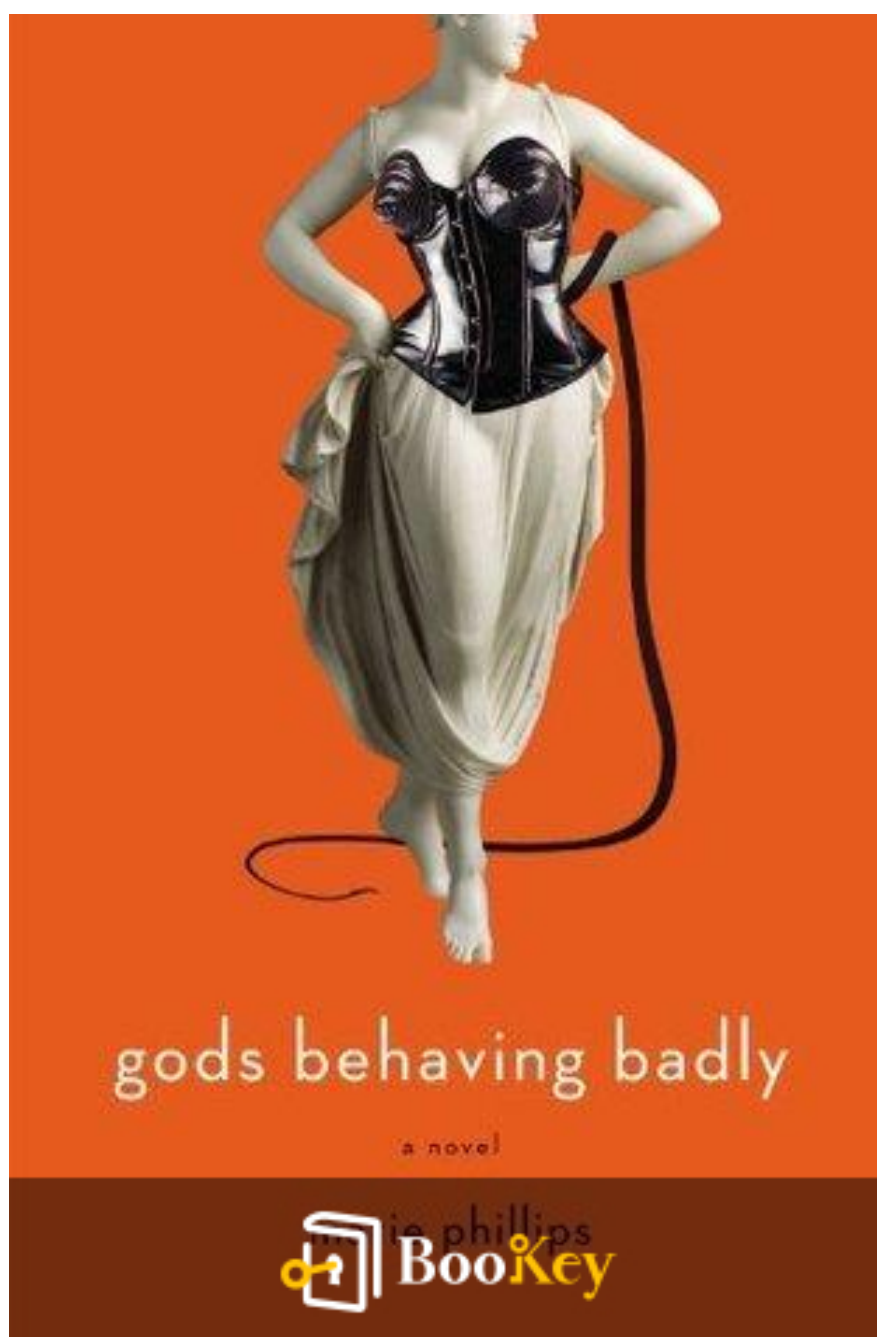


Gods Behaving Badly PDF (Limited Copy)

Marie Phillips



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Gods Behaving Badly Summary

Modern gods navigating life's absurdities and complications.

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About the book

In "Gods Behaving Badly" by Marie Phillips, the once-omnipotent deities of Greek mythology find themselves exiled in modern-day London, living mundane lives and grappling with the trials of contemporary existence. From a disillusioned Aphrodite running a struggling phone sex line to a resentful Apollo working as a pet psychic, these timeless figures wrestle with their lost power and relevance in a world that has long since forgotten their epic tales. As their divine mischief intertwines with the lives of hapless mortals, Phillips weaves a humorous yet poignant narrative that explores themes of love, ambition, and the absurdity of life, inviting readers to reflect on the nature of divinity and humanity. Get ready for a quirky journey that breathes new life into mythological lore while reminding us that even gods can face the everyday challenges of growing up!

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About the author

Marie Phillips is a talented British author known for her unique blend of humor, mythology, and contemporary storytelling. She burst onto the literary scene with her debut novel "Gods Behaving Badly," which cleverly reimagines the lives of the Greek gods as they navigate modern-day London. With a background in English literature and a knack for witty prose, Phillips deftly combines traditional mythic elements with sharp observations about human nature. In addition to her acclaimed first novel, Phillips has written several other works that continue to showcase her imaginative approach and ability to engage readers through her distinct narrative voice.

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Chapter 1 Summary:

In a remarkable morning stroll on Hampstead Heath, Artemis, the goddess of hunting, chastity, and the moon, stumbled upon an extraordinary sight: a newly sprouted eucalyptus tree that had appeared overnight. With her keen observational skills—developed from daily runs through this area—she quickly recognized it as a new species that should not exist.

Approaching the tree, Artemis touched its bark, sensing a life force beneath the surface. She spoke to it, and to her astonishment, the tree responded with a distinctly Australian accent, introducing itself as Kate, a mergers and acquisitions employee at Goldman Sachs. Confounded and intrigued, Artemis explained Kate's predicament: she had inexplicably transformed into a tree. Initially panicked, Kate soon accepted this surreal reality, albeit with a hint of yearning for her former human life.

As they conversed, Kate expressed disbelief at the existence of a goddess, having previously assumed there was only one God. This moment signified an interesting theme of the narrative, as it juxtaposed human skepticism with divine realities. Artemis attempted to clarify her identity and role, but Kate's bewilderment continued to linger, particularly as Artemis revealed she could not revert Kate to her original form, due to the actions of another god—Apollo, her twin brother, known for his impulsive and sometimes inappropriate behavior.



As Kate recounted the events leading to her transformation, she explained that a strikingly handsome man had approached her, making inappropriate advances. After rejecting him, she fled, which ultimately resulted in her current predicament as a tree—an occurrence not uncommon among those who crossed paths with divine beings.

Recognizing the limits of her influence, Artemis attempted to soothe both Kate's distress and her embarrassment regarding her brother's actions. She affirmed Kate would be happier as a tree, devoid of the complex emotions of human existence. However, the goddess's reassurances felt hollow, and she was left troubled about her brother's impulsive interference with mortal lives.

With a reluctant farewell, Artemis departed, knowing she needed to locate Apollo to address the chaotic consequences of his actions. The dogs accompanying her sensed their mistress's unease, reinforcing the dark undertones of the narrative that contrasted the light-hearted façade of her divine interactions with mortals.

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Critical Thinking

Key Point: Embrace the Unpredictable Changes in Life

Critical Interpretation: Much like Kate's unexpected transformation into a tree, life often throws us into unexpected situations that challenge our understanding of ourselves and our reality. When faced with these unforeseen changes, it can inspire you to adapt and find meaning in your circumstances, even when they seem bleak or absurd. Just as Kate had to confront her new identity and learn to accept her situation, you too can draw strength from the moments of uncertainty in your life, shifting your perspective to discover new opportunities for growth and resilience.

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Chapter 2 Summary:

In this chapter, Apollo finds himself in an uninspiring bathroom with Aphrodite, the goddess of beauty and his distant family member. As he engages in a rather lackluster intimate moment with her, he reflects on how their relationship has grown stale over the centuries. Apollo, once excited by the prospect of being with the goddess, now feels boredom creeping in, highlighting a contrast between his desire for novelty and the repetitive nature of their interactions.

Their lack of passion is palpable, as Apollo notices Aphrodite's indifference to their encounter. He imagines how exciting the thrill of their clandestine meeting could have been at another time, but now it feels mundane. He reminisces about their family's long history in London, having moved there during the plague in 1665 to capitalize on low property prices, an investment strategized by Athena, the goddess of wisdom. Apollo warns his family about the potential pitfalls of their choice, but his warnings go unheeded. He also ruminates bitterly on the family dynamic, especially concerning Hephaestus, Aphrodite's husband, who tirelessly manages the household upkeep despite being disdained by the others.

Amid their physical engagement, Aphrodite mentions plans to redecorate her room, hinting at her habitual whims. This encounter is interrupted by Ares, the god of war, Apollo's half-brother and also Aphrodite's lover, who



impatiently demands entry to the bathroom. The tension rises as Apollo refuses to yield his spot and asserts their bathroom rules, but he is keenly aware of Aphrodite's easy charm that attracts others, including Ares.

After a quick climax from Aphrodite, she wastes no time in dismissing Apollo's feelings, leading to a minor argument over household frustrations, particularly about the lack of hot water. As she transforms from demanding to flirtatious, asking Apollo for help in heating water for a shower, he remains resolute in his refusal. Her abrupt shift from sweet to scornful underscores the volatile nature of their relationship, leaving Apollo both wary and slightly amused by the potential fallout of her wrath.

Overall, this chapter deftly illustrates the complexities of divine relationships, the stagnation of passion, and the supernatural dynamics of family: all set against a backdrop of long-standing grievances and power plays among the gods.



Critical Thinking

Key Point: Embrace Change to Avoid Stagnation

Critical Interpretation: This chapter highlights the danger of letting relationships fall into monotony, reminding you that embracing change and pursuing novelty can reinvigorate even the longest of connections. Just like Apollo reflects on the stale aspects of his relationship with Aphrodite, you too can inspire your own life by seeking new experiences and challenges that foster growth and excitement. By being proactive and open to transformation, you can infuse your personal and familial relationships with passion, ensuring they thrive instead of withering away in complacency.

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Chapter 3 Summary:

In Chapter 3, we find Artemis in a rather chaotic household. After a long day of returning dogs to their indifferent owners, she opts not to unwind in the park, as was her custom, but heads home instead. As she approaches her house, she observes its disheveled state—the peeling paint and tarnished knocker serve as reminders of neglect. Before entering, Artemis takes a moment to mentally prepare herself for the tumult within.

Upon stepping inside, she is immediately confronted by the overwhelming sound of music. Her half-brother Dionysus is busy at the kitchen table, mixing tracks, seemingly oblivious to the havoc his noise wreaks on the household. Athena, another resident deity, can be heard shouting over the music, irate that her groundbreaking research is being disrupted. The dynamic illustrates a common clash of interests among the gods living under one roof, highlighting themes of chaos and neglect for personal responsibilities.

Artemis seeks out Apollo, her twin brother, in the bathroom. However, her quest for a serious conversation is interrupted by the playful banter of Aphrodite, who is in a compromising situation in the shower. This light-hearted interaction contrasts with Artemis's serious intent.

The focus quickly shifts as Artemis confronts Apollo about his recent



misuse of divine power, specifically regarding a mortal named Kate, who he transformed into a tree. This act of frivolity is a source of contention, as Artemis argues that Apollo's actions threaten the stability of their abilities as gods. Tension builds as they discuss the implications of his power usage, with Apollo growing defensive, indicating a self-centered neglect of their shared responsibilities.

Aphrodite joins the fray, emphasizing the various ills plaguing the mortal world that reflect a burden on their divine powers. The argument spirals into a broader discussion about the gods' relevance and effectiveness, engaging themes of accountability and the consequences of neglecting their roles.

After much back-and-forth, Artemis insists that Apollo take an oath to cease any future wasteful use of his powers, highlighting the importance of unity and responsibility among the deities. The negotiation culminates in a compromise—Apollo reluctantly swears on Styx, the river associated with solemn oaths, that he will refrain from harming mortals unnecessarily for the next decade or until they regain their powers.

