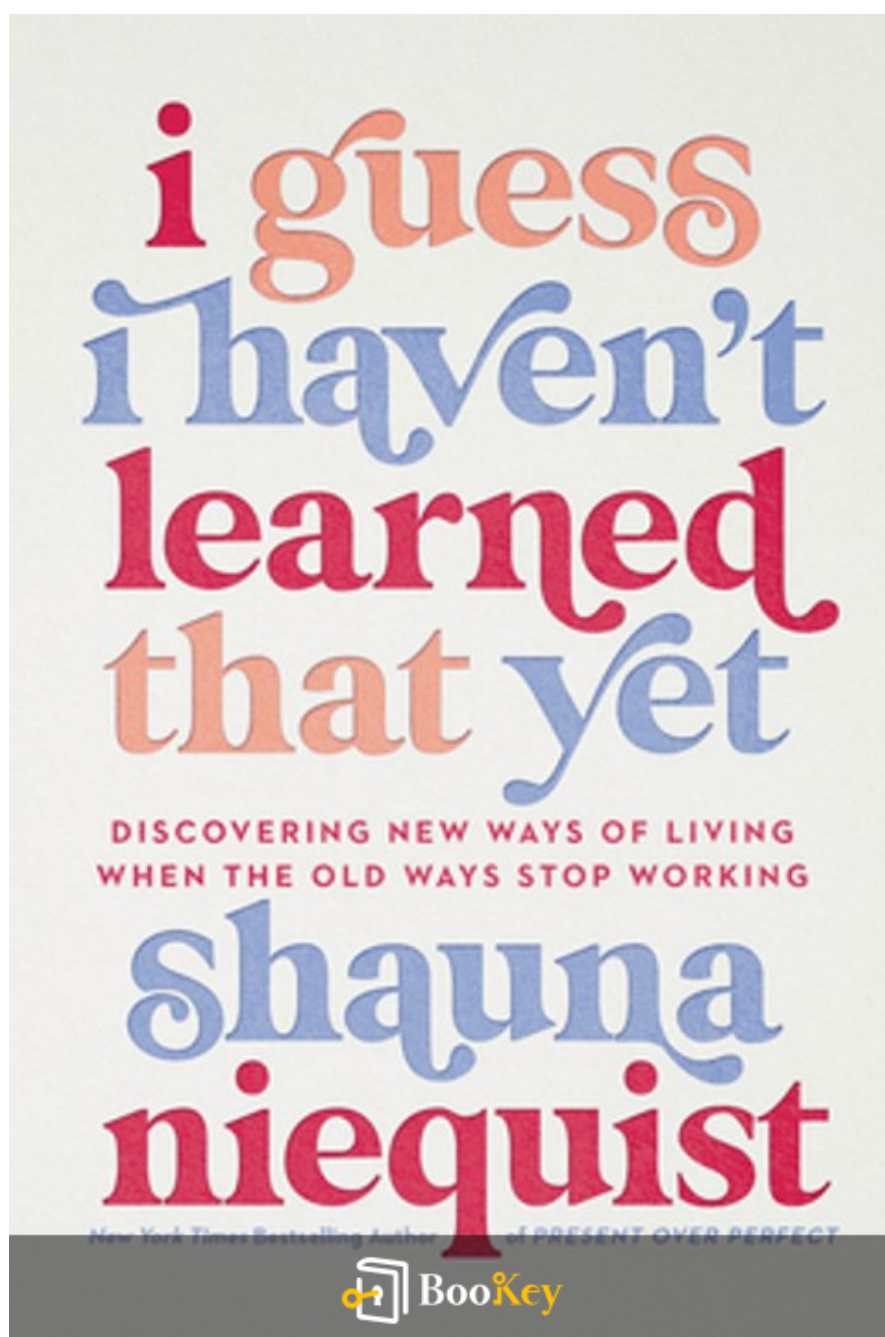


I Guess I Haven't Learned That Yet PDF (Limited Copy)

Shauna Niequist



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I Guess I Haven't Learned That Yet Summary

Navigating life's lessons through love and vulnerability.

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About the book

In "I Guess I Haven't Learned That Yet," Shauna Niequist invites readers on a heartfelt journey of growth, introspection, and the messy beauty of life's uncertainties. Drawing from her own experiences, Niequist explores the lessons we often overlook or resist, confronting the notion that personal growth is not a linear path but a series of detours filled with unexpected revelations. Through her candid storytelling and relatable reflections on faith, food, and relationships, she illuminates the transformative power of embracing our vulnerabilities and the grace found in accepting that we are all a work in progress. This book is a gentle reminder that it's okay to admit we haven't yet mastered the lessons life has to offer, encouraging us to lean into the questions and the waiting, and to find joy in the process of becoming.

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About the author

Shauna Niequist is a beloved author and speaker known for her heartfelt and relatable writing style that resonates with readers seeking authenticity and connection in their lives. With a background in writing and a passion for food, family, and faith, she has penned several best-selling books that explore themes of love, loss, and growth. Shauna's work often reflects her own life experiences, inviting readers into her personal journey and encouraging them to embrace their own stories. As the daughter of renowned author and pastor Bill Hybels, she carries on a legacy of impactful storytelling, sharing insights that inspire the pursuit of joy and purposeful living.

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Chapter 1 Summary: 2. Shoulders Down, Heart Open

Chapter Summary: Shoulders Down, Heart Open

In this introspective chapter, the narrator reflects on a physical and emotional struggle with chronic pain, particularly in the shoulders, which serves as a metaphor for deeper inner turmoil. The narrator describes a habitual tension held in their shoulders—a sign of stress and the instinct to protect oneself from emotional pain. A significant encounter with a massage therapist named Blue highlights this issue; she suggests that the tension may stem from unresolved emotions and the need to shield oneself from uncomfortable truths.

The narrator's physical discomfort is compounded by emotional grief stemming from a recent departure from a cherished church community, deepening the sense of loss and disorientation. Despite various attempts to seek relief through medical channels, dietary adjustments, and natural supplements, the chronic pain persists, illustrating the complexity of the mind-body connection.

Drawing inspiration from Blue's insightful questions and the work of Dr. John Sarno, who argues that chronic pain often signals unacknowledged emotions, the narrator embarks on a journey of self-discovery. This involves

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consciously working to relax their shoulders and open their heart, symbolizing a willingness to confront suppressed feelings.

As the narrator embraces their pain and questions the emotions tied to it, they recognize the necessity of feeling and processing the difficult truths in their life. Though daunting, this path of emotional honesty begins to correlate with a gradual transformation toward healing. The chapter concludes with a sense of hope, as the act of welcoming previously unacknowledged feelings—however painful—becomes a pivotal step in unlocking emotional resilience and leading to a more open heart.

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Chapter 2 Summary: 3. Finding a New Way

Summary of Chapters: Finding a New Way

In the chapter "Finding a New Way," the narrator reflects on life in their hometown, a close-knit community deeply rooted in history and relationships. The narrator and Aaron grew up in neighboring suburbs, sharing friendships and experiences that intertwined their lives. Aaron's family, long-established members of the community, has been in the same home since the 1940s, and they run a chiropractic clinic that has been in the family for generations. In contrast, the narrator's family founded a church the year they were born, further anchoring them in the community.

The familiarity of daily interactions with friends, family, and neighbors generated a comforting sense of stability for the narrator, who reveled in this intricate web of connections. However, while Aaron embraced some aspects of this world, he felt increasingly stifled by the expectations and constraints of community life that revolved around the narrator's family and church. His desire was to break free from these confines and explore life as an independent couple, forging their own path while maintaining a warm connection to their roots.

Their faiths were changing, and the narrator recognized a growing tension

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between personal aspirations and familial obligations. While the narrator prioritized loyalty to their family over aligning with their evolving spiritual beliefs, Aaron, who worked at the narrator's family church, felt his creative freedom curbed. This dynamic led to resentment and regret, as the narrator acknowledges a tendency to ignore the signs of Aaron's discontent, choosing instead to focus on their ideal vision of family and community. This chapter ultimately encapsulates a struggle for identity, autonomy, and the challenges of maintaining relationships in the face of personal growth and change.

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Chapter 3 Summary: 4. On Crying in Church

Summary of Chapter Four: On Crying in Church

In a small, white-steepled church on a chilly February Sunday, the author finds herself captivated by the powerful sermon of an inspiring African American preacher named Zina. Through her words, she explores profound themes of loss, change, and suffering, illuminating the struggle of navigating life's uncertainties. Zina draws on the biblical story of Joseph and his brothers, emphasizing that when caught in the midst of turmoil, one cannot fully grasp the entirety of their story.

The author reflects on her personal journey of leaving the church her family founded, which has been a disorienting and painful process. Those awkward first visits to new congregations evoke deep feelings of loneliness and disconnection from the sacred traditions that once defined her. As societal ties weaken, the author notes a widespread feeling of isolation echoing in the lives of many, including friends grappling with political divides, shifting faiths, and the perennial struggle to balance family responsibilities.

Amidst the disillusionment, she maintains a belief in God and the fundamentals of faith, asserting that spirituality is not a substitute for emotional well-being but a pathway to comfort, healing, and community.

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The chapter grapples with the reality that as life evolves at a dizzying pace, individuals may find themselves in unfamiliar territory, stripped of the certainties that once anchored them.

The author reveals that despite the chaos and the void of the future, life persists, children still need nurturing, and the mundane responsibilities of daily living continue. Acknowledging that she has shed many illusions about faith and identity, she emphasizes the sacredness of vulnerability. The tears shed in moments of grief, especially within the walls of a church, are sacred markers of personal change.

She invites readers who feel lost to understand that they are not alone in their sorrow. While the process of leaving behind cherished communities can feel like a painful separation, glimpses of hope and healing continually emerge, reminding us that life can rebuild and grow anew, even from the broken places. The chapter concludes by affirming that mourning is a natural response to change and that it is perfectly acceptable to grieve, cry, and seek solace in shared experiences of loss.

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Critical Thinking

Key Point: Vulnerability is sacred.

Critical Interpretation: When you allow yourself to be vulnerable, especially in moments of grief or change, you open the door to genuine connection and healing. The tears that flow during hard times are not simply signs of weakness; they are profound expressions of your humanity. Embracing vulnerability encourages you to lean into community, reminding you that others share similar struggles and experiences. This shared journey through sorrow not only nurtures personal growth but also enriches your relationships, creating a supportive environment where healing and hope can flourish.

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Chapter 4: 5. She

In Chapter Five, the narrator reflects on a life-changing crisis that emerged just as she and her husband, Aaron, were beginning to redefine their relationship and their place within their community. Central to this upheaval were her father and their church, which, while not her narrative to disclose, left her deeply shattered. She grapples with the complex interplay between her identity and those of her father and the church, realizing that her self-concept was intricately woven into their stories rather than forming from her own individual experiences.

This crisis became both a personal trauma and an opportunity for profound self-examination. The narrator wrestles with feelings of loss, questioning who she is in a world that seems upside-down. The emotional turmoil is heavily felt—she feels like a ghost of herself, unable to fully engage with daily life despite continuing with routine tasks, such as attending her son's graduation and engaging with friends.

In the aftermath, she begins a lengthy process of introspection, leading to a metaphorical excavation of her inner self, a journey that involves dismantling every belief and assumption about her identity. This process proves transformative, leading her to a new understanding of herself. Rather than merely being the daughter of a prominent figure, she discovers another version of herself that had been hidden away—strong and authentic.



Chapter Six hints at the continuation of this journey, with the narrator poised to delve further into her personal evolution, revealing her findings about her true self and the woman she has become as a result of her struggles. The chapter serves as a pivotal moment in her story where loss transforms into a quest for self-discovery and empowerment.

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Chapter 5 Summary: 6. Corpse Reviver

Chapter Summary: "Corpse Reviver"

The narrator reflects on the reasons behind their move from the suburbs of Chicago to Manhattan, offering a range of candid explanations. Each reason—be it pursuing her husband's graduate studies, their flexible freelance careers, or the emotional upheaval they faced—reveals the layers of complexity in their decision. The move symbolizes a fresh start at a time when their lives felt shattered and stagnant.

In Chicago, the couple had been grappling with disillusionment; they were in a limbo where every attempt to find stability was met with new setbacks. Their beloved church and hometown no longer felt like home. The idea of leaving became clear, though the timing remained uncertain. They were entangled in a confusing reality that felt like a chilling suspension in time.

An already planned trip to New York City becomes a pivotal moment. This visit, a tradition of sorts, includes preaching at a cherished church and celebrating the Fourth of July. During a sermon on darkness, they start confronting their own struggles. The following day unfolds into a delightful date in the bustling West Village, where they encounter the vibrant energy of the city and indulge in a meal at Buvette, a favorite restaurant of the narrator.

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Their social engagements take an unexpected turn when they are invited over by a neighbor, Michael, the academic dean at a local seminary. This meeting, orchestrated by their friend David, sparks a significant discussion about their future, dreams, and the potential for relocating to New York and joining the seminary's community. The rooftop conversation fills them with a mix of excitement and uncertainty, hinting at a promising new chapter in their lives.

Later, the narrator attends a lively gathering that defies expectations, featuring exuberant elements like belly dancers and a tap-dancing Axl Rose impersonator. Aaron, upon discovering the remnants of the night—glow necklaces, a whimsical token of the evening—expresses his bewilderment, echoing the narrator's own sentiments.

In the aftermath of their New York escapade, both are captivated by thoughts of the seminary and the connections made during their visit. The memorable cocktail, aptly named "Corpse Reviver," signifies their yearning for revival amid personal tumult. While they wouldn't claim to be "corpses," the couple acknowledges the lifeline that New York offers, hinting at the possibility of redemption and a vibrant future.

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Chapter 6 Summary: 7. Kicking

In the chapter titled "Kicking," we find Shauna reflecting on an afternoon spent in Saugatuck, Michigan, just a couple of months before her son Henry's second birthday. The scene unfolds on a boat where they are surrounded by family and friends, most of whom are childless or have older children. Feeling the weight of solo parenting in Aaron's absence, Shauna grapples with her anxiety as the only adult responsible for Henry, who eagerly wants to go swimming.

