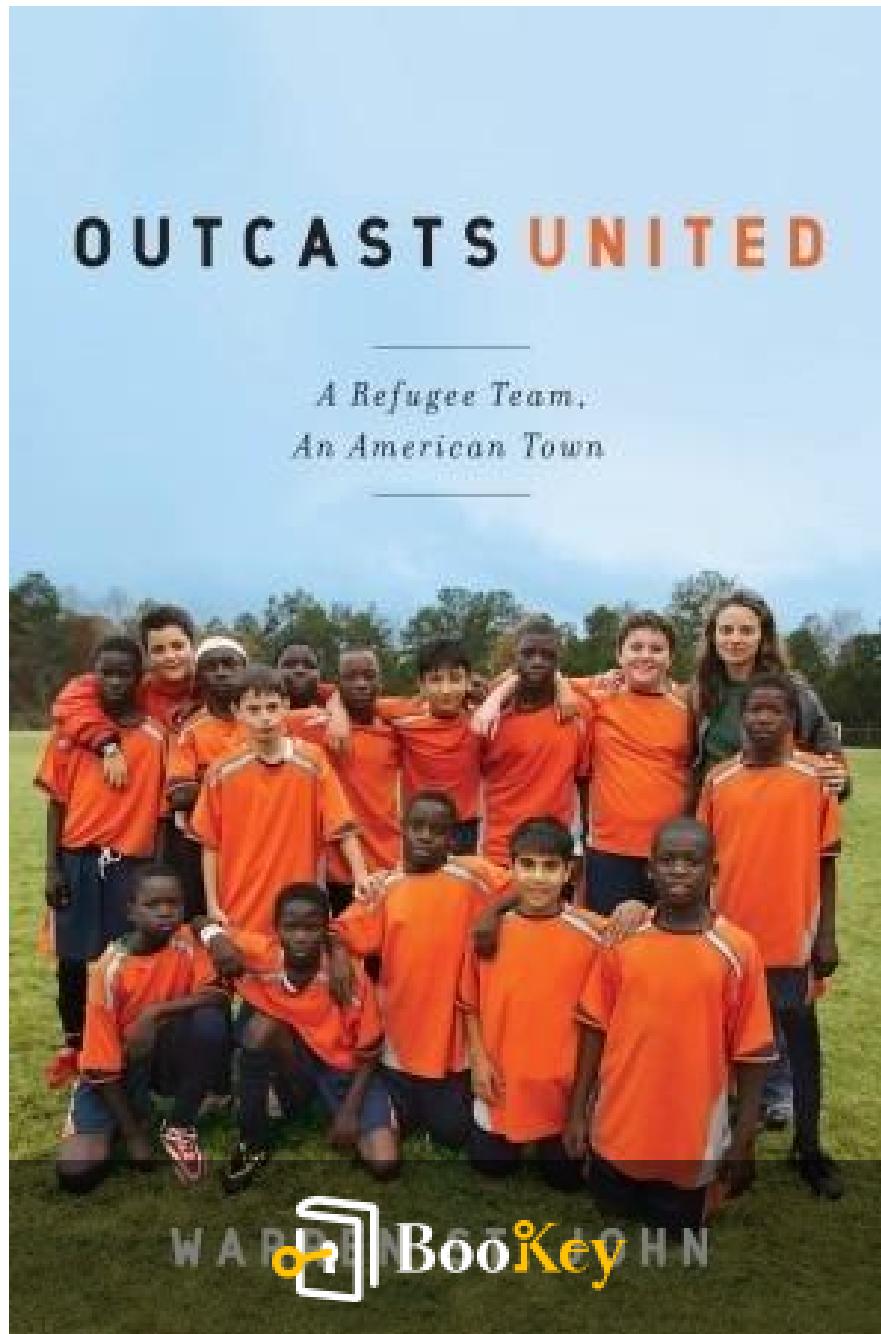


# Outcasts United PDF (Limited Copy)

Warren St. John



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# **Outcasts United Summary**

Unity through soccer in a diverse community.

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## About the book

In "Outcasts United," Warren St. John weaves a compelling tapestry of resilience and community through the inspiring story of a refugee soccer team in Clarkston, Georgia, a unique microcosm of contemporary America where cultures collide and identities forge anew. At the heart of this narrative is Luma Mufleh, a passionate coach who transforms a disparate group of young boys from war-torn countries into champions on the field, yet their triumphs go far beyond sport; they embody the struggles and aspirations of immigrants seeking belonging in a foreign land. Through vivid storytelling and poignant insights, St. John invites readers to explore themes of diversity, acceptance, and the unifying power of sport, illuminating how in the face of adversity, hope and community can thrive.

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## About the author

Warren St. John is a distinguished American author and journalist, best known for his ability to weave compelling narratives that highlight the human experience in contemporary society. Born and raised in New York City, St. John has cultivated a career that blends investigative reporting with insightful storytelling, evident in his celebrated works such as "Outcasts United," which chronicles the journey of a refugee soccer team in Georgia. With a background that includes writing for notable publications like The New York Times, St. John's keen observations and authentic portrayals of marginalized communities not only shed light on pressing social issues but also celebrate the resilience of the human spirit. His unique perspective and engaging writing style have garnered him a loyal readership, making him a prominent voice in today's literary landscape.

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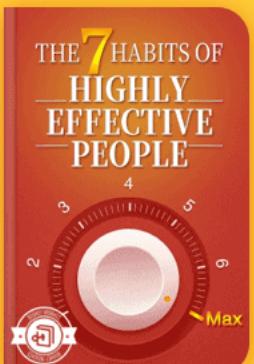
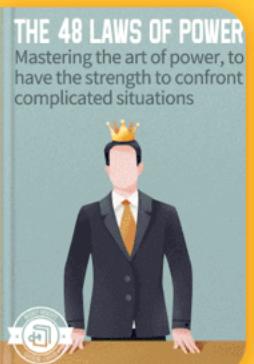
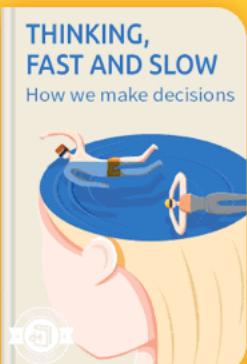
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# Chapter 1 Summary: 1. Luma

## ### Chapter Summary: Luma

The chapter begins by introducing Luma al-Mufleh, a young woman from a wealthy family in Amman, Jordan. Her name, which means "dark lips," was chosen by her parents, Hassan and Sawsan, more for its sound than its literal meaning. The al-Muflehs made their fortune by manufacturing rebar for concrete, allowing them to enjoy a comfortable life in a city characterized by its hills and desert breezes.

Luma's upbringing was a blend of affluence and traditional expectations. While her father, Hassan, expected her to conform to societal norms—marriage and loyalty to family—Luma demonstrated an early sense of independence and sensitivity. Her younger sister, Inam, noted the family's shared reluctance to reveal personal emotions, highlighting Luma's internal struggles to balance her gentle nature with societal expectations.

Luma attended the American Community School, where she flourished linguistically and socially, interacting with peers from diverse backgrounds, including diplomats' children. Her grandmother, Munawar, instilled in her a sense of responsibility toward the less fortunate, often inviting beggars into their home—a sharp contrast to Luma's sheltered life. At her grandmother's

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home, Luma would sneak out to play soccer with local boys, marking the beginning of her passion for sports, which was further nurtured at ACS.

Under the coaching of Rhonda Brown, Luma developed her athletic skills, albeit begrudgingly at first. Brown pushed her team to excel through rigorous training, fostering a work ethic in Luma that helped her face growing tensions between her liberal upbringing and the traditional Jordanian societal norms she was raised in. Luma longed for the freedom to engage in pickup soccer games and partake in a more assertive lifestyle similar to what Brown encouraged.

As her junior year at ACS ended, Luma's parents supported her decision to attend college in the United States. Initially excited for the opportunities that America presented, she enrolled at Hobart and William Smith College. However, an injury caused her to reassess her experience with the harsh winter climate, prompting her transfer to Smith College. There, Luma developed a close friendship with Misty Wyman, who, like many, was unaware of her Jordanian nationality due to Luma's impeccable English skills.

After returning to Jordan for a visit post-graduation, Luma felt alienated from her home country, recognizing the limitations on women's independence and rights compared to what she knew in the U.S. Disillusioned with the prospects in Jordan, she decided to remain in the

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United States permanently—a choice that devastated her father. Despite his disappointment and threat to cut her off financially, Luma stood firm in her desire for self-sufficiency and independence.

The abrupt financial and emotional separation from her family thrust Luma into a new reality where she had to fend for herself. Without the financial support she had taken for granted, she took on menial jobs, including washing dishes at a restaurant while navigating feelings of loneliness. She eventually moved aimlessly between towns, and in 1999, seeking familiarity in climate, Luma settled in Atlanta, despite her friends' concerns about fitting in as a Muslim woman from Jordan. Determined to carve her own path, she embraced her future in the U.S., leaving her past behind and rejecting the option to return home.

This chapter chronicles Luma's journey of self-discovery as she seeks autonomy and identity in a society far removed from her Jordanian roots, underscoring both the challenges and triumphs of her transition to life in America.

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## Critical Thinking

**Key Point:** Embrace your independence and pursue your passions.

**Critical Interpretation:** Luma's story is a powerful reminder that following your own path and passions, even when it means stepping away from expectations, can lead to profound personal growth. By choosing to pursue her love for soccer and her education in a foreign land, Luma illustrates that true self-discovery and fulfillment often require courage and resilience. This can inspire you to explore your own interests and not be confined by societal norms or familial expectations, encouraging you to forge a unique identity that aligns with your own values and dreams.

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## Chapter 2 Summary: 2. Beatrice and Her Boys

### ### Chapter 2: Beatrice and Her Boys

In 1997, as Luma celebrated her graduation from Smith College in Massachusetts, Beatrice Ziaty faced harrowing challenges in Monrovia, Liberia, where civil war ravaged the landscape and turned everyday life into a struggle for survival. Beatrice lived with her husband and four sons—Jeremiah, Mandela, Darlington, and Erich—amidst chaos wrought by rival rebel factions. Gunfire erupted regularly, and marauding soldiers were a constant threat. One fateful night, their home was invaded by men wielding machine guns, demanding money from Beatrice's husband, a former government paymaster. The chilling encounter marked the beginning of a frantic escape from the escalating violence.

