unsure of where he stands emotionally, resolves to write a letter, hinting at his need to clarify his feelings and direction moving forward.

| Element         | Description                                                                  |
|-----------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Setting         | Early morning; a small café on a quiet street.                               |
| Main Characters | Hugo, Margaret, Mae.                                                         |
| Hugo's Emotions | Anticipation mixed with anxiety; excitement and guilt over meeting Margaret. |

| Element                  | Description                                                                      |
|--------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Meeting with Margaret    | Warm greeting; conversation includes nostalgia and past memories.                |
| Conversations            | Small talk shifts to serious topics; misunderstandings about another girl arise. |
| Margaret's Confession    | She misses Hugo and considers rekindling their romance.                          |
| Hugo's Internal Conflict | Feels nostalgia but is reminded of his commitment to Mae; recognizes changes.    |
| Conclusion of Meeting    | Bittersweet parting; Hugo resolves to write a letter to clarify his feelings.    |

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## Chapter 34 Summary: Mae

In the quiet stillness of morning, Mae awakens in her own bed, momentarily disoriented by the recent whirlwind of changes and the many new spaces she has occupied. The comforting sound of a nearby train whistle reminds her of home, yet her heart sinks when she notices an absence of messages from Hugo. Their parting had been deliberate, but she can't shake the feeling of uncertainty—wondering if he's with Margaret. The recurrent question haunts her: does he miss her as much as she misses him?

Just as she wrestles with these thoughts, Priyanka enters the room, surprising Mae and causing her to burst into tears. Their friendship, filled with shared history and emotional support, quickly provides a safe haven.

Priyanka—who has skipped school to be there—crawls into bed alongside Mae, mirroring the comfort of their childhood sleepovers. They take a moment to acknowledge the weight of their recent loss, the absence of Mae's grandmother, Nana, who meant so much to them.

The conversation lightens as they discuss their lives; Priyanka's relationship with Alex, Mae's recent adventures, and the unexpected truths that blossoms from love. Mae reflects on the courage it takes to maintain love amidst distances, realizing how transformative the past week has been. After recalling fond memories of Nana, Priyanka heads home to prepare for the upcoming funeral, leaving Mae to confront her grief alone.



As Mae rummages through her closet for a black dress to wear to the funeral, she discovers a note pinned to it—a message from Nana. Emotion floods her as she reads the heartfelt words, which express Nana’s love and encouragement, even amidst the finality of death. The note is filled with warmth, humor, and wisdom, urging Mae to shine brightly and embrace life.

With tears still glistening in her eyes, Mae retrieves her camera, ready to document a tribute to Nana. Seated on her bed, with the somber dress in her lap, she begins to speak directly to the camera. Her voice quivers slightly, but she is determined to share a story that connects the past with her present. “Once upon a time,” she says, “my grandmother fell in love on a train.” Taking a moment to gather her breath, she adds, “Fifty years later, so did I.” This poignant line encapsulates Mae’s journey of love and loss, firmly linking her heartache to the legacy of her grandmother’s spirit.

| Element           | Description                                                                                       |
|-------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Setting           | Mae awakens in her room, reflecting on recent changes and feelings of disorientation.             |
| Internal Conflict | Mae is troubled by the absence of messages from Hugo and questions if he misses her.              |
| Friendship        | Priyanka surprises Mae, and they share a comforting moment, reminiscent of their childhood.       |
| Loss              | They acknowledge the recent death of Mae's grandmother, Nana, who was significant in their lives. |

| Element               | Description                                                                                             |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Character Development | Mae reflects on how love changes and the courage needed to maintain it despite challenges.              |
| Note from Nana        | Mae discovers a note from Nana, providing comfort and urging her to embrace life.                       |
| Tribute               | Mae decides to document a tribute to Nana using her camera, connecting her love story with Nana's past. |
| Conclusion            | Mae begins her story, linking her journey of love and loss to her grandmother's legacy.                 |

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## Chapter 35 Summary: Hugo

In a bustling Mexican restaurant, Hugo is engrossed in a basket of tortilla chips when an email arrives that could change his future. The night prior, he had painstakingly crafted a letter that he sent to Nigel Griffith-Jones, the Chair of Council at the University of Surrey, expressing his desire to defer his scholarship in favor of a gap year to travel. Although he considered reaching out to Mae, someone significant to him, he ultimately decided against it, telling himself her priorities were elsewhere. Instead, he confided in just his friend Alfie, assuring him that if this attempt fails, he would stand by them, but he had to try one last time.