Despite her hesitation, Shauna knows she must dive into the water to keep her son happy and safe. Henry, equipped with a Coast Guard-approved life jacket—a nod to their sailing community's emphasis on water safety—jumps into her arms. However, when Shauna is submerged in the water, panic sets in as she struggles to keep both of them afloat. In her frantic attempt to kick her way to the surface, she fears for Henry's safety and imagines the worst, praying he remains calm and follows the swimming techniques they've practiced together.

Just as despair begins to overwhelm her, a friend named Alex, affectionately nicknamed "Alex the Lion" for his vibrant personality, jumps in to rescue her. He pulls her up from beneath the surface, revealing an unexpected truth: Henry had never actually entered the water; he was simply bewildered by his mother's refusal to let him go, while the rest of the group had been

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concerned about Shauna's alarming behavior. Alex's comic intervention brings a sense of relief and lightness to the moment, highlighting the miscommunication that led to undue panic.

As Henry happily paddles around with friends, Shauna reflects on the broader theme of her experience: the tendency to complicate situations with worry and fear, only to discover that life often takes care of itself with a little guidance from those around her. This realization resonates with her ongoing struggle to balance her maternal instincts with the understanding that sometimes, it's okay to ease up and trust that things will work out—a recurring lesson in her journey of parenting and life.

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Chapter 7 Summary: 8. Hello to Here

Chapter Eight: Hello to Here

In this chapter, the narrator reflects on a recent dinner with her friend Julie, who introduced her to the phrase “hello to here” from Pádraig Ó Tuama’s book *In the Shelter*. This phrase encapsulates the idea of being fully present in the moment—embracing reality without dwelling on the past or future. The narrator connects this concept to a friend’s insight about spiritual maturity, which involves accepting reality as it exists, rather than longing for an ideal life or fantasizing about what could be.

The discussion leads to deeper questions about faith and the meaning of everyday experiences. How can one find significance in mundane activities—like making sandwiches—amidst the darker aspects of life? The narrator acknowledges the struggle of facing uncomfortable realities, especially when life doesn't feel beautiful. It becomes increasingly difficult to embrace the notion of being present in a reality that feels painful and overwhelming.

The chapter explores the repression often experienced, particularly in women and within religious communities, where feelings of anger, jealousy, and despair are discouraged. The narrator reflects on a lifetime conditioned

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to suppress these emotions, leading to physical manifestations of pain.

However, as she gradually confronts these feelings—acknowledging her anger, fear, and heartbreak—she learns to navigate through them instead of avoiding them.

This process is likened to labor, where breathing through the pain and staying present allows her to release emotions gradually. The act of walking through her feelings becomes a steady rhythm, transforming her experience from one of being consumed by pain to one of cleansing release.

By the end of the chapter, the narrator finds freedom and newfound sensitivity, both to her own suffering and that of others. Embracing the phrase “hello to here” becomes a transformative practice—an acknowledgment of her pain and the reality of her experiences.

Chapter Nine: [Content Unavailable]

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Chapter 8: 9. Living Lightly

Chapter Nine: Living Lightly

The chapter opens with the author reflecting on their move to New York City, which prompted a profound reconsideration of material possessions and relationships. After spending ten years in a modest Midwest house, the reality of how much they had accumulated became startlingly clear during the moving process. The couple downsized significantly from their spacious home, packing everything they owned into a compact 16-foot box truck, which included essentials like silverware and cloth napkins, but not nearly enough clothes. The presence of a pragmatic friend, Rachel, proved invaluable; she helped the author decide what to keep from their extensive makeup collection with swift efficiency.

Living in New York brought an unexpected sense of lightness. Every item in their new 825-square-foot apartment held purpose and significance, contrasting sharply with the passive accumulation of belongings in their past. The author discovers that this principle of intentionality also applies to relationships. In a poignant conversation with a visiting friend from Chicago, the author realizes that they have a small but solid circle of friendships in their new city, which is sufficient for their needs. This understanding marks a shift from a previous mindset that valued having a

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large network of acquaintances to one that appreciates the depth of fewer, meaningful connections.

The author contrasts their new urban life with the deep roots established in their hometown, where life revolved around long-term commitments and familial traditions. They narrate the bittersweet experience of saying goodbye to the family home tied to 75 years of memories, marking a significant shift from their past. The previous lifestyle, filled with gatherings and a sense of permanence, is now replaced by the fluidity of city living, where frequent relocations are the norm. This transition, while jarring, introduces new freedoms and possibilities.

The author recalls a friend's disbelief at their decision to move to a bustling city like New York, highlighting the stark contrast between their former life and their new reality. However, they come to embrace and love their new way of living, finding it enriching despite its differences. This chapter emphasizes that life can be meaningful in various forms, and each lifestyle holds its own value without being inherently right or wrong.

A deeper reflection emerges on the themes of forgiveness and the burdens of emotional baggage. Once filled with anger and resentment, the author realizes that maintaining such feelings is as impractical as filling a small apartment with unnecessary items. They liken this cluttered emotional state to rubbish that ultimately stifles hope and gratitude. The limitations of city

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living, where space is at a premium, serve as a metaphor for personal growth—the necessity of letting go of what no longer serves them.

The current lifestyle, though it might seem unconventional, is embraced for its simplicity: fewer possessions, a limited circle of friends, and diminished expectations. In their small apartment, shared experiences become more valuable than material affluence. The author acknowledges the joy in living with fewer belongings and the peace that comes from letting go of irrelevant emotional weight. They conclude with an affirming list of what truly matters: just a few good friends, essential items, and the willingness to embrace a lighter life.

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Alex Walk

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Chapter 9 Summary: 10. Gravity of Love

Gravity of Love

In the early days of their new life in New York, the narrator experiences a profound moment during church on their first Sunday when the congregation sings "Gravity of Love." The song resonates deeply with them, stirring emotions they had long buried. For months, they had been grappling with a sense of free fall, feeling as if they were teetering on the edge of despair and awaiting an inevitable crash. However, at that moment, they grasp the existence of a deeper gravity—one not defined by loss, but by love, as a sense of God's presence envelops their wounded heart.

Reflecting on their life leading up to this point, the narrator recalls turning forty and feeling anchored by a seemingly unshakeable foundation—strong relationships, shared values, trusted institutions. They believed they were cocooned in safety, but this sense of security unraveled dramatically. What ensued was not an exhilarating embrace of freedom, but rather a crushing sensation of suffocation.

The emotional turmoil led them to instinctively press a hand against their chest, a gesture born of a need to stabilize their racing heart, a technique that would later reveal itself as significant in the context of body work and

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trauma recovery. This physical manifestation of their inner state highlighted the rawness of their existence during those turbulent months—cut off from joy, battling feelings of impending doom.

The breakthrough came during that church service. As the song played and tears flowed, they did not weep out of sadness but rather from the weight of relief. In that moment, enveloped by love and a sense of support for the first time in ages, the narrator experienced a holy connection, reinforcing their understanding that they are indeed held. The gesture of placing their hand on their heart became a physical acknowledgment of this newfound awareness, bridging past pain with the promise of healing.

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Critical Thinking

Key Point: The deeper gravity of love is essential for emotional healing.

Critical Interpretation: Imagine standing amidst a crowd, your heart racing with the memories of loss and uncertainty, yet in that moment of vulnerability during a simple song, you are enveloped by a profound sense of love. This experience teaches you that while life may often feel like a free fall into despair, the true gravity that holds you is not one of despair, but one of love and connection. It reminds you that even in your most difficult moments, there is a deep well of support and understanding waiting to embrace you. This realization inspires you to seek and cultivate love in your life, allowing it to anchor you in the storms, and encouraging you to express your joys and sorrows with those who matter most, leading you toward healing and community.

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Chapter 10 Summary: 11. Buzz the Beach

In the depths of a long, dark winter, the narrator, alongside Henry and Mac, finds comfort in the warmth of their shared reading ritual. To illuminate their cozy night, they adorn their bedroom with copper-threaded twinkly lights, creating a soft and inviting atmosphere. As they settle in, the narrator prompts them with a familiar phrase, expecting the reply that expresses their shared joy in reading together. However, Mac unexpectedly responds with “Buzz the beach!”—a phrase that encapsulates a cherished summer activity.

“Buzz the beach” signifies taking the scenic route to the ocean, a metaphor for actively seeking out beauty and joy in life. The narrator emphasizes the importance of savoring these moments, relating it to an almost spiritual practice of noticing and celebrating the small joys that life offers. This mindfulness leads to a deeper understanding of joy—not just as something that happens on good days but as a conscious effort during hard times.

The narrator reflects on their role as a moment maker and a celebrator of life’s tiny pleasures. This realization is underscored by a memorable experience officiating a wedding, where they were amusingly dubbed “Officiant with a side of sparkle” in the program—a title they cherish.

Importantly, finding joy is likened to a discipline, one that requires practice even in darkness. The narrator advises walking out of one's way to embrace

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beauty, emphasizing that such moments are restorative and vital for the soul. This practice of “buzzing the beach” connects the narrator’s inner joy and gratitude to their wider community and faith, illustrating a deeper commitment to living joyfully.

Ultimately, the narrator’s practice becomes a form of thankfulness and acknowledgment of a greater existence that transcends daily to-do lists. It’s an affirmation that even during life’s bleakest days, nature continues its cycles of beauty, and thus, embracing joy is not just desirable but a responsibility to oneself, others, and the Creator. This philosophy transforms even mundane moments into meaningful experiences, reinforcing the narrator’s commitment to living a life filled with joy and gratitude, and reminding them that the act of making memories is never wasted.

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Chapter 11 Summary: 12. The Best Mistake

Chapter 12: The Best Mistake

As the impending move loomed, one of my primary worries revolved around my sons' happiness during this turbulent transition. A friend of mine, inspired by her recent acquisition of a puppy, urged me to consider how a furry companion could bring daily joy and responsibility into our boys' lives. This idea resonated deeply with me; I was willing to bring home just about anything—perhaps even a dinosaur—if it could brighten their days.

We began searching for a puppy, gravitating towards a reputable breeder amidst the well-meaning suggestions to adopt a rescue dog. While the notion of rescuing a pet appealed to us, our family's serious allergies made us cautious. Thus, after conducting extensive research and making plans, we settled on a breeder we felt comfortable with.

We envisioned the puppy as a source of stability for our boys during a time filled with uncertainty. Our hope was to welcome the puppy in early summer, giving us a few months of puppy life before the New Year, when we anticipated moving to New York City.

However, as is often the case, life had other plans. Just when we thought we

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had a timeline set, everything shifted dramatically. When the long-awaited puppy was finally born, the breeder contacted us to raise concerns about possible allergies, suggesting we wait for the next litter. Compounding this uncertainty was the rapid sale of our house and the unexpectedly early availability of our New York apartment. Faced with the prospect of paying dual rents—both for our current home and the soon-to-be apartment—we needed to adjust our plans significantly.

What we had envisioned as a smooth six to eight months of pre-move puppy integration swiftly devolved into an overwhelming whirlwind of events. We were suddenly thrust into the chaos of Manhattan life, arriving in our new city with only a brief glimpse of the apartment we had chosen and a truckload of furniture, ready to embark on this unexpected journey.

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Critical Thinking

Key Point: Embrace Uncertainty

Critical Interpretation: Life is often unpredictable, and the best moments can emerge from the chaos. When you let go of rigid expectations and embrace uncertainty, you create space for unexpected joys and opportunities. Much like how the author adjusted her family's plans regarding the puppy amid a whirlwind of changes, you too can navigate life's transitions by remaining open to new possibilities. This mindset allows you to find happiness in unexpected places and teaches you to appreciate the journey, regardless of how different it may turn out from your original vision.

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Chapter 12: 13. Waiting for Daylight

Chapter Thirteen: Waiting for Daylight

In this chapter, the author reflects on the profound darkness that can envelop one's life amid loss, sorrow, and disappointment. The imagery of waiting for dawn serves as a metaphor for hope; the author firmly believes in the eventual arrival of light and life after periods of hardship, even when currently engulfed in darkness. Many have experienced the pain of losing loved ones, facing illness, or seeing cherished relationships dissolve. This shared suffering extends to concerns about the state of the nation, the struggles of family with addiction, and the burden of mental health challenges.

The chapter introduces the concept of the Paschal Mystery, a central theme in Christianity that outlines the cyclical nature of death and new life. This spiritual perspective is contrasted with the author's initial belief in a more straightforward narrative of life and growth. Over time, the author acknowledges the inevitable pain that accompanies growth and learning, epitomized in the metaphor of winter transitioning to spring.

The author emphasizes that pain is universal and shouldn't be diminished by comparisons. Each person's suffering is valid, and it is crucial to experience

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a full range of emotions without guilt—joy can coexist with sorrow. Admitting to struggles can be difficult, yet the author highlights the importance of honesty and vulnerability in seeking support from trusted friends.

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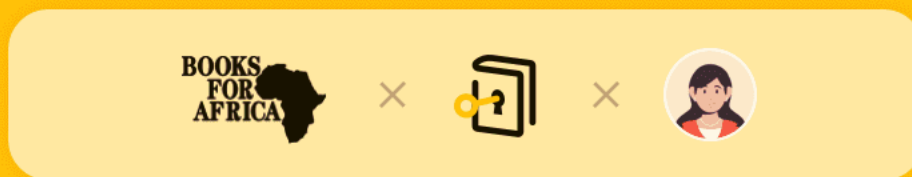




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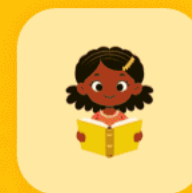
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Chapter 13 Summary: 14. Healing in the Trying

Chapter Fourteen: Healing in the Trying

In this chapter, the author reflects on the significance of vocation and the healing power of practice through both personal anecdotes and broader insights. The narrative begins with a friend's brother, Robert, who has recently been ordained as a priest in the Roman Catholic Church. The author learns that Robert is expected to celebrate Mass daily, not just as a matter of obligation but as a vital practice to stay spiritually connected to his calling. This concept of daily Mass embodies the idea that regular engagement with one's vocation fosters a deeper relationship with God.