To understand Beatrice's plight, it is crucial to grasp the historical context of Liberia and its tumultuous past. Established in 1821 as a colony for freed American slaves, Liberia had gone through cycles of political turmoil. After the violent coup led by Samuel Doe in 1980, the country was further destabilized by Charles Taylor's insurrection starting in the late 1980s, which specifically targeted the Krahn tribe, to which the Ziatys belonged.

When civil unrest peaked in the mid-'90s, Beatrice and her family found

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themselves trapped in Monrovia. As food and medical supplies dwindled and her youngest son fell gravely ill, Beatrice felt helpless, praying for Jeremiah's recovery. Tragedy struck when armed men broke into their home, and fearing for her family's safety, Beatrice fled with her two younger sons into the dangerous streets, haunted by the cries of her husband left behind.

After a harrowing ten-day trek, they reached a refugee camp in Ivory Coast, overwhelmed with thousands fleeing the carnage of war. Life there was precarious, rife with shortages of food and the risk of military recruitment for young men. Beatrice occupied herself with hope, applying for resettlement with the United Nations, all while trying to protect her sons and navigate the often cruel realities of life as a refugee. After five years filled with uncertainty, fortune smiled upon them. The Ziatys were accepted for resettlement to the United States.

Their journey began in September 2003, following a structured path typically afforded to refugees: they flew from Abidjan to Atlanta, Georgia, where they were assigned a caseworker from the International Rescue Committee. Upon arrival, they found that their new home in Clarkston was modest, equipped merely with basic necessities. Despite the disorienting transition, Beatrice quickly recognized the importance of providing for her family and began her job hunt immediately.

Securing a position as a maid at the Ritz-Carlton, Beatrice faced the dual

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burden of work and motherhood. With limited government support and mounting financial obligations, she navigated Atlanta's public transportation, striving to maintain a semblance of normalcy for her boys, who were attending school. However, as the nights darkened and fear seeped into her consciousness like an unwelcome guest, her protective instincts for her children intensified.

One evening, after a long shift at the hotel, Beatrice was accosted by a man demanding her purse. Though she managed to escape unscathed, this encounter deepened her sense of vulnerability in this unfamiliar environment. The fear of losing her children in a place where community support was absent loomed large in her mind. Unlike the safety net of acquaintances back in Liberia, Beatrice found herself isolated, worried about the influence of gangs nearby, and distrustful of the police, who she believed could take her children away if left unattended. Consequently, she emphasized repeatedly to her sons the importance of staying inside when they returned home from school, instilling in them the same fear that gripped her heart.

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## Chapter 3 Summary: 3. “Small Town ... Big Heart”

### ### Chapter 3: “Small Town... Big Heart”

#### **Background and Setting:**

Before the arrival of refugees, Clarkston, Georgia, was a quiet town with a population of around 7,200, often described by Mayor Lee Swaney as “just a sleepy little town by the railroad tracks.” Nestled outside Atlanta, Clarkston retained its small-town charm and independence, offering residents a tight-knit community where life was straightforward. Originally settled by farmers and railroad workers post-Civil War, the town's demographic was predominantly white and conservative, with local establishments like the neighborhood grocery store, Thriftown, and churches defining daily life.

#### **Growth and Change:**

The tranquility of Clarkston began to shift in the 1970s when the expansion of the Atlanta airport triggered economic growth, drawing new residents to the area. Investors purchased land for apartment complexes aimed at accommodating the influx of middle-class families drawn by job opportunities. However, by the 1980s, rising crime rates and the departure of white residents marked a decline in the town's appeal. As property values

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fell, landlords increasingly rented to lower-income tenants, leading to urban decay.

Enter the nonprofit resettlement agencies during the late 1980s, seeking affordable housing for refugees fleeing war and persecution. Organizations like the International Rescue Committee began facilitating the relocation of Southeast Asian refugees, followed by others from Bosnia, Kosovo, and numerous African nations. By 2000, a significant proportion of Clarkston's population was foreign-born, drastically transforming the community that had once felt so familiar to its original residents.

### **Cultural Transformation:**

As refugees settled into the town, visible changes occurred. The demographics of Clarkston shifted profoundly; residents now included individuals from diverse backgrounds, contributing to a culturally rich environment. Traditional establishments transformed as new businesses sprang up to cater to the varying needs of the population. Consequently, local institutions, including schools and churches, adapted to reflect this diversity, showcasing attendance and participation from families representing over fifty countries.

Yet, this cultural evolution did not come without conflict. The introduction of refugees sparked confusion and anxiety among longtime residents, who

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felt their safe, predictable lives being disrupted. As the refugee population grew, social tensions simmered beneath the surface, leading to resentment towards the resettlement agencies and refugee communities.

### **Emerging Tensions:**

The tensions escalated particularly around law enforcement interactions, where refugees often felt targeted by the local police. Police Chief Charlie "Chollie" Nelson viewed the driving patterns of refugees—many of whom struggled with language barriers—as alarming and often wrote tickets, aggravating feelings of discrimination within the community. This environment of misunderstanding prompted some refugees to take action against perceived injustices, often leveraging community solidarity in moments of distress.

The political landscape also changed with Swaney's election as mayor, reflecting a desire among some residents to restore "old Clarkston." His administration became a focal point amid rising tensions, particularly following the news that 700 Somali Bantu refugees were to be relocated to the town. This group, unfamiliar to the town's residents, included individuals who had faced significant trauma and required immense support to integrate into their new environment.

### **Community Reactions:**

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Fears about the Somali Bantu were compounded by insecurity amongst Clarkston residents regarding the lack of adequate support systems in place for these refugees. Councilwoman Karen Feltz voiced her concerns over the housing dispersal strategy for the Bantu population, highlighting the risks they would face in a community still fraught with racial tensions. Her worries mirrored the anxieties of many residents who preferred the status quo and were unwilling to adapt to the dramatic shifts in their town's demographics.

In a pivotal town hall meeting on March 31, 2003, residents gathered with mixed emotions, and the atmosphere quickly turned contentious. The gathering revealed a divide: while some passionately defended the arrival of refugees as a humanitarian obligation, others expressed deep-seated fears regarding their presence in Clarkston. The harsh reality of this conversation underscored the challenges of coexistence and the limits of empathy when confronted with significant social upheaval.

As residents confronted their fears and disagreements, the chapter concludes, setting the stage for deeper exploration of community dynamics against the backdrop of transformative change—a theme that will unfold as Clarkston navigates its new identity during a time of significant upheaval.

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## Chapter 4: 4. Alone Down South

In Chapter 4, titled "Alone Down South," we meet Luma al-Mufleh, who has recently relocated to Decatur, Georgia, close to the refugee community in Clarkston. Initially unfamiliar with the area, she quickly finds work as a waitress and seeks opportunities to coach soccer, drawing on the demanding training techniques she learned from her previous coach, Coach Brown. Luma applies for and secures the position to coach a fourteen-and-under girls' soccer team at the Decatur-DeKalb YMCA.

Luma's coaching style is intense and rigorous, causing frustration among some parents who are not accustomed to her demands for responsibility and discipline. Despite a challenging start in her first season—where the team lost every match—her efforts begin to bear fruit as dedicated players embrace her philosophy. By her third season, the team goes undefeated, showcasing the transformation Luma has facilitated. One of her players, Maritza Miller, describes the profound impact Luma had on her life, emphasizing that the lessons transcended soccer, fostering a sense of trust and accountability.

However, Luma grapples with deep homesickness for her family in Jordan, particularly after the death of her beloved grandmother, who remained a crucial connection to her heritage. In her sadness, she finds solace in driving around Atlanta, exploring the diverse neighborhoods and unexpectedly

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discovering a small Middle Eastern grocery store called Talars, which becomes a comforting haven for her amidst the stranger's culture.

Motivated to create a community space, Luma opens a café called Ashton's, where people can gather. Despite her hard work—spending sixteen-hour days balancing the café and coaching—business struggles lead her to question the sustainability of her venture. One day, while making a routine trip to Talars, she encounters a group of boys playing soccer in a nearby parking lot. Observing their passion for the game—an echo of her own childhood memories in Jordan—Luma feels a connection to these boys. Unlike the structured environment of her girls' team, the boys show a raw, intrinsic love for soccer, spurring Luma to consider creating a program for them.

Over time, she builds relationships with the boys and learns about their diverse backgrounds and the challenges they face as refugees. Aware that recreational sports are often beyond their families' financial reach, Luma is inspired to initiate a free soccer program. Although uncertain about the logistics and overwhelmed by her existing commitments, she perseveres. After discussing her idea with a mother of one of her players, the YMCA unexpectedly provides funding for fields and equipment, encouraging Luma to move forward.

She prepares to launch the program by designing flyers in multiple

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languages, including English, Vietnamese, Arabic, and French, announcing tryouts at the Clarkston Community Center. Despite her initial doubts about turnout, she decides to post these flyers throughout the local apartment complexes, igniting an exciting new chapter in her journey as she aims to provide a new opportunity for the refugee children of Clarkston.

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## Chapter 5 Summary: 5. The Fugees Are Born

### ### Chapter 5: The Fugees Are Born

In the small town of Clarkston, excitement buzzes around a new free soccer program, especially for eight-year-old Jeremiah Ziaty. He and his family—his mother Beatrice and older brothers Mandela and Darlington—recently immigrated from Liberia. After Beatrice was mugged shortly after their arrival, she became overly protective, keeping her sons confined to their apartment. Soccer, however, was Jeremiah's passion, and he was determined to persuade his mother to allow him to try out for the new soccer team.

The tryouts took place at the Clarkston Community Center, a gathering hub for the local refugee community, energetically run by Chris Holliday. Many refugees eagerly signed up for various programs, including soccer, wary yet hopeful of integrating into American society. Lack of interest from some board members regarding refugee-focused programs highlighted tensions within Clarkston, pitting long-time residents against newcomers.

Luma, a dedicated soccer coach, arrived at the community center unsure how the boys would respond to her flyers. On the other side of town, Jeremiah anticipated the tryouts, clutching a single oversized black sneaker

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while wearing flip-flops on his other foot. When he arrived at the field, he joined other boys who were initially skeptical about a female coach. Luma quickly dispelled their doubts by demonstrating her skills, earning their respect and establishing a connection with them.

Despite Beatrice's initial objections, Jeremiah's enthusiasm persuaded her to meet Luma. She expressed her concerns about safety and insisted on knowing how Luma would protect her son. Luma reassured her, promising to drive Jeremiah to and from practice and placing his well-being at the forefront.

