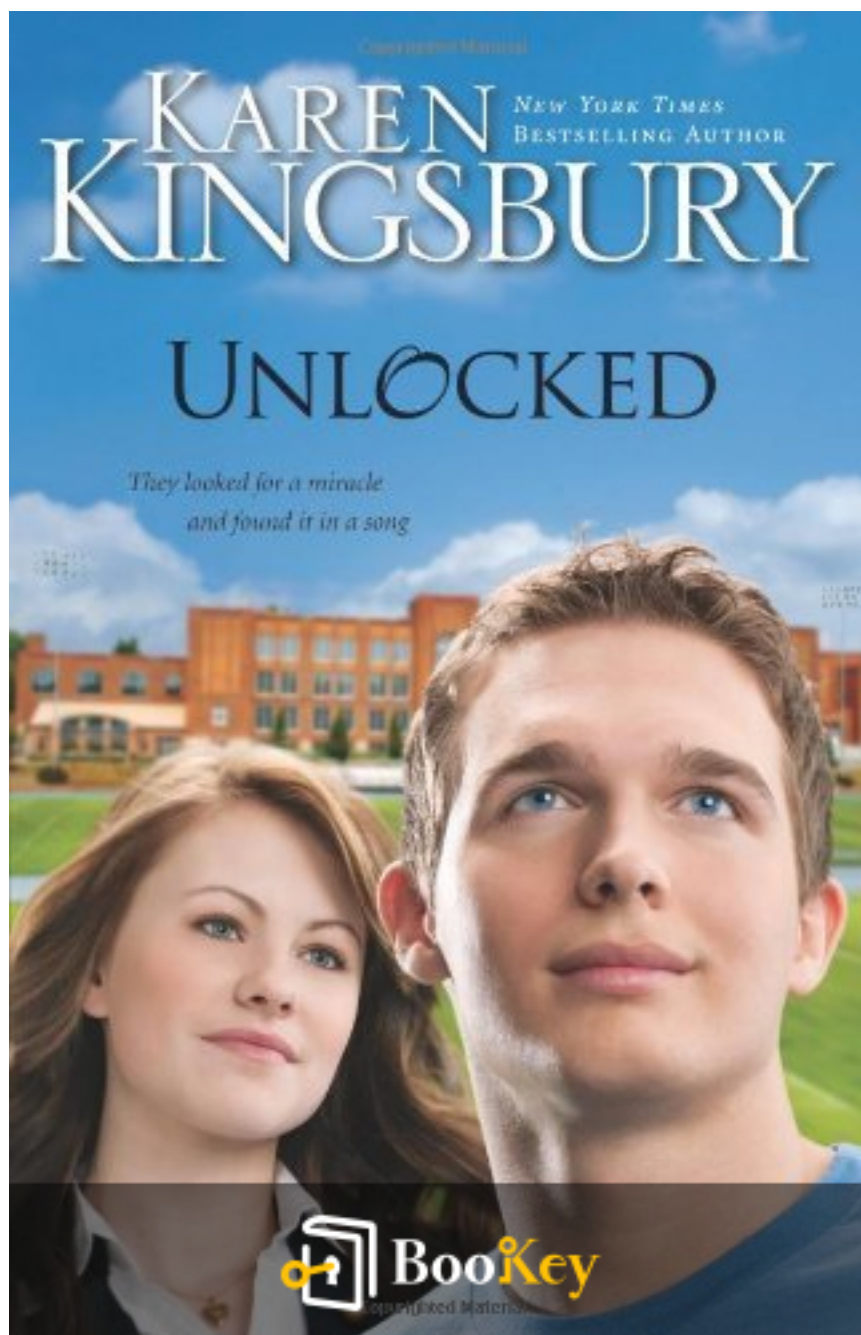


# Unlocked PDF (Limited Copy)

**Karen Kingsbury**



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## Unlocked Summary

"Discovering Hope and Healing Through Unspoken Bonds."