The author draws a parallel to their own experiences, highlighting their twin callings of storytelling and hospitality. Through simple acts of gathering loved ones or engaging in writing, the author finds healing and rejuvenation, especially during life's challenging moments. They emphasize that even amidst despair and darkness, continuing to pursue one's passions, no matter how trivial they may seem, can lead to profound personal restoration.

The chapter introduces a pivotal idea from a novel titled "How to Walk Away" by Katherine Center, where a physical therapist states, "the healing is in the trying." This mantra underscores the importance of perseverance in

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the face of adversity. The author affirms that the process of engaging in our callings—be it creativity, service, or honesty—is essential not only for its outward impact but also for nurturing our inner selves.

Despite the shadows that may envelop us, and the seemingly endless wait for the dawn, the author reassures readers that morning inevitably arrives. The chapter concludes by encouraging all to persist in practicing their own vocations, as this active engagement is key to maintaining a connection with the self and with the divine. Consistency in pursuing what brings joy and purpose is the pathway to healing, promising that eventual enlightenment will follow the darkness.

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Chapter 14 Summary: 15. Unbelonging

Chapter 15: Unbelonging

In this chapter, the author reflects on the profound sense of "unbelonging" that has permeated their life in recent years. Identifying as a "belonger," someone deeply invested in relationships, traditions, and loyalty, the author grapples with the unexpected unraveling of their connections to people, places, and ideas that once defined their identity. This process of detachment is depicted not as a conscious choice, but rather as a series of painful separations, akin to someone gradually peeling away the threads binding them to a familiar but constrictive life.

They recount how this experience is not unique; many friends share similar stories of disconnection—whether it's leaving a longtime political party, grappling with the church's controversial stances, ending long-term marriages, or distancing themselves from family members over divisive political views. The landscape of personal and communal belonging is shifting dramatically, prompting some to seek life in new countries amidst a loss of faith in their own nation's future.

Despite the turmoil, the author discovers a newfound resilience. Resilience is framed as the capacity to continue rising after each fall, to grieve lost

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connections, and to revise expectations about life and belonging. The narrative shifts to a more hopeful tone as they describe resilience as a skill developed through repeated efforts to stand back up after hardships. Each struggle contributes to an inner strength that will serve in future challenges.

The narrative takes a personal turn as the author describes feelings of disorientation and self-doubt earlier in the year, likening the experience to being submerged and out of rhythm. They emphasize the importance of continuing with daily practices—such as walking, reading, therapy, and prayer—that contribute to well-being, even amid chaos.

A significant breakthrough occurs during a church gathering, where the author recognizes a return to solid ground, highlighting the reality that healing and personal growth often require sustained effort and time—an acknowledgment that good things do not come quickly. They've come to understand what it means to experience heartbreak and the gradual process of forgiveness.

In conclusion, the author embraces a new self-reliance, finding a way to belong to themselves and adapt to a life that may feel lonelier and more challenging. They are learning to make a home within the wilderness of unbelonging, ultimately appreciating that while connection to something larger than oneself is valuable, it isn't essential for every season of life.

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Chapter 15 Summary: 16. Learning to Let Go

Chapter 16: Learning to Let Go

Time spent on Lake Michigan with my cousin Melody marked a pivotal lesson in letting go. Our fathers, eager to teach us water-skiing, chose the expansive lake—less than ideal for beginners, typically maneuvered on calmer, smaller waters. But the glassy surface and morning excitement reigned supreme. Melody, initially hesitant, suddenly found motivation when Uncle Dan offered her five dollars for getting up on the skis. Without hesitation, she dove in and soon glided across the water for thirty seconds before willingly letting go of the rope, sinking back into the lake. Though we cheered her on, she only wanted her reward and never skied again.

I, on the other hand, adhered strictly to the warning from our fathers: "Don't let go of the rope!" During my first attempt, the rope pulled me headfirst into the water, my body skimming along the surface. Despite the chaos, my resolve remained firm; I refused to release the rope, even as my ears filled with water. Eventually, they had to turn the boat to rescue me, and when I resurfaced, I explained my stubbornness. This incident encapsulated my approach to life over the last forty years—an unwillingness to let go, often resulting in being metaphorically dragged along.

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Reflecting on this mindset, I encountered the Zen proverb, “let go or be dragged,” resonating deeply within me. It articulated a struggle I faced repeatedly, particularly as I navigated my way through midlife. The concept of letting go became central to my journey, one I practiced consistently while living in New York, a city filled with constant departures. Friends, colleagues, and acquaintances came and went, making goodbyes a regular occurrence. Pastors often express that the hardest part of their role in New York is the transience of relationships.

Amidst this backdrop, I met Barbara—a priest who was preparing to leave the city she had called home for over forty years. Our connection blossomed within a short timeframe, beginning in December and culminating in June. In that fleeting period, Barbara became a source of wisdom and comfort—sharing her life stories while creating a safe space for my own grief and questions. She had lived through significant moments, mourning losses and celebrating joys, including the death of a dear friend who had lived in my current apartment during the AIDS crisis of the 1980s.

During our spiritual direction sessions in a modest office on Fifth Avenue, we delved into themes of transition and the painful yet necessary act of letting go. Our conversations often reflected the bittersweet nature of saying goodbye, with Barbara leaving behind a legacy of meaningful connections and profound love. Each encounter felt precious, amplifying my understanding of the inevitable nature of change.

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Now, as I walk the familiar streets of New York, I carry Barbara's spirit with me, remembering our time together with gratitude. Despite having shared only a brief moment in time, she profoundly shaped my understanding of letting go and the beauty embedded in transience. Through our prayers and shared experiences, she imparted lessons on embracing change while honoring the past, forever leaving an imprint on my heart.

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Critical Thinking

Key Point: Letting go is essential for personal growth and freedom.

Critical Interpretation: Imagine standing on the edge of a vast lake, the water representing all the attachments and burdens that weigh you down. Shauna's journey highlights how holding on tightly to the past can drag us under, much like the rope in her water-skiing incident. By letting go, you not only free yourself from the exhausting struggle but also open your life to new possibilities and connections. Embracing change and allowing for transience can be transformative; it can lead to unexpected friendships and profound understanding, much like the impact Barbara had on Shauna's life. In your own experiences, practicing the art of letting go can help you navigate life's currents, discovering joy in the fleeting moments and finding strength in the beauty of impermanence.

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Chapter 16: 17. Enchantment

Chapter 17: Enchantment

After moving to New York, I found myself uncertain about my design style when a new friend inquired about it. Back in our previous home, I had a clear vision: a mix of classic and masculine touches, with a preference for neutrals and blues, complemented by abundant books, artwork, and musical elements. Our decor, characterized by gray walls, navy cabinets, and leather furniture, reflected my established aesthetic perfectly. However, in this vibrant city, I began to feel drawn to bright colors and vintage, playful designs—things that were worlds apart from my former choices.

My environment seemed to awaken a new artistic expression within me, filled with color and whimsy. I imagined our new space as a creative, cozy professor's office adorned with gold-leaf frames, colorful throws, and even a rose-gold disco ball. I embraced this transformation, allowing the diverse inspirations from the city and its culture to reimagine my perspectives on design and lifestyle. I realized that it's perfectly acceptable to change, to let new surroundings influence our tastes and desires. I once viewed my identity as fixed, but now I appreciate the fluidity it brings to my life and creativity.

Our move also brought new traditions and experiences, particularly for my

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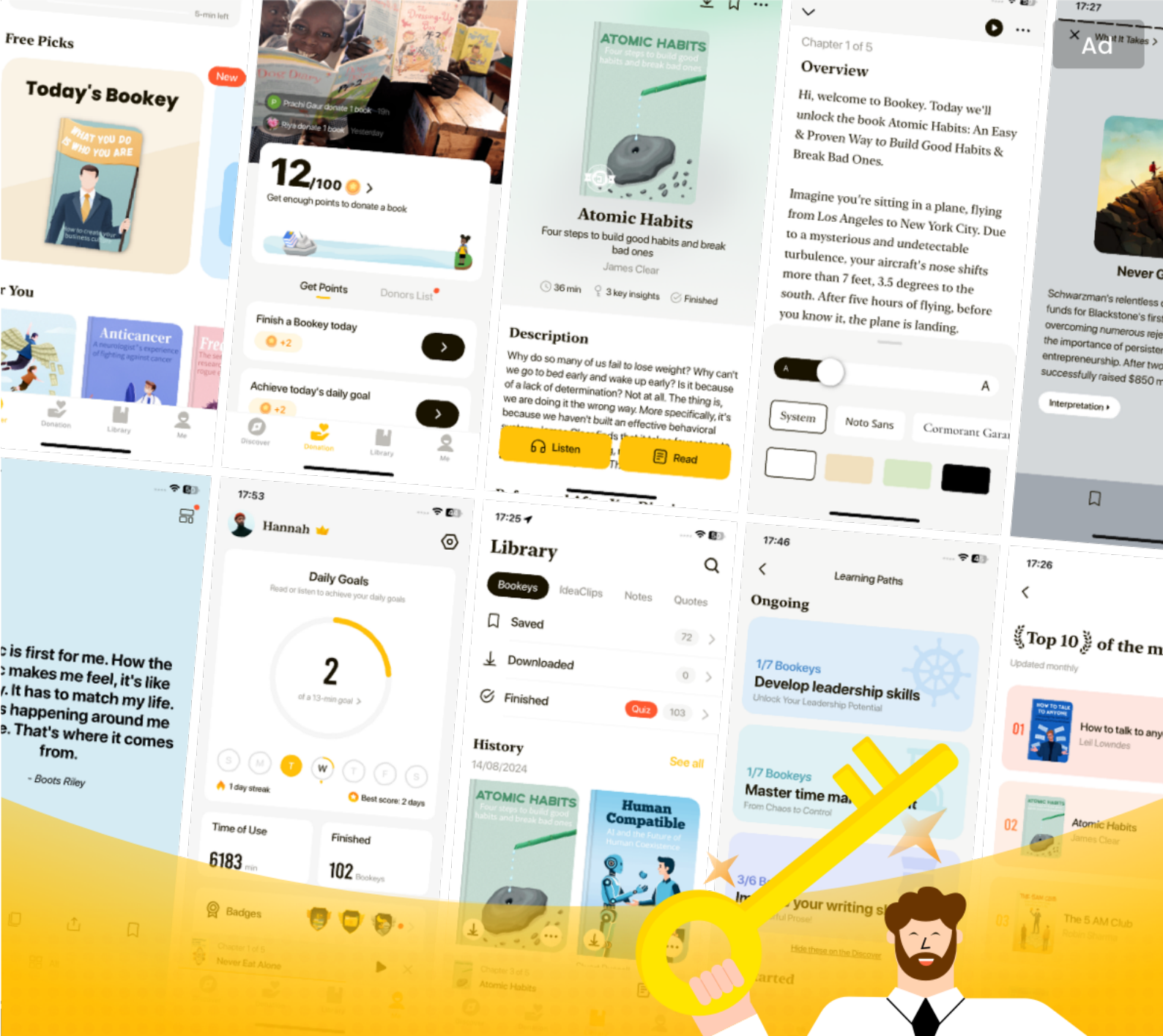
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son, Henry, who has developed a love for classic diners and quirky bookstores. Each week, we explore our city, from indulging in burgers at iconic diners to discovering unique books, creating cherished memories together. During this time, I reflect on a wise insight from child psychologist Wendy Mogel, who encouraged parents to embrace the enchantment that

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Chapter 17 Summary: 18. Our First New York-iversary

Chapter 18: Our First New York-iversary

In this chapter, the narrator recounts a challenging period marked by illness amidst a busy life in New York City. Initially dismissing what seems to be a bad cold, the narrator's condition escalates, leading to a high fever that persists for ten exhausting nights. The chaotic demands of life, alongside not yet having a local doctor, further contribute to the narrator's neglect of their health. It is not until Aaron steps in, insisting on seeking medical help, that the seriousness of the situation becomes apparent.

A visit to an urgent care clinic reveals alarming symptoms, prompting a referral to a glamorous obstetrician-gynecologist, who delivers unsettling news: the narrator has undergone menopause, and tests indicate a risk of sepsis due to the persistent fever. Within a day, the narrator finds themselves in the ER, ultimately admitted to a hospital room where the distress of another patient amplifies their own sense of vulnerability. The chaos and pain around them underscore a deep sense of isolation as they wait for medical answers.

A wake-up call comes from a friend who recognizes the narrator's tendency to shut down in crises. This prompts the narrator to reach out to Jennifer, a

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friend from their past, who arrives the next morning equipped with comfort food and magazines. This moment marks a shift in their friendship, indicating deeper emotional support. When the noisy environment becomes unbearable, Jennifer advocates for the narrator's change to a private room, showcasing the power of friendship in difficult times.

As the narrator undergoes treatment, they grapple with the physical discomfort of IV medications and the fear of complications. A particularly distressing incident occurs when a blown vein leads to a gruesome scene, heightening the narrative's tension. Throughout the ordeal, the narrator reflects on their experience of being hospitalized far from family, highlighting how genuine connections in a new city can transform it into a home. Friends rally to support, reminding them that belonging is cultivated through shared moments of care and kindness.

By Thanksgiving, the narrator's release from the hospital coincides with the anniversary of their move to New York. Gratefulness envelops them as they gather with friends in a warm, inviting setting, appreciating not only the comforts of good medical care and hospitality from neighbors like Kate but also the camaraderie from friends who offered support during a trying time. This experience illustrates how, despite the chaos and challenges, the bonds formed in the city have made it a true home.

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Chapter 18 Summary: 19. Parenting Ourselves

Chapter Summary: Parenting Ourselves

In her reflective exploration of parenting, the author shares insights gained over a decade and a half of raising her children alongside her partner, Aaron. She acknowledges a common sentiment among parents: that the knowledge of effective parenting can feel overwhelmingly limited. However, there are fundamental principles she and Aaron return to, which foster well-being for both their children and themselves.

One of the simplest truths about parenting is the transformative power of water. Whether through a shower, a bath, or simply seeing a body of water, it can elevate moods for both kids and adults. This realization is underscored when a sudden spring thunderstorm invigorates her senses, refreshing her perspective much like it affects children. Post-storm, everything appears renewed, mirroring how breaks in routine can reset our emotional states.