As practices commenced, Luma focused on teaching the boys the fundamentals of soccer while avoiding delving into the traumas many carried from their homelands. Jeremiah's experiences hinted at deeper issues, highlighting how the war in Liberia had significantly affected his life. Through his and his teammates' stories, Luma recognized the lasting scars of their pasts, which often intertwined with inadequate education. Many of her players struggled to keep up educationally, and although schools offered English-as-a-second-language programs, they were often ill-prepared for the influx of refugee students.

Luma decided to implement a tutoring program before soccer practices, making attendance a requirement for playing on the team. This initiative aimed to enable the players not only to thrive on the field but also to succeed

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academically—a crucial step for their futures. The team adopted the name “Fugees,” a nod to their status as refugees.

Initially, the Fugees participated in a recreational league, facing challenges like gear mismatches and learning the basics of organized play. However, a significant hurdle surfaced when ethnic divisions among the players became evident. Boys clustered by background, demonstrating underlying prejudices. Luma understood the importance of uniting the team, emphasizing commonalities rather than differences.

Through her commitment to her players, Luma began to engage with their families, mainly single mothers like Beatrice. By translating documents, assisting with appointments, and making herself available for questions, Luma nurtured a sense of community. The gratitude she received from families reinforced her desire to help them navigate their challenges and illuminated her own struggles at her failing café, Ashton’s.

Luma’s perspective shifted dramatically when Jeremiah revealed that his family often went hungry due to the timing of their food stamps. Motivated by this revelation, she bought groceries for him, realizing just how much disparity existed in her community. This awareness led Luma to reconsider her future. She recognized her calling lay not only in coaching but also in creating a sustainable cleaning business that could employ refugee mothers—providing them fair jobs that honored their responsibilities to

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family life.

In conclusion, Luma made the pivotal decision to leave Ashton's entirely, shifting her focus to the Fugees and the community she had grown to love. The realization of her commitment—both to her players and their families—became a defining moment in her journey, affirming her resolve to succeed for their sake.

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## Critical Thinking

**Key Point:** The importance of community support in overcoming challenges.

**Critical Interpretation:** Imagine standing at the crossroads of your dreams and fears, where the weight of your background and struggles seems insurmountable. Like Jeremiah, who yearned to play soccer but was held back by uncertainty, you, too, may feel the pull of ambition stifled by circumstances. This chapter illustrates the transformative power of a community when individuals unite to support each other. As Luma stepped forward to guide the Fugees, she not only taught them the game but forged a strong bond of understanding and respect. This inspires you to seek out or cultivate your own community—one that lifts you up, recognizes your potential, and fights for your success. By investing in others and allowing them to invest in you, together you can shatter barriers, navigate challenges, and create pathways toward a brighter future.

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## **Chapter 6 Summary: 6. “Coach Says It’s Not Good”**

### **Chapter 6 Summary: “Coach Says It’s Not Good”**

On September 26, 2005, Bienvenue Ntwari, a weary twelve-year-old boy, stepped out of his family's new apartment in Clarkston, Georgia, marking their first morning in America. Bien and his family—his mother Generose, older brother Alex, and younger brother Ive—had recently traveled thousands of miles from a refugee camp in Mozambique, where they had sought refuge from the devastating civil war in their homeland of Burundi.

The Ntwari family's journey to the United States was fraught with hardship. Burundi, a small, impoverished nation, had been torn apart by ethnic conflict between the Tutsi and Hutu populations. Following political turmoil and the assassination of the first Hutu president, Generose, a Tutsi, had to flee with her boys to a refugee camp to escape the violence. After several years of waiting, they were granted resettlement, leading them to the unfamiliar landscape of Atlanta, Georgia, where they experienced the bewildering sights and sounds of an American city for the first time.

Upon arriving at their new apartment, Bien and his family were exhausted. Their makeshift home contained little more than mattresses on the floor, but it was a welcoming change from the refugee camp and represented a new

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beginning. The family quickly fell asleep, not fully grasping that they had finally reached safety and stability.

As the sun rose the next day, Bien ventured outside, where he encountered Grace, a boy his age from the Congo. Bien greeted Grace in English, struggling with the language but eager to connect. Grace explained that American kids were different; they had different styles and sometimes engaged in troubling behaviors. However, the conversation shifted to their shared love of soccer. Grace introduced Bien to the soccer practice organized for refugee kids, which was led by coach Luma, a woman dedicated to helping integrate newcomers.

At practice, Grace requested that Bien join. Despite Bien's limited English skills, Luma welcomed him to the team on the condition that he abide by her rules. Bien was filled with hope, realizing that he wasn't alone and could share his passion for soccer with other children like him.

Luma faced challenges as a coach, especially when integrating new players into the existing team dynamics. She implemented strategies to prevent cliques based on language or background, encouraging players to interact with one another and fostering an inclusive environment. As each boy aimed for Luma's approval, she became a maternal figure to them, trying to ensure every player felt valued and equally regarded, regardless of their background.

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The interactions between players led to humorous instances, such as when Jeremiah, the son of one of the families, insisted that he wouldn't eat pork because "Coach says it's not good." This reflected the influence Luma had over her players, as they began to adopt her values and preferences.

As Bien immersed himself in this new life and culture, he found solace in soccer and the camaraderie of the other children. Despite the challenges they faced—such as social adjustments, language barriers, and occasional hostility from local peers—the boys grew closer in their shared experiences, bonding over the joys and struggles of their new lives in America. Luma's coaching not only helped improve their skills but also provided a crucial support network as they navigated the complexities of their new environment.

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## Chapter 7 Summary: 7. Get Lost

In early 2006, tensions began to surface between the Fugees—a youth soccer team for refugees—and the Clarkston Community Center, where they practiced. Emanuel Ransom, a board member, pushed for increased payment from the Decatur-DeKalb YMCA, their primary sponsor, which led to a breakdown in relations and ultimately meant the Fugees were barred from using the center. This created an urgent challenge for Luma Mufleh, the passionate coach who tirelessly advocated for her players while juggling the demands of her sponsors and community members.

After the season concluded, Luma scrambled to secure a new field for her team, eventually finding an underutilized space behind Indian Creek Elementary School. However, the field was in poor condition, littered with debris, and lacked any proper soccer infrastructure, which deeply frustrated Luma. She longed for a well-maintained environment where her players wouldn't face the distractions of a busy communal space. Despite these challenges, the location was beneficial in terms of accessibility for the refugee families living nearby and offered free use, making it the only viable option.

Luma's anger at the lack of support from organizations like the YMCA, and her awareness of the disparities faced by her players compared to more privileged teams, spurred her to seek help. Enter Tracy Ediger, who had a

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deep-rooted commitment to serving the refugee community. Hailing from Nebraska, Tracy had moved to Georgia to work with refugee families and had developed a strong connection with them through her experiences at Jubilee Partners, a facility focused on aiding refugees. Over time, she and Luma bonded over their shared mission to create a welcoming and supportive environment for the refugee youth.

Tracy initially hesitated to join Luma's program due to her unfamiliarity with urban life, but after witnessing the joy and transformation in the players during a game, she felt compelled to lend her skills. Eventually, she agreed to become the Fugees' team manager without a salary, motivated by her commitment to the cause. With Tracy on board, Luma hoped to enhance the program through better organization and support systems. As summer turned to autumn, tryouts for the Fugees' fall season were announced, marking a new chapter for the team as they prepared to overcome the considerable obstacles in their path.

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## Chapter 8: 8. “I Want to Be Part of the Fugees!”

### ### Chapter 8: "I Want to Be Part of the Fugees!"

In the community of Clarkston, summer was a sluggish experience for many, particularly for youth like Bien, who spent his days devoid of excitement without soccer. Bien, a determined participant, eagerly anticipated the Fugees soccer team tryouts, confident in his place as a returning player. Having previously played soccer on makeshift fields in a refugee camp in Mozambique, he was awed by the Clarkston Community Center's facilities and had a nostalgic moment when discovering the new tryout location behind Indian Creek Elementary. The sight of the field reminded him of home in Africa.

As word spread about the tryouts, excitement bubbled among the kids in Clarkston, pushing many to start training, jogging, and engaging in more intense pickup games. The Fugees team was more than just a free soccer program—it provided a structured environment where young players could showcase their skills and escape from the dangers of their surroundings. Luma, the dedicated coach, aimed to form three teams: Under Thirteen, Under Fifteen, and Under Seventeen, each comprised of a mix of experienced and new players. Luma understood the unique dynamics within each group; she needed a balanced roster that included well-adjusted boys to

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mentor those from more troubled backgrounds.

Luma's vision involved instilling discipline and teamwork within her players, who came from various countries, including Liberia, Ethiopia, Bosnia, and Kosovo. Many of the boys faced ongoing challenges stemming from their experiences with war, displacement, and the adjustment to life in a new country. Luma acknowledged that a third of her team should be stable young men who could support their peers, another third consisted of dependable but troubled kids, and the last group comprised boys in dire need of her guidance.

The Under Seventeen team was seen as the most squared away, with fewer discipline issues. In contrast, the Under Fifteen team, filled with promising talent, struggled with commitment, particularly surrounding Luma's rules, including the requirement for short haircuts. Players like Prince, who sported stylish braids, symbolized the cultural tensions they navigated between their heritage and the expectations of American society.

The tryouts began on a hot August day, and Luma was met with a motley crew of boys dressed in various casual attire, some even in shoes inappropriate for play. As they contested the rough, dusty field, Luma faced a challenging environment and a grim outlook, but she remained resolute. She called out her expectations—strict attendance and commitment to both academics and soccer—while ensuring each boy understood the

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consequences of missing practices.

Luma emphasized that the final team roster would be carefully selected based on both talent and adherence to her structured rules. After distributing contracts outlining expected behaviors and responsibilities—no smoking,

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# Chapter 9 Summary: 9. Figure It Out So You Can Fix It

## ### Chapter 9: Figure It Out So You Can Fix It

In this chapter, tensions rise within the Under Fifteen soccer team as a hair rule imposed by Coach Luma becomes a point of contention among the players. Luma, a tough but caring coach, has mandated that team members must keep their hair shorter than hers to promote discipline and to prevent any potential backlash linked to hairstyles associated with gang culture in their community. As a result, Prince, a talented player, refuses to comply and subsequently drops out, leaving the team struggling to fill the void amidst a shortage of skilled players after several veterans had moved away from Clarkston.