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## About the book

In "Unlocked," Karen Kingsbury masterfully unfolds a heartwarming tale that bridges the chasm between silence and sound, isolation and understanding. The narrative revolves around a remarkable young man, Holden Harris, who is trapped in a world of autism. Though he doesn't speak, his actions and dreams resound louder than words. As the school grapples with the challenges of bullying and miscommunication, one empathetic classmate, inspired by a shared past, sets out to bring change and unveil the profound potential of connection and acceptance. Through poignant storytelling and engaging characters, this novel invites readers on a transformative journey that challenges perceptions, celebrates inclusion, and ultimately showcases the redemptive power of love that can unlock even the most guarded hearts.

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## About the author

Karen Kingsbury, a New York Times bestselling author, is renowned for her impactful storytelling and inspirational Christian fiction. With a career that has spanned over three decades and produced more than 50 novels, Kingsbury has firmly established herself as one of America's favorite storytellers. Her books, which often explore themes of redemption, faith, and familial bonds, resonate deeply with readers across the globe, selling over 25 million copies worldwide. Many of her works have been adapted into films and television series, further broadening her influence and reach. Known for her deeply relatable characters and heartwarming narratives, Kingsbury's writing has a unique way of touching the heart, encouraging reflection, and fostering hope. Alongside her literary achievements, she is also a dedicated speaker, using her platform to inspire and uplift audiences everywhere. Karen Kingsbury's work, including the beloved series revolving around the Baxter family, continues to capture the hearts of readers, with each new release eagerly anticipated.

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# Chapter 1 Summary: One

## Chapter One Summary

This chapter introduces us to a lively first day back at Fulton High School, particularly through the eyes of Jake Collins, the star quarterback. Jake, along with his group of confident football buddies, claims ownership of the school's hallways with their cocky and carefree attitude. The school year promises great things for them, with dreams of state championships and a dominant presence in athletics, including football, basketball, and track.

Jake's circle, including his best friend Sam Sanders, engage in their typical banter, enjoying the attention of their peers, especially that of some flirty freshmen girls. However, their behavior takes a darker turn when they mock a fellow student, Holden Harris, who exhibits some idiosyncratic behaviors. Holden, a young man with autism, unknowingly becomes the target of their taunts due to his peculiar mannerisms, such as flapping his arms and avoiding eye contact. Despite Holden's handsome appearance, rivaling any model in an Abercrombie ad, he is unfairly ostracized by Jake and his friends for being different.

Rudy, another one of Jake's friends, takes the bullying a step further by scattering Holden's flashcards, tools he uses to communicate in the hallway.





Jake experiences a fleeting moment of remorse for their actions but dismisses it, as their focus shifts back to class and their senior year aspirations. The incident underscores the insensitive and unkind environment that some students like Holden must navigate, as they are misunderstood and marginalized.

Holden, although bullied, remains resilient. His unique perception of the world is dominated by music, which plays a continuous, soothing soundtrack in his mind. This music represents comfort and serenity for Holden, offering a contrast to the harshness of his school environment. A glimpse into Holden's inner world reveals his affinity for church music, which reminds him of love, joy, and the fundamental truth that everything will be okay.

A twist occurs when Michael Schwartz, another marginalized student, steps in to help Holden gather his scattered flashcards. This simple act of kindness amidst the bullying becomes a significant moment for Holden, suggesting that friendship exists even in unlikely places. Through the exchange, Holden chooses to see the good in Michael, offering silent prayers rather than dwelling on negativity.

The chapter paints a vivid picture of the dynamics at Fulton High, highlighting themes of friendship, acceptance, and resilience. As Holden walks to his Trigonometry class, guided by his music and prayers, readers are left hopeful that amidst the trials of high school life, there are glimmers



of understanding and kindness.

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## Critical Thinking

**Key Point:** Seeing the good in unlikely places

**Critical Interpretation:** In the bustling corridors of Fulton High, you might often feel overwhelmed by the chaotic swirl of personalities and peer pressures. Yet, even in such a tumultuous environment, it's crucial to notice and embrace small acts of kindness that can transform your perspective. As Michael reaches out to help Holden gather his flashcards, a moment of compassion pierces through the relentless clamor of high school life. This act serves as a powerful reminder for you to look beyond the surface of others, to see the good even in unlikely places, and to recognize that true friendship and understanding can emerge often when you least expect it. By cultivating this mindset, you can contribute to a more inclusive and empathetic community, shining a light on the path for others to follow.