The chapter ends with a sense of uneasy resolution, hinting at the ongoing struggles the gods face in maintaining their status and power in a changing world. These dynamics set the stage for further challenges ahead, exploring the intersection of divine duty and personal freedom.



Critical Thinking

Key Point: Accountability in Relationships

Critical Interpretation: In this chapter, the struggle between Artemis and Apollo illustrates the critical importance of responsibility in our interactions with others. Just as the gods must navigate their shared powers and the consequences of their actions, we too can draw inspiration to hold ourselves accountable in our relationships. This accountability acts as a foundation, nurturing trust and understanding while also preventing chaos in our personal lives. When we step up and acknowledge our impact on those around us, we not only strengthen our connections but also foster an environment where everyone feels valued and respected.

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Chapter 4:

In this chapter, Neil and Alice find themselves in a cluttered cleaning storeroom at the TV studio where Alice works. The atmosphere is intimate and slightly tense, as both characters grapple with their feelings while discussing Alice's meticulous organization of the space. Alice has transformed what was once a disordered room filled with cleaning supplies into an orderly haven, showing off her pride in her work. Her dedication to safety and efficiency reflects her conscientious nature and attention to detail.

As they converse in hushed tones, Alice reveals her intention to sneak Neil into the studio audience, despite company policies prohibiting cleaners from doing so. Neil expresses concern about potentially getting Alice into trouble, showcasing his protective instincts and growing affection for her. Their dialogue is filled with playful banter and shy glances, hinting at a deeper connection brewing beneath the surface.

Alice's collection of china figurines adds a personal touch to the otherwise stark storeroom, and Neil recalls a past gift he gave her, suggesting an underlying romantic tension. The pair engage in light-hearted conversation, deciding to pass the time with a game of Scrabble on Neil's Palm Pilot while sharing juice boxes, which adds a sense of childlike whimsy to their interaction.



The chapter builds on the theme of both characters stepping outside their usual roles, with Alice breaking the rules for the sake of camaraderie, while Neil struggles with his nervousness and admiration for Alice. Their gathering in the cramped space fosters a sense of intimacy and sparks the potential for deeper emotional connections as they navigate their budding relationship amidst the backdrop of their everyday lives.

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Chapter 5 Summary:

In this chapter, we find Apollo, the Greek god of music and prophecy, nervously preparing for his television debut in a shabby dressing room that starkly contrasts his lofty expectations. Surrounded by fawning hangers-on—nymphs, graces, and demigods—he struggles to conceal his discomfort with the less-than-glamorous setting. The room is cluttered with unwanted props and the furnishings are worn and outdated, mimicking Apollo's inner turmoil on what should have been a momentous occasion.

Despite Apollo's desire for admiration, there is an underlying tension, particularly noted by Aphrodite, the goddess of love, who feigns enthusiasm while secretly reveling in the irony of his unfortunate situation. As they banter about the importance of his appearance on camera, there's an air of mockery in her sweet tones, revealing her true feelings about Apollo's vanity and attention-seeking ways.

A sudden phone call disrupts the moment, with Aphrodite excusing herself to take it outside. It's Eros, her son and the god of love, who ironically embraces a more moral stance against something she wishes him to do. Their conversation transitions into a comical yet poignant clash between the carefree, hedonistic values of his mother and his burgeoning sense of ethics. Eros resists a task that Aphrodite insists he must fulfill, leading to humorous threats and banter laden with maternal guilt, all the while highlighting their



complex familial dynamics.

Despite the tension, Aphrodite employs her persuasive tactics, invoking both guilt and nostalgia to manipulate Eros into compliance. The chapter skillfully intertwines the comedy of their exchanges with deeper themes of familial duty and the conflict between hedonism and morality, culminating in a moment where Apollo, oblivious to the ongoing drama, proclaims his readiness for the spotlight, now heavily made up and prepared to dazzle the audience.

The blend of humor, divine politics, and familial relationships illuminates the vivid personalities of the gods while providing insight into their struggles, creating a dynamic scene as Apollo readies himself for what might just be a disastrous debut.

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Critical Thinking

Key Point: Embrace Your Imperfections

Critical Interpretation: In the face of Apollo's glamorous aspirations clashing with the stark reality of his shabby dressing room, we are reminded that perfection is often an illusion. This chapter encourages you to embrace your imperfections and acknowledge the messiness of life as a part of the journey. Just like Apollo, who sought admiration yet faced the irony of his situation, you too may find strength not in flawless presentation but in the authenticity of your experiences. Learning to be comfortable with discomfort can empower you to step onto your own stage, face challenges with confidence, and allow your true self to shine, regardless of the circumstances.

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Chapter 6 Summary:

In this chapter, the narrative unfolds with Alice and Neil, enjoying a friendly competition in a game that Alice surprisingly excels at, landing herself a significant lead before they have to leave. Despite Neil's initial intentions to let her win, Alice proves to be quite the skilled player, attributing her success to luck rather than skill. As they wrap up, Neil cherishes Alice's suggestion of a "next time," indicating a desire for future outings together.

Leaving the game room, they navigate a brightly lit yet uninviting corridor toward the TV studio auditorium, decorated with faded stars of presenters long forgotten. The atmosphere is thick with a blend of disinfectant and decay, punctuated by Alice's optimistic spirit which outshines the dreary environment.

As they near the studio entrance, they encounter a tall young man with a fake mustache who seems equally wary. After some hesitation, they enter together, joining an audience primarily composed of older women, all seemingly engrossed in conversation. Neil is fascinated by the compactness of the studio and the low-budget set designed to resemble the Oracle at Delphi, igniting his enthusiasm for the show.

With Alice's keen memory of his interests, they anticipate a production filled with theatricality—the idea of fortune-tellers excites Neil, deepening their



connection. Their conversation highlights the depth of their friendship; Neil's casual touch against Alice's knee exemplifying their burgeoning bond.

Meanwhile, backstage, Apollo, a god in charge of the show, prepares for his performance amidst a chaotic backdrop of technical equipment and aging gods. As he navigates his role, he tries to maintain his charisma despite complications, like struggling sibyls and an overabundance of distractions. Apollo's self-importance grows as he improvises, momentarily dismissing the production team's frantic instructions.

Meanwhile, Eros, Apollo's cousin and the god of love, lurks in the back, feeling discomfort as he observes Apollo's vanity and the show's chaotic reality. Eros is torn between his familial ties and the urge for mischief, having previously caused Apollo considerable embarrassment by invoking the love of Daphne, a nymph who shunned him.

As Apollo begins to perform, Eros grapples with his own intentions. He receives haranguing messages from his mother urging him against interference. This leads to a decisive moment where Eros decides to shoot an arrow of love, redirecting Apollo's affections toward someone in the audience, yet he hesitates to conjure hate, allowing for the natural unfolding of human emotion.

By the chapter's end, Eros's inner conflict reflects the complexity of love



and hate, embodying the delicate balance of emotions within both divine and mortal realms. The chapter closes on Eros's moral hesitation enough to indicate a shift in his character, showcasing the evolving dynamics of love, free will, and the repercussions of divine intervention.

Section	Summary
Game Competition	Alice and Neil engage in a game where Alice excels, surprising Neil who intended to let her win. They bond over the experience, hinting at future outings.
Environment	They navigate a dreary corridor towards the TV studio, contrasting Alice's optimism with the decaying surroundings.
Studio Experience	The studio is filled with older women and low-budget set designs. Neil admires the theatrical layout, deepening his excitement for the show.
Friendship Development	As they share the experience, Neil and Alice's friendship deepens, highlighted by casual, intimate gestures.
Apollo's Role	Apollo prepares for his show amidst chaos, struggling with technical issues and maintaining his charisma while improvising.
Eros's Dilemma	Eros observes Apollo's vanity and feels torn between familial loyalty and mischief, recalling a past incident with Daphne.
Climactic Moments	Eros receives pressure from his mother not to interfere but ultimately decides to shoot an arrow of love, hesitating to invoke hate, reflecting on emotional complexities.
End Reflection	The chapter concludes with Eros's moral hesitation, showcasing his character shift and the balance of love, free will, and divine consequences.

Critical Thinking

Key Point: Embrace Your Skills Proudly

Critical Interpretation: In this chapter, the key moment is Alice's unexpected prowess in the game, which showcases the importance of recognizing and taking pride in one's skills, even if luck plays a part. This can inspire us to embrace our own abilities and talents, allowing us to step out of the shadows of self-doubt. Instead of attributing our successes to external factors, we should acknowledge the hard work and dedication that have shaped our skills. By doing so, we not only boost our confidence but also open ourselves up to new possibilities and connections, much like Alice's growing bond with Neil. Remember, celebrating your own victories can lead to more opportunities and deeper relationships.



Chapter 7 Summary:

In this chapter, Alice feels a mix of excitement and nervousness as she sits next to Neil in the studio, reflecting on her bold decision to invite him after years of tentative interactions. Their friendship had been largely initiated by him, and this moment feels significant as they sit closely, their shoulders touching. Alice watches Neil intently, captivated by his focused demeanor, while battling her own growing attraction. She recalls the awkwardness of finally calling him, her heart racing as she managed to invite him to a pilot filming, a move far outside her usual reserved nature.

Meanwhile, Apollo, a fellow in the studio, is struck by the beauty of a girl next to Neil. Overwhelmed by his sudden infatuation, he fantasizes about her as he struggles to maintain his composure on air. His desire is so intense that it disrupts his ability to perform, leading him to experience a very embarrassing situation. Through the backdrop of the studio, Apollo's thoughts drift to his stepmother, Hera, in a desperate attempt to regain control over his lustful distractions.

After the filming wraps up, Apollo rushes back to his trailer, convinced that the girl will seek him out, believing his attraction is mutual. However, the anticipation turns into disappointment when Aphrodite, the Goddess of Love, appears instead. Her entrance disrupts his hopes, as she teasingly implies there is no one left to keep him company. Despite his earlier



expectations, this encounter with Aphrodite forces Apollo to confront the reality of his unrequited feelings, leaving him with an unresolved tension.

Thus, this chapter intertwines the earnest emotions and frustrations of both Alice and Apollo, establishing a connection of longing and miscommunication while delving into the complexity of desire and attraction in their respective scenarios.

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Chapter 8:

In Chapter 8 of **Apollo's Oracle**, the narrative begins a week after the airing of the first episode. Apollo, in a desperate quest for connection, has been trying to locate a mysterious woman—the angel he noticed in the audience during filming. He charmfully obtained the audience list from the reception and embarked on a fruitless endeavor around London, culminating in an awkward encounter at a rundown bungalow where he was coerced into an unwanted visit, which left him drained and questioning his choices.

Meanwhile, the gods—having gathered to watch the broadcast—experience a mix of mischief and anticipation. The gathering includes key figures like Hermes, Eros, Hephaestus, and Aphrodite, all of whom are eager to see Apollo's performance, especially since Aphrodite has hinted that it was a disaster. Hera and Zeus, along with other gods residing elsewhere, are presumably tuned in as well, captivated by the idea of watching a fellow god stumble in public.

As Apollo prepares for the viewing, he tries to defer the gods' impatience, expressing doubt about their interest in his work. However, Artemis rebuffs him, insisting they switch on the television. The gods, in a rare moment of camaraderie, press Apollo until he reluctantly flips the switch. The program, however, quickly becomes a source of embarrassment for Apollo. Instead of showcasing his once-promising performance, the show has been heavily



edited—much of it portraying his failures and awkward moments, peppered with inappropriate focus on the audience's glitzy appearances.

As the cringe-worthy scenes unfold, the atmosphere shifts. Initial laughter turns to somber silence as Apollo's floundering becomes evident, forcing a

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Chapter 9 Summary:

In the upstairs den that Neil had transformed into a personal sanctuary, he engaged in a flurry of activities, showcasing that multitasking wasn't just a skill for women. Surrounded by his cherished possessions, which included meticulously organized shelves of comics, books, and a vast collection of media, Neil felt an attachment to this haven, reminiscing about his childhood favorites like Beano and Tintin, and indulging in his love for science fiction, fantasy, and history. His TV collection was a point of pride, revealing his evolving tastes over years.