Mandela Ziaty and Fornatee Tarpeh, both Liberian boys on the team, voice their frustrations over Prince's departure and the hair rule, which they feel is tearing apart their camaraderie. While Fornatee expresses his loyalty to Luma because of her personal support during difficult times, he also grapples with his allegiance to his fellow Liberians, which he feels is more profound than his relationships with other teammates from different backgrounds. This internal conflict is exacerbated by Fornatee's recent family struggles, as his father is recovering from serious injuries, raising worries about their financial stability.

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As the team suffers under the heat of Georgia's late summer, their rigorous practices consist of brutal conditioning drills and skill training, often pushing them to their limits. Luma's insistence on discipline compels players to run laps under her watchful eye, a punishment for misbehavior that they initially try to manipulate but learn the hard way isn't a viable option. Her approach toughens them, as she believes many are not accustomed to the rigors of responsibility they need to embrace.

Meanwhile, Prince's presence still looms large; his casual visits to practices serve as distractions for players like Fornatee and Mandela, who are pressured to choose between following their coach's directives or socializing with friends. As they begin to test Luma's authority, Mandela's attitude worsens, leading to escalating disrespect. Despite her challenges, Luma believes firmly in the importance of self-discipline and growth, instructing her players that they must learn to figure out their issues in order to fix them.

Mandela's struggle with self-identity and the stigma of being a refugee becomes central to his character as he inadvertently faces issues of reputation and belonging. Desiring to distance himself from the label of "refugee," he often feels out of place even among his teammates. His mother, Beatrice, instills a strong sense of heritage and responsibility, reminding him constantly of their past hardships in Liberia and as refugees. As Luma and Beatrice navigate their roles in Mandela's life, they work

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together to mentor him, aiming to steer him away from detrimental behaviors while instilling respect for their sacrifices.

By the chapter's conclusion, both Luma and Beatrice are portrayed as stalwart figures aiming to stabilize their community of boys amid the challenges they face on and off the field. The chapter underscores themes of identity, community, and the tough love needed to cultivate resilience in young, vulnerable individuals striving to carve out a positive path in their new lives.

Key Element	Description
Chapter Title	Figure It Out So You Can Fix It
Main Conflict	Tension regarding hair rule imposed by Coach Luma.
Coach's Authority	Luma enforces discipline through a hair rule to prevent gang affiliation perceptions.
Key Players	Prince, Mandela Ziaty, Fornatee Tarpeh
Prince's Departure	Prince quits the team due to the hair rule, leaving a skills gap.
Team Dynamics	Frustration among players, loyalty conflicts, and struggles with identity.
Fornatee's Dilemma	Struggles between loyalty to Luma and commitment to his Liberian roots amid family issues.
Training Conditions	Intense workouts in Georgia's summer heat, highlighting discipline and endurance.

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<b>Key Element</b>	<b>Description</b>
Mandela's Challenges	Struggles with self-identity and stigma of being a refugee, influenced by family expectations.
Mentorship	Luma and Beatrice guide Mandela, conveying values of respect, resilience, and responsibility.
Conclusion Themes	Identity, community, tough love, and resilience in the face of adversity.

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# Chapter 10 Summary: 10. Meltdown

## ### Chapter 10: Meltdown

In the small community of Clarkston, Georgia, Luma Mufleh faced logistical challenges as she prepared her diverse soccer team, the Fugees, for their first regular-season game of the Under Fifteens league. The local Indian Creek Elementary field was unsuitable for scheduled matches, so she arranged to hold games at Ebster Field in Decatur, just a brief drive away. To ensure all players arrived on time, Luma hired a YMCA bus and instructed her team to meet at the Clarkston Public Library an hour before game time. She emphasized the importance of punctuality, warning that anyone late would be left behind.

Their first opponent, the Gwinnett Phoenix, represented a stark contrast to the Fugees. Based just ten miles away in the predominantly white and affluent town of Lilburn, the Phoenix boasted a rich soccer tradition, including numerous state championships. On game day, while the opposing team enjoyed the support of a large enthusiastic crowd, the Fugees' sidelines remained empty, raising concerns about their competitiveness.

As the scheduled game time neared, delays with the bus led to significant anxiety among the Fugees. Luma anticipated the bus arriving by 1:15 p.m.,

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but it didn't arrive until after 1:30. Only nine players were on board, leaving the team short two players. Mandela Ziaty, one of the more experienced Fugee members, was among those present. Realizing Fornatee and a couple of others had not made it, Mandela's frustration grew. The oppressive heat and humidity added to the risk of fatigue without the option for substitutions.

Seeking a solution, Mandela borrowed a cell phone to frantically call teammates. When he reached Fornatee, he discovered he was at home watching TV instead of en route to the match. Mandela asked for a ride to retrieve Fornatee and a couple of others, weighing the risks of bending the rules against the need for a full team. Encouraged by team manager Tracy, Mandela and the narrator rushed to collect the missing players.

By 1:55 p.m., they returned just in time for warm-ups, with the three boys sprinting onto the field. However, Luma remained distant, sitting far from the team, which puzzled players and stoked tension. Her unexpected silence was a protest against what she perceived as their irresponsibility, stemming from previous lapses in discipline during practice and team obligations.

The game commenced despite Luma's absence. The Phoenix quickly scored a penalty goal, igniting their supporters' cheers. As the Fugees struggled on the field, they were penalized repeatedly, resulting in mounting frustration and another goal against them. Nonetheless, Mandela found a moment of

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brilliance and scored, which briefly sparked a glimmer of hope. Unfortunately, as the first half concluded, his teammate Fornatee hesitated during a promising chance, resulting in a missed opportunity for a crucial goal.

With Luma providing no guidance, the Fugees reconvened during halftime. Tensions culminated as Fornatee voiced his frustration, insisting they needed their coach's direction. However, Kanue Biah, a dedicated veteran player, urged the team to focus on playing together and not rely solely on Luma's support. Fornatee rallied his teammates, attempting to shift their mindset to face the challenge ahead.

The second half saw no improvement; the Phoenix continued their dominance, scoring repeatedly while the Fugees spiraled deeper into disarray. Fornatee, overwhelmed with emotion and frustration, received a second yellow card and was ejected from the game. As the referee's whistle sounded to signal the end of a painful 7-2 loss, the Fugees sat in stunned silence.

Afterward, as they regrouped, Luma explained her absence—a demonstration of their own lack of commitment and discipline. Frustrated with their tardiness and casual approach to practices, she felt abandoning the team was a necessary lesson in accountability. She ultimately made a heart-wrenching decision: cancel the Under Fifteens' season. With no more

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games, practices, or tutoring sessions on the horizon, the fate of the Fugees hung in the balance, leaving their future uncertain.

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## Critical Thinking

**Key Point:** The importance of accountability and commitment in teamwork

**Critical Interpretation:** Imagine standing on the field, feeling the weight of your team's hopes and dreams on your shoulders. Chapter 10 of 'Outcasts United' serves as a powerful reminder that true success, whether in sports or life, hinges on the responsibility each member carries. As you reflect on Mandela's frustration and Luma's decision to step away, consider how accountability shapes not just individual performance, but the collective spirit of a group. Each time you honor your commitments—by showing up, being punctual, or supporting your teammates—you contribute to an environment where everyone can thrive. This chapter challenges you to ask yourself: Are you fully committed to your team, your goals, and your community? Embracing this mindset can transform setbacks into opportunities for growth, pushing you and those around you toward success.

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## Chapter 11 Summary: 11. “How Am I Going to Start All Over?”

### ### Chapter 11 Summary: "How Am I Going to Start All Over?"

In this chapter, we delve into the life of Kanue Biah, a fifteen-year-old Liberian immigrant facing a pivotal moment in his young life. Following Luma's decision to cancel the Under Fifteens' soccer season due to issues with player commitment and behavior, Kanue feels a profound sense of loss. Having emerged from a turbulent background—his family fleeing war-torn Liberia and navigating life through a refugee upbringing—soccer has been a lifeline for him in the U.S. Kanue's uncle, Barlea, works tirelessly to support them, leaving little room for Kanue to pursue leisure activities, including soccer.

Despite his precarious home life, Kanue has become a resilient young man who contributes to household responsibilities, including cooking meals based on the recipes passed down by his great-aunt. His experience at Avondale Middle School has been challenging; while fluency in English helps, his accent subjects him to teasing. Yet, Kanue responds to adversity with grace, seeking to improve through open communication instead of resentment.

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Upon discovering the Fugees—a soccer team for refugee children—Kanue embraces the opportunity to connect with peers and channel his energy into soccer. He joins summer practices, knowing that team spots are not guaranteed. Over time, he earns a position as goalkeeper and impresses his teammates with his tenacity. When given the chance to play as a striker due to a shortage of players, he scores his first goal, further fueling his dedication to the team.

As the chapter progresses, the emotional weight of Luma's cancellation weighs heavily on Kanue. He grapples with the idea of starting anew in a higher age group, the Under Seventeens, feeling a strong bond with his teammates who have become like family. A rainy day further compounds his gloom, but a call from Luma reignites his hope. The two embark on a quiet, contemplative outing to see a movie, during which Kanue musters the courage to plead for the team's season to be saved.

In a heartfelt conversation, Kanue presents his case to Luma, arguing that not all players should be punished for a few misbehaving teammates. He proposes a plan to recruit new players who will adhere to team rules, highlighting his leadership and commitment to the Fugees. Luma, although mindful of the challenges posed by forming a new team in a short time, agrees to consider Kanue's plan and the possibility of holding tryouts.

The chapter concludes as Kanue takes initiative, reaching out to potential

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players to form a new roster, while Luma manages her other teams. As the Under Thirteens prepare for their own matches, they feel the pressure of expectations set by the cancellation of the Fifteens. Luma addresses their lackluster performance, emphasizing the need to play hard, reflecting her high standards and commitment to fostering discipline.

The chapter illustrates Kanue's growth and resilience, as well as the pivotal role soccer plays in his integration into American life, providing him with a sense of belonging, purpose, and hope for the future.

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## Chapter 12: 12. Alex, Bien, and Ive

In this chapter, we are introduced to Bien, his brothers Alex and Ive, their infant sister Alyah, and their mother Generose, who have settled in a modest two-bedroom apartment after fleeing their home country of Burundi a year and a half earlier. The living conditions reflect their recent arrival: the walls remain sparse except for a personal photograph and a child's abandoned mural. They possess donated furnishings, including old sofas and a basic TV setup, which paints a picture of their economic struggles.