A key tenet of their parenting practice is encouraging outdoor activities. The author recalls advice from her friend Kirsten, who likened boys to Saint Bernards, underscoring the need for physical exercise to manage their energy levels. This emphasis on outdoor play showcases the community spirit and spontaneous connections formed with neighbors, as their ambivalence about

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a get-together shifts when a picnic plan emerges. The fresh air and shared moments foster not only an exhausting fun for the kids but also a sense of connection and joy among the adults.

As much as they prioritize activity, the author notes the importance of preparation, particularly in terms of food. Keeping her household stocked with snacks is not just practical; it is a reflection of her identity as a host. This nurturing instinct reveals itself in her commitment to ensure that guests, whether friends or family, are never left hungry.

Sleep is another vital component of their home. After her son Mac's birthday party, his emotional outburst reinforces the idea that fatigue can distort perceptions and feelings. This experience resonates deeply with the author, who recognizes her own struggles with exhaustion and how it influences her emotional resilience. She advocates for the value of sleep and, like any good parent, has learned the importance of rest for everyone in the household—including herself.

When tucking the boys into bed, the author uses a unique ritual to help them release their worries. Imagining their fears as tangible items, she metaphorically receives these burdens, turning the act into both a parental and spiritual exercise. This ritual illustrates the shared responsibility of emotional care—holding those concerns for their children, similar to how divine support operates.

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The author's parenting philosophy also emphasizes the significance of apologies and the capacity to admit faults. By modeling vulnerability and humility, she not only fortifies her relationship with her children but also sets a precedent for healthy interpersonal communication. A heartfelt apology serves as a healing mechanism, allowing them to address disputes and reconnect rather than allowing grievances to fester.

Finally, she reflects on the broader context of the emotional landscape we inhabit, filled with challenges and healing. The concept of nurturing oneself with the same diligence as one does for their children is a profound life lesson. Healthy, whole individuals emerge from the consistent, small choices made each day, ultimately benefiting both the young and the weary adults navigating life's complexities.

Through these insights, the author's narrative intertwines self-care with parenting, emphasizing that what benefits children ultimately enriches the lives of parents as well. The themes underscore a shared journey of growth, resilience, and the necessity of connection and care.

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Chapter 19 Summary: 20. The Speed of the Soul

In "The Speed of the Soul," the narrator reflects on the profound relationship between walking, personal healing, and spirituality. The chapter opens with the narrator's morning routine, where a simple act of grabbing a laptop and umbrella transforms a walk to school with Henry into a meaningful journey through New York City. Each character, including Mac, Henry, and Aaron, is drawn to the city for different reasons—friendship, theater, and progressive culture—but the narrator finds solace in the act of walking itself.

Walking serves as an antidote to the grief and disconnection felt in the wake of a significant loss, providing both a physical and emotional release. The narrator recalls a previous life filled with grief and privacy issues, where even mundane tasks like retrieving the mail became burdensome. In contrast, the anonymity of New York allows for personal reflection—its vastness offers space for everyone grappling with their own struggles.

The chapter deepens the exploration of walking as a spiritual practice, likening it to a pilgrimage or a committed journey alongside a loved one. This metaphor reflects the narrator's belief that spiritual growth occurs not simply in thought, but through our physical being. It raises questions about modern life and technology, positing that fast-paced travel often outstrips the soul's ability to keep up, while walking allows for a harmonious connection between body and spirit.

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Through the story of a decade-long friendship with another Jennifer, the narrator illustrates the transformative power of companionship during shared walks, particularly during the isolation felt throughout the pandemic. These walks become a way to express fears, frustrations, and grief. They also serve as a celebration of discovery—every new turn in the city representing possibilities yet to be explored.

Ultimately, “The Speed of the Soul” underscores that walking is not merely a physical act but a restorative practice, reconnecting individuals with their feelings and the world around them. This blend of personal narrative, spiritual insight, and keen observation of life in the city beautifully encapsulates the healing quality of movement, binding the soul and body in a shared journey.

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Chapter 20: 21. A Midlife Move

Chapter 21: A Midlife Move

In this chapter, the author reflects on their preconceived notions about moving and stability. Previously, they viewed people who relocated every few years with a sense of sadness, believing that true commitment lay in deep-rooted ties to a community. This perspective was shaped by their experience in a Midwestern town where families remained for generations, reinforcing the idea that a stable family life involved staying close to home, particularly where good schools and family support were available.

However, as the decision to move to New York began to feel inevitable, the author sought insights from families who had embraced multiple relocations. These families viewed moving not as a loss but as an enriching experience, fostering bonding and creating lasting memories. This revelation challenged the author's earlier convictions, highlighting that responsible parenting and meaningful living come in many forms. The narrative underscores the idea that just because one way of living has long been accepted as the norm doesn't mean it's the only valid option.

During their first year in New York, the author encountered skepticism from friends and family back in the Midwest, who worried about their well-being

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and happiness in the urban landscape. Despite the concern, the author reassured them of their contentment—emphasizing the intentionality behind their move to Manhattan. For the author, this city and their new apartment held transformative experiences, symbolizing a refreshing chapter in their life. The vivid imagery of favorite local foods and sounds connects to their newfound identity in New York, contrasting sharply with the rooted, small-town existence they once envisioned.

As the author delves into memories of their life in the Midwest, a realization dawns: the place we call home does not solely define us. With a closet full of reminders of their past, they grapple with the evolving concept of identity that transcends geographical boundaries. Living in New York teaches them that happiness and selfhood can manifest in various environments. They begin to understand that moving reshapes their perspective, urging them to adopt a sense of humility and curiosity as they navigate new cultural landscapes.

By integrating elements of both their Midwestern roots and their urban experiences—symbolized playfully through their mixed wardrobe choices—the author illustrates the beauty of an unfolding identity that embraces change while cherishing past connections.

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Chapter 21 Summary: 22. Put Yourself in the Path

Chapter Summary: Put Yourself in the Path

In the chapter "Put Yourself in the Path," the author challenges the traditional notion of inspiration as a fleeting, mystical force. Instead, they assert that inspiration is a deliberate choice and a responsibility tied to the creative process, particularly in writing. The author emphasizes that one must actively cultivate environments conducive to inspiration by engaging with art, literature, nature, and interesting people. This proactive approach applies to both creative work and personal joy.

Reflecting on their own experiences, the author discusses writing their first book while caring for a newborn, which fostered a sense of urgency and discipline in their creative practice. They illustrate how one can seek joy in simple moments—like shared smiles with neighbors, enjoying a musical moment at the grocery store, or the satisfaction of a perfectly packed tote filled with fresh figs. These small delights are essential in a life that can often feel overwhelming.

The author encourages readers to allow themselves to find joy in the mundane, celebrating the minor victories and ordinary pleasures, such as a good song, a cozy mug, or memories of loved ones. This intentional pursuit

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of happiness helps cultivate a sense of self-care and belonging.

Moreover, the chapter highlights the importance of self-compassion and the need to create a nurturing personal rhythm that fosters joy, especially during challenging times. The author shares a vivid moment of watching two women playfully swinging incense, which brings forth a reminder of joy, freedom, and connection to the present.

Ultimately, the message is clear: we must actively position ourselves to welcome joy and inspiration into our lives. By doing so, we can appreciate the beauty in the ordinary and embrace a life rich with meaning and satisfaction, even amidst chaos.

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Chapter 22 Summary: 23. The New York Way

Chapter 23: The New York Way

As our family transitioned from the Midwest to Manhattan, we embraced the idea of adopting values that were specific to this new environment, summarized in the guiding question: “What’s the New York way?” This mindset helped us navigate the unfamiliarity of city life while resisting the urge to cling to the comforts of our previous suburban existence.

Two weeks after our move, we faced a quintessential New York experience: enrolling our child, Mac, in school. In the Midwest, this process was comprehensive and involved, requiring extensive interaction between families and school staff. However, in New York, the process was streamlined. We arrived with the necessary paperwork only to discover that Mac's birthdate meant he was eligible for second grade, as the school's cutoff dates contrasted sharply with what we were used to.

The parent coordinator swiftly assessed Mac's reading ability and social readiness, suggesting he start second grade immediately. While I initially longed for the detailed, relational, and drawn-out onboarding process from our hometown, I reminded myself of our core value—what was the New York way? So, we embraced this new, expedited school approach, and Mac

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thrived in his new class from day one.

That evening, a friend invited us to a jazz performance at the Village Vanguard, a renowned venue, at 10:30 p.m. Initially reluctant, recalling our past habits of resting early on school nights, we paused to reflect on our new identity. “Perhaps our New York selves are open to new experiences,” we realized. We attended the concert and enjoyed a late-night pizza stroll through the West Village, delighted by our serendipitous night out with good friends.

This journey signifies more than just a change of location; it’s about redefining our routines and perspectives. Embracing the New York way has opened doors to spontaneity and excitement, allowing us to detox from past patterns and reshape our lives in ways we never expected.

Chapter 24: [Content Not Provided]

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Chapter 23 Summary: 24. Grief Is a Kitten

Chapter 24: Grief Is a Kitten

In this chapter, the author reflects on the paradox of grief and the complex emotions tied to loss. The healthiest individuals, they argue, are often those who have faced profound hardships—loss that forces them to confront vulnerability, control, and ultimately, healing. The author shares personal experiences, including losing a beloved job and enduring a painful journey through miscarriages and infertility. These experiences initially seemed to promise transformation, yet they revealed the intricacies of coping with grief rather than delivering straightforward lessons.

The text addresses the human tendency to cling to the past for comfort, recognizing that while this attachment can feel safe, it ultimately impedes growth. The author acknowledges the deep heartbreak that arises when significant relationships dissolve and the loneliness that can accompany such losses. However, it is emphasized that the only path forward is one of resilience—a battle to reclaim agency in the face of overwhelming sorrow.

A powerful assertion is made regarding the nature of grief: it often manifests as anger. This anger serves as a temporary shield against the helplessness that accompanies loss. The author draws a stark contrast between anger—an

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active force that provides a false sense of control—and grief, which is tender and vulnerable. While anger may feel safer, it masks the painful reality that lies beneath.

Exploring the nuances of anger, the author invites the reader to consider whether grief lurks beneath. This emotion, often less fierce and more fragile, is where true sadness resides. The text reveals a personal struggle with anger tied to circumstances beyond the author's control, highlighting a contrast to their previously privileged position where choices cultivated a sense of autonomy. As the author learns to sit with their anger, it transforms into a softer grief, reminiscent of a kitten rather than a lion, suggesting that acknowledging and embracing this vulnerability is a crucial step in healing.

As the chapter progresses, the author discusses the evolution of pain and the journey toward empathy. Initially, suffering can distort one's perspective, making personal pain seem like the greatest burden imaginable. However, with time, healing emerges; the ability to recognize and empathize with others' experiences grows. This shift signifies an important milestone in recovery—moving from self-centeredness to understanding the collective human experience.

Empathy, described as a delicate but powerful practice, becomes a central theme. The author illustrates its significance through real-life scenarios: showing grace to children during challenging moments or listening to

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marginalized voices without defensiveness. Empathy, a bridge connecting humanity, involves acknowledging shared vulnerabilities and joys, working against the divisive tendencies present in society.

Drawing from biblical narratives, the author presents Jesus as a model of radical love and empathy—one who subverts societal norms to embrace and uplift the marginalized. To embody Christian values, the author argues, is to commit to this form of brave, boundary-breaking love, reflecting a vital aspect of spiritual integrity.

Ultimately, the chapter illustrates that healing begins when we embrace the tenderness of grief while cultivating empathy for ourselves and others. This journey emphasizes the interconnectedness of humanity, suggesting that through vulnerability and compassion, we can stitch together the fabric of shared experiences, weaving a narrative of resilience and communal support.

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Critical Thinking

Key Point: Grief as a path to empathy

Critical Interpretation: Imagine transforming your grief into a deeper understanding of others' suffering. By embracing your own vulnerability and allowing sadness to surface, you uncover a profound connection to the collective human experience. This chapter teaches you that in the delicate handling of your grief, akin to nurturing a fragile kitten, lies the potential for empathy. This journey not only helps you heal but also enables you to extend grace and compassion to those around you, turning individual pain into a source of strength that binds humanity together.

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Chapter 24: 25. On Prayer

Summary of Chapters Twenty-Five and Twenty-Six: On Prayer

In the twenty-fifth chapter, the author reflects on the nature and power of prayer, drawing an analogy from chef Thomas Keller's approach to mastering recipes. Keller suggests that by first faithfully following a recipe, then rewriting it in one's own terms, and finally recreating it from memory with personal adjustments, one makes the recipe truly their own. Similarly, the author applies this method to prayer, which has been a central aspect of their Christian faith and has recently become a vital source of support in turbulent times.

Prayer is described as a way to surrender the people we love to God's care, especially during moments of uncertainty and loss of control. The author particularly highlights Jesus' prayers for his disciples, centering on four themes: union, protection, joy, and sanctification. The author began to pray in this structured manner for their children, focusing on specific needs and situations, which deepened their emotional connection and awareness of their loved ones. This cyclical process of prayer and attentiveness led to a more profound sense of love and understanding.

As the author became comfortable with this pattern, they adapted their

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prayers to reflect personal language and imagery, turning traditional prayer into a more embodied and internal experience. They prayed in various settings—at night, while cooking, and even in visualization exercises, which made the act feel instinctive rather than rehearsed.

Moreover, the author speaks candidly about a particularly painful relationship with a friend who had become estranged. The act of praying for this friend using the same four themes provided a framework that steered clear of judgment and frustration, instead focusing on goodwill and personal growth. While the relationship wasn't immediately healed, the author found that prayer shifted their own perspective, fostering hope for future reconciliation.

The author likens prayer to a form of internal yoga, where connecting with God allows for personal transformation, healing old wounds, and fostering the qualities of forgiveness and openness to change. They encourage readers to adopt this daily practice of prayer, not only for loved ones but also for individuals with whom they have complicated relationships, thereby inviting God's work within their hearts.