However, the TV show Apollo's Oracle, which he was currently watching, disrupted the tranquility of his space. Neil had sensed the unsettling vibe of Apollo, a charismatic psychic, especially regarding his friend Alice, after observing the way Apollo had looked at her during filming. This made Neil uneasy, sensing a predatory nature lurking beneath Apollo's charm.

Simultaneously, Neil communicated with a work colleague, Derek, via instant messaging, sharing his disdain for Apollo's self-importance and wondering how Alice viewed him. Neil's thoughts wandered as he felt conflicted about his feelings for Alice, questioning whether she found Apollo attractive, despite their friendship being purely platonic.

As he juggled the conversation with Derek and his TV viewing, Neil's phone



rang, shattering his concentration. When he answered, he was met not with the familiar voice of his mother, but the distressed sound of Alice crying. Concerned, he asked for details, and Alice revealed that receiving attention on the show had backfired. The head of her agency had seen her appearance and accused her of breaking rules by participating, which led to her dismissal from her job.

As Alice cried out in despair about losing her employment, Neil felt an overwhelming sense of guilt, believing he had urged her into this predicament. However, Alice reassured him that her decision was her own, but her panic about the future hung in the air. Neil sensed the gravity of the situation, realizing that their friendship was now at a crossroads, and he needed to support Alice as she faced an uncertain path ahead.



Chapter 10 Summary:

In the aftermath of a recent broadcast, Artemis, an ancient Greek goddess known for her independence and connection to nature, awakens early one morning to surprising sounds coming from her living room. Curious, she enters to find her brother, Apollo, in a disheveled state, strumming his guitar while lamenting over a song about missing someone. Apollo reveals he hasn't slept, consumed by his feelings for a mortal girl named Kate, whom he failed to connect with before she disappeared. Nearby, Aphrodite, the goddess of love, lounges on the sofa, engaging in intimate phone conversations that reflect her characteristic flirtation.

Artemis, witnessing this unusual scene, expresses concern for Apollo's well-being, criticizing his obsessive emotional state and drunkenness. Meanwhile, Aphrodite offers a mix of teasing and provocative commentary, further complicating the already tense atmosphere. Amidst their banter, Artemis reveals to Apollo that his beloved tree - transformed into a eucalyptus in homage to Kate - was cut down, highlighting Apollo's sentimentality about mortals and his deteriorating dignity.

Suddenly, Artemis interrupts their reunion with the arrival of a small, dumpy mortal woman, identified as a cleaner, who is distributing flyers. Despite Artemis's initial brusqueness, the cleaner summons unexpected confidence, advocating for the importance of hiring a professional to maintain a tidy



home. The conversation turns comedic as Aphrodite dismisses the cleaner's presence, suggesting that Artemis's cleaning skills are sufficient. However, Artemis sees a potential value in the cleaner's offer, particularly regarding pest control, as she attempts to negotiate terms while hinting at the distinctiveness of their living situation.

The dynamic shifts as Artemis, despite Aphrodite's protests, expresses her desire to hire the cleaner, proposing an arrangement that prioritizes cleanliness over food expenses. She envisions a structured environment where rules will be established for the cleaner to follow. The mortal woman, taken aback by the sudden turn of events, finds herself caught in this peculiar negotiation between two deities.

As Artemis confidently dismisses any doubts about the plan, she sets the cleaner's start date for the following day, unknowingly inviting further chaos into their unconventional household. With her resolve firm, she heads out to walk her dogs, leaving behind the bewildered cleaner and a playful yet critical Aphrodite voicing concerns over the new arrangement.

This chapter explores themes of emotional turmoil, the complexities of divine relationships, and the clash of mundane mortal responsibilities with the extraordinary nature of the gods, ultimately foreshadowing the chaotic blend of myth and reality that lies ahead.



Chapter 11 Summary:

In Chapter 11, Alice finds herself in a paradoxical situation—she is working a job she never truly accepted, killing rats in a decrepit house owned by a mysterious woman named Artemis. Despite her disdain for both rats and the job itself, Alice feels an inexplicable force propelling her to return every day, even as she contemplates resigning. Initially, Alice was elated to be offered a higher-paying freelance position after being unjustly dismissed from an agency, thanks to a friend named Neil who encouraged her to take the plunge into independent work.

The rules of her new job are strict and bizarre, creating an unsettling atmosphere. On her first day, Artemis instructs her to never knock or ring the bell, explaining that punctuality is key and that no questions are allowed. The house, a seemingly neglected and filthy place, adds to Alice's discomfort as she navigates through its dirt and disarray while adhering to Artemis's rules. As she begins her grim task of rodent control and cleaning, she grapples with her feelings about the job, oscillating between fear, confusion, and resignation.

On the third day, Alice meets a new character, Apollo, a television host whom she recognizes but cannot acknowledge due to Artemis's directives. Apollo's strange reaction to her presence unveils his eccentric personality—he displays an odd mixture of fascination and confusion,



believing that a divine intervention of sorts has brought Alice into his life. Their interactions reveal Apollo's past fame and current disillusionment, as he recounts how he and his peers were once revered figures, living in splendor before fading into obscurity.

Apollo's earnest but unsettling admiration for Alice becomes evident, culminating in an uncomfortable moment when he impulsively touches her knee, prompting Alice to act defensively by seizing the broom she had been using. The conversation teeters on the edge of discomfort, with Alice trying to maintain her professional distance while navigating Apollo's erratic impulses. As she prepares to leave, Alice assures him that she will return the next day, but not without a budding sense of unease about the nature of her entanglement with the enigmatic figures in the house.

This chapter introduces complex themes of power dynamics, personal resentment, and the weight of the past, all encapsulated within the eerie context of a once-celebrated TV personality living a shadow of his former life. Alice's internal struggle highlights her conflict between adhering to the job's bizarre rules and her emerging sense of autonomy as she steps into the peculiar world orchestrated by Artemis and Apollo.



Chapter 12:

In Chapter 12, we find Artemis on her usual Sunday run at the Heath, relishing her time away from the distractions of dogs, which she views as slowing her down. As she runs, she reflects on the recent unsettling events in her life, particularly her twin brother Apollo's embarrassing appearance on a television program. Unlike the typically confident and prescient god, Apollo seems to have lost his touch, leading Artemis to ponder how long it's been since he had a clear vision of the future. This line of thinking also prompts her to consider the power struggles of the past, recalling how the Titans weakened and allowed the Olympians to rise to dominance.

Amidst her thoughts, Artemis anticipates the arrival of Persephone, who will soon return from the underworld. This brings her a sense of dread about the cramped living conditions in their home. Though Persephone's visits have been growing shorter over time, Artemis fears the day she may stop returning altogether.

Returning home, Artemis is greeted by Eros, who has just come from a church service. Despite their once rocky relationship, they now have a cordial bond, largely due to Eros exhibiting a newfound sense of morality. They decide to take a leisurely walk instead of heading into the house filled with clutter and tension. During their stroll, they engage in a discussion about the new cleaner Artemis hired to manage the house's mess. Though



they note some improvement, both agree that superficial cleaning cannot hide the deeper issues affecting their lives.

As they walk, their conversation shifts to a more profound contemplation of mortality and regret. Eros expresses a yearning to have met Jesus and reflect on lost opportunities to connect with historical figures who have shaped human experience. They touch upon the unchangeable nature of mortality, with Eros lamenting how quickly life passes and the fleeting of meaningful relationships.

Their dialogue grows increasingly philosophical, leading to a moment where Eros speculates about what it might be like to be dead, triggering a panic in Artemis. She is unwilling to confront such heavy thoughts, but Eros suggests that imagining death could offer a sense of peace and freedom from responsibility. This distresses Artemis, who identifies strongly with being in charge and grappling with the weight of obligation—elements that are central to her identity.

Ultimately, the chapter concludes with Eros prompting Artemis to consider how she would spend the limited time of a mortal life. Amidst the backdrop of a chaotic street scene, Artemis's instinctive response is a desire to escape and move out, highlighting her deep-seated frustrations with her current life and responsibilities. This poignant moment encapsulates a blend of longing for change and a struggle with the inevitability of existence and duty,



foreshadowing potential developments in their intertwined fates.

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Chapter 13 Summary:

In Chapter 13, two weeks after starting her new job, Alice meets Neil at a quaint café for a celebratory tea. Neil carefully selects a cozy corner table to help Alice feel comfortable and shares his thoughts on her job, curious about her colleagues. However, Alice struggles to articulate her feelings about the people she works with, sensing a disconnect between their intentions and actions. She describes them as being nice “in their own way,” although she feels their kindness is often accidental.

As they talk, Alice reveals that she can't disclose too much about her job due to confidentiality rules, which puts a strain on their conversation. Neil, in his eagerness to understand her world, unintentionally touches on a sore spot by mentioning a previous game of Scrabble, a day linked to Alice's dismissal from a previous job due to Neil's involvement.

Amidst their light banter, Alice finally confesses something she has been holding back: Apollo, the charismatic and somewhat controversial figure from a popular TV show, resides in the house where she works. Neil reacts with a mix of disbelief and concern, questioning Apollo's character, as he has reservations about the man's integrity. Alice defends Apollo, asserting he has been kind to her, which only deepens Neil's apprehensions.

Their conversation shifts uncomfortably as Alice struggles to share details



about the other residents of the house, including Aphrodite, who seems to have a tumultuous personality that unnerves Alice. Despite her best efforts to maintain professionalism and not judge her unusual coworkers, Alice finds herself caught in a web of complex interpersonal dynamics, particularly with the volatile Aphrodite.

Throughout the chapter, Alice is torn between her desire to talk openly with Neil and the fear of violating her employer's trust. Even as she considers leaving her job, she feels inexplicably drawn into the chaotic family of characters around her, each with their own quirks and dramas. This internal conflict is mirrored in her interactions with Neil, where unspoken thoughts linger between them, highlighting her struggle to bridge the gap between her two worlds.

Ultimately, Alice grapples with her growing attachment to the household's eccentricities and the mounting pressure of keeping their secrets, unsure of where her loyalty truly lies. As she locks eyes with Neil across the table, she senses a growing suspicion and feels compelled to withhold the truth, a struggle that leaves her feeling isolated and conflicted.



Chapter 14 Summary:

In Chapter 14, Artemis finds herself in a less-than-ideal situation while searching for a new home. She meets a cheerful but disingenuous estate agent who tries to sell her on a dismal flat featuring a bathroom that can only be described as a potential health hazard and an entrance hall more reminiscent of a neglected atrium than a welcoming space. Despite her skepticism, the agent insists on the flat's merits, including a supposed communal courtyard and the ability to potentially keep small pets, but Artemis firmly desires a space for a larger dog—one that would require a garden.

Frustrated by the estate agent's evasive answers and his attempt to mask the property's shortcomings with unfounded positivity, Artemis heads home to face the disarray of her family life. Upon arrival, she discovers a volatile atmosphere as arguments erupt between Aphrodite and Eros, characterized by raised voices and the sound of shattering dishes—a reflection of the growing tensions in their household. Seeking solace, she retreats to the garden, where she finds Demeter, the goddess of the earth and fertility, visibly distraught over a dying clematis plant, a symbol of her nurturing spirit.

Despite her own turmoil, Artemis tries to comfort Demeter, who is grappling with feelings of failure as she faces an inability to sustain the life around



her—an ironic situation for a goddess primarily associated with growth and fertility. As Demeter mourns the dying plant and expresses her fears of aging and decline, Artemis helplessly braces herself against her conflicting emotions. Her jealousy of Demeter's despair hints at her own struggles and deep-seated insecurities, leaving her caught between wanting to escape her current situation and the painful realities she must confront within her family's chaotic dynamic. The chapter underscores themes of nurturing, loss, and the complexities of familial relationships as Artemis navigates the challenges of finding her own identity amidst the tangled lives of those around her.