## Chapter 2 Summary: Two

Ella Reynolds is navigating the bustling atmosphere at Fulton High School, where she begins her senior year amid the chaos and excitement typical of teenage life. The outdoor lunch area is vibrant, filled with students eagerly soaking up the energy of the new school year. Ella, carrying her meal, is approached by a boy from her Algebra II class and then greeted warmly by her boyfriend, Jake Collins, a popular football player known for his confidence and charisma. Although Ella finds Jake charming and romantic, she's relieved to find that he respects her boundaries, a trait she values as she manages her busy life.

Ella's social circles include the cheerleaders and the dance team, where her close friend LaShante excitedly congratulates her for landing the lead role of Belle in the school's major production of "Beauty and the Beast." Having secured both the role and a promising relationship with Jake, Ella's senior year is on track to be as ideal as she hoped.

However, as Ella tries to share her good news with her family, she feels a disconnect. Her mother, preoccupied with cosmetic enhancements, seems distant, and her father's focus remains on his struggling career in sports. Her twin brothers are engrossed in their own activities, leaving Ella feeling isolated at home. Despite this, she pushes her family concerns aside to focus on the positive aspects of her life at school.



The story takes a turn when Ella witnesses a disturbing encounter as she heads back from trying to call her mom. Jake and his friends, a group of football players, are bullying a boy associated with the special-needs group by mocking his unusual behavior. This surprises Ella, as it contrasts sharply with the Jake she knows. The boy, though different in demeanor, catches Ella's attention with his strikingly clear blue eyes, which seem almost familiar to her. Despite his odd and timid gestures, there's an undeniable depth and intelligence in his gaze.

Driven by a sense of justice, Ella stands up to Jake and his friends, insisting they leave the boy alone. While they eventually back off, the episode leaves Ella questioning how well she knows Jake and challenges her perspective on her fellow students. As she looks back at the boy, Ella notices that his demeanor changes – the flapping of his arms stops, and he smiles at her, indicating a shared understanding and gratitude for her intervention.

This encounter underscores themes of empathy, the discovery of unexpected connections, and the complexities of adolescent relationships, setting the stage for Ella's journey through her final year at high school.



## Chapter 3 Summary: Three

In this chapter, we explore the emotional and challenging life of Tracy, a mother working as a cashier at Walmart, as she navigates the complexities of raising Holden, her autistic son. During a rare quiet moment at work, Tracy glimpses a headline, "Hollywood Takes on Autism," reminding her of her ongoing efforts to raise awareness and support for autism. Despite participating in autism-related events and conversing with other mothers, she carries the longing for Holden to be like he was before autism changed their lives.

After her shift, Tracy's interactions with her manager, Mr. Groves, reveal a supportive community praying for Holden. A deep network of care surrounds Tracy and her son, fueled by hope and faith. On her way home, Tracy picks up laminate sheets for crafting Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) cards—vital tools that aid Holden's communication. She reflects on his love for music, recognizing it as a potential key to unlocking his world.

Back at her apartment, the story delves into her family dynamic. Her husband, Dan, works distant and risky fishing jobs in Alaska, a choice rooted in his inability to reach Holden. Although he loves them, Dan struggles with their son's condition, making infrequent visits home. Tracy's sister, Holly, is deployed in Iraq, leaving her daughter Kate in Tracy's care.





Kate, a beacon of youthful energy, provides a refreshing contrast to Tracy's usual routine with Holden.

The story dives into Tracy's daily challenges, detailing Holden's structured routine and the hefty financial strains of his therapies. In a poignant moment, she revisits an old family photo, reflecting on the time before autism took over, a time when life seemed full of endless opportunities.

Holden's return from school signals another part of the day: watching home movies. These films serve as a bridge to Holden's happier, communicative past. For Tracy, they're a bittersweet reminder of what's been lost, but also what she aims to reclaim. Kate, demonstrating innate empathy, connects with Holden through music played during the movie. Her simple actions spark a glimmer of hope for Tracy, who contemplates whether Kate might help unlock Holden's silent world.