As the narrative concludes in chapter twenty-six, the call to action is clear: engage in consistent, heartfelt prayer. The author suggests that such practices can lead to profound inner changes and a renewed sense of connection with others, emphasizing that, though the results may not always be immediate,

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the act of praying itself is transformative. This sacred tool, prayer, has the potential to repair and rebuild relationships day by day, cultivating warmth and compassion within oneself and towards others.

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Chapter 25 Summary: 26. Delete/Unfollow/Unsubscribe

In Chapter Twenty-Six, titled "Delete/Unfollow/Unsubscribe," the author reflects on the profound effects of social media on her life and emotional well-being. Initially believing that technology, including the internet, is neutral, she now contends that social media is different, given its potential to overwhelm users with countless voices and opinions. As her social media following grew, the incessant noise began to feel suffocating, particularly for her as an empath—someone who deeply feels others' emotions. The pressure to meet the expectations and desires of many became exhausting, leading her to establish boundaries for her engagement with these platforms.

She contrasts the experience of social media to being in a packed stadium, where the constant commotion can drain one's spirit. The author grapples with the unsettling reality of allowing strangers unfettered access to her thoughts and emotions, akin to letting them into her home. Recognizing this boundary violation, she gradually restricted her social media use, discovering that disconnecting from these platforms brings her joy and peace.

Throughout her journey, the author acknowledges that exposure to online cruelty and unsolicited opinions has eroded her self-esteem, as she unconsciously internalized hurtful comments. Reflecting on her past, she admits to a delay in taking action against these negative influences, resulting

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in deeper emotional wounds. She highlights the necessity of rejecting harsh judgments from individuals who do not truly know her and advocates for creating a supportive environment comprised of trusted voices.

The chapter advocates for cultivating silence and reflection over engaging in constant digital dialogue. The author emphasizes the importance of surrounding oneself with kind and nurturing influences rather than succumbing to the toxicity often present in social media interactions. She encourages readers to be selective about whose opinions they let into their lives, as these voices can shape their self-perception.

The author offers practical advice on managing social media usage, such as rearranging apps on her phone to make healthier activities more accessible and limiting engagement during vulnerable moments. She underscores the importance of guarding one's heart by consciously choosing what to allow in and promoting an environment rich in compassion and kindness.

Finally, she concludes with a call for personal responsibility: while it would be ideal for social media culture to shift towards decency and kindness, she recognizes the futility in waiting for others to change. It is up to each individual to curate their digital interactions, safeguard their mental and emotional health, and decide which voices to embrace and which to shut out. Through this deliberate practice, she seeks to cultivate a life filled with positivity and support rather than negativity and criticism.

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Chapter 26 Summary: 27. On Having a Body

Chapter 27: On Having a Body

In this chapter, we are drawn into the reflections of the narrator during a poignant church service led by their friend Christine, a priest in a beautiful old stone building adorned with a majestic clock tower. Christine's sermon centers on a passage from Ephesians that emphasizes the interconnectedness of all individuals, likening them to different parts of a single body, each playing a vital role in the whole.

Christine openly shares her struggles, confessing that she often feels pressured to conform to expectations of what a priest should be, grappling with her identity in a cultural environment that often demands a more stereotypical male presence. However, she resolves to embrace her true self and encourages the congregation to do the same, inspiring the narrator to reflect on their own authenticity and vulnerability in a community setting. This moment evokes powerful emotions, prompting the narrator to question what it truly means to be their genuine self amidst societal pressures.

As these thoughts unfold, the narrator confronts a significant personal conflict—their complicated relationship with their own body. They confess an appreciation for the physical world yet express profound discomfort with

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their middle-aged, sick body, feeling disjointed and disconnected within it. This dichotomy of loving the embodied experience of life while feeling trapped in a frail and unpredictable vessel intensifies her struggle, resulting in a poignant introspection about self-acceptance and societal standards of beauty.

The narrator acknowledges cultural pressures that create an illusion of universal body confidence, realizing they are not alone in their insecurities, even if they often feel isolated. They confront the painful realization that despite their intelligence and ability, they have grappled with self-image throughout their life. Living in New York City has provided a liberating perspective due to its diversity in body types and styles, yet even amongst this freedom, the narrator still wrestles with moments of despair about their body.

They recount physical challenges—difficulty breathing, sleepless nights, and feeling unwell—that amplify their negative feelings toward their body. The contrasts between their previous comfort in their skin and their current disdain are stark, as they reveal an overwhelming desire to just feel at ease within themselves once more. Their reflections reveal a deep yearning for acceptance and the frustration of grappled self-acceptance as they strive to navigate life, come to terms with their body, and remain present for their family.

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This chapter concludes with the realization that self-acceptance is a journey, not a destination. The narrator recognizes that they haven't fully learned to embrace their body yet, indicating an ongoing internal struggle that resonates with many as they navigate the complexities of identity and acceptance in a challenging world.

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Chapter 27 Summary: 28. North Fork

In the fall, the narrator embarks on a weekend getaway with friends Kate and Kyndi to a charming cottage on the North Fork of Long Island. Their arrival is delayed until after dark, leaving just enough time to unload before heading to their dinner reservation at The Halyard in Greenport. The cottage, reminiscent of an old motor lodge refurbished with a modern touch, greets them with its glossy white walls and rustic wooden features.

Though the night sky conceals the water, curiosity leads them to inquire about its whereabouts. Initially met with disbelief from their server, they learn about a door that opens directly to the ocean. When they step outside, the roar of the surf and the briny scent of the sea envelop them, a stark contrast to the cozy warmth of the cottage. This moment of connection with nature is fleeting; they quickly retreat inside, leaving the wild beauty of the sea behind.

At dinner, the group enjoys a delightful array of dishes, but as Kate inquires about the narrator's writing progress, emotions spill over. Overwhelmed by the complexities of living with chronic pain and emotional turmoil, the narrator is taken aback by tears that surface during what was meant to be a joyous outing. Despite the initial feelings of shame, this vulnerable moment fosters connection as Kate and Kyndi provide silent companionship rather than solutions. The act of sharing this burden brings unexpected clarity and



hope by morning.

The next day, they walk along a windswept beach, taking in the raw beauty of the crashing waves. Communication gives way to shared silence, with the wind roaring so loudly they cannot speak. During their stroll, the narrator collects three white stones, each symbolizing support and resilience. Upon returning to the city, these stones are stacked on a bookcase—a small yet powerful reminder of the strength found in friendship and the understanding that even in tumultuous times, one is never truly alone.

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Chapter 28: 29. Pink Folder

Chapter 29: Pink Folder

In the corner of the bedroom, I maintain a file box for essential documents, distinguishing my active files from long-term storage in the pantry. Among them, a bright pink folder labeled "Shauna Health" houses hospital bills, insurance forms, and referrals, gradually becoming a repository of my recent health struggles.

After a troubling hospital experience, I recalled a conversation with my OB-GYN about my unexpectedly shrunken ovaries. Despite the chaos, I managed to schedule a follow-up appointment, where blood tests revealed I was experiencing full menopause—significantly earlier than expected. My doctor noted the surprise in still having menstrual bleeding and suggested a three-month trial of herbal supplements.

Walking home through the flower district, I reflected on my health. At thirty-nine, I had felt something was wrong, attributing it mostly to stress, a rationale that now seemed inadequate. A wave of understanding washed over me as I connected the dots between my menopausal symptoms and the chronic pain I had been experiencing. My friends, all in their childbearing years, could only offer theoretical advice, and options such as cannabis or

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antidepressants were recommended instead of genuine discussions.

A trip to a ski town in Pennsylvania revealed the gravity of my situation. Surrounded by family, their concern illuminated the fact that my mental and physical well-being had deteriorated consistently. Realizing I could no longer ignore the mounting symptoms, I made another doctor's visit, presenting a long list that included insomnia, anxiety, unusual weight gain, and severally intense hot flashes, which felt more like episodes of rage rather than mere physical discomfort.

In describing my hot flashes, I recalled a less intense moment a friend had during a shopping trip. Her casual reaction seemed worlds apart from my experience, which felt like an unmanageable and terrifying surge of emotions, akin to impending disaster. My doctor assured me that hormone treatment would start following a clean mammogram. However, the journey toward clarity was fraught with challenges, requiring numerous appointments and referrals, each laden with unfamiliar medical language.

Navigating various hospitals, I utilized a mix of walking and Uber rides, clutching my colorful health folder tightly. Following one mammogram, I allowed myself a moment of indulgence with a rich meal at a favorite Italian restaurant, an attempt to soothe the rising anxiety. As routine appointments became increasingly invasive, culminating in a biopsy, I grappled with the weight of uncertainty—how many samples would be needed, and what did it

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all mean?

The emotional burden became overwhelming, punctuated by fear during the waiting period for results. When I eventually received a call from the medical office—harsh, abrupt, and dispassionate—I learned that "nothing was wrong." The relief felt superficial, leaving me angry and bewildered; I craved a clearer explanation. While my family celebrated, I remained tangled within the web of fear and doubt.

That night, a gathering for a friend's birthday provided a fleeting reprieve from my worries. Surrounded by familiar faces, laughter, and lightness returned, illuminating a brief moment of joy amidst the chaos. Returning home, exhausted yet somehow renewed, I finished baking the raisin bread we had started that morning, realizing how tightly I had been coiled with anxiety.

Weeks later, I received a simple letter detailing the results from my biopsy: a benign fibroid, a 1.3-centimeter solid nodule, requiring no further action. I noted the name of the surgeon, Zeva, appreciating her kindness during treatment. This letter found its rightful place within my pink folder, symbolizing a significant, if precarious, resolution to a chapter of uncertainty in my health journey.

Chapter 30

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(Chapter 30 should follow the same careful attention to detail, focusing on the continuation of the author's journey through health challenges, personal growth, or shifts in perspective—building further on the established themes of struggle, resilience, and community support.)

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Chapter 29 Summary: 30. Cold Moon

Chapter Summary: Cold Moon

As December approaches its end, the narrator experiences a profound emotional turmoil set against the backdrop of the Cold Moon—a symbolic representation of the darkest time of the year. The convergence of menopause and the isolating effects of the pandemic heightens her feelings of rage and despair, leading her to contemplate a mental breakdown. This period of extreme emotional distress makes her feel trapped in her apartment, where her anger looms large, suffocating the space and intensifying her sense of being caged.

Desperate for relief, she wrestles with her rage, attempting to understand it as part of her rather than something to be feared or avoided. She begins to view this anger not merely as a hormonal response, but as a potential source of empowerment—an avenue for personal transformation that could guide her toward a new version of herself. Here, she acknowledges her complex emotions—an array of tears, grief, and rage—and begins the process of owning and nurturing them rather than repressing them.

However, insomnia plagues her nights, turning her thoughts into a relentless cycle of shame and regret, and filling her days with exhaustion. She grapples

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with sleep remedies in vain, finding herself awake at odd hours, lost in self-critique or futile distractions. Feeling the weight of her emotions, she chooses to isolate herself for the evening, recognizing the need to avoid interactions that might lead to outbursts.

The following morning, however, she wakes up with a newfound sense of strength, realizing that menopause is compelling her to confront her anger head-on. This realization transforms her pain into a potential superpower, a necessary step toward personal evolution as she learns to embrace and harness her rage.

A recent snow squall mirrors her seasonal experience—unexpected, chaotic, yet imbued with beauty. As the storm disrupts the daily routines of her community, she feels a profound connection to the surrounding chaos, finding parallels between the swirling snow and her own inner turmoil. This duality—darkness intertwined with beauty—captures the essence of her journey through this challenging period, reminding her that while life may not unfold as planned, it can still hold unexpected moments of wonder.

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Chapter 30 Summary: 31. Magic Desk

Chapter 31: Magic Desk

After the New Year, I found solace and purpose in writing, spending hour after hour at my desk, gazing out at the city, pouring out my thoughts and emotions. This ritual became my refuge, a place where I could process my pain and rediscover my identity. For years, community and connection had been my lifelines—I thrived on conversations, seeking support and wisdom from others. But now, I discovered that the written word was the only thing that made sense.

As I confronted my fears, sadness, and anger through writing, I felt a transformative release. The simple act of pouring my thoughts onto the page became essential for my healing. I cried unabashedly, fueled by countless cups of lukewarm tea, but with each word typed, I began to find clarity. My writing was not for public consumption; it was a vehicle for understanding my life, giving form to my pain and fears—a safe haven where I could confront the difficult parts of my existence.

While I maintained my routine with therapy, walks, and conversations with friends, my desk emerged as a crucial sanctuary. It was where I not only protected myself but also challenged and built a new version of

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myself—transforming cell by cell. This environment fostered self-discovery, enabling me to express hard truths and confront challenging situations.

Drawing parallels with my experience in yoga, I realized that while long-term practice nurtures growth subtly, at times it can lead to immediate transformation. Much like in yoga, where emotions often surface unexpectedly, writing became a profoundly cathartic experience. Moments of pure, uncontrolled emotion poured out of me—moments that felt almost spiritual.

My journey through writing had always been one of gradual healing, yet now it transcended that process. The act of writing became an immediate, transformative experience, akin to the instant emotional release found in prayer or singing. Every keystroke felt like a healing session, like unearthing long-buried threads of my spirit that needed to be released into the world.

In lightheartedness, I whimsically referred to my writing space as my "magic desk." One delightful aspect of it was observing Mac, a neighbor, joyfully dancing his way back to our building while carrying packages. It highlighted how I had become an observant sentinel of my surroundings, well-acquainted with the rhythms of life unfolding outside my window. I noted my neighbors' routines—their comings and goings, trivial yet comforting details that connected me to them.

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With each day, I remained committed to my craft, watching the beauty in the world outside while simultaneously writing my way toward a new self. My magic desk became a powerful metaphor for resilience, growth, and transformation as I learned to embrace both vulnerability and strength in my words.

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Chapter 31 Summary: 32. Energy in the Air

Chapter 32: Energy in the Air

In this chapter, the protagonist reflects on the interplay of exhaustion and hope following a challenging period. They recognize that, while there are more difficulties ahead, they have emerged from a significant struggle, allowing for a glimmer of optimism.