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Chapter 15 Summary:

In this chapter, Neil arrives at a dilapidated house where Alice works, driven by concerns for her well-being after noticing changes in her behavior since she started there. Upon reaching the house, he is unexpectedly greeted by a stunning woman named Aphrodite, who invites him in. Though he finds himself entranced by her beauty, Neil's mind is occupied with the reason for his visit: to uncover what might be troubling Alice.

As Neil follows Aphrodite through the house, he tries to maintain his composure but feels increasingly awkward. He is anxious about confronting whatever situation Alice is involved in, especially when he overhears a conversation in another room. His unease grows, especially upon discovering that she is with Apollo, an annoyingly handsome man with whom she seems overly friendly.

When Neil enters the room, he finds Alice looking uneasy as Apollo photographs her, an act she clearly dislikes. This prompts Neil to assertively confront Apollo about his behavior. Tension escalates as Alice tries to calm Neil down, revealing a complex power dynamic in their relationship. Neil's dismissive comments about Alice's job as a cleaner lead to a heated exchange, with Alice asserting her own value and education, countering Neil's condescension.



The confrontation spirals into a fight fueled by Neil's frustration over Alice's apparent submission to Apollo's charm. In an unexpected twist, Alice reveals that she enjoys her job and chooses to clean for personal reasons, dispelling Neil's preconceived notions about her. The emotional exchange ends with Alice telling Neil to leave, making it clear that he misunderstood her and the situation.

Feeling defeated and confused, Neil leaves the house in tears, his anger toward Alice giving way to regret and realization. The chapter poignantly highlights themes of beauty, self-worth, and the complexities of personal relationships, while also illustrating how quickly misunderstandings can provoke intense emotional responses.



Chapter 16:

In Chapter 16, tension unfolds in Apollo's room following a heated confrontation between Alice and Neil. After Ares leaves, Apollo approaches Alice, who is crying on the bed, showing a tender side he rarely reveals. She expresses confusion about her emotional outburst and questions her bond with Neil, reflecting on their relationship and her tendency to worry about others like him.

As Apollo comforts her with a glass of wine—provided by Dionysus, the god of wine and revelry—Alice begins to feel the effects and becomes increasingly introspective. She grapples with guilt over her argument with Neil and rationalizes her loyalty to him, despite Apollo's somewhat dismissive comments about Neil's behavior.

Their conversation shifts, and a moment of vulnerability arises when Alice and Apollo's fingers brush together, igniting a confusing tension between them. When Apollo leans in for a kiss, Alice is taken aback by the sudden shift from platonic to romantic, emerging from their emotional bonding into unexpected physical attraction. However, haunted by thoughts of Neil, she withdraws sharply, injuring Apollo in the process. This surprising acceleration of feelings leaves Alice distraught, insisting she must leave.

Apollo's desperate refusal and declaration of love for Alice complicate the

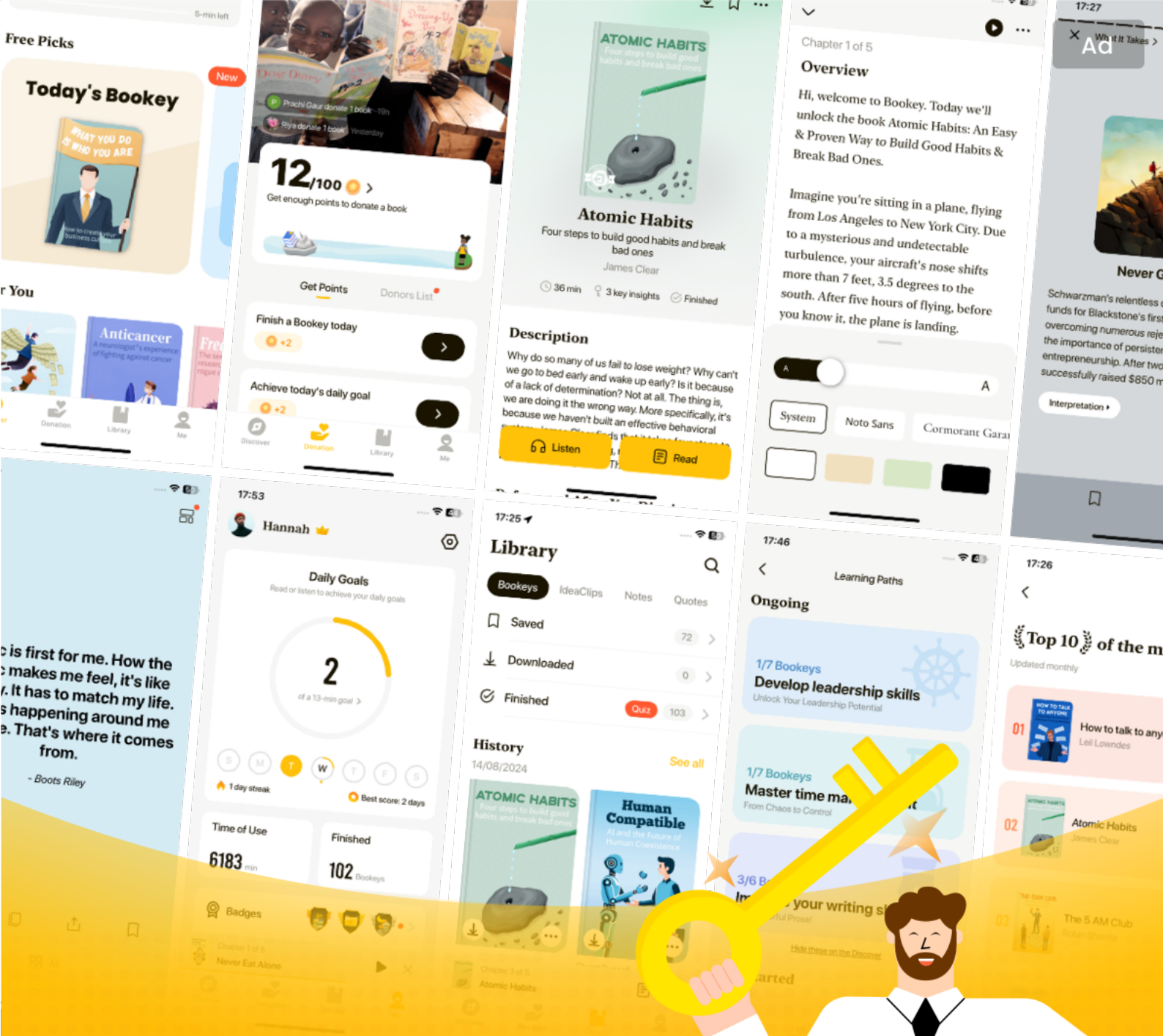


situation as she tries to maintain her boundaries. When Alice insists she loves someone else and attempts to leave, Apollo's demeanor shifts; a moment of dark curiosity arises when he provocatively asks whether rape constitutes harm, leading Alice to fear for her safety. Yet, their conversation takes an unexpected turn when Apollo releases her, allowing her to leave

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Chapter 17 Summary:

Chapter 17 Summary

In the aftermath of a painful rejection from Alice, Apollo copes with his emotions through excessive drinking. He starts in his bedroom, consuming wine from Alice's glass, but quickly finds himself confronted by Ares who inquires about the failed romantic encounter. Wanting to preserve his pride, Apollo provides a vague response and retreats to the kitchen, hoping for solitude.

However, in the kitchen, he encounters Aphrodite, who makes insinuating remarks about a cleaner, Neil, who had been around earlier. Feeling cornered and exposed, Apollo leaves the house seeking refuge in Bacchanalia, a notorious nightclub owned by his brother Dionysus. The club is a chaotic hub of debauchery, known for its potent wine and extravagant performances, thriving despite various legal troubles.

When Apollo arrives, he boldly bypasses the line, confronting the uninterested maenads at the door. Inside, he finds Dionysus restocking the bar and is immediately blunt about his desire to drink heavily and engage with multiple partners. Dionysus, recognizing the signs of Apollo's distress, pours him a tall glass of wine as they exchange pleasantries.



As their conversation unfolds, Apollo reveals the emotional turmoil behind his brash exterior. He confesses his infatuation with Alice, revealing that he believed she was "the one"—the partner he could settle down with. Instead, he feels humiliated, lamenting that Alice led him on and then rejected him entirely, leaving him feeling like a fool. Dionysus politely indulges his brother's woes, commenting on their absurdity, but is intrigued to learn that Alice is not just a random lover but the same woman who cleans their house.

In a drunken haze, Apollo spirals further into despair, expressing a desire for vengeance against Alice for her rejection but hesitating because of a vow he made on the River Styx—a binding promise that prevents him from harming her. Dionysus is amused yet sympathetic, suggesting darkly that perhaps Alice might meet an untimely end anyway.

As Apollo contemplates Dionysus's not-so-helpful comment, the chaotic performances on stage echo the tumult of his feelings, leaving him in a blend of anguish and absurdity, trapped between love and the constraints of his divine existence.



Chapter 18 Summary:

In Chapter 18, Apollo wakes up on the floor of a deserted club, experiencing the unwelcome sensation of a hangover, a stark contrast to his previous, more powerful self. The irony of his pain weighs heavily on him, as he realizes he could relieve it using his powers but would only weaken himself in the process. As he gathers himself and heads to the bus stop, he notices the mortals around him keeping their distance, their disdain for him palpable. In a moment of self-reflection, he recalls his power over mortals and laments the loss of it, stemming from the actions of his twin sister, Artemis, who recently stripped him of much of his divine abilities.

When he arrives home, he encounters Artemis, who is preparing for an important meeting called by Athena, the goddess of wisdom. Despite his protests and desire to skip the meeting due to feeling unwell, Artemis insists he participates. Their exchange highlights the sibling tension between them, with her reprimanding him for his attitude and behavior, while he lashes out at her for being sanctimonious and uptight.

As their argument escalates, Apollo expresses disdain for the meeting and their family's troubles, while Artemis remains steadfast in her belief that Athena's guidance could help them. Frustrated, Apollo storms away, throwing keys into the street before retreating to his room. Meanwhile, Artemis girds herself for the meeting, contemplating the effectiveness of



Athena, who has a reputation for being brilliant yet lacking in communication skills.

The meeting begins with various gods arriving, including Hermes, who expresses his usual impatience, and Aphrodite, who seems to be in good spirits, possibly at the expense of someone else. When Athena calls the meeting to order, it's revealed that Apollo is absent, prompting groans from the others who are all too familiar with his habitual disinterest.

Later, in an effort to avoid the mundane, Apollo decides to check on a long-forgotten door at the top of the house leading to a restricted area. After considerable effort, he opens it to unveil a dark and dust-laden staircase, ascending to find Hera, their stepmother. Her presence is austere, and she has sat silently for two decades, symbolizing a critical static influence within the divine family.

After a tense conversation between them, Apollo reveals that there is a conspiracy against Hera and Zeus. Despite her skepticism and dismissive demeanor, Hera reluctantly acknowledges the seriousness of the situation. She exhibits a flicker of concern when Apollo mentions Zeus's name, revealing her protective nature toward him.

As Hera heads down to confront the situation, she instructs Apollo to guard Zeus's room and warns him not to unlock the door. Apollo, emboldened by



the brief exchange, dismisses her warning and prepares to approach the door to Zeus's chamber, hinting at possible ramifications that could unfold in the chapters to come. Apollo's need for agency amidst familial power struggles sets the stage for a potentially volatile clash of divine wills.

The chapter masterfully intertwines themes of power dynamics, familial loyalty, and the weight of responsibility as Apollo grapples with his own place within divine hierarchies, setting up a narrative ripe for conflict and resolution in the chapters ahead.

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Chapter 19 Summary:

In Chapter 19, Artemis struggles to stay engaged as Athena projects a convoluted business plan that attempts to analyze the market dynamics of various faiths. The distractions in the room are plentiful: Aphrodite and Hephaestus are lost in a passionate embrace, Eros and Hermes are absorbed in a game, and Demeter is lost in her own grim thoughts while Dionysus listens to music. Despite Athena's fervent attempts to present her ideas, it is clear that her audience is disengaged, causing her growing desperation to reveal itself.