Generose's family demonstrates their cultural heritage through food, serving hearty meals such as rice with cassava leaves, stewed greens, and occasionally meat during special occasions. This act of hospitality speaks volumes about their tradition and Generose's desire to maintain her roots despite the challenges they face in a new country.

As Bien and Alex, the older brothers, navigate daily life, we learn that the language barrier poses challenges. Bien, at thirteen, is adapting more quickly to English than Alex, who is fifteen and shyer, communicating primarily in Swahili. Seven-year-old Ive, however, has already become fluent without an accent, often bridging gaps when interactions with English speakers arise. This dynamic showcases the pressures and responsibilities the brothers carry in their immigrant experience while highlighting the varying adaptative capacities within the family.

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Generose is portrayed as a nurturing yet burdened mother. Recently unemployed due to the birth of Alyah, she grapples with the harsh realities of supporting her family. Previous tragedies, including the loss of a daughter in a refugee camp, weigh heavily on her fears regarding child safety and her

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## Chapter 13 Summary: 13. Trying Again

### ### Chapter 13: Trying Again

The chapter opens with the anticipation surrounding the tryouts for the revival of the Under Fifteens soccer team, scheduled for Monday afternoon at the field behind Indian Creek Elementary. Kanue, Mandela, and Natnael, eager to see their team restored, patiently wait for their coach, Luma. However, a mix-up in the start times leaves them stretching and practicing on their own. As the atmosphere builds, other players from nearby Fugee teams arrive, intrigued by the potential of a new lineup.

At five minutes to six, Luma arrives, bringing a bag of soccer balls with her. She observes a mix of familiar faces—four current players and two who had previously practiced with the Fugees—alongside many new prospects. Notably absent is Fornatee, who feels insulted by the need to try out again despite his previous experience.

Luma begins by gathering the newcomers' names and dividing them into two teams for a scrimmage, deciding merely to observe. She notices one boy in sandals, and surprisingly realizes they wear nearly the same shoe size. Offering him her soccer shoes, she settles down to watch the game unfold.

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As the scrimmage progresses, Luma senses the challenges ahead. She expresses uncertainty about the team's chances, worrying that a lack of practices may lead to failure. The boys, however, play with determination, showcasing their skills and teamwork. Kanue leads the charge, while the Muganga brothers display solid defense. Mandela scores a goal, and Natnael impresses with his passing. Luma jots down notes, scrambling to determine positions for her team as the chemistry among the players develops.

By the scrimmage's end, Luma gathers everyone to address the reality of their situation. Acknowledging her limited experience with most of the players, she lays out the daunting prospect of competing against teams with far more experience.

Kanue, ever optimistic, suggests they could squeeze in an extra practice early on Saturday morning, and Luma agrees to meet them again on Thursday for future practice sessions. She stresses the commitment and effort required to compete effectively, warning that her coaching approach will not soften.

With a sense of relief, Kanue feels a renewed sense of purpose. He is determined to rally the team for their next meeting and shares his gratitude with Luma, vowing to respect her guidance and the team's objectives.

As the chapter concludes, the young characters are on the brink of a new

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season filled with challenges, yet united by hope and determination, ready to face whatever comes their way.

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## Chapter 14 Summary: 14. The Fifteens Fight

### ### Chapter 14: The Fifteens Fight

In this chapter, we witness the challenges faced by a diverse group of boys who make up the Fugees' Under Fifteens soccer team. These young players, hailing from various conflict-ridden nations such as Liberia, Kosovo, Sudan, Somalia, and Afghanistan, bring a wealth of raw talent but struggle to bond due to their different backgrounds and shared experiences of trauma.

With just nine days until their first match, Coach Luma plans to foster unity among the boys by throwing them into a competitive scrimmage against the more seasoned Under Seventeen team. This tactic aims not only to test their skills but also to gauge their reactions under pressure, which is critical in determining their potential as a cohesive unit. Luma is particularly concerned about Mandela, a talented but troubled player, who feels isolated after the exclusion of his friends from the team due to a controversial hair rule. His discontent manifests through belligerent behavior, which Luma hopes will change as he adjusts to the dynamics of the new team.

On the day of the scrimmage, Fornatee, another skilled player who had skipped practices due to pride and loyalty to his friends, seeks redemption by attempting to rejoin the team. Despite his eagerness, he finds himself

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rebuffed by Luma when he tries to assert his presence. While he watches from the sidelines, his friends have moved on, leaving him to ponder his next steps.

The scrimmage unfolds energetically, with the Under Fifteens surprising everyone, including themselves, by tying the game 1-1 at halftime, fueled by Mandela's determination. However, as the match progresses, the experience and physicality of the Under Seventeens quickly turn the tide in their favor, leading to a score of 3-2 by the end. Luma's mixed feelings emerge: she is proud of her team's effort and spirit but troubled by individual outbursts, particularly from Kanue, whose frustration led him to a reckless tackle.

After the game, Luma acknowledges the need for discipline, and her concerns linger about the team's cohesive existence without Mandela's core friendships and Fornatee's absence. Meanwhile, the chaotic environment around their usual practice space at Indian Creek weighs heavily on Luma, who dreams of a safer, inviting venue for her players.

Determined to find a better home for the Fugees, Luma approaches Mayor Lee Swaney to advocate for the use of Armistead Field in Milam Park, an underutilized location that would provide the grass surface and security her team deserves. Despite providing a compelling argument about keeping youths engaged in positive activities, the mayor remains apprehensive about potential backlash from local residents and suggests presenting her case to

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the City Council. Luma resolves to take her request to the upcoming meeting, driven by the belief that the Fugees deserve a chance to thrive in a supportive environment.

In this chapter, the struggles of newcomers to adapt and bond in a competitive atmosphere highlight the deeper themes of belonging and resilience among young refugees facing their own personal battles. The urgency of Luma's mission encapsulates her role not only as a coach but as a guardian and advocate for these boys seeking stability and success in a new land.

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# Chapter 15 Summary: 15. Go Fugees!

## Chapter 15: Go Fugees!

On the morning of their first game back after a suspension, Luma awoke in her modest Decatur apartment, overwhelmed by anxiety. Her stomach churned as she realized the pressure on her players — Kanue, Natnael, and particularly Mandela — who had invested their hopes in this reformed team. Luma feared that her decision to keep the season alive might lead to their humiliation.

The game was scheduled for Ebster Field, and the weather was perfect. As the white YMCA bus rolled in, Luma felt a sense of relief when the entire roster of the Fugees arrived, eager to take the field. Leading warm-ups, Kanue ensured the boys were ready, despite their lack of prior experience. The opposing AFC Lightning, a well-established team from a wealthier suburb, presented a stark challenge with their larger, older players and supportive entourage. The Fugees, on the other hand, only had a few fans cheering them on.

Before the match began, Luma conveyed her simple game plan: maintain composure, avoid cursing, and refrain from tackling from behind. After a short team huddle, the boys shouted "Go Fugees!" in unison, rallying their

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spirits.

The match started uneasily, with the Fugees struggling to connect. A turnover led to an early goal for the Lightning, leaving the Fugees down 1–0. However, Kanue's leadership and encouragement helped lift their spirits. Soon after, Mandela broke through the defenses, scoring the equalizer, followed by a skillful assist leading to another goal. By halftime, the Fugees led 2–1, much to Luma's relief.

During halftime, Luma provided tactical insights, emphasizing the need for improved defense against the Lightning's repeated attacking strategies. She encouraged her players to adapt their game, particularly Mandela, emphasizing the importance of unpredictability in their tactics.

Energized, the Fugees returned to the field for the second half. Mandela, closely marked, initially frustrated his teammates but ultimately embraced Luma's guidance and assisted Muamer in scoring a crucial goal. The Fugees extended their lead to 3–1, followed by another outstanding individual effort from Mandela, making it 4–2.

As the clock wound down, the Lightning mounted a comeback and narrowed the score to 4–3 with a well-placed shot. The pressure intensified, culminating in a dangerous free kick for the Lightning. Just when it seemed the Fugees might falter, Kanue executed a remarkable defensive play,

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clearing the ball and securing victory as the referee's whistle ended the game.

Luma felt a wave of relief wash over her as her players celebrated their unexpected triumph together. She praised their performance and expressed her doubts leading up to the game, admitting that she hadn't expected such a spirited fight. In response, the Fugees applauded their coach, forming a bond strengthened by this moment of shared accomplishment, setting a hopeful tone for the season ahead.

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## Chapter 16: 16. Gunshots

### ### Chapter 16 Summary: Gunshots

On a seemingly ordinary Sunday morning around ten-forty, gunshots echoed through the neighborhood surrounding Indian Creek Elementary. What initially sounded like small firecrackers turned to horror when Tito, a recent recruit to the Under Fifteens soccer team known as the Fugees, was shot in the face. The confusing circumstances of the shooting involved Tito and his fellow Liberian friends encountering an African American teenager, which escalated into an argument centered on territory and gang affiliations. Tito, a member of a self-identified gang called the Africans, inadvertently crossed into what was seen as the territory of the American teenager's gang. The teenager pulled out a small-caliber pistol and opened fire, injuring Tito before fleeing back home.

When the police arrived shortly after the incident, they encountered the teenager's mother attempting to cover up for her son by claiming he had been sleeping all morning. However, eyewitnesses implicated her son, leading to his arrest by the DeKalb County police. Miraculously, Tito survived the gunshot; the bullet struck his chin and tore through his jaw, narrowly missing critical areas that could have proved fatal.

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In the aftermath, Luma, the Fugees' coach, was profoundly shaken. Concerned for the safety of her players, she recognized that Tito's involvement in the shooting could lead to potential gang retaliation, prompting her to cancel practices and warn her players to stay away from the field. Alarmingly, Tito's claims about being part of a gang cast a shadow

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## Chapter 17 Summary: 17. The “Soccer People”

### ### Chapter 17 Summary: The “Soccer People”

On a pivotal Tuesday night in October, Luma, the head of a local youth soccer program, stood before the Clarkston City Council, anxiously advocating for the use of Armistead Field in the town park for her team, the Fugees. With local fields at Clarkston High School and Georgia Perimeter College fully booked, and the Clarkston Community Center out of the question due to conflicts, Luma was determined to secure a safe practice space for her players, especially after the traumatic events surrounding Tito’s shooting near Indian Creek Elementary. Luma believed that allowing her players to practice in unsafe or uncontrolled environments was unacceptable, fearing for their safety.