The narrative unfolds as the protagonist engages in an ordinary day filled with domestic tasks, from preparing a large breakfast to cleaning the kitchen. This routine signifies a return to normalcy, contrasted with their previous turmoil. The arrival of neighbor dads and their children for a movie signals a lively atmosphere, prompting the protagonist to step out into the vibrant city streets.

As they wander through the bustling neighborhoods of New York City, the protagonist notices a palpable energy in the air—young, lively, and slightly frantic, echoing the transitional essence of spring that seems just out of reach. With difficulty finding a table at a restaurant, they finally settle down alone and savor a dirty martini and a pizza, relishing a moment of calm amidst the chaos.

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Even in the depth of winter, there is a sense that spring is approaching—both in the external world and within the protagonist's spirit. They acknowledge the long winter they've endured, which has concealed much beneath the ice of their feelings.

The following day, the protagonist establishes a new morning routine, one centered around confronting their emotions and forgiving past grievances. This practice involves allowing space for desire, as they articulate what they truly want: healing, liberation from pain, and an awakening of spirit. Guided by Andrew, their compassionate therapist, they are reminded to dedicate time each day to embracing sorrow, committing to self-inquiry through reflective writing.

The protagonist's questions revolve around their internal state, potential lessons to learn, and the cultivation of kindness toward themselves and others. As they process grief and longing, they become more attuned to their emotional landscape and the hope for renewal.

A pivotal moment occurs when, during a solitary ascent to their apartment, the protagonist experiences a profound realization: acceptance of their life as it is. They affirm their ability to inhabit their current reality, drawing on the resilience of others who have faced adversity. In this moment of clarity, they recognize their strength and capacity to thrive in the midst of their journey.

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Chapter 33: [Summary Placeholder]

(Continue onto Chapter 33, reflecting on the protagonist's next steps or challenges.)

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Chapter 32: 33. On Resurrection

Chapter 33: On Resurrection

As spring arrived and the city began to thaw from the long winter of isolation brought on by the pandemic, life stirred once again. The Javits Center transformed into a bustling vaccination site, signaling a new beginning for New Yorkers. Families emerged from their months of confinement to explore places like the Museum of Natural History and Rockaway Beach, as they packed away their winter gear and prepared for picnics.

Easter Sunday, a day typically filled with vibrant gatherings and traditions, saw families come together once again on sunny patios, sharing meals of mimosas, pimento cheese, deviled eggs, and lamb. The day felt unusually precious after an extended period of solitude, as children joyfully searched for Easter eggs, traded sweets, and indulged in cupcakes. Adults moved between conversations, savoring the warmth of companionship that had been deeply missed. This celebration, steeped in the themes of rebirth and renewal, felt especially poignant—a true resurrection from the desolation of the past year.

However, Easter is not just a celebration of new life; it is also a reflection on

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the darkness that precedes it, rooted in the story of death and resurrection central to the Christian faith. This year, the significance of these themes resonated more profoundly as many struggled with the grief of those lost during the pandemic. The vibrant atmosphere of Easter was juxtaposed with the painful memories of last year's muted observance. It served as a stark reminder that while life triumphs over death, the complexities of grief linger.

Living on an Episcopal seminary campus deeply immersed in the church calendar, the rhythms of religious observances marked the passing days. The Chapel of the Good Shepherd, with its ever-open doors symbolizing welcome and connection, experienced a unique stillness each Good Friday. On this day, a somber service culminated in darkness as candles were extinguished, leaving the campus shrouded in silence. The closure of the ornate doors felt heavy and disconcerting, highlighting a sense of absence and discomfort that persisted throughout Holy Saturday—a stark reminder of loss and uncertainty.

However, on Easter Sunday, the day begins anew. A priest unlocks the chapel doors before dawn, symbolizing hope and restoration as they swing open, echoing the themes of an empty tomb and life renewed. This moment, a profound metaphor for resurrection, encapsulates the collective longing for peace and the promising light that emerges after a period of darkness. In this season of rebirth, the embrace of new life stands resilient against the shadows of past losses, inviting all to nurture growth and possibility in the

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aftermath of struggle.

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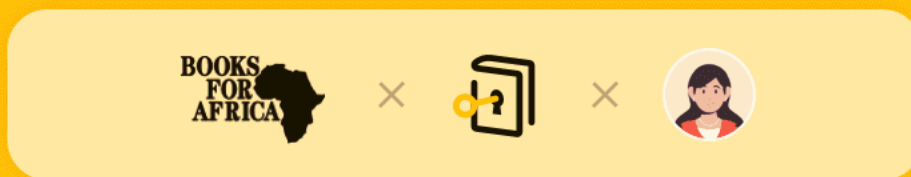




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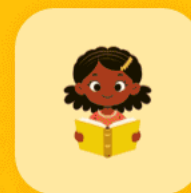
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Chapter 33 Summary: 34. On Painting Badly

Summary of Chapter 34: On Painting Badly

In this chapter, the protagonist, encouraged by her therapist, embarks on a creative endeavor—painting—alongside her two sons, Henry and Mac. The therapy suggestion focuses on exploring an art form that enhances emotional expression without dependence on words. One afternoon, they visit Blick Art Materials, a spacious art supply store, where they enthusiastically explore various mediums and materials. The experience is both joyful and inspiring, highlighting the connection between creativity and family bonding.

Back at home, the trio sets up a casual painting night filled with music and camaraderie. As they work on their artwork, the protagonist acknowledges her lack of skill—her initial attempts are poorly executed. Regardless, she finds the experience to be calming and liberating, contrasting it with her previous creative outlets like cooking or jewelry-making, which produced tangible results. Here, the act of painting becomes an exercise in vulnerability, where she embraces the notion of creating art for art's sake rather than for productivity or perfection.

She reflects on modern "grind culture," which often pressures individuals to

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derive intrinsic value and productivity from everything they pursue. The chapter emphasizes that it's okay to create without the intention of monetization or achievement—a notion her children humorously validate by acknowledging the quality of her work without sugarcoating their feedback. This honest interaction reinforces the idea that the process itself—its therapeutic impact and the moments shared with her sons—is far more significant than the final product.

Ultimately, the protagonist learns to value the importance of being a beginner, accepting that failure is an integral part of the learning experience. Engaging in activities without pressure to excel fosters personal growth and healing. This chapter, therefore, culminates in a celebration of creative exploration, reinforcing the vital lessons of humility, patience, and the joy found within the journey of learning.

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Chapter 34 Summary: 35. A Movable Feast

Chapter Summary: A Movable Feast

The chapter opens with a touching memory from ten years ago when the narrator, on a work trip to Dallas, reunites with a dear friend named Sarah. On their last morning together, Sarah surprises the narrator with a beautifully arranged picnic behind a car wash, emphasizing the power of personal hospitality and connection. Sarah's thoughtful gesture, which included a table adorned with flowers and a delightful meal, deeply moves the narrator, illustrating that true hospitality is about making someone feel loved and valued, rather than merely providing a perfect meal.

The narrative shifts to reflect on the pandemic and how it reshaped social interactions and gatherings. As individuals faced limitations on traditional hospitality, many adapted creatively. The narrator shares personal anecdotes of reconnecting with friends via virtual happy hours, outdoor gatherings, and even picnics during colder months, demonstrating resilience in finding ways to foster connection despite unusual circumstances. The beauty of these moments lies not in elegance but in the simple joy of being together, whether over gourmet cheeses or humble takeout.

As spring arrives, the narrator describes the blossoming community spirit in

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their neighborhood, where spontaneous gatherings replace old traditions of perfect entertaining. The Close, a green space central to their lives, transforms into a gathering place where neighbors come together to share food and connect, symbolizing a shift away from perfectionism in hospitality. The message is clear: it's not about the food or the setting but about the bonds formed through shared experiences.

The chapter eloquently discusses the contrast between isolation and the healing power of community connection. The necessity of gathering and being present with others emerges as a fundamental human need, reaffirming that we thrive through relationships. The narrative acknowledges the challenges of societal divisions and explores how intentional hospitality can foster unity and understanding. It suggests that even in unfamiliar settings, the potential for enriching connections exists, encouraging the reader to embrace differences and engage in brave acts of hospitality.

The chapter culminates with a call to action: to continue gathering, to embrace the awkwardness of new experiences, and to practice hospitality as a means to combat isolation and enrich our lives and communities. It underscores that true hospitality is a transformative force, capable of healing and fostering relationships in a fractured world. The narrator thus encourages the reader to embrace this "movable feast" of life and love, committing to building connections that can sustain us amidst challenges.

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Chapter 35 Summary: 36. Living Lightly Redux

Chapter Summary: Living Lightly Redux

In this reflective chapter, the narrator embarks on a journey of letting go—both of physical belongings and past identities. As spring unfolds, she feels compelled to release items that are tied to a version of herself that no longer resonates. This self-awareness brings forth a realization: relinquishing these items symbolizes her acceptance of aging and embracing a new identity. This process becomes a meditative exploration of what to keep and what to discard, encouraging her to focus on the present rather than clinging to an idealized past.

She carefully examines her wardrobe, parting with dresses that no longer feel like her and sneakers that are uncomfortable. Each item represents a fragmented narrative of who she used to be, highlighting the internal conflict of holding onto memories while navigating her evolving identity. The act of decluttering is not simply about physical space; it's a metaphorical shedding of old selves, allowing room for growth and new experiences.

Amid this purging, the narrator contemplates the significance of memories tied to her belongings. She envisions a future where she shares stories with her children and grandchildren rather than holding onto every object. This

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shift in perspective allows her to cherish memories without being confined by them. She decides to celebrate the stories of her past while releasing the tangible remnants, such as toys and kitchenware that have outlived their utility.

In a moment of inspiration, she finds herself enchanted by a woman with striking silver hair and bright lipstick, prompting a moment of self-reflection. Her son's innocent question, "Is that you, Mom?" reinforces her realization of self-acceptance. The chapter concludes with a sense of empowerment, as she recognizes that embracing her evolving identity, combined with letting go of the past and future, allows her to live more authentically in the present.

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Chapter 36: 37. Rooftop

In the chapter titled "Rooftop," the narrator reflects on a night spent on a rooftop with a mix of young adults in their twenties and friends in their forties. The gathering begins with light-hearted banter highlighting the generational gap—jokes about ages and milestones signal the carefree ambitions of youth. The younger attendees speak with enthusiasm about their plans for the future: pursuing advanced degrees, establishing careers, and setting timelines for marriage and relocation. This optimism starkly contrasts with the past experiences of the older group, who have been through trials that have reshaped their hopes and expectations.

The narrator recalls a difficult period in their late twenties when they were fired from a cherished job at a church, a painful uncertainty that lingered in the aftermath. Their early thirties were marked by heartache, including multiple miscarriages and the stress of selling a house during a recession. These challenges culminated in a chaotic few years in their forties, a time described as a "blender" of good and bad experiences that ultimately brought a sense of respite in moving to Manhattan.

As they engage with the bright-eyed twentysomethings, the narrator feels a mix of nostalgia and caution. They ponder sharing the harsh realities of life, recognizing the naivety in youthful ambitions—grappling with the unpredictable nature of existence that often derails plans. Instead of

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dampening the spirits of the younger generation, they resist the urge to be a voice of disillusionment, acknowledging that every generation must navigate their own path toward understanding.

The narrator attempts to encourage the belief that life improves with age, only to meet a skeptical response from their peers. With a sense of honesty, they admit that their own forties have been challenging, filled with chaos and stress. They highlight the privilege of being able to express that uncertainty exists, particularly for women and people of color in a predominantly white male world where confidence and certainty are often expected.

With a reflective demeanor, the narrator aims to cultivate a culture that values curiosity and questions over the need for definitive answers. They wish to impart the wisdom that as life unfolds, it often becomes messier than anticipated, leading to a richer understanding of what it means to live fully.

Ultimately, the rooftop conversation serves as a poignant reminder of life's complexities—where plans can morph or fail, and true wisdom comes not from having all the answers but from embracing the journey, complete with its failures and unexpected twists. As the evening wraps up, the narrator and Aaron share a laugh about their youthful misconceptions regarding turning forty, recognizing how far they have come from those simpler, more certain beginnings. The light-heartedness of this moment contrasts with the weight

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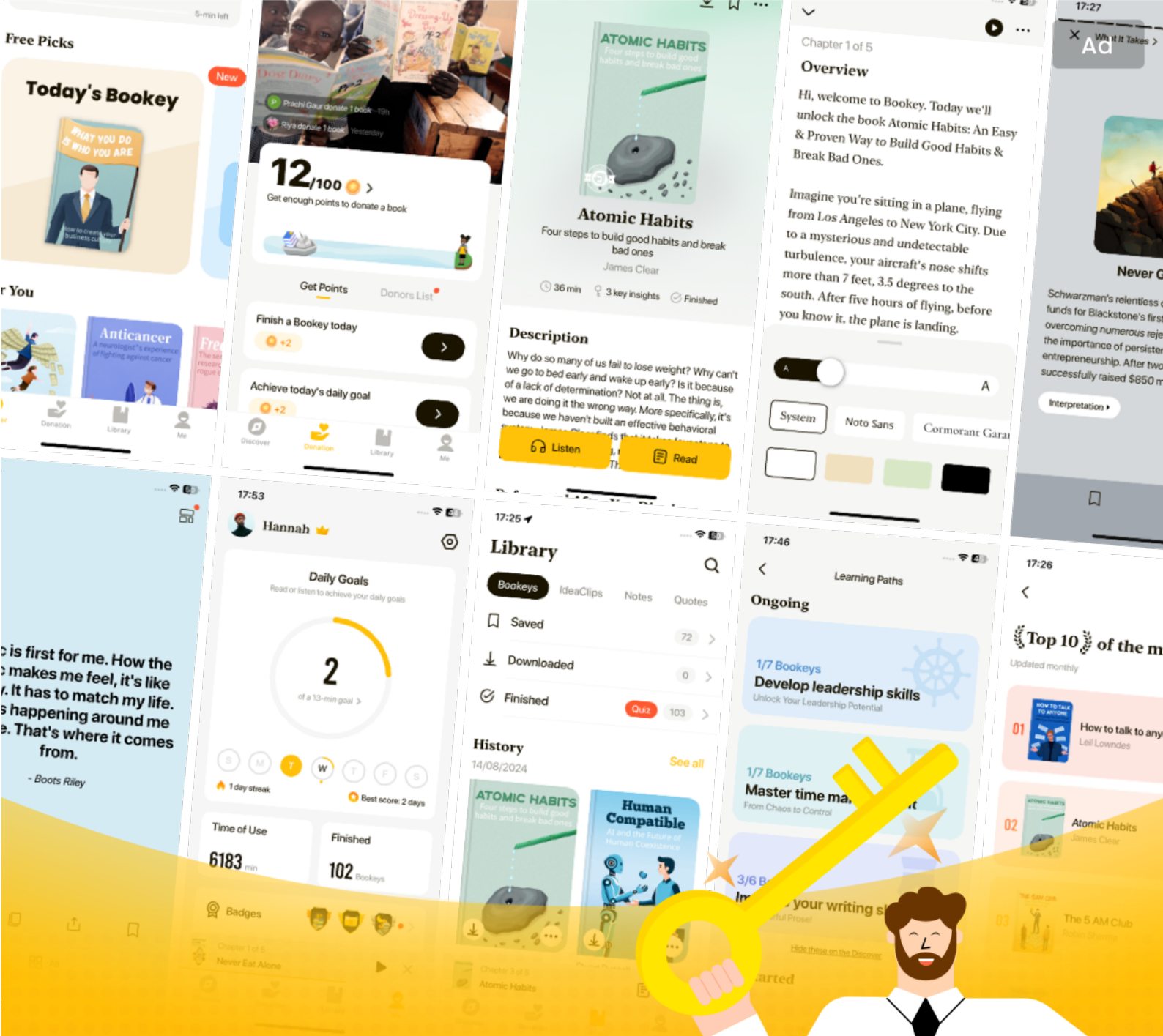
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of their experiences, yet it encapsulates the bittersweet nature of aging and the continuous evolution of self.