When he sees the email from Griffith-Jones, panic sets in, causing him to spill his drink. Ignoring the mess, Hugo eagerly reads the email, which reveals a compromise from the university: they will defer his scholarship if he participates in some promotional events for the university's upcoming term. Elated, Hugo leaps up, knocking over the chips as he celebrates. His mind races with tasks: how to share the good news with his siblings, plan his travels, notify his parents, and most importantly, tell Mae.

In the midst of his excitement, a nearby boy interrupts him, enthusiastically revealing his own taco ambitions. Hugo chuckles and raises a chip in his direction, feeling lighter than air. His gaze then falls on a map of California, with Los Angeles marked prominently. In that moment, inspiration



strikes—he knows where his adventure will begin: in the City of Angels.

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## Chapter 36: Mae

In the aftermath of a gathering steeped in memories, three characters—Dad, Pop, and Mae—find solace and exhaustion on the couch, surrounded by remnants of the evening. The mood is bittersweet as they reflect on a loved one who recently passed away. Dad, with a sigh, notes how much the deceased would have disliked certain appetizers but would have appreciated the desserts and heartfelt eulogies shared. The family shares a moment of warmth, recalling memories, including a humorous yet embarrassing story involving a donkey that would have drawn her ire. Mae, caught up in their banter, interrupts with news of an email from Hugo, a figure central to her heart and aspirations.

Mae's immediate reaction to the email reflects a mix of excitement and nervousness. Pop and Dad's teasing only adds to her anticipation, but she quickly retreats to her room, eager to uncover what Hugo has to say. The email, though brief, contains a message of gratitude and a forwarded note from the University of Surrey. Mae is uplifted, knowing how much this opportunity means to Hugo. After a day filled with longing for his company, she feels elation at the thought of his success and the hope of their connection.

As she reads Hugo's letter, she feels a wave of emotion. His words about courage, dreams, and the struggle of being one of six siblings resonate