As the meeting commenced with the Pledge of Allegiance and the usual committee reports, Luma finally had her chance to present. She approached the lectern and introduced her program, requesting permission to use Armistead Field from Monday to Thursday evenings. When questioned by the council about why she needed this space, Luma explained the deteriorating conditions at Indian Creek and the unsafe environment created by unsupervised play.

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The council responded with a barrage of inquiries regarding logistics, costs, and the demography of her players — emphasizing if they were local and whether there would be supervision. Reassured by Luma's confidence that she would always oversee practices and provide necessary equipment and insurance, the council remained skeptical. A particularly pointed question about whether the team was mixed raised an uncomfortable silence, as Luma clarified that she only had a boys' team at the moment.

However, the atmosphere shifted when Mayor Swaney, having been approached by Luma previously, chimed in. He noted that the lower end of Armistead Field remained unused and expressed his support for giving Luma's program a chance. Encouraging the council to see the potential benefits for local kids, he proposed allowing a trial period for the soccer practices. This suggestion transformed the council's tone, leading to a constructive discussion among members.

Ultimately, the council agreed to initiate a six-month trial for Luma's use of Armistead Field, which passed unanimously. With gratitude, Luma accepted their decision, her team, the Fugees, now had a temporary home to practice and focus on their passion for soccer.

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## Critical Thinking

**Key Point:** Advocacy for Community Support

**Critical Interpretation:** By witnessing Luma's unwavering determination to advocate for her team's right to a safe practice space, you can be inspired to take initiative in your own community.

Whether it's addressing local concerns, standing up for vulnerable groups, or pursuing opportunities that benefit others, Luma's journey teaches the importance of using your voice to effect change. Her ability to navigate challenges with confidence reminds you that advocating for what is right not only builds safe environments but also fosters a sense of belonging and unity within your community.

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## Chapter 18 Summary: 18. Playing on Grass

### ### Chapter 18 Summary: Playing on Grass

In this chapter, Luma initiates a crucial conversation with the younger members of her soccer team, the Fugees, about the dangers of gang involvement in their community. After Tito's shooting, Luma seeks to understand the motives that draw young boys into gangs—responses include race, money, protection, and the desire to assert masculinity. In an earnest effort to educate her players, she distinguishes gangs from the Fugees by explaining that gangs often resort to violence, and membership can trap them into dangerous lifestyles with life-threatening consequences.

Holding meetings for both the Under Thirteens and Under Fifteens teams, Luma engages the boys with a compelling question: "How many here would know where to join a gang in their neighborhood?" The candid answers reflect a troubling awareness among them about gang culture. Luma illustrates the manipulative tactics gangs might use—offering money, electronics, or other rewards to get young boys to carry out illegal tasks, seducing them into gang life.

As the conversation deepens, Luma evokes the boys' understanding of street dynamics and safety, sharing her own perspective. She openly discusses the

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reality of being attacked and the temptation of seeking protection through gang affiliation, but urges them to consider safer alternatives—reporting incidents, informing adults, and choosing different paths. The boys recognize the truth in her words, acknowledging the shared experiences that come with growing up in a tough environment.

Realizing that action is needed beyond just words, Luma announces a significant change: the Fugees will relocate their practices from Indian Creek Elementary to Milam Park, a space that offers safety and a chance to set a positive example in their community. The lush, green field contrasts sharply with their previous dusty practice area, providing not only a newfound sense of pride but also a responsibility to uphold.

She emphasizes that maintaining respect in this new environment is crucial—no loud behavior or littering. The excitement among the boys about their new home is palpable as they witness the natural beauty surrounding Milam Park, including flocks of geese and even deer, which briefly distract them during practices. The wilderness of their new field encapsulates a moment of wonder as they adapt to this fresh chapter.

In summary, this chapter underscores not only the boys' realities and the perils of gang culture but also Luma's commitment to guiding them towards healthier choices through soccer, camaraderie, and community responsibility. The transition to Milam Park symbolizes hope and the

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opportunity to redefine their identities away from the threats that loom in their lives.

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# Chapter 19 Summary: 19. Who Are the Kings?

## ### Chapter 19: Who Are the Kings?

In this chapter, the narrative delves into the personal and cultural backgrounds of Qendrim Bushi, a talented midfielder on the Under Thirteen Fugees soccer team made up of refugee boys from various countries. The chapter begins with a reflection on their soccer idols—global stars like David Beckham and Ronaldo—contrasting them with Qendrim's idol, his grandfather, a famed goalkeeper and referee in Kosovo. His grandfather's legacy lives on through a well-worn soccer rule book that the Bushi family cherishes, representing their connection to Kosovo, a country torn apart by ethnic violence in the 1990s.

The Bushi family's journey begins in Kacanik, Kosovo, where they ran a successful grocery business. However, the violent conflicts led by the ethnic struggles between the predominantly Albanian Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) and the Serb-dominated Yugoslav army devastated their lives. As NATO intervened with airstrikes in 1999, Kacanik became a battleground, resulting in loss of life and destruction, including that of the Bushi family's home and livelihood. Xhalal Bushi, Qendrim's father, managed to evacuate his family ahead of the fighting, but was ultimately forced to flee on foot back to Macedonia where they spent months in a refugee camp before being

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granted asylum in the United States.

Upon their arrival in Georgia, Qendrim's adaptation to a new culture and language was challenging. His initial isolation began to change when he made friends with other refugee children, forming a tight-knit community largely centered around soccer. The Fugees soccer team became not just a source of joy for him but a grounding force, helping him connect with peers from diverse backgrounds.

As the Under Thirteens improved in their games, camaraderie blossomed among the players, leading to moments of unity and fun—their synchronized running and chants during practice becoming an emblem of their teamwork and brotherhood. Their playful chant, “Who are the kings?” followed by a spirited response, “The Fugees!” further signifies their growing bond.

Meanwhile, Luma, the coach, learns to leverage the unique talents of her players, discovering strategic advantages such as hiding a strong player, Bien, in defense before switching him to offense to surprise opponents. Each player brings distinct strengths; for instance, Jeremiah is versatile on both ends of the field, while Josiah excels in scoring. However, the team still struggles with their goalkeeping, since Eldin and Mafoday, despite their dedication and good-natured personalities, lack the intimidating presence typically expected of a goalkeeper. Luma's challenge is to coach around their weaknesses while fostering the strengths of her unconventional players.

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The chapter encapsulates themes of resilience, unity, and the power of sports to bridge divides, illustrating how a group of boys from disparate backgrounds can transform their challenges into shared triumphs on and off the soccer field.

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## Chapter 20: 20. Showdown at Blue Springs

### ### Chapter 20: Showdown at Blue Springs

The Under Thirteens soccer team, the Fugees, arrived at the home field of the Blue Springs Liberty Fire in Loganville, Georgia—an area known for its predominantly white population. As the players disembarked, coach Luma noticed the stark contrast in the teams, reminding her player Mafoday that their opponents rarely faced teams with black players. Despite this awareness of racial dynamics, Luma urged her team to focus on the game.

The Liberty Fire, boasting a solid 3–2 record, had recently triumphed with a staggering 10–0 victory over another team. The early morning timing of the match left the Fugees groggy, especially since Luma had adjusted their transportation to accommodate the chilly weather, ensuring the players were picked up from their homes. However, Jeremiah was notably absent, delayed by his mother's night shift, which forced Luma to wake him just in time to get to the bus.

As the game commenced, it quickly became clear that the Fugees were struggling. Blue Springs took an early lead with a simple goal, while the Fugees found themselves outmatched and disoriented, with players like Qendrim and Grace feeling the impact of their opponents' physicality. At

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halftime, the score stood at 1–0 against the Fugees. Frustrated, Luma delivered a strong message, emphasizing the need for teamwork and resilience. “You’re playing lazy soccer; we need to fight back!” she declared. To invigorate the game, she repositioned Jeremiah to midfield, hoping to enhance their offensive strategy.

The second half began with renewed vigor as Josiah skillfully maneuvered through defenders to score an equalizer. However, this momentum was briefly halted when Mohammed committed a foul, allowing Blue Springs to successfully convert a direct kick, retaking the lead at 2–1. In response, Luma executed a strategic swap, moving Bien to center midfield. This tactical adjustment paid off when Bien assisted in a crucial goal by Qendrim, leveling the match once more at 2–2.

As the tension escalated, Blue Springs began to focus on Bien, aiming to neutralize his gameplay. Yet, he managed to orchestrate a final play with Idwar, who scored the decisive goal, putting the Fugees ahead 3–2. The game wasn't over, though; Blue Springs launched a final offensive attack, but to Luma's relief, young Robin Dikori—a spirited and nimble player—intervened just in time to clear the ball, preserving their lead.

With the whistle signaling the end of the match, celebration erupted from the Fugees. They had not only secured a hard-fought victory but demonstrated perseverance and teamwork against formidable odds. As the players reveled

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in their win, a Blue Springs spectator acknowledged their efforts, sharing his admiration for the competitive spirit of the game. The victory brought the Fugees closer to the top of the standings, a testament to their growth and resilience throughout the season.

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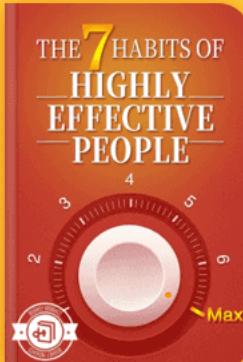
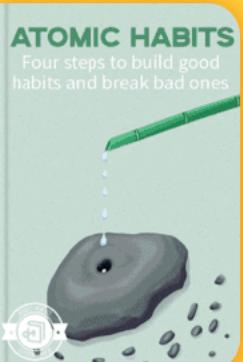
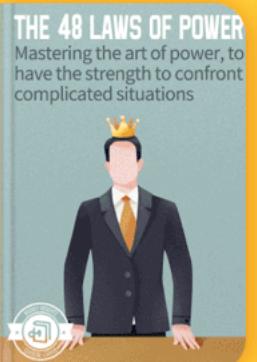
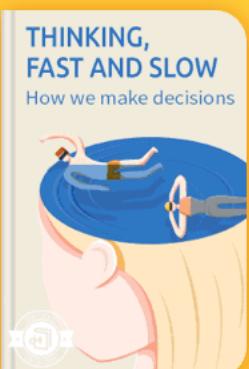
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## Chapter 21 Summary: 21. Coming Apart

In Chapter 21, titled "Coming Apart," the narrative focuses on the Under Fifteens Fugees as they prepare for a challenging away game against the affluent Santos team from Roswell, Georgia, who are vying for the division championship. The Fugees, still attempting to find their rhythm, come off a disappointing loss after a promising victory. Tensions run high, particularly surrounding Mandela, a talented but frustrated player who misses his old Liberian teammates and exhibits declining commitment and poor sportsmanship during the game.