As Artemis's attention drifts, she fantasizes about her own mortality and how her family might finally appreciate her role as the goddess of the hunt, chastity, and the moon after she's gone. However, her musings are abruptly interrupted when Hera bursts into the room in a dramatic display of rage, casting fireballs and hurling accusations at Athena, whom she calls an 'ingrate' and a 'traitor'. Athena, surprisingly composed, tries to reason with her, but their confrontation quickly escalates.

In the midst of the chaos, Ares steps in, and with a proposal for a land war in Asia, he unexpectedly diffuses the situation. This interaction leads Hera to abandon her wrath for a moment and share a rare smile as Athena's predicament is defused—albeit momentarily.



Meanwhile, Apollo finds himself at the threshold of Zeus's grim bedroom, the only part of the house where no other god has ventured. He is surprised by the deplorable condition therein; Zeus, seemingly oblivious, is slumped in bed, surrounded by nothing but dust and the flickering glow of a television. Their dialogue is filled with confusion as Zeus struggles with his identity and memory, reflecting on his past while questioning Apollo's presence.

As Apollo attempts to communicate with his father, he is struck by the frailty of the once-mighty god. Zeus, trapped between madness and lucidity, clings to memories of his past grandeur. In an attempt to reconnect and evoke a semblance of the old Zeus, Apollo takes charge, guiding him to the window, bringing light and the outside world back into his father's life.

However, a grim realization surfaces as Apollo reveals that a mortal named Alice has entered their home, a significant violation of divine law. He presents her photograph to Zeus, indicating that the repercussions of this breach could endanger their security. Apollo must navigate this precarious situation, knowing that Zeus's reaction may have profound consequences for both their futures and that of Alice. In this chapter, themes of power dynamics, familial neglect, and the fragility of divinity unfold against the backdrop of chaotic godly interactions.



Chapter 20:

In the aftermath of an unexpected storm that caught meteorologists off guard, the media and political figures quickly shift focus when war breaks out between lesser-known nations rich in oil, diverting attention from the crisis at home. Amid this chaos, Neil is preoccupied with the emotional fallout from Alice's traumatic experience, which remains shrouded in mystery.

That night, Neil finds himself unable to sleep, haunted by worry for Alice, who arrives at his flat visibly shaken. In stark contrast to his daydreams of her joyful presence, Alice appears pale and disconnected. Despite his attempts at normalcy—offering tea and soup—she remains withdrawn, and the interlude he dreams of turns into a painful reality. After some time, Neil offers her a safe space by giving her a T-shirt and shorts to sleep in, closing the door gently so she can rest.

As dawn breaks, Neil learns that Alice is too frightened to go to work, prompting him to take a day off to stay with her. While Alice drifts back into sleep, Neil grapples with his feelings of helplessness and concern for her well-being. Trying to focus on work proves futile as he reflects on her state and the fight that may have contributed to her distress.

When Alice finally emerges from the bedroom, she expresses gratitude for



Neil's kindness, but Neil senses her deep inner turmoil; she seems plagued by an unspoken shame. Unwilling to push her, Neil suggests a walk to the park to distract her, an invitation that brings a glimmer of companionship amid their shared silence.

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Chapter 21 Summary:

In Chapter 21, Alice awakens outside a park, dazed and initially unsure of her surroundings amid a chaotic scene. Rain pours down heavily as car alarms wail around her. Feeling disoriented and sensing a lingering shock, Alice tries to find Neil, her companion, but can't spot him in the commotion.

Alarmed by the crowd's panic, she races towards a figure on the ground, desperately hoping it's not Neil. When she sees Neil lying unconscious but alive, relief washes over her, and she immediately checks on him. However, instead of responding to her, he seems dazed and focused on the chaos around them.

Around the park, people are gathering, and distressed cries fill the air. Alice realizes that someone is gravely injured, but when she tries to help, she finds herself ignored by the crowd and unable to reach them. Instead, she instinctively moves to assist, but to her horror, she realizes that her hand passes through a man's arm, which signals something deeply troubling about her condition.

Neil, too, becomes aware of Alice's absence as he attempts to move through the crowd, feeling the weight of cold rain and listening to somber proclamations about Alice's dire state. In a moment of clarity, he announces



her name with an unsettling sense of certainty. He watches as medics administer CPR to her body, unaware that Alice is nearby, watching helplessly.

Alice's dual existence becomes clearer as she witnesses Neil's grief and desperation from a distance. She tries to reach out to him, expressing her love, but he remains oblivious to her presence, consumed by the realization that he might lose her. As the paramedics struggle to revive her, escalation ensues—their efforts fail, and the devastating truth begins to dawn on the crowd: a life has been lost.

When the ambulance arrives and takes Alice's body away, Neil's attempts to articulate his feelings for her only heighten her anguish. Desperately calling out, Alice struggles against her intangible state, unable to connect or intervene. Just as everything she cherishes slips away, she is left standing alone, engulfed by sorrow and confusion. Then, a mysterious voice calls her name, hinting at a shift in her journey.



Chapter 22 Summary:

In Chapter 22, we find Alice Joy Mulholland in a state of shock, having just encountered Hermes, the Greek god and messenger. Wearing his distinctive winged business attire, Hermes confirms Alice's worst fear: she is dead, having been struck by lightning. The surreal encounter leaves Alice bewildered, especially when Hermes removes her heart to check for signs of life, only to reveal it is no longer beating.

Hermes is brusque but practical, explaining that staying in her current state would sentence Alice to a ghostly existence where she could only interact with mediums. He offers her a ride on his motorbike, which she reluctantly accepts after realizing her options are limited: follow him to the underworld or remain alone in her disembodied state. As they ride, Alice learns more about Hermes's role as a god and the nature of her death. She discovers that other gods, such as Apollo and Zeus, whom she had encountered in life, are indeed real, which adds to her complexity of emotions.

Their conversation turns candid when Hermes probes Alice about her kiss with Apollo, a god known for his many romantic conquests. Alice, initially hesitant, finally admits that Apollo had attempted to sexually assault her before she was killed by Zeus's lightning—a shocking revelation for both her and Hermes.



Upon arriving at Upper Street, a portal to the underworld disguised as a typical urban train station, Hermes tells her that she must proceed alone, as he has more souls to guide. Despite Alice's pleas for him to relay a message to her beloved friend Neil, Hermes explains that he cannot cater to individual requests from the countless souls he assists daily. He acknowledges the difficulty in his role, reassuring Alice that she handled her passing with grace.

As Hermes departs, he gives her a Tube ticket, stressing the importance of not giving it to the driver until she arrives in the underworld, or she risks becoming eternally trapped in the London Underground, known for its haunted reputation. After Hermes leaves, Alice meets an elderly man, one of the fortunate souls who seem to embrace death, and takes charge, guiding him toward the entrance of Angel Tube station.

The chapter combines elements of mythology with an examination of death, presenting Alice's transition through the lens of humor and surrealism, as she confronts the reality of her existence and the inevitability of moving on. The encounter with Hermes highlights her emotional turmoil, particularly regarding her relationship with Neil, while cleverly weaving in the complexity of the gods and their interactions with humans.



Chapter 23 Summary:

In this chapter, Apollo finds himself entangled in a repetitive and hollow sexual encounter with Aphrodite in the bathroom, reflecting on his life and relationships. Despite the physical intimacy of the moment, Apollo's thoughts are consumed by the haunting memory of Alice, a mortal he loved and lost. His mind races as he grapples with regret and nostalgia for the qualities that made Alice unique—her flaws, humility, and the warmth she brought to his life. The encounter is tinged with an unsettling realization: no matter how many times he engages with Aphrodite, it cannot replace the genuine connection he had with Alice, whose death now looms over him like a ghost.

Meanwhile, Artemis returns home after an unsuccessful search for a new apartment. The state of the house fills her with sadness; debris litters the steps, and the air is thick with neglect. Her thoughts turn to Alice, the cleaning lady who had recently gone missing. It's revealed that Hermes, the messenger god, encounters Artemis and informs her of Alice's tragic fate: she has been killed by Zeus due to a series of unfortunate events involving Apollo. Disbelief and anger consume Artemis, leading her to confront the implications of Apollo's actions and the broken oath he made on Styx, the river that separates the world of the living from the dead.

As the conversation deepens, Hermes and Artemis discuss the gravity of the



situation. They explore the nuances of justice and vengeance as Artemis grapples with her desire for revenge against Apollo for taking Alice's life—a desire intensified by her protective instincts over someone she considered part of her own family. Hermes warns her against seeking retribution, emphasizing the dangers of crossing the boundary into the underworld. Nevertheless, Artemis remains resolute, proposing to recruit a mortal to assist in her quest for justice.

The chapter ends with Hermes reluctantly agreeing to help Artemis by providing her with a hero—a unique and dangerous solution to her mournful predicament, driven by his own frustrations and the sentiment he felt for Alice. Amidst the backdrop of divine egos and moral dilemmas, this chapter reveals the intertwined fates of gods and mortals, the burden of choice, and the complexities of loyalty and revenge.



Chapter 24:

In Chapter 24, Alice reflects on her conventional yet unexamined beliefs about religion and the afterlife as a nominal member of the Church of England. Though she typically dismissed the idea of an afterlife, her reality shatters when she finds herself at the entrance to the underworld, through a hidden passage at Angel Tube station—a concept that echoes the Greek myth of Hermes, the messenger of death.

Upon arriving on the platform, Alice is struck by the sight of the dead around her. This place resembles a bustling Tube station, yet its passengers are not alive. The distinct groups of deceased individuals reveal the grim realities of death: some appear as the elderly she expected, while others are shockingly youthful, having died from avoidable tragedies and diseases. Among them are countless emaciated adults and children, evoking a visceral reaction of grief and helplessness in Alice. She quickly realizes that her existence as a living being is now lost, as she watches parents attempt to comfort their children without being able to touch them.

The situation worsens when a train arrives, and the specter of Charon, a figure embodying mythological themes of transport across borders of life and death, demands tickets. When fellow passenger Jean-François offers his ticket, Alice's instinctual warning arrives too late. As Charon takes Jean-François's ticket, a powerful gust of wind whisks him away, leaving



Alice terrified and bewildered by his absence. The remaining passengers sit passively, unwilling to give up their tickets, and the train arrives at its destination.

Exiting the train, Alice navigates a nondescript Tube station that could be mistaken for any London suburb, save for its eerie emptiness. Here, Alice abandons her ticket and ascends an escalator that leads her into the underworld, a starkly barren landscape devoid of life. The sky is dull, illuminated by a light that does not signal dawn or dusk. Flat streets lined with faux-Tudor homes stretch endlessly, emphasizing the lifelessness of this realm.

Suddenly, Alice feels a cold, wet touch on her ankle, signaling the presence of a monstrous three-headed dog—an embodiment of ancient mythos representing fear and the beasts of the underworld. In stark contrast to her ethereal form, the creature is solid and terrifyingly real, generating a jolt of adrenaline as it sniffs her, hinting at a predatory instinct. As her heart races, despair sinks in: she realizes she has landed not in heaven but in what appears to be hell—an unsettling truth for someone like her.

As other dead people exit the station, spilling into the empty streets like spilled ink, the creature shifts its attention, abandoning Alice for a new source of fascination. Although she remains alive in a conscious sense, she faces an uncertain fate—a spectral existence in a possible hell. Determined



to make sense of her surroundings, Alice chooses a random street and begins to walk, ready or not to navigate whatever awaits her in this unfamiliar afterlife.

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Chapter 25 Summary:

In this chapter, Neil grapples with the profound grief following the death of Alice, a love who was taken from him unexpectedly. Time for Neil has splintered into two distinct states: a vibrant past filled with memories of Alice, and a present steeped in a stagnant, painful reality. The influence of his guilt hangs heavily over him, as he retraces the series of events he believes led to her tragic demise. Neil ruminates on their conversations, her struggles, and the decisions he made—like persuading her to pursue freelance work, which he feels indirectly set off a chain of unfortunate events culminating in Alice's death.