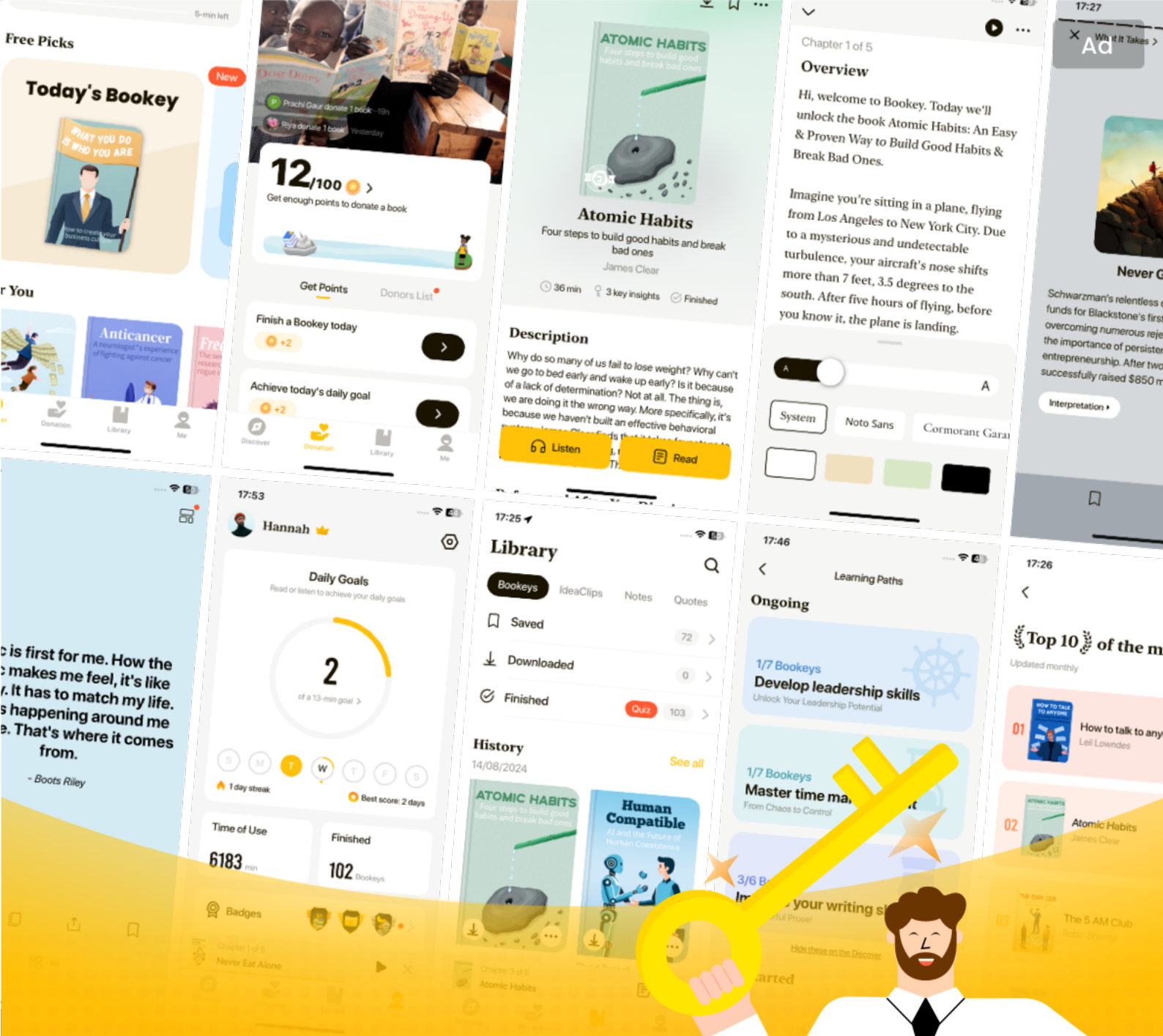


deeply with her. Despite not being a traditional love letter, it touches her heart and brings tears to her eyes. In a moment of impulsive courage, she decides to share her creative work—a rough cut of her film that includes a recent recording, displaying her support for Hugo’s dreams. Accompanying it is a note asserting that he already embodies the magic he seeks. By offering this, Mae takes a step toward embracing her own advice: to be brave and pursue what she truly desires.

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## Chapter 37 Summary: Hugo

In this chapter, Hugo finds himself wide awake, his mind buzzing with thoughts when he receives a video from Mae. He had anticipated a straightforward documentary featuring their recent interviews with Ida, Ludovic, Katherine, and others, but instead, he is captivated by Mae's heartfelt segment. She begins by recalling a poignant moment: "Fifty years later, so did I," which echoes her grandmother's own love story on a train. This revelation hits Hugo deeply, invoking a blend of nostalgia and affection that stirs within him.

As Mae continues, Hugo is initially taken aback, expecting the same overwhelming sensation he felt when Margaret once uttered similar words about love. Yet, instead of fear or sadness, he finds himself laughing—unexpectedly filled with happiness. It dawns on him that he has developed feelings for Mae, a realization that fills him with a buoyant joy, akin to helium lifting him. The depth of his emotions surprises him, and in the quiet of his hotel room, he contemplates how the film has deftly captured the essence of love and human connection.

The documentary itself is an artistic blend of interviews, weaving together snippets of various conversations in a way that reflects a collective contemplation on love and existence. It stands out as a brilliant piece of work—moving, humorous, and uniquely engaging—mirroring Mae's own



spirited nature. By the end of the film, Hugo finds himself in tears, overwhelmed by its impact and the recognition of his feelings for Mae. With a renewed sense of purpose, he resolves to watch the film again, longing to explore the emotions it has stirred within him once more, all while contemplating his upcoming train trip and the potential it holds for their relationship.

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## Chapter 38 Summary: Mae

As Mae gazes out of the airplane window, the clouds drift by in whimsical formations, while below, the landscape unfolds in vibrant patches of green and gold. Yet, she is preoccupied with thoughts of her past week, particularly about her beloved Nana, who would be thrilled to see Mae off to college — a milestone overshadowed by a whirlwind of farewells. She recalls the tender hugs from her dads and the bittersweet parting with her friend Priyanka, who offered a final wave as she drove away.

Mae reflects on the text she sent to Garrett, conceding that he might have been right about certain aspects of her film project. She carries a flash drive with the final cut of her film, a work she is quietly proud of and intends to present to the dean of admissions once she arrives. The drive feels significant, almost like a piece of her heart that she hopes to share.