Tracy's unwavering faith that music and love can breach Holden's barriers is central to her resilience. In moments of doubt, she finds solace and strength in her faith and the possibility of a miracle. With the chapter concluding on this note of hope, Tracy's perseverance in facing her daily struggles against the backdrop of profound faith and a supportive community serves as a testament to the enduring power of love and belief in the unseen possibilities.



## Critical Thinking

**Key Point:** Faith and hope in the unseen possibilities

**Critical Interpretation:** You journey with Tracy as she navigates the emotionally charged and intricate path of raising an autistic child, and alongside her, you are prompted to draw profound inspiration from the enduring power of faith and hope. The chapter illustrates Tracy's unwavering faith as a source of solace and strength during her darkest moments. Despite the heavy financial burdens and emotional challenges, Tracy's ability to see beyond the immediate struggles and hold onto the belief in the unseen—manifested in her hope that music could unlock Holden's silent world—reinforces the idea that hope is a vital, transformative force. The chapter encourages you to adopt a similar resilient mindset, leveraging faith and hope as a beacon during your own life's trials, inspiring you to believe in the miraculous potential of love to transform what often seems unchangeable.



# Chapter 4: Four

## Chapter Four

A fierce storm erupted with ominous black clouds and relentless lightning, enveloping the SS Wicked Water in a maelstrom of chaos. Dan Harris fought against the elements, desperately trying to pull a shrimp-laden net onto the deck amidst the storm's fury. The harsh reality was inescapable; they were forty miles from shore, far from help, and Captain Charlie's rare expression of worry intensified the sense of urgency.

With steadfast determination, the crew scrambled to secure everything on deck, anticipating the power of the encroaching waves. Amidst the chaos, Dan and another deckhand struggled to retrieve the nets, aware that their best catch in weeks was at risk. Despite the raging tempest, breaking nets meant financial loss—a heavy blow for the crew's livelihoods.

As perilous waves battered the vessel, Dan's mind wandered to his family—his wife Tracy and his son, Holden. Memories flooded him of happier times before Holden's autism altered their lives forever. Dan's mind flashed back to Holden's early childhood, a time when he was a joyful, vibrant boy. He became introspective, pondering the storms both at sea and in his life.



Dan's thoughts turned to Holden's diagnosis, a moment that forever changed the family's world. The aftermath left Dan feeling powerless against forces beyond his control, echoing his current fight against the ocean's wrath. The storm back home—the diagnosis and its implications—felt insurmountable.

Caught in the storm's grip, Dan had an epiphany, likening his current fight against nature to his ongoing battle with Holden's condition. The imagery of Jesus calming the waves brought a fleeting solace, but Dan knew that faith alone couldn't rescue him from the overwhelming force threatening his life.

The freezing sea water sapped his strength, and with each wave, the risk of mortal peril increased. It was a grim reminder that Alaskan fishing held the kind of danger that could claim lives without warning. In those moments, Dan contemplated his life's purpose and questioned his decision to face physical challenges at sea, hoping they would somehow equip him to tackle the emotional storms at home.

Just as the situation seemed dire, with Dan doubting his survival, a shift occurred. The storm dissipated as suddenly as it had arrived, and Dan held onto the faint possibility of salvation. Through blurred vision and staggering exhaustion, he realized he had survived. Captain Charlie's voice cut through the haze, confirming that Dan was, against odds, still alive.



Back in the relative safety of the bunk, Dan's relief mingled with deep-seated doubt and sorrow. While he had physically weathered the tempest, he acknowledged a truth that the captain couldn't comprehend: the real storm, the one that mattered most, had already claimed its victory in his life in the form of his son's enduring condition.

This chapter intricately weaves past and present, contrasting the physical struggle at sea with the emotional turmoil of Holden's autism diagnosis. Dan's internal monologue and memories humanize his distress and reveal the essence of his relentless battles. The storm is not just a natural occurrence but an allegory for Dan's personal challenges, leaving readers with a poignant understanding of his journey.

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## Chapter 5 Summary: Five

In Chapter Five, we follow Ella, a high school student at Fulton High, who has recently landed the lead role of Belle in the school's spring musical production of "Beauty and the Beast." While she should be overjoyed, Ella is troubled by various aspects of her life. Her boyfriend, Jake Collins, a star athlete, is not as admirable as she once thought. After a recent football victory, his behavior at a party and his bullying towards a special-needs student have Ella questioning his character.