As the match begins, the Fugees display some initial threat, but a missed pass from Mandela to Muamer, the new Bosnian forward, leads to frustration among teammates. Unfortunately, the Fugees' defensive errors culminate in a penalty kick that allows the Santos to score first. Following this, two additional goals put the Fugees at a 3-0 deficit at halftime. With Mandela's frustration boiling over, he critiques his teammates harshly instead of fostering collaboration. To address the ongoing issues and Mandela's lack of discipline, coach Luma makes the difficult decision to bench him for the remainder of the game.

In the second half, the Fugees show improvement without Mandela, managing to score once but ultimately losing the match 6-1. Luma, addressing her players afterward, emphasizes the need for better fitness and

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teamwork. As they leave, she confides to Natnael, another player, her struggles with managing Mandela's attitude despite having supported him and his family significantly. Natnael, understanding the complexities of such relationships and the importance of discipline, suggests that Luma let Mandela go from the team, acknowledging the tough love required to maintain team integrity.

When they reach Mandela's home, Luma confronts him directly, expressing disappointment in his lack of respect for her and his teammates. In a pivotal moment, she tells Mandela not to call her "Coach" and to step away from the team, leaving him to grapple with the consequences of his actions. The chapter concludes with Luma retreating into her own thoughts, feeling the weight of her decisions and the emotional toll of parting with someone she once believed could thrive on the team.

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## Critical Thinking

**Key Point:** The importance of teamwork and discipline in achieving success

**Critical Interpretation:** As you reflect on Chapter 21 of 'Outcasts United,' let it inspire you to embrace the spirit of collaboration and the necessity of discipline in your own endeavors. Just like the Under Fifteens Fugees faced challenges when individual egos overshadowed team dynamics, you too can realize that personal growth often requires putting the collective interest above self. By fostering respect, accountability, and mutual support in your pursuits, whether in sports, work, or relationships, you will build a strong foundation for overcoming obstacles together and achieving greater success.

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# Chapter 22 Summary: 22. Hanging On at Home

## Chapter 22: Hanging On at Home

In Clarkston, many refugees, adjusting to life in America, find their first jobs in local chicken processing plants. These factories operate around the clock, with night shifts attracting a workforce that often includes those who, like Generose, have limited English skills and pressing family responsibilities. Generose, a single mother of four—Alex, Bien, Ive, and baby Alyah—seeks financial stability while navigating the challenges of parenting in a new country.

Her decision to take a night shift at a processing plant means leaving her children alone during her work hours—a reality that weighs heavily on her. Despite the chaos of her home life, Generose’s children adapt by stepping in to help. Alex, the eldest, arises as a secondary caregiver, feeding and looking after Alyah while also making dinner for his brothers. He rises to the occasion, meticulously preparing their meals, even when distractions arise.

One evening, as Alex juggles dinner preparation and caring for Alyah, the kitchen fills with smoke as his hot dogs burn. The children watch in amusement and concern, their camaraderie evident despite the challenges they face. This shared experience reflects a sense of family resilience amidst

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the chaos of their new life.

Meanwhile, the narrative shifts to Mandela Ziaty, who struggles with feelings of disappointment after being kicked off the Under Fifteen Fugees soccer team. The burden of his sudden free time and absence from the sport weighs heavily on him, especially against the backdrop of his mother Beatrice's concerns for his well-being in an environment where risks abound.

Beatrice, herself working nights to support her family, worries that without the structure of soccer, Mandela may find trouble in the uncertainty of his unsupervised time. Despite his tough exterior, hints of Mandela's nostalgia for the team emerge, exemplified by the way he reverently hangs his old Fugees uniform on his wall—a tangible reminder of belonging and camaraderie.

Together, these experiences highlight the struggles of refugee families in Clarkston, illustrating their efforts to create a home while navigating the complexities of work, education, and the longing for community in a new and often challenging environment.

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# Chapter 23 Summary: 23. The Dikoris

## Chapter 23: The Dikoris

After her conflict with Mandela, Luma found herself inundated with responsibilities, leaving little time to address her own personal affairs.

Despite unanswered emails and a burnt-out brake light on her Volkswagen, she remained devoted to the Fugees soccer team, coaching the players and supporting their families. Just as she seemed poised for a break, another challenge would arise.

However, on the soccer field, optimism was burgeoning. The Fugees had transitioned to Milam Park, which revitalized the team and allowed Luma to focus on addressing their weaknesses. The upcoming match scheduled for October 21 against the undefeated Athens United Gold Valiants marked a significant test for the Under Thirteens. Luma felt that, given recent improvements in communication and strategy, they had a fighting chance. A standout factor was the burgeoning talent of the Dikori brothers.

Idwar and Robin Dikori, the youngest players on the team, brought surprising speed and agility. Originally from the Nuba Mountains of Sudan, a fertile region home to over a million people from diverse ethnic backgrounds, the brothers had escaped the brutalities of civil war and

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genocide orchestrated by the Islamist regime that took power in 1989. The government's campaign had driven their family from their home, leading them through a harrowing journey across Sudan and eventually to Egypt, where they faced overwhelming challenges as refugees.

Their parents, Daldoum and Smira, had been relatively prosperous in their homeland, members of the Christian Moro tribe. However, during the war, the family fled to escape violence and ended up in Cairo, where they struggled with discrimination and poverty. In 2000, they were fortunate enough to be resettled in the United States.

Upon their arrival in Georgia, they began to adapt to their new land. The Dikori family joined the community, taking English lessons and navigating the school system. Tragically, their newfound life was upended in a car accident that claimed the lives of Daldoum's wife and three daughters, leaving Shamsoun and his younger brothers, Idwar and Robin, to cope with sorrow and the struggle for survival in a foreign culture.

Shamsoun, as the oldest, became a pillar of support for his brothers, even as he too navigated the overwhelming challenges of adolescence and grief. Soccer became an outlet for them, an escape from their painful reality, offering camaraderie, socialization, and a sense of belonging. Slowly, Robin emerged from his shell, while Idwar, typically quiet and reserved, began to find his confidence on the field.

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Luma recognized the potential of the Dikoris, especially their speed, and saw them as a critical advantage in the approaching game against Athens United. Soccer not only provided the boys with a means to express themselves; it served as a vital source of healing, fostering friendships across cultures and helping to create a new family in the midst of their loss. The Fugees had become more than a team; they were a sanctuary for healing, community, and resilience amidst the struggles of their pasts.

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## Chapter 24: 24. “What Are You Doing Here?”

### ### Chapter 24 Summary: "What Are You Doing Here?"

On the morning of October 21, the Under Thirteen Fugees soccer team boards a white YMCA bus outside the Clarkston Public Library, excited for their upcoming match against the Athens United Gold Valiants. Tracy drives the bus while Luma, their coach, follows in her yellow Volkswagen, enjoying a much-needed moment of peace amidst her hectic schedule. As they journey through the picturesque Georgia countryside, Luma's thoughts are interrupted when a state trooper pulls her over for an unforeseen traffic violation.

To her shock, Luma learns that her license has been suspended—she has no recollection of this, as she had recently paid off a ticket for an expired registration. The officer, adhering to protocol, is forced to arrest her, handcuffing Luma in front of the young soccer players, many of whom are already anxious about their coach's unexpected absence. The team has its own painful experiences with authorities, which heightens their concern as they see Luma being led away. Josiah Saydee, the team leader, conveys the unsettling news to his teammates: Coach Luma is being taken to jail.

While Luma is processed into the Walton County jail, the young Fugees

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arrive at the soccer club, concerned but determined. As the game kicks off, they struggle without Luma's guidance. The opposing Valiants capitalize on the Fugees' disorganization, scoring several goals within the first half. Meanwhile, Luma experiences the stark reality of the legal system, where she encounters discrimination and confusion about her identity as she navigates the booking process.

Back on the field, the Fugees fight to manage their positions amidst rising tensions. Despite their frustration, they gain some momentum in the second half, with Mafoday Jawneh stepping up as an unexpected hero by saving a penalty kick. Although they concede defeat with a 5–0 score, the boys do not give up entirely; they succeed in holding the Valiants scoreless in the second half.

Meanwhile, Luma's time in jail leads her to reflect on her life choices and her role as a coach. Upon her release, she rushes back to the team. Though disappointed about missing the game, Luma learns from the boys that they admire each other's resilience and believe they could have won with her presence.

Later that evening, she receives a call from a young boy whose family is facing its own struggles. Luma relates to him, sharing her turbulent day to bring a sense of comfort, but she quickly realizes he sees her as invincible—something she knows isn't true. Their conversation underscores

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Luma's dedication to her team and the community, as well as the importance of empathy toward the challenges they all face.

The chapter emphasizes themes of vulnerability, resilience, and the complexities of cultural identity in the face of systemic challenges, leaving both Luma and the boys with a deeper understanding of their struggles and connections to one another.

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## Chapter 25 Summary: 25. Halloween

### ### Chapter 25 Summary: Halloween

On October 27, just days after Luma's arrest in Athens, news broke of a prison riot in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo, resulting in five inmate deaths and fourteen escapes. Among those incarcerated was Joseph Balegamire, Paula's husband and father to her children. Amid the uncertainty of Joseph's fate, Paula anxiously awaited any news regarding his wellbeing.

In Clarkston, Georgia, Halloween was an unfamiliar holiday for many of the refugees. Recognizing the need for a joyful distraction, Luma organized a Halloween outing for her team, the Fugees. She arranged transportation with the local YMCA and picked up matching ninja costumes. On the night of the event, Luma led the boys in a spirited practice before revealing their plans for trick-or-treating.

Luma chose a wealthy area in Decatur for the evening, known for its enthusiastic participation in Halloween festivities. The streets would be transformed into a candy haven, complete with decorated homes and excited children in costumes. As they rode in the bus, Luma excitedly distributed costumes, with Mafoday standing out in his oversized ninja robe paired with a flamboyant pink feather boa and an Elvis mask.