However, mixed in with her pride is a gnawing anxiety about Hugo, her classmate, who has yet to respond to her about the film. This uncertainty leads Mae to fear that he either disapproved of her work or withdrew due to the vulnerability she expressed. She wonders if perhaps they were never meant to have a resolution, thinking that this might be one story that doesn't end happily.

Despite her doubts, Mae resolves not to let this discourage her. She's willing



to face rejections head-on in her pursuit of filmmaking, promising herself that if her meeting with the dean doesn't yield the desired outcome, she'll return the following day, and the day after that, until she finds her way.

Interestingly, her perspective has shifted; the thought of immersing herself in the breadth of subjects like literature, religion, and science no longer feels like a setback. Instead, she begins to see value in these experiences, realizing they may lead her on unexpected paths. Mae recognizes that the film she created could only have come to life thanks to the detour she took — the creative journey she embarked on by embracing spontaneity. Regardless of what lies ahead, she feels a deep sense of gratitude for the experiences that have shaped her. This new understanding provides Mae with a renewed sense of purpose as she approaches her future in college and beyond.

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## Chapter 39 Summary: Hugo

As the journey through America unfolds, Hugo finds himself captivated by the magnificent ocean that comes into view, a brilliant blue that surpasses his dreams of the Pacific. Surrounded by the beauty of the sandy dunes and the rhythmic waves, he feels a profound sense of longing, wishing he were sharing this moment with Mae rather than a frustrated executive consumed by work.

Their train journey, though lasting twelve hours, seems to drag on without Mae by his side, illustrating how time feels different when spent apart from the ones we care about. Hugo's thoughts shift toward Los Angeles, the city he knows only through films, where Mae is scheduled to meet with the dean of admissions that very day.

Just as the train begins to move again, a message from Alfie breaks through the noise of his thoughts—a link to their mother's blog—inviting Hugo into a heartwarming reflection on his journey thus far. The blog features a familiar sketch of their family and recounts how, throughout their childhood, Hugo had been lovingly compared to Paddington Bear due to his endearing clumsiness. His mother's words highlight how proud they are of his independence and the leap he's taken, venturing far from home, possibly to even greater horizons than they anticipated.



As Hugo reads, he admires his progress, feeling a sense of clarity about who he is and the dreams he is chasing. The train's intermittent reception allows him to connect with his family via video call, where he shares the joy and excitement of his journey while addressing his mother's concerns over the distance he is placing between them. Their loving banter reveals a deeper understanding of his choices, especially regarding his feelings for Mae, which had been shared with his family through Alfie.

Their conversation is filled with warmth and acceptance as Hugo reassures them that he will share more about his experiences on his return. As he turns the camera to capture the breathtaking coastal view outside the train, the beauty of the moment resonates with them all, solidifying their bond across the miles and reminding Hugo that, despite the distance, he is supported every step of the way. Together, they marvel at the ocean's vastness, united in love and hope as he continues his journey toward Mae.

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## Chapter 40: Mae

Mae steps out of the airport shuttle into the vibrant warmth of a sunlit campus. The intoxicating scent of flowers and the gentle swaying of palm trees instantly lift her spirits. Rushed and excited, she's across from the admissions office, eager yet anxious for her upcoming meeting. Her belongings have already made it to her new dorm, and she's been in touch with Piper, her future roommate who has assured her that the room is small but cozy.

As Mae adjusts her backpack, a flood of nostalgia washes over her, reminding her of home, her travels, and most notably, Hugo, the boy she recently connected with. Their week together, while brief, left a lasting impact on her, prompting thoughts about the future and the bonds they've formed. In a moment of playful frustration, she nudges her backpack, only for it to topple over. As she bends down to retrieve it, she's surprised to see Hugo there, grinning at her.

Mae's initial reaction is disbelief, but as they exchange playful banter, she realizes this encounter feels unexpectedly right. Hugo reveals he knew she would be there, having gleaned it from their previous conversations, and shares that he is still in town for a few weeks before resuming his travels. Their reunion sparks laughter and warmth, and when Mae mentions her recent film project, Hugo expresses his admiration for it directly, having



chosen to share his thoughts in person rather than through a message.

Encouraged by their mutual excitement, the tension builds between them, leading to a tender moment that blurs the lines between a greeting and a farewell. As they embrace and share their first kiss, Mae feels an undeniable connection, reassuring her that she senses this same bond with Hugo. Together, they relish in their shared experience, standing on the brink of a new chapter filled with uncertainty yet brimming with possibility.

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