He finds himself in a self-imposed isolation, choosing to remain in uncomfortable spaces of his flat rather than confront the memories embedded in their shared environment. The silence amplifies his inner turmoil, prompting him to experiment with speaking words associated with his loss, such as "dead" and "Alice." These words trigger a profound sense of despair, forcing him into an emotional cycle of torture—first through the anguish of their lost future together and then by recalling the joyful moments they shared.

Performing daily tasks feels surreal to him, and he neglects them until his hunger drives him to scavenge for food, which he ultimately finds lacking. In a fit of rage sparked by his empty cupboards, he loses control and breaks a



jar of marmite. Driven by the necessity to eat yet filled with ambivalence, he ventures out to buy takeaway food, feeling disoriented and disheveled by his grief.

As Neil walks through the cold, grim streets, he intentionally avoids eye contact with others, fearing their happiness in stark contrast to his own pain. Upon purchasing his meal, he returns home to a filthy kitchen—both a reflection of his self-neglect and a reminder of Alice's absence, which further deepens his sense of revulsion for himself.

In a chilling moment, while cleaning up the mess, he discovers a newspaper featuring an article on a man he identifies as a 'local lunatic' attempting suicide—a man that he recognizes as the figure he saw in the sky right before he and Alice were struck by lightning. The image forces Neil to confront a creeping suspicion and deepens the uncanny nature of his recent experiences. This connection between the man in the article and the day of the incident establishes a haunting motif of interconnected fates, leaving Neil in a tumultuous spiral of confusion and dread.



Chapter 26 Summary:

In Chapter 26, Neil finds himself at an unfamiliar door, confronting a young man named Hermes who is impatient and dismissive. Hermes soon reveals that he is aware of Neil's identity and quickly shuts him out. As Neil waits in the cold, he reflects on his recent troubling experiences related to Alice's death and the mysterious newspaper article he carries.

Hermes returns accompanied by Artemis, a striking woman who bears a resemblance to the youthful Apollo, though with dark hair. Their initial exchange is marked by criticism of Neil's appearance, which they compare to the famed hero Odysseus. Neil asserts his presence is about Alice, his late girlfriend, but Artemis insists they must leave the house before anyone notices him. She reveals that Alice was her cleaner, suggesting a connection that Neil desperately wants to explore. Despite his protests, Neil is compelled to follow Artemis as she leads him away.

As they move through a quiet London, Artemis speaks of her lost dogs with longing and regret, connecting their shared experiences of loss. Neil grapples with his grief over Alice, feeling trapped in his memories and unsure how to move forward without her. Their conversation reveals that Artemis has insight into Neil's emotional turmoil, and she implores him to consider any heroic actions he might have taken, suggesting they are relevant to his mourning.



Neil opens up about his feelings for Alice, admitting he loved her and is struggling to cope with her absence. Artemis, striving to connect and comfort him, shares her unconventional views on love and loss, revealing her own deep connections to her dogs that she had to let go. Their exchange turns more personal as they both admit to never having had sexual relations, highlighting their shared sensibilities. Yet, Artemis pushes the idea that Neil has the capacity for heroism that could transcend his current despair.

The conversation takes a surreal turn when Artemis introduces the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, urging Neil to see the precedent set by Orpheus's journey to reclaim his lost love—a notion Neil initially dismisses with skepticism. However, Artemis's insistence that he, too, could reclaim Alice stirs something within him, though fear and doubt cloud his belief.

As their discussion intensifies, Neil feels conflicted and ultimately recoils from Artemis's desperate plea for him to trust her ability to help. In a moment of fear and revulsion, he runs away, trying to escape what he perceives as her insane ideas. Yet, Artemis swiftly reappears, claiming her goddess-like speed as proof of her identity. This revelation confounds Neil further, prompting him to question everything about their interaction and Artemis's true nature.

Before parting, Artemis gives Neil her contact number for Hermes, insisting



that they cannot let Apollo prevail in whatever schemes surround them. Though Neil feels unready for any further engagement, Artemis believes strongly that he will eventually reach out. As she disappears, Neil is left grappling with doubt and fluctuating emotions, unsure of the path forward amidst the darkness of his grief.

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Chapter 27 Summary:

Chapter Summary: Alice's Journey in the Underworld

Alice finds herself disoriented in the underworld, having lost all sense of time and reality since her descent into this strange realm. The absence of sensations associated with the physical world—like hunger or temperature—leaves her questioning how long she's been in this limbo, though she reassures herself that eternity stretches before her. As she wanders through what she perceives to be suburbs of hell, she encounters a diverse group of deceased souls, including people from various cultures and even extinct populations. These "veteran dead" appear indifferent to her presence, moving effortlessly along the pavement.

Eventually, Alice arrives at a skyline reminiscent of Manhattan but with nuances that distort its familiarity. The area is strikingly clean and devoid of the typical markers of a bustling city, such as noise or decay, creating an eerie ambiance. Curiosity drives her to enter one of the tall buildings, which is part of the administrative center for the arrivals in the underworld, known as Sector A.

Inside the building, Alice meets Mary, a compassionate woman who communicates through a form of metaphysical understanding that transcends



spoken language. Mary, who has been dead for several decades, informs Alice of her new reality and offers her reassurance that this place is not hell, but an administrative hub for the deceased. As Alice learns more about her situation, she expresses confusion and anxiety over what to do next. Mary suggests that many find purpose in work to avoid the pervasive depression that afflicts many souls in the underworld.

Mary's explanation prompts Alice to consider her options. After expressing her desire for a job, she is directed to the careers department where she meets Mr. Kunmanara, a four-year-old Aboriginal boy serving as a careers adviser. He reveals that the job market for the dead is competitive, as positions are based on personal desire rather than necessity. This quirk of the afterlife is compounded by a belief that the skills required for various positions may differ significantly from what was valued in life.

Alice candidly shares her predeath experience as a cleaner, but Mr. Kunmanara points out the limited applicability of this role in a realm where cleanliness is inherent. Inquiring about her hobbies, he discovers Alice's talent in Scrabble, which impresses him. He explains that having skills in leisure activities is valuable in the underworld, where boredom is a significant issue. They discuss the possibility of her pursuing a vocation in gaming establishments that cater to the leisure needs of the dead.

Though hesitant, Alice comes to realize that her skills might serve a purpose



in this new existence. Mr. Kunmanara enthusiastically assures her that they have found her vocation, setting the stage for Alice's new life in the underworld and allowing her to embrace the possibilities of her afterlife journey.

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Chapter 28:

In the chapter, Apollo finds himself enveloped in a profound depression, a feeling he initially mistakes for mere boredom. Having spent millennia grappling with ennui, nothing seems to alleviate his profound sadness. Typical distractions, such as indulging at Bacchanalia, seducing mortals, and even dedicating time to his music, fail to provide relief. His sorrow stems from the poignant absence of Alice, a mortal he cherished, whose loss he feels more acutely than the presence of his often irritating family members.

Living with Ares, the god of war, amidst rising tensions between Athena and Hera, Apollo's environment is chaotic and uninviting. As he struggles with his melancholy, a visit from Eros, the god of love, interrupts his self-imposed isolation. Eros, seemingly unbothered by Apollo's gloomy demeanor, shares that he has been rehearsing for a youth club Easter show and is preparing to perform a rap—something he admits he finds embarrassing.

Apollo, looking for an opportunity to express his anguish, brushes off Eros's inquiries with feigned indifference until confronting the truth of Alice's death. When Eros inquires about Alice, Apollo bluntly admits that Zeus, the king of the gods, is responsible for her demise after learning she had stayed in their home. The revelation that Zeus discovered their secret highlights the peril of mingling with mortals, especially given the severity of his reaction.



As their conversation deepens, Eros notes the weight of guilt Apollo carries, possibly suggesting that his feelings of responsibility for Alice's death are rooted in their complicated relationship. Eros probes into Apollo's emotions, leading Apollo to wrestle with the possibility that even if he didn't directly

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Chapter 29 Summary:

In chapter 29, Neil struggles with the aftermath of a profoundly unsettling encounter with Artemis, who insisted that his deceased girlfriend Alice still exists in some form, rekindling his hope and anguish. Distraught by the possibility that Alice's spirit could still be reachable, Neil resolves to “Get Over It, Let Go, and Move On,” a mantra he clings to while attempting to tidy his apartment in a way that painfully reminds him of Alice. He finds it hard to even change the sheets she slept on, symbolizing his deep-seated grief.

When the doorbell rings, his initial instinct is to ignore it, but he suppresses that impulse as part of his effort to heal. Neil opens the door to discover Apollo—Alice’s flirtatious and confident suitor—standing outside. The visit shocks him, as it is unexpected and unwelcome. Apollo reveals he learned Neil's address from Hermes, a messenger god, suggesting a connection to divine networks that Neil isn't comfortable navigating.

Though their previous interactions have been charged with jealousy, Neil finds himself in an awkward position as he reluctantly invites Apollo in. They sit in Neil's kitchen, where Apollo fumbles for the right words. Eventually, he awkwardly offers an apology for Alice's death, which Neil meets with skepticism, feeling that Apollo's self-centeredness belies any genuine remorse. The conversation unfolds revealing Apollo's struggle with



identity and humility—he admits he kissed Alice, asserts his superiority over Neil, and confesses to feeling rejected. He attempts to pin some responsibility for Alice's death on circumstances beyond his control and even hints at divine manipulation involving Zeus—another powerful figure in mythology.

This reveals a deeper layer of conflict: Neil grapples with the emerging notion that Zeus may have more directly influenced Alice's fate. As the conversation intensifies, Neil grounds himself in a realization of his own emotional strength and unwillingness to accept Apollo's convoluted apologies as a means to appease himself.

In a climactic confrontation, Neil asserts that accountability lies in understanding the nature of guilt and apology, sharply rejecting Apollo's demands for forgiveness. Apollo's desperate plea for absolution transforms into a commanding anger when he declares, "I demand that you forgive me!" This, however, only frustrates Neil further. He challenges Apollo's authority, declaring that he is not beholden to a god's whims.

The chapter reaches a dramatic climax as Apollo, in a moment of defiance, gestures to the sky to assert his godly power, but in doing so collapses, and astonishingly, the sun goes out. This moment encapsulates the chaotic intersection of human emotion and divine influence, leaving Neil to contend with something greater than the grief he initially faced—the realization of



the volatile forces at play, both in his life and in the greater mythological landscape.

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Chapter 30 Summary:

In Chapter 30, Artemis finds herself on the Heath as an unsettling phenomenon unfolds: day has inexplicably turned into night, signaling a dire emergency concerning her brother Apollo, the sun god. Despite her close connection with the moon, which she feels deeply, she realizes that a total eclipse is not the cause of the darkness, but rather a grave situation surrounding Apollo. As she races home, the screams of distressed mortals fill the air, highlighting the chaos caused by the absence of sunlight. These mortals, unlike birds, are incapable of finding their way home, adding to the pressing crisis that Artemis and the other gods must confront.

Upon reaching her doorstep, Artemis encounters Aphrodite, who, for the first time in decades, speaks with genuine concern. The urgency of the situation strikes them both as they enter their home, where they hear commotion as others search for Apollo. Hermes, typically confident in his ability to locate anyone, admits his inability to find Apollo, further amplifying the group's dread.

Aphrodite voices the need for action, while Artemis emphasizes the seriousness of their predicament—the planet cannot sustain life without the sun for long. She warns that their collective powers might be needed to keep the world functioning temporarily, enough to ascertain Apollo's fate. Just then, Ares arrives, posing questions that highlight the anxious atmosphere



among the gods. They discuss the potential of using other celestial bodies, like stars, as temporary sources of light and heat, but skepticism looms over their capabilities.

As they strategize, tension rises around the looming question of Zeus's involvement, and mention is made of Eros speaking with Hera, potentially assessing the risk of unleashing Zeus to intervene. In the midst of this chaos, an unexpected phone call interrupts Aphrodite, revealing more of the dysfunction in the mortal realm. The call leads to a cynical comment on human behavior at such an urgent time.