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Chapter 37 Summary: 38. Never Too Late

In the chapter titled "Never Too Late," the narrator reflects on the profound impact of their grandfather, Robert Lawrence Barry, who transformed the lives of two young refugee brothers. Years earlier, these brothers arrived in the narrator's small town from a distant country, needing assistance with basic life skills such as language, driving, and even grocery shopping. Initially, Bob, as he was known, volunteered to host them for what was intended to be a short stay, despite his reservations about their different backgrounds and beliefs.

However, what began as a modest act of service evolved into a rich, transformative relationship that lasted five impactful years. Bob, who was then eighty-five years old and recently widowed, committed himself fully to the brothers' well-being. He not only taught them essential skills but also immersed himself in their culture, learning about their traditions and favorite foods. He became their mentor, advocate, and a father figure, accompanying one of their girlfriends on a trip back to her homeland. Together, they forged familial bonds that crossed cultural lines.

As Bob proudly shared his experiences with his family, it became clear that these young men had equally enriched his life. This chapter serves as a powerful reminder that it is never too late to make a significant difference in the lives of others, regardless of age or circumstance. Bob's unusual vitality

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and eagerness to learn and grow inspired the narrator to rethink their own limitations and embrace the idea that opportunities for personal growth and impactful relationships are always available.

Ultimately, the narrator encourages readers to recognize that one can start anew and create a lasting legacy at any stage in life. Bob's journey illustrates that with openness and generosity, anyone can grow, change, and leave a nourishing mark on the world.

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Chapter 38 Summary: 39. Bloom

Chapter Summary: Thirty-Nine

As spring unfolds, the beauty of the outside world serves as a poignant reminder of life's transient nature. The narrator marvels at the stunning tulip magnolia outside their apartment, awakening a sense of renewal and hope. With the vibrant blooms poised to vanish by the weekend, this fleeting beauty reflects the inevitable passage of time.

During this season of change, the narrator observes their children thriving amidst the bustle of outdoor life. The rhythmic chaos of kids running between the playground and their home, eager for snacks, mirrors the steady progression of the days. With Aaron nearing completion of his master's degree and Henry preparing for high school applications, each family member faces significant transitions. Meanwhile, Mac's independence blossoms as he joyfully ventures to school alone for the first time, a sign of growing up that astonishes the narrator.

Reflecting on their own journey, the narrator considers how a profound low point in December acted as a catalyst for growth. It prompted a proactive approach to mental health, motivating them to seek therapy and cultivate self-compassion. This period of introspection equipped them with tools to

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navigate through challenges, despite life's difficulties. They've learned to cope with persistent grief and anxiety by cultivating a routine that includes asking for help, prioritizing wellness, and immersing themselves in nature.

Through this reflective process, the narrator finds hope and meaning. They recognize the beauty that persists in the world, the kindness that remains, and the inevitable healing that time brings. This chapter closes with an affirmation of faith and resilience, celebrating the little joys amidst life's uncertainties, and embracing the fact that even while much remains unknown, there is still so much to cherish.

Chapter Summary: Forty

(Note: Although chapter forty is not provided, the summary can be prepared for the next chapter if the contents were made available.)

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Chapter 39 Summary: 40. How to Stay

Chapter Summary: "How to Stay"

In this chapter, the author reflects on the myriad reasons people seek her out, from book recommendations and dining advice to more sensitive topics like miscarriages and the crises of faith. Through candid discussions, she expresses both compassion and understanding for those who feel lost or in pain, particularly regarding the loneliness that often accompanies miscarriages—a subject that is starkly under-discussed, yet impacts one in four pregnancies. This personal resonance with such experiences has led her to become a reluctant expert, providing solace to those facing similar heartbreak.

She recounts her own experiences with miscarriage, detailing the emotional and physical turmoil they entail. These personal stories resonate with others who reach out during their times of need, seeking a sense of connection and comfort. Similarly, she receives calls from individuals grappling with their faith, particularly when their trust in religious institutions falters. These conversations often bear a confessional tone, where individuals reveal doubts and fears, looking for reassurance that they are not alone in their struggles.

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The author expresses a profound commitment to the idea of faith, viewing it as vital nourishment for her life. She acknowledges the messiness of church communities and the failings of organized religion but emphasizes that she refuses to let those failings define her own spiritual journey. She believes in the transformative power of faith, which can be reimagined and rebuilt through processing pain and seeking genuine connection beyond flawed institutions.

An important anecdote involves a transformative moment shared with a friend, where they discuss feeling "unanchored" after disillusionment with familiar institutions. Here, the author metaphorically likens the process of rebuilding faith to constructing a sanctuary at the ocean's bottom—a place built on love, honesty, and compassion, where individuals can find deeper solace and connection.

Recalling her mother's own struggles with faith during her upbringing, the author details how her mother's journey of spiritual exploration inspired her to embrace the idea that faith is not a static concept but a dynamic process. She recalls the significance of her mother's absence from church services during her time of reflection, which demonstrated the importance of nurturing and adapting one's faith in response to personal experiences. The support from church elders during this family crisis served as a reminder that compassion and authenticity matter more than maintaining appearances.

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In a closing reflection, the author emphasizes the importance of openly discussing faith's evolution with her children, preparing them for the natural doubts and questions that come along life's journey. She acknowledges the myriad reasons to leave toxic or unhealthy churches, including issues of racism, manipulation, and distrust. Yet, amidst these reasons, she asserts the necessity for those who remain committed to hope and honesty to persist in gathering and nurturing their communities.

Ultimately, the chapter conveys a powerful message about the enduring nature of love and faith. The author champions the idea that, despite past mistakes and failures within religious frameworks, genuine faith remains a wellspring of strength and resilience. She concludes by reaffirming her choice to stay committed to a faith that embraces humility, creativity, and love, emphasizing that this tradition is innate to humanity—born from purpose and shaped by kindness.

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Chapter 40: 41. Recovering

Chapter Summaries

Chapter Forty-One: Recovering

On a blissfully sunny morning, the narrator and their children are enjoying a day at Rockaway Beach, fully embracing the joy of summer after a long period of challenges. They prepare for a day of fun by gathering snacks and essentials, reminiscing about a fulfilling day spent with friends over brisket, baked beans, and delightful discussions on their patio. This gathering highlights the sense of community the narrator cherishes, contrasting with their earlier feelings of loss and disconnection.

Reflecting on their life's journey, the narrator expresses profound gratitude for the recovery they have experienced despite past hardships in which they felt unworthy of goodness and happiness. They recall the difficult years when everything seemed to fall apart and the feelings of despair that clouded their mind. Through years of therapy and self-reflection, they have learned to embrace healing as a viable path forward, permitting themselves to enjoy life and acknowledge their worth.

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The narrator draws a powerful parallel between the maintenance of a beloved chapel, visible from their workspace, and the necessity of personal healing. Just as scaffolding is required to preserve the structural integrity of the chapel, so too is intentional self-care essential for mending emotional wounds. This analogy underscores that healing often requires confronting

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Chapter 41 Summary: 42. Abundance

Summary of Chapter 42: Abundance

In this chapter, the narrator reflects on their cozy New York City apartment, noting its charm and idiosyncrasies, including the north-facing kitchen and bedrooms, which look out onto the picturesque Twenty-First Street lined with trees. The living room and bedroom have lovely southern light and a serene view of the courtyard. The third-floor location creates a feeling akin to living in a treehouse, where nature intertwines with urban scenery.

The narrator cherishes the small, personal spaces that offer unique comforts—like a kitchen corner perfect for enjoying morning light. They find solace in the morning routine, opening the window to embrace the din of the city, reminiscent of earlier days in the Midwest filled with the soothing sounds of wind chimes. This connection to nature and the outdoors continues to ground them amid the bustling life of New York.

Family dynamics play an important role in their life, with the boys forming a bond with their teenage neighbors, showcasing the joys of childhood friendships during the carefree summer months. An invitation from neighbor Julia to help with a dinner party sparks a significant joy for the narrator. The preparation brings anticipation and excitement, leading to a joyful evening

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surrounded by friends, good food, and stunning views.

As the narrator reflects on the themes of abundance and connection, they begin to understand a deeper sense of belonging, learning to reclaim parts of themselves that had felt lost. This period is marked by new relationships, adventures, and a myriad of experiences yet to be explored. They engage in daily practices for emotional well-being, learning to navigate feelings of anger and sadness while cultivating gratitude in the evening, transitioning to a state of peace as the day winds down.

The chapter delves into the concept of balancing productivity with personal fulfillment. A day is not only measured by tasks accomplished but also by connections made, experiences shared, and joy found in simple moments. This shift in perspective—from measuring life by productivity to valuing experiences and personal growth—opens up a broader understanding of success and satisfaction.

Ultimately, the narrator proposes that true abundance lies not in traditional measures of success but in the healing, relationships, and moments that make life richer.

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Chapter 42 Summary: 43. Keep Going

Chapter 43: Keep Going - Summary

In this reflective chapter, the narrator grapples with the complexities of life, especially in the context of the arrival of spring—a season that typically signifies renewal and hope. With the world around them blooming and bursting into vibrant colors after a long winter, the narrator feels a deep yearning for personal rejuvenation and resolution that the season seems to promise. However, this desire conflicts with their reality, as they continue to struggle with sleeplessness and emotional burdens.

Despite the positive external changes in their environment and the increased energy of people around them as they emerge from a pandemic, the narrator acknowledges their ongoing internal fight. The expectation for a "happy ending" grows into frustration, and they realize that life doesn't conform to the narrative arcs one might hope for. Instead, life, with its multifaceted experiences of chaos and healing, is unpredictable and can't be controlled.

Through this realization, the narrator reflects on the lessons learned from perseverance: that joy often comes in fleeting moments and requires effort—echoing the importance of accepting reality as it is. They emphasize the concept that life is not a linear journey marked by clear beginnings and

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ends, but rather a continual process of facing challenges, evolving, and moving forward, despite setbacks.

A significant theme emerges in the narrative: the importance of 'showing up', embodying resilience, and embracing the mundane aspects of life without expectation of grandeur. The narrator illustrates this with anecdotes of past triumphs and struggles, reinforcing the idea that life can be both beautifully chaotic and heartbreakingly simple simultaneously.

As the narrator contemplates their life journey, they recall moments shared with friends, where they are reminded of their growth from a polished and poised version of themselves to someone navigating the deeper, more authentic layers of existence. In this transition, they find beauty in vulnerability and humility, realizing that even in the smallest, everyday moments, there is profound joy to be found.

The chapter concludes with the narrator's resolve to "keep going," recognizing that the path forward is less about achieving perfection and more about being present and persistent. They emphasize the value of small, consistent actions—compassion for oneself and others—as a means of building lasting legacies.

Ultimately, they embrace life as a continuous story, filled with light and darkness, and they reaffirm their strength to hold space for all experiences,

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recognizing the complexities that make their narrative authentic and rich. The chapter invites readers to acknowledge their struggles, learn from them, and persistently advance, reinforcing that life's imperfections are what truly create its beauty.

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Chapter 43 Summary: 44. Greenport

Summary of Chapters 44 and 45

Chapter 44: Reflections in Greenport

In this chapter, the narrator finds solace in a quaint fishing village on the North Fork of Long Island, a significant retreat from the hustle of New York City. The dark, rainy summer day creates a melancholic yet conducive atmosphere for introspection and creativity, as the narrator grapples with a pressing deadline while seeking clarity for the future.

Amid the backdrop of rolling waves and thick foliage, the narrator reflects on personal growth and evolution over the past four years. From an initial inability to envision life in New York City, the narrator has profoundly embraced the city and its myriad experiences. This sense of belonging is contrasted with the inevitability of life's impermanence, as dreams once held may vanish. The narrator recognizes the limitations of time and chance, acknowledging that certain opportunities—like aspirations of becoming a ballerina or a chef—have likely passed.

However, the chapter conveys a sense of hope and possibility. The narrator

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envisions numerous uncharted experiences ahead: new places to discover, relationships to form, and lessons to learn. There's a resolution to remain open and engaged with life, cherishing moments of beauty and joy, even amidst challenges. This determination encapsulates a belief in second chances and the ongoing journey of personal narrative.