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Upon arriving, the Fugees, unfamiliar with the customs, received instructions from Luma on how to ask for treats. They stood out in this affluent neighborhood, yet their amazement absorbed their insecurities as they stepped into the festive scene, filled with laughter and candy.

Initially shy at the first house they approached, the boys were taken aback when the resident expressed surprise at their appearance. After recovering, they followed protocol: ringing the bell, saying "Trick or treat," and thanking the homeowners. Mafoday, with his beaming smile, delighted in a particularly generous offering of candy, quickly running back to join his friends.

As the evening continued, the boys explored the neighborhood, scavenging for treats and venturing to less frequented homes. During their adventures, a humorous misunderstanding occurred with a group of American girls dressed as younger children, leading to laughter among both parties, each unaware of the cultural gap in their interactions.

As the night drew to a close, the boys returned to the bus, their bags brimming with treats. However, they were suddenly silent, reflecting on the vibrant neighborhood and the stark contrast to their own experiences. Grace shared his perspective, noting that in Africa, one would be lucky to receive an egg instead of candy.

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Later that night, as Grace settled down to sleep, he was jolted awake by the sound of gunshots just outside his window. Understanding the dangers that surrounded him, he remained hidden and silent as police arrived, only to depart without making any arrests. The chaotic sounds of the night slowly faded, allowing Grace to close his eyes once more, hoping for a calmer reality.

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## Chapter 26 Summary: 26. The Fifteens' Final Game

### ### Chapter 26: The Fifteens' Final Game

As the Under Fifteen Fugees head to their final match of the season, Natnael and Joseph share a heartfelt moment in the car. Natnael learns that Joseph's father has passed away—a detail that had remained hidden from him. Joseph explains that he didn't cry when his father died, as he barely knew him, likening it to how Natnael would feel if he lost a parent he never knew. This revelation deepens Natnael's understanding of his friend's emotional landscape.

On arriving at the field, the team, guided by their coach Luma, is in a playful mood, likely to mask the pressure of their underwhelming season. Initially, their spirits seem high, but they are aware of the stakes—this match could determine whether they avoid demotion to a lower division. Luma reminds them that how they play today will reflect on their future as a team; they need to shift their focus from casual fun to serious competition.

Their opponents, the Cobb YMCA Strikers, are formidable and have already beaten teams that the Fugees managed to defeat earlier in the season. Luma's determination to instill discipline and teamwork clashes with the boys' current mindset. However, as the game begins, the Fugees lose their

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intensity. The Strikers quickly exploit this weakness, scoring two goals in the first half. Frustrated by their lack of effort, Luma questions her players relentlessly, highlighting their failure to apply their skills and strategize effectively. Her fiery outburst emphasizes that this wasn't just a loss in the game; it was a failure of their teamwork and discipline.

The boys, feeling the weight of their coach's disappointment and their own embarrassment, regroup. Inspired by Sebajden's encouragement to perform better for Luma and as a team, they rally their spirits and return to the field with renewed determination. Kanue leads the charge, and Natnael scores a goal with a well-timed free kick, offering a glimmer of hope. However, despite their efforts, the Fugees continue to make critical mistakes, leading to a penalty goal for the Strikers. Ultimately, the match ends with a 3-1 scoreline, marking a disappointing end to their season.

After the whistle blows, Luma addresses her team with a serious tone, conveying her discontent but also her commitment to their development. She emphasizes the importance of proper technique and mental discipline, reminding them that they must adhere to her coaching methods if they wish to improve. The boys are left to reflect on the collective responsibility they bear and the lessons learned from a season fraught with challenges. The chapter closes with Kanue and Natnael contemplating their next steps, determined to regroup and work harder for the future, knowing they must find a way to transform their potential into success next year.

Key Aspects	Details
Chapter Title	The Fifteens' Final Game
Context	The Under Fifteen Fugees are heading into their last match of the season.
Main Characters	Natnael, Joseph, Luma, Kanue, Sebajden
Emotional Moment	Natnael learns Joseph's father has died, enhancing their friendship and understanding.
Team Spirit	Initially playful but aware of the pressure to avoid demotion.
Opponents	Cobb YMCA Strikers, a strong team that has beaten their previous opponents.
Coach's Challenge	Luma struggles to shift the team from a fun mindset to serious competition.
Game Performance	The Fugees start weak, allowing the Strikers to score two goals in the first half.
Turning Point	The team regroups inspired by Sebajden, leading to Natnael's goal.
Final Score	Fugees lose 3-1.
Post-Game Reflection	Luma addresses the team about discipline, technique, and the importance of teamwork.
Future Outlook	Kanue and Natnael contemplate regrouping and improving for the next season.

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## Chapter 27 Summary: 27. My Rules, My Way

### ### Chapter 27 Summary: My Rules, My Way

In the world of youth soccer, Luma's stronger bond with the Under Thirteen Fugees contrasted sharply with her relationships with the older boys. She had nurtured the Thirteens since they were under ten, implementing her coaching style that emphasized discipline and teamwork—"my rules, my drills, my way." Their performance reflected this approach; while they had tied two games and lost one since the Athens match, they showed resilience and sportsmanship, allowing no red cards and supporting one another off the field. Notably, Josiah displayed compassion by gifting his winter coat to Santino, a reticent Sudanese teammate arriving shortly before the season.

As they prepared for their final regular-season game against the formidable Georgia Futbol Club, Luma's tactical plan was clear: the Fugees would focus on keeping the ball on the ground, utilizing the speed of Josiah and Idwar on the wings, and maintaining composure to avoid fouls. Despite the challenge posed by larger opponents, she encouraged them to take hits without retaliation.

Before kickoff, a spontaneous decision emerged among the players to pray collectively, honoring both their Christian and Muslim backgrounds. Grace

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led a prayer in Swahili while Eldin offered one in Bosnian. This moment of unity showcased their respect for diverse beliefs and commitment to their shared goal, followed by an enthusiastic "Amen" from all.

The match commenced with the Fugees taking the offensive. Midway through the first half, Bien maneuvered past defenders and assisted Jeremiah, who then passed to Josiah, leading to their opening goal. Armed with a 1–0 lead at halftime, Luma urged her team to maintain focus and enjoy the game. In the second half, their strategy paid off as Jeremiah scored again, widening the lead to 2–0, despite a late penalty conversion by Lawrenceville.

With a final score of 2–1, the Fugees secured an impressive third place in their division, behind only Athens Gold Valiants and Dacula Danger. Luma rewarded their hard work by entering the team into the prestigious Tornado Cup, a significant tournament featuring top teams from across the state, giving the Fugees a week to fine-tune their preparations and build on their successful season.

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## Chapter 28: 28. Tornado Cup

### ### Chapter 28: Tornado Cup

As the Under Thirteen Fugees prepared for the Tornado Cup, Coach Luma faced a challenge: inclement weather threatened their practice schedule. With heavy storms disrupting Atlanta, Luma condensed their preparation into three intense days of drills focusing on crosses, corners, and free kicks, culminating in a crucial scrimmage against the Under Fifteens at Milam Park.

Despite the weather, the scrimmage proceeded on a damp Thursday afternoon. Luma set the tone, emphasizing discipline and teamwork: "No clowning around... no switching up your positions." Meanwhile, the Fifteens, frustrated by their lackluster season, sensed their pride was at stake as they faced the younger Thirteens, who were eager to prove themselves, especially with older siblings on the opposing team.

The scrimmage began, and the Thirteens exhibited skill and determination but struggled to convert their opportunities, missing eight shots in the first half. Luma regrouped them, urging focus and teamwork. The Fifteens, feeling the pressure, began to play aggressively, managing to score, but not without the Thirteens continuously mounting pressure. The scrimmage

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ended with a 3-1 loss for the Thirteens, but they earned Luma's praise for their fight, which would prove instrumental for their upcoming cup matches.

On the day of the Tornado Cup, confidence buoyed the Fugees as they arrived at the Gwinnett YMCA. Their first match was against Blue Springs Liberty Fire, a team they had narrowly defeated earlier in the season. Luma, noting their heightened performance, felt anxious, particularly about their shot accuracy. As the game began, the Fugees demonstrated their strengths, controlling the field but failing to finish before trailing 1-0 at halftime—a tough wake-up call from Luma to kick them into gear.

In the second half, the Fugees rallied back with Josiah scoring the equalizer and further goals from Jeremiah and Idwar, securing a 3-1 victory. The comeback came at a cost, as injuries plagued the team, but they celebrated their best soccer of the season. However, with fatigue setting in, they faced the Strikers in their next match, suffering a narrow 2-1 defeat, denying them a shot at the finals.

That evening, the boys enjoyed a rare team sleepover, an opportunity to bond and recharge for the next day. Miraculously, they remained in contention for the finals and knew they needed to win their next match against the formidable Concorde Fire, boasting superior resources.

Luma's instructions were clear: focus solely on the game and team spirit.

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The Fugees entered the field with newfound fan support, showing early offensive strength and showcasing their improved play. Jeremiah netted a goal, leading at halftime 1-0. Luma continued to motivate them during the break, stressing the importance of the remaining minutes.

As the second half unfolded, tension mounted. Despite their efforts, the Fugees conceded an equalizer. Undeterred, they pressed forward, and Jeremiah scored once more, igniting hope. With thrilling spectator energy surrounding them, the team fought hard to defend their lead but ultimately allowed a heartbreak tie in the final moments—2-2.

Despite their disappointment, Luma reminded the boys they fought valiantly, and their season was still remarkable. After the match, lighthearted camaraderie persisted among the boys. As the holiday season approached, they found joy in simple moments together, even as they worked to fund a trip for an upcoming tournament.

In a subsequent twist, Luma learned that the Fugees had been unjustly barred from using their practice fields by city officials. Determined to prepare the team, Luma set aside her frustrations to focus on the tournament ahead while encouraging her players to embody teamwork and independence.

As Christmas approached, Luma fulfilled her commitment by connecting with players' families, delivering food boxes. Meanwhile, the boys

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organized efforts to raise the remaining funds for their tournament travel, showcasing their determination and unity. Ultimately, their efforts culminated in securing the necessary funds, revealing their growth as a cohesive team ready for adventure ahead.

Amidst the bustling chaos around them and the uncertain logistics, Luma's steadfast belief in her team's potential kept the spirit alive, nurturing hopes for a promising future, both on and off the soccer field.

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