The conversation among the gods takes a turn when Aphrodite cynically suggests abandoning mortals entirely, allowing the world to perish in order to conserve their strength for re-creating a better existence elsewhere. This controversial proposal hangs in the air, prompting a somber debate about whether they should take any action at all, weighing the risks of remaining passive against the potential of imminent disaster. Artemis insists that they must gather Athena's input, knowing Demeter's contributions are critical to preserving the earth's sustenance.

Just as uncertainty lingers, another phone call comes for Artemis, revealing a voice on the other end—Neil, a mortal, who urgently relays an alarming scenario: he has a god passed out in his kitchen, and the stakes have never felt higher. Recognizing this as a pivotal moment, Artemis feels a surge of



strength at the thought that her brother may be closer than anticipated, compelling her to act swiftly to avert disaster as the chapter culminates in a tense cliffhanger.

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Chapter 31 Summary:

In Chapter 31, Artemis hurries through the icy streets of Hackney as chaos descends on the mortal world. As people panic and shops close amidst a strange darkness caused by her brother Apollo's actions, she arrives at Neil's small and grimy flat. Neil, disheveled and anxious, admits that he now believes Artemis after witnessing Apollo's mysterious collapse and the sun being switched off in retaliation for his doubt.

Inside, Neil reveals that he has kept Apollo, a powerful god, away from the hospital, fearing for his well-being. Artemis learns that Apollo's health is at risk, possibly due to the immense power required to switch off the sun or a potential punishment from Styx, the imposing river goddess of the underworld who enforces vows. If Styx is indeed involved, Apollo could be incapacitated for nine years, plunging the world into darkness.

Despite their urgency, Artemis is troubled by her brother's condition. Although she confirms Apollo is still alive, reviving him proves more complex than simple resurrection: it requires considerable divine power. Artemis explains to Neil that gods' abilities aren't unlimited; revealing too much could endanger their already diminished strength. Together, they face a daunting task: they need Apollo's innate healing abilities to save him.

Artemis considers the possibility of rounding up other gods to help, but their



power has waned significantly, making it overly risky. If they were to pool their resources to revive Apollo, they might inadvertently jeopardize their own functions and the world's stability. There's also the chilling reality that if Styx has intervened, their attempts to revive Apollo could be futile.

In a moment of vulnerability, Artemis recognizes her deepening affection for her brother, seeing him not only as a powerful god but as family. To confront this dire situation, she decides they must journey to the underworld to find Styx. If Styx is not responsible, she hopes to seek assistance from Hades and Persephone, the rulers of the underworld, to ensure that the world remains safe and operational until a solution can be found. As time is of the essence, especially in the otherworldly realm, Artemis prepares to take action swiftly, hoping to save both her brother and humanity from the oncoming calamity.

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Chapter 32:

In Chapter 32, Neil faces the unsettling task of leaving his physical body behind as he prepares to venture into the underworld alongside Artemis. While initially hesitant, he learns that he must do so to avoid being trapped in live time, particularly as Apollo lies unconscious on the sofa in their flat. With Artemis's assistance, Neil's spirit separates from his body, sparking a mix of relief and melancholy. For the first time, he truly understands the deep emotional and physical bond he had with his body—a connection made painfully clear by the absence of his grief for Alice, which had manifested as physical pain since her death.

As they embark on their journey, Neil grapples with the absurdity of his mission: to save the world and, more personally, to find Alice in the underworld. Despite his doubts and feelings of defeat over previous failures, he resolves to try again—this time with Artemis's offer of help as a potential lifeline. They navigate the icy streets toward Islington, where a portal leads to the underworld.

Along the way, they encounter a group of distressed individuals gathered outside a church. Neil finds himself reflecting on his previous atheism and his past contempt for religious beliefs, while Artemis chastises the effectiveness of the prayers being offered. Their conversation reveals a budding camaraderie and mutual understanding as they discuss belief in the



supernatural and Neil's evolving perspective on life and death.

Arriving at the desolate Angel Tube station, they prepare to access a secret platform that leads to the underworld. Artemis explains that such forbidden journeys are typically avoided by gods to maintain the balance between the

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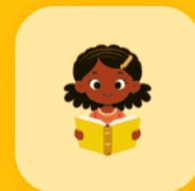
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Chapter 33 Summary:

In Chapter 33, Artemis and Neil find themselves at a critical juncture in their journey through the underworld. They are trying to evade Charon, the ferryman of the dead, who has grown lazy over the centuries and now performs only the bare minimum of his duties while occasionally tossing souls overboard for amusement. Knowing Charon's dispassionate nature makes it easy for them to avoid him; they simply lie flat as his train passes overhead to collect its cargo of souls.

However, their greater concern is Cerberus, the fearsome three-headed dog of the underworld, who has become increasingly ravenous for souls. They contemplate various methods that legendary figures like Orpheus and Heracles used to calm or distract Cerberus. Artemis recalls that Orpheus lulled Cerberus to sleep with song, but Neil painfully admits that his own singing would likely have the opposite effect. While they consider whether to use honeycakes or the golden bough—both elixirs for traversing Cerberus—it's clear they possess neither of these items for their plan.

Faced with limited options and Artemis's formidable presence, they discuss the dire outcome of the encounter. Artemis suggests she would fight Cerberus while Neil runs for the river Styx, which encircles the underworld nine times. She prepares herself by regaining her corporeal form as they approach the exit, feeling powerful and unyielding despite knowing the



impending battle. They step into the light of the underworld's suburbs, which starkly contrasts with typical depictions of a grim, crowded underworld.

As they maneuver through confused souls emerging from the train, Neil expresses his desire to explore, but Artemis reminds him that time flows differently here and they have urgent matters to attend to. The gravity of their task weighs heavily on them, as they prepare for an encounter with Cerberus.

When Cerberus finally appears, he embodies sheer power and menace. His massive form and three heads present an intimidating challenge, each head bearing glowing red eyes and sharp, dripping fangs. Artemis, sensing that this creature is unlike any she has ever faced, is seized with both fear and determination. In a moment of adrenaline, she launches into action, attacking Cerberus in an attempt to blind one of his heads before the confrontation escalates further. The stakes are high, and their survival hinges on Artemis's strength and Neil's speed.



Chapter 34 Summary:

In the chapter, Neil finds himself in a surreal and unnerving environment, frantically running to escape a confrontation between Artemis and the terrifying Cerberus. This fear propels him forward through a dreamlike landscape filled with the dead, all of whom seem indifferent to his presence. As he continues to run, Neil experiences a profound sense of unreality, questioning when his dreams or the nightmare began—dating back to the moment he had first encountered Apollo, the god of the sun, whose actions had significantly disrupted the natural order.

Eventually, Neil arrives at the edge of a river that Artemis had mentioned. This river, identified as Styx, embodies a striking woman who is both part of the water and its spirit. Styx communicates in a way that combines her identity as a deity and a geographical feature, revealing that she is bound by rules that govern the actions of gods and mortals alike. Specifically, she must enforce the consequences of oaths sworn upon her by deities.

Neil's desperate situation becomes clear. He recounts how Apollo inadvertently extinguished the sun, potentially placing his entire world in jeopardy. Styx informs him that Apollo did not technically break his oath to her; his actions may not have been intended to harm mortals, which is why she cannot help Neil restore the sun. Her explanations highlight the complex nature of divine laws and the intricate relationships between mortals and



immortals.

The conversation takes a turn when Neil learns that Styx's powers do extend to binding a mortal's oath. Seeing a flicker of hope, he swears an oath upon Styx to find Alice, a woman who has recently died and whom he desperately seeks. Styx smiles, indicating that accepting his sworn commitment might embolden her to assist him in some capacity, even if her direct influence in reversing Apollo's situation is limited.

Ultimately, the chapter highlights Neil's transition from fear to a sense of agency, revealing his determination to find Alice while navigating the complexities of the underworld and the looming threat of Cerberus. His journey illustrates the nuanced interplay of fate, free will, and the binding nature of oaths, setting the stage for Neil's next steps in his quest.

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Chapter 35 Summary:

In Chapter 35, Alice finds herself engaged in a game of Scrabble against a Victorian scientist who met an untimely death while collecting algae samples. As she enjoys the relaxed atmosphere of the twentieth-century gaming zone—a vibrant patchwork of interconnected pubs representing different eras—she reflects on her afterlife in Sector A, a vast entertainment complex dedicated to the experiences of the deceased. While Alice plays, she grapples with her desire to remember her life before death, particularly her connection to Neil, her late partner. The specter of forgetting hangs heavily in the underworld, where the dead overwhelmingly choose to drink the waters of Lethe to erase their pasts.

Despite the social vibrancy around her and the camaraderie with her colleagues, Alice feels a persistent loneliness, especially as she wanders the streets searching for Neil's familiar face among the crowds. Just as her Scrabble game nears its conclusion, Alice experiences an inexplicable urge pulling her towards the gates of Hades and Persephone's palace—an unexpected summons that sparks both curiosity and concern.

The palace itself, a transformed abode of grandeur since Persephone's arrival, stands as a vibrant oasis in an otherwise bleak underworld landscape. Its ornate grounds are maintained by an army of imaginative landscapers, resulting in lush greenery that starkly contrasts with the desolation typically



associated with death. As Alice approaches, she encounters the guards stationed at the palace. Their banter reveals a humorous dynamic, with one guard, Eddie, admitting his cowardice in battle, while the other, Dieter, prepares to enter the palace to investigate the purpose of Alice's unexpected visit.

Amidst their playful exchange, Alice becomes aware of Cerberus, the three-headed guardian of the underworld, approaching in a weary state, led by none other than the goddess Artemis. Recently victorious in a fierce battle against the beast, Artemis now stands triumphant, re-establishing her strength in this realm. As she nears the entrance to the palace, she spots Alice and joyfully greets her, clarifying that she is not dead but continues to live on in the upper world.

The chapter closes with Alice and Artemis reconnecting, introducing layers of narrative where the dynamics of the gods and the experiences of mortals intertwine. It hints at deeper themes of conquest, identity, and the ties that bind the living to the dead, setting the stage for unfolding adventures in the underworld.



Chapter 36:

In Chapter 36, Neil departs from Styx and rushes toward the palace of Hades and Persephone, seeking answers regarding Alice. Styx had cryptically assured him that he would find his way. Shortly, Neil encounters a long stone wall which, upon inspection, he realizes is solid. Although momentarily caught up in the sensation of having his tangible body again, he quickly scales the wall and peers into the expansive, serene grounds beyond, revealing the majestic palace in the distance.

As he nears the palace, he observes the absence of guards, pondering his uncertain approach. Artemis, the goddess of the hunt and a close ally to Neil, had spoken vaguely about the dangers of Hades, hinting at the possibility of dire consequences should he be caught, yet Neil recalls that Artemis intended to request Hades's assistance for the looming troubles afflicting the upper world. Taking a leap of faith, he decides to enter through the modest kitchen door at the back.

Inside, he encounters a gathering of spirits—architects engrossed in their work—one of whom humorously informs him he is in the wrong room, as engineers belong in the ballroom. Ignoring their chatter, Neil continues deeper into the palace, finding himself before gilded doors manned by two guards with ghastly yellow complexions. They initially express their surprise at his presence, contemplating their duty to prevent entry yet ultimately



permitting him inside, albeit with a warning regarding his departure.

As Neil crosses the threshold into the throne room, he finds himself in an opulent Hall of Mirrors, seemingly inspired by Versailles but adorned with representations of Hades and Persephone themselves instead of the typical grandeur. Hades, a formidable figure with an intimidating presence, sits on an ebony throne alongside a petite Persephone, who reacts with surprise at Neil's unexpected intrusion. Their eerie banter reveals long-standing tension and a degree of disdain regarding mortals, with Hades demanding to know why Neil is there.