In an evocative moment, the narrator recalls a comforting dinner alone at a local bar, savoring a lobster roll and a Manhattan against the backdrop of a rain-soaked night. This solitary meal sparks a reflection on family traditions disrupted by distance—illustrated by a memorable Zoom Christmas where recognition was given for resilience. The award, aptly named the "I'm Still Standing Award," symbolizes personal endurance through life's tempests. The narrator's new understanding is that mere survival amidst adversity is indeed worthy of celebration.

Chapter 45: Embracing Life's Stories

The narrator continues their exploration of life as an evolving story, emphasizing that every individual defines their narrative through a tapestry of experiences rather than being constrained by singular moments. With a firm belief in countless future possibilities, the narrator expresses excitement for new adventures, relationships, and stories that await.

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Amidst life's unpredictability, the narrator underscores the importance of remaining present and engaged with the world, which includes embracing aspects such as love, forgiveness, and learning. Each chapter of life—like aging or raising teenagers—will be woven into the ongoing narrative, filled with both struggle and hope. An acceptance of loss intermingles with an embrace of beauty, suggesting a more profound understanding of life's cycles.

The chapter concludes with a reaffirmation of the growth that comes through experience. The narrator reflects on past fears of loss and struggle, expressing newfound strength in facing life's challenges. The sentiment of "we get through" serves as a powerful mantra, illustrating resilience and optimism as they move forward into the unknown—where future dreams await and new narratives will unfold.

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Chapter 44: 45. One More Song

Chapter 45: One More Song

As summer unfolded, the narrator and her family embarked on a road trip from New York to Illinois for a long weekend with Aaron's family. The gathering was filled with lively activities at Aaron's sister Emily and her husband Brad's home, which boasted a pool, a bonfire pit, and a par-3 golf hole. Over five days, the family engaged in joyful moments—from swimming to grilling and enjoying pudgy pies by the fire. Amidst these gatherings, the narrator embraced her role by braiding hair for her nieces and providing delicious dishes, like a sheet pan of nachos and a spicy street corn dip that had become her culinary obsession.

On the final night of this joyous reunion, the children were treated to a late-night movie with popcorn and cotton candy, eventually joining the adults at the bonfire for a magical night adorned with glow sticks and sparklers. Despite the parents' attempts to usher the kids to bed with a “last song” declaration, their infectious enthusiasm led to joyous chants of, “One more song,” prolonging their delightful evening together.

Following the family gathering, the narrator spent additional days with Aaron's parents and reconnected with friends and relatives she hadn't seen

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in years. Enjoyable moments unfolded with her cousins and their daughters in the backyard, as they savored cuisine and observed the kids playing. A scenic boat ride on the Fox River with lifelong friends added to the trip's cherished memories.

The narrator's visit included a brunch at her friend Rachel's house, a makeup artist who enthusiastically transformed her with new beauty products, leading to a glamorous appearance. Another delightful encounter unfolded when a friend's young daughter, Summer, introduced Mac to the joys of collecting fresh eggs from their chicken coop, igniting his imagination about bringing chickens to Manhattan.

One poignant moment occurred when Summer, perched in her high chair, expressed her affection by exclaiming, "I love your face!" This simple interaction encapsulated the warmth and affection shared among loved ones and underscored the depth of their relationships.

Driving through familiar streets, the narrator felt a profound connection to her past, as she revisited her childhood home and church—locations rich in memories that shaped her. This journey was more than a visit; it was a healing experience that allowed her to reclaim her history and integrate it into her ongoing narrative. Reuniting with old and new friends, she reflected on the shared experiences and intimate knowledge that bonded them across time.

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This trip marked a turning point. It signified the end of a challenging winter and spring, ushering in the warmth of summer and renewed vitality. Initially feeling drained and weary upon arrival, the narrator gradually found solace and rejuvenation through love, laughter, and companionship.

As they departed, her mother-in-law lovingly packed a pizza from Lou Malnati's along with freshly picked blueberries and homemade strawberry jam. Grateful for the abundance of love, history, and the comforting tastes of home, the narrator felt a deep connection to her roots—a realization that the rich tapestry of her life is woven with the voices, experiences, and cherished relationships she holds dear. And just like the sweet refrain of “one more song,” these moments lingered in her heart, enriching her journey.

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Chapter 45 Summary: 46. Try Softer

In "Try Softer," the narrator returns to New York after a fulfilling but exhausting summer trip to the Midwest, facing a looming work deadline. Contrary to past experiences where anxiety fueled productivity, this time they find themselves devoid of the usual energy, feeling calm yet deeply fatigued. Despite attempts to spark motivation through walks and caffeine, the exhaustion remains unyielding, a result of both emotional and physical labor compounded by ongoing long COVID symptoms, which manifest as unpredictable fatigue and brain fog.

As the narrator grapples with this unexpected state, they consult their therapist, Andrew, who emphasizes the importance of listening to one's body and spirit over the relentless drive of the mind. This conversation highlights a significant theme: the need to practice self-compassion rather than hard-driving self-criticism, especially under pressure. Andrew's guidance to "slow everything down" serves as a pivotal moment, steering the narrator away from familiar patterns of anxiety and pushiness.

Shifting their approach, the narrator opts for gentler, nourishing actions—reading poetry, cooking, and spending quality family time—leading to a gradual reawakening of their energy. This newfound energy feels more effortless, akin to a gentle breeze rather than a forceful push.



In reflecting on these lessons, the narrator recalls insights from Henry's teacher, Donna, whose wisdom on managing intensity resonates with their own struggles. She advises that the best educators are those who find balance through life experiences, not merely through work. This notion underscores the narrator's desire for Henry to cultivate a balanced, spacious life, emphasizing the importance of pausing and savoring moments of ease.

Ultimately, the chapter encapsulates the narrator's journey towards overcoming deep-seated habits of anxiety-driven productivity, advocating for a softer approach to challenges and embodying a nurturing mindset that they wish to pass on to their son. The mantra "Inhale, exhale, try softer" becomes a guiding principle, emphasizing the power of listening to one's own needs in the pursuit of balance and fulfillment.

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Critical Thinking

Key Point: Practice Self-Compassion Over Self-Criticism

Critical Interpretation: Imagine absorbing the essence of self-compassion as a soothing balm for your weary spirit amidst life's pressures. In the chaos of deadlines and expectations, let this chapter inspire you to shift your narrative from relentless self-criticism to nurturing kindness towards yourself. By embracing the mantra of 'Inhale, exhale, try softer,' you may discover the profound impact of slowing down, of genuinely listening to your body's signals, and of engaging in gentle, restorative activities. This soft approach can allow your energy to bloom naturally, reducing anxiety and fostering a more balanced, fulfilling life.

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Chapter 46 Summary: 47. Twenty

Chapter Summary: Forty-Seven

In a reflective narrative, the author revisits her relationship with her husband, Aaron, as they celebrate their twentieth anniversary. Early in their dating, Aaron sought advice from a friend on recognizing the right partner. The friend's response emphasized the importance of personal growth and willingness to learn in a marriage, insights that resonate deeply with the author over the years. Aaron exemplifies this growth mindset, continuously learning and evolving, which is crucial to their enduring relationship.

This year, they began seeing a couples therapist, providing a safe space to explore their shared experiences and challenges. Through therapy, they rediscover empathy and connection in their marriage, leading their relationship into what the therapist describes as a rebirth. The author acknowledges the unexpected joy in still feeling butterflies after two decades, enjoying laughter together, and finding new ways to care for one another.

As they navigate their marriage, they also reflect on their family dynamics. The author marvels at their sons—Henry, who resembles her, and Mac, who carries Aaron's spirit—and the passage of time that has elevated them from

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babies to young men with distinct personalities and talents. The author fondly recalls her in-laws, who have been a steadfast source of support and love throughout their journey, especially during difficult times.

During a challenging period in their marriage, a family trip to the cabin provided reassurance and a feeling of belonging. Surrounded by Aaron's family, the author's anxiety faded as she was reminded of her place within this supportive circle. The lighthearted banter revealed the strength of familial bonds, and she found solace in their acceptance.

The author reflects on the tradition of taking her husband's last name upon marriage, which was initially appealing for its simplicity. However, she soon found herself dealing with the frequent mispronunciation of "Niequist," a name she learned to embrace despite its complexities. Through humor and humility, she shares amusing anecdotes, illustrating the ups and downs of her marriage.

Ultimately, the author celebrates her bond with Aaron, acknowledging how he challenges and enriches her life in ways she never anticipated, turning their marriage into a collaborative journey of growth. They reminisce over a special evening on their anniversary at a restaurant, where they share stories and heartfelt letters, reiterating their mutual commitment to grow and evolve together.

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In conclusion, while traditional gifts for a twentieth anniversary may include china, the author suggests that their rebirth as a couple is a far more significant celebration. With hopes for a future filled with continued growth, they toast to twenty more years of shared adventures and love.

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Chapter 47 Summary: 48. Welcome Home

Chapter Summary: Welcome Home

Years ago, Au Cheval, a small diner in Chicago, garnered acclaim for having the best burger in the country. Its thin patties, house-made dijonnaise, and pickles became the stuff of legend. Despite the pandemic's toll on restaurants, news surfaced that Au Cheval had reopened its Tribeca location, prompting the narrator to book a reservation with friends Michael and Kyndi, despite their unfamiliarity with the place. Amid lingering uncertainties about its status, they rode their bikes to the dimly lit restaurant, only to be elated upon finding it bustling with energy.

The dinner brought astonishing flavors back to life, especially the first bite of the iconic burger. This experience stirred deep nostalgia, awakening memories of life in Chicago, including cherished moments with Aaron and friends. The narrator muses on the significance of taste memory—how familiar flavors provide comfort and a sense of connection to past experiences, especially following a time of disconnection and isolation during the pandemic. Instead of complex dishes, it is the simple, comforting tastes that evoke warmth and nostalgia.

Memories flood in as the narrator recalls previous favorite spots, like

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Wrigley Field, which represented familiarity and joy. Yet, as they settled into their new life in New York, feelings of disorientation surfaced, particularly during experiences that reminded them of Chicago but felt distinctly different, such as attending a Mets game at Citi Field instead of Wrigley.

While adjusting to their new city, the narrator notes stark contrasts between Chicago and New York—from smells and accents to food traditions. New Yorkers have their own unique definitions of what it means to belong, marked by experiences that solidify one's identity in the city.

As the story unfolds, significant milestones illuminate their adaptation to New York life. A memorable backstage experience at the musical *Wicked* encapsulated the welcoming spirit of New York, as a performer gifted them a signed photo that read, "Welcome home." This phrase resonated deeply, suggesting that "home" is not a singular concept; rather, it expands with new experiences and connections.

Ultimately, the narrator reflects on how both Chicago and New York can be home, along with the important relationships and memories tied to them. More profoundly, the journey reveals that true belonging lies within oneself, transcending geography or affiliations. Through the passage of time and experience, they find their sense of home rooted in self-acceptance and inner peace.

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Chapter 48: 49. Next Self

Summary of Chapter Fifty-Nine: "Next Self"

In this reflective chapter, the narrator captures a particularly rainy day, symbolizing a transitional period from summer to fall. The narrative begins with her rushing through the Meatpacking District, dressed in a vibrant pink dress paired with checkered Vans, a stark contrast to her feelings of invisibility and discomfort regarding her body image. After making a significant change by cutting her long blonde hair into a short, gray-tinged style for her 45th birthday, she grapples with her new appearance and the perception of others.

Throughout the day, she encounters numerous strangers who comment on her striking pink dress, despite feeling invisible and unrecognizable in her new look. This situation evokes a profound realization about visibility, joy, and the role of self-expression. The dress, initially a simple choice made in haste, turns into a beacon of happiness for those around her, illustrating how vibrant self-expression can uplift not just oneself but others as well. The narrator reflects on how her willingness to show up authentically, despite insecurities, contributes to joy in her community.

As she reminisces about the previous year's isolation during the pandemic,

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the narrator recalls the sense of community formed within her quarantine pod. Their Friday night gatherings—filled with laughter, popcorn, and dancing—served as a crucial reminder of connection amid darkness. This backdrop of shared experiences emphasizes resilience and the importance of showing up for each other, even when it's challenging.

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Chapter 49 Summary: 50. Still Yes

In the chapter titled "Still Yes," the author reflects on their transformative journey through life, marked by significant personal changes and a mindset shift encapsulated in two meaningful tattoos. The first, a red heart on the left forearm, symbolizes a commitment to create from love rather than from competition, fear, or ambition. This tattoo serves as a reminder to prioritize meaningful connections in life and work.

On the author's right arm is the word "yes," intricately scripted by a friend. This represents the author's realization that to align their life with their true values, they needed to say many hard nos—decisions that meant disappointing others but ultimately allowed for a more fulfilling existence. The journey was fraught with challenges, including the exhaustion and isolation brought on by the hustle culture, which detracted from their roles as a partner and parent. Saying no became essential, yet it was equally important to recognize that these nos were in service of a larger yes: a commitment to love, play, connection, and the exploration of the world's beauty.

The author draws a parallel between their life and the world of sailing, illustrating their upbringing in a family of sailors surrounded by nautical symbols. This familiarity leads to a deeper exploration of the meaning behind nautical flags, particularly one that signifies both "yes" and a course

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change during a regatta. This duality resonates profoundly with the author, reflecting the essence of adapting to life's unexpected turns while maintaining a forward momentum.

The concept of "yes, and" from improv further informs the author's outlook. Rather than settling for a simple affirmation, they embrace the challenges of life with the understanding that change is intrinsic to experience. The author emphasizes that despite fears and a tendency to retreat into self-protection, they consistently choose to say yes—to life, creativity, community, and the richness of human connections.

The chapter concludes with a strong affirmation of hope and resilience. The author reaffirms their belief in the beauty of the world and the importance of stories and relationships. They express a commitment to trust—whether in people, in God, or in themselves. The message is clear and uplifting: in the face of life's complexities and uncertainties, the author chooses a resounding "still yes" as a testament to their enduring spirit and faith.

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