When Neil explains that Artemis directed him to come, the conversation shifts as they discuss Alice, leading Neil to reveal his heartfelt plea concerning her fate. Hades expresses no intentions of releasing Alice, insisting on a sacrifice as a prerequisite for her return. A humorous exchange occurs between Hades and Persephone, where they discuss possible challenges for Neil, such as a dance or a more grotesque sacrifice.

Ultimately, Hades offers Neil a fateful choice: save the world or reclaim Alice. Neil quickly realizes the weight of the decision, recognizing that his love for Alice means sacrificing his own happiness for the greater good. In a poignant moment, he chooses the world over his personal desires, articulating that true love often means putting others first. Hades laughs at what he perceives as a foolish choice, yet Neil stands firm in his resolve.

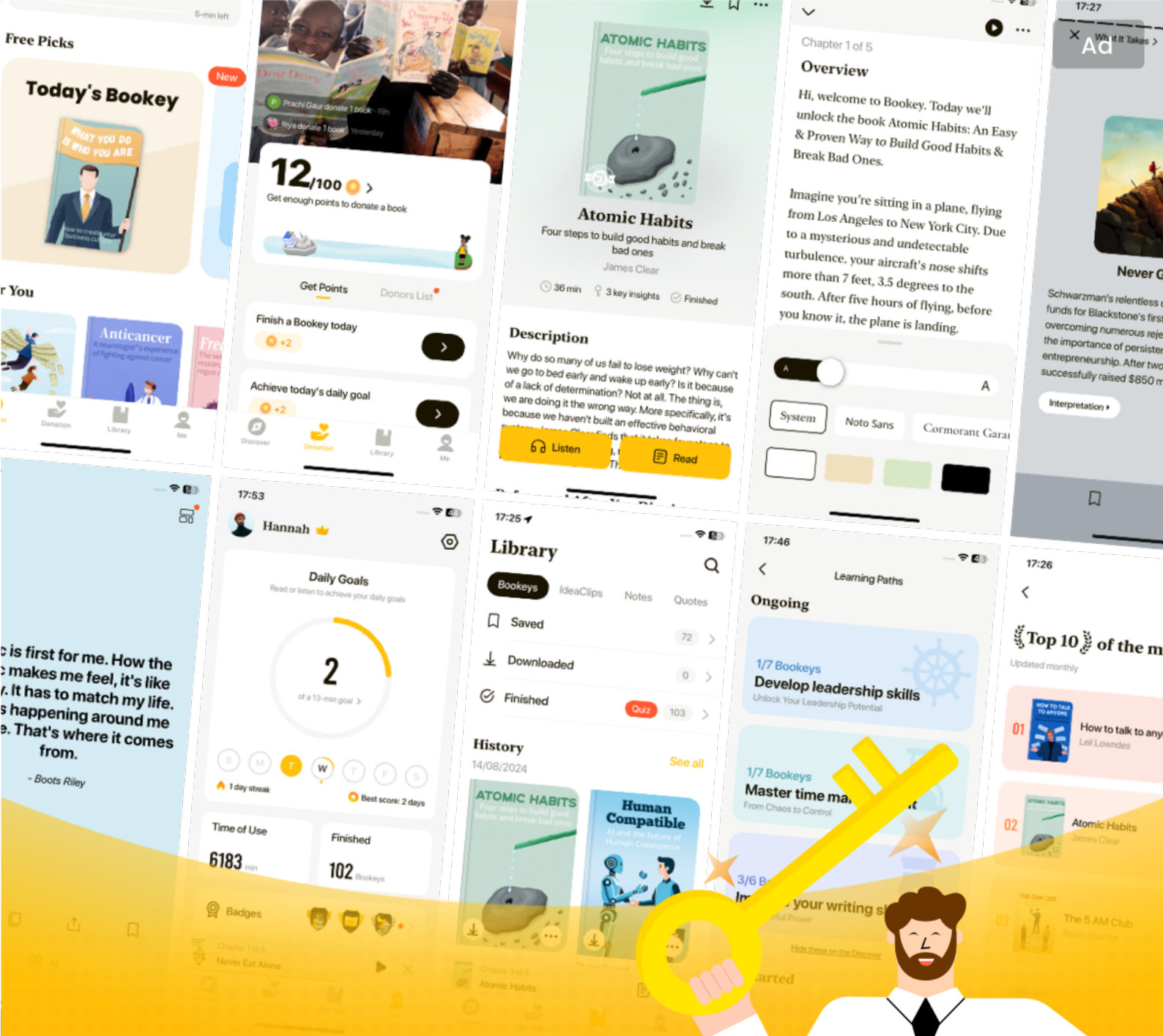


The chapter concludes with Hades cryptically noting that he cannot directly influence the condition of the world, but he finds Neil's answer intriguing, casting doubt on what truly lies ahead for the fates of both Neil and Alice.

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Chapter 37 Summary:

In Chapter 37, Artemis arrives at the opulent palace of Hades, where the stark contrast between her squalid upperworld and the refined underworld annoys her. She reflects on how this luxurious setting contributes to Persephone's superior demeanor during her visits. Seeking an audience with the powerful gods, Artemis strides past the guards, boldly declaring her lineage as niece to Hades and sister to Persephone.

Inside, Hades greets her with a dark humor as Persephone makes light of the situation, likening Artemis and her companions to characters from "The Wizard of Oz." However, the jovial atmosphere quickly fades when Artemis reveals the dire situation above ground: Apollo has put out the sun and is now in a coma. Without the sun or Apollo's presence, the world is facing imminent disaster.

This revelation prompts a harsh reaction from Hades, who points out the potential gains for him: the death of all mortals means their souls would belong to him. Alice, a mortal accompanying Artemis, interjects with a logical argument about the future of mortals and the long-term implications of their potential demise, which catches Hades' attention.

A negotiation ensues, with Hades suggesting a trade: Cerberus, Artemis's fierce dog, for the life of Neil, a mortal trapped in a cage. This raises tension,



as Neil and Alice share an emotional connection, and the stakes become clear. Although Artemis initially refuses to part with Cerberus, the conversation evolves into a larger debate about power dynamics between the upperworld and underworld, with Persephone expressing a newfound disdain for the surface.

As Artemis grapples with the situation, Neil bravely urges Artemis to stay firm in her resolve, even as Hades coldly dangles the life of Neil before them. Amidst the exchanges, Artemis strategically shifts her demands, suggesting Hades release Neil and Alice in exchange for Cerberus, crafting a clever deal that ultimately serves her interests.

In a surprising turn, Artemis's humor and intuitive bargaining lend the final unshakeable blow, leading Hades to agree. As Alice rushes to free Neil, the chapter closes with Artemis planning to contact Hermes, hinting at the clever machinations at play as she smiles, satisfied with her seemingly unobtrusive manipulation of the gods. The chapter reflects not only the themes of power and survival but also the intricate relationships among gods and mortals, setting the stage for the unfolding consequences of their decisions.



Chapter 38 Summary:

In this chapter, Aphrodite finds herself in a flurry of packing, uncertain about their destination but determined to prepare for whatever lies ahead. The looming threat of the world's end prompts her to gather her belongings, especially her beloved luxurious clothing and shoes. Despite her glamorous nature, she's surprisingly contemplative about her situation, reflecting on the absence of Apollo, the god of the sun and light, whose presence is essential for beauty and warmth in any new realm they might create.

As she packs, her son Eros enters, visibly troubled. Eros, the god of love and desire, tries to reassure her but admits he is losing hope regarding Apollo's safety and their current predicament. Aphrodite attempts to maintain a facade of optimism, asserting that everything will be fine, even while packing sex toys, a playful nod to her domain over love and desire. She embraces Eros, showcasing her maternal side, and encourages him to stay hopeful and persuasive among the other gods who are panicking in Apollo's absence.

Eros expresses doubt about their situation, but Aphrodite insists that they all play a role—her allure provides inspiration, Artemis, the goddess of the hunt, is on a critical mission, and Eros holds the power to instill faith in others. She emphasizes their collective strength, reminding Eros that they will find a way to navigate the crisis, even if the outcome isn't what they



might desire.

Just as they reach a moment of understanding, the messenger god Hermes interrupts them, informing Aphrodite that Artemis has contacted him. This sudden urgency shifts the focus back to their immediate situation, underscoring the precariousness of their reality and setting the stage for what could unfold next.

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Chapter 39 Summary:

In Chapter 39, Alice and Neil undertake a nerve-wracking journey back to the surface after their unexpected experience in the underworld—a realm ruled by Hades and Persephone, characterized by darkness and death.

Following the mythological tale of Orpheus, Neil must walk ahead of Alice and refrain from looking back at her; his glance could spell her permanent return to the underworld. As they traverse the oppressive blackness of the tunnel, Alice struggles with her anxieties about her new existence as what she fears might be a ghost.

Conversing with Artemis, the goddess of the hunt and protector of women, Alice learns that the goddess Aphrodite will grant her a new body. Alice hesitates, imagining the complexities of returning to life after being widely reported as dead due to a tragic lightning strike. Artemis is confident, though, insisting that they can restore her, despite the looming threat of the end of the world caused by the sun's disappearance and Apollo's slumber.

As they emerge from the darkness of the tunnel into the familiar shadows of the mortal world, Alice's hopes bloom into reality. With a full spirit, she is momentarily overwhelmed but recalls the immediate need to return to Neil's flat. Their emotional reunion is bittersweet; when Neil finally turns to look at her joyfully, they pass through one another, still grappling with the aftermath of her death.



Despite the surrounding chaos of London's crumbling neighborhoods, where shops are shuttered against looters, Alice revels in the vibrancy of life—something starkly absent in the underworld. She expresses a longing for food and the sensory experiences of the world above, emphasizing her isolation during her time "dead," which she mistakenly thought lasted for years but was only twenty-six days.

As they navigate the streets, Neil and Artemis guide Alice back to reality, a journey punctuated by innocence and love, reminding her of the missing parts of life she had yearned for in the underworld. The chapter concludes with a sense of urgency, as they approach Neil's home, hoping to find both Apollo safe and their last connection to the fragile balance between the living and the dead intact.

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Chapter 40:

In this climactic chapter, Neil, Alice, and Artemis find themselves at a critical juncture in their quest to save the world from impending darkness. After a brief return to the physical realm, Neil realizes the urgency of their situation as he hurriedly dons warm clothing to set out with Alice and Artemis to Trafalgar Square, where a gathering of Londoners awaits. The city is shrouded in an unnatural cold, heightening their urgency as they traverse the icy streets, which are largely devoid of life.

While walking, they seize the chance to reconnect, reminiscing about their recent past. Artemis carries Apollo's comatose body, whose absence has profound implications for the world, as she alludes to the chaos that would ensue without his presence. They finally reach Trafalgar Square, where the crowd's restless energy signals their discontent over the sun's disappearance. Artemis's status as a goddess enables her to part the crowd effortlessly, leading Neil and Alice toward the center for a pivotal moment.

As they reach the iconic Nelson's Column, Artemis gathers the attention of the crowd, explaining the dire situation. Yet, doubt looms in the air as questions about the sun's return grow louder. To quell the rising panic, she urges Neil to speak, believing that his connection to Alice will resonate with the gathered mortals—a task he is reluctant to embrace. When he finally takes the stand, he struggles to articulate the miraculous



events—specifically, the resurrection of Alice after her tragic death by lightning. Initially met with disbelief and derision from the crowd, Neil's honesty about his raw emotions begins to shift the atmosphere.

With Artemis's encouragement and the crowd's tension still palpable, Alice

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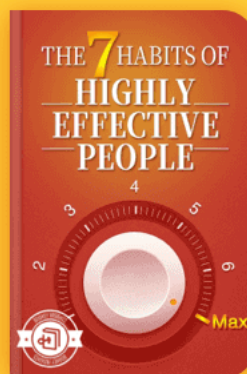
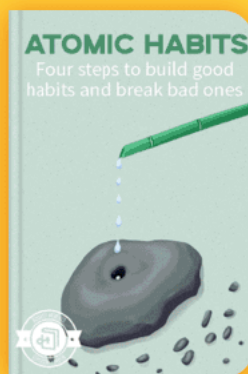
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