At home, Ella's family life is equally unsettling. Her mother is preoccupied with her appearance, hiding under sunglasses and makeup, while her father, who is a baseball player, is absent and distant, supposedly preoccupied with his career. The tension at home leaves Ella wary of discussing her achievements with her parents.

In drama class, Ella prepares for the musical alongside her peers, under the direction of Mr. Hawkins, their stern but dedicated drama teacher. The audition turnout is lower than expected due to budget cuts, and rumors swirl that Mr. Hawkins might retire soon. During rehearsal, Ella's attention is drawn to Holden Harris, a student with autism, who is captivated by the music from outside the classroom. Despite his communication limitations, expressed mainly through a flashcard stating "I see," Holden connects with the music in a profound way.



Ella feels an inexplicable connection to Holden and is moved by his reaction. She approaches Mr. Hawkins to advocate for Holden’s inclusion in rehearsals, despite initial resistance. Mr. Hawkins, recognizing Ella's passion, eventually relents and allows Holden to attend, as long as he remains non-disruptive.

The chapter underscores Ella’s internal conflict and empathy, juxtaposing her professional success with personal struggles. It explores themes of perception and inclusion, as Ella seeks to bring Holden into the world of theater as a means of connection and understanding. By the end of the chapter, Ella's resolve to help Holden is firm, providing a glimmer of hope in her otherwise strained life.

Section	Summary
Introduction	Ella, a high school student at Fulton High, secures the lead role of Belle in "Beauty and the Beast."
Relationship Issues	Ella questions her boyfriend Jake’s character after observing his inappropriate behavior post-football victory.
Family Dynamics	At home, Ella faces tension with preoccupied parents - a self-conscious mother and an absent father focused on his baseball career.
Drama Class	Under Mr. Hawkins’ direction, Ella participates in rehearsals; facing challenges due to low class turnout and budget cuts.
Connection to Holden	Ella notices Holden Harris, a student with autism, who is drawn to the music; she feels a strong connection to him.

Section	Summary
Inclusivity Efforts	Ella advocates for Holden's inclusion in rehearsals. Mr. Hawkins initially resists but eventually permits Holden's attendance.
Themes	The chapter highlights Ella's internal conflicts, focusing on empathy, perception, and inclusion.
Resolution	Ella becomes determined to help Holden, finding hope in her desire to include him in theater.



## Critical Thinking

**Key Point:** Empathy and Advocacy for Inclusion

**Critical Interpretation:** In Chapter 5, you witness a moment that inspires profound reflection on empathy and the power of advocacy. Ella, despite facing her own personal challenges and triumphs, channels her compassion towards Holden, a student with autism who is drawn to the music of the theatrical world. In recognizing the beauty in Holden's silent connection with music, Ella becomes an advocate for his inclusion in the school's musical production, 'Beauty and the Beast.' Her determination to see beyond Holden's limitations and advocate for a space where he can express himself is deeply inspiring. It invites you to consider the barriers often placed on individuals due to preconceived notions and societal norms. By championing Holden's inclusion, Ella not only enriches his life but also contributes to a more compassionate and understanding environment for everyone involved. This story challenges you to embrace empathy and stand as advocates for those who may not have a voice in your own communities, promoting a culture of inclusivity and understanding that celebrates diversity in all its forms.



## Chapter 6 Summary: Six

In this chapter, we find Holden, a bright and imaginative student, taking refuge in the realm of his mind during gym class. Holden, who finds solace and joy in numbers rather than sports, had been relegated to a chair at the corner of the gym. His solace inside school walls is the happy dream of reuniting with Ella, a childhood friend with whom he shares a deep connection.

Ella is not only a figment of Holden's imagination but a symbol of comfort and joy in his life. Their friendship is rooted in the innocence and joy of childhood, symbolized by their laughter and singing from years past. Holden's visions of Ella transport him to a stage surrounded by lush, green fields where they dance together, reminiscent of the carefree days of their youth. The applause he imagines signifies the joy and beauty he finds in reconnecting with her essence.

Holden's inner world becomes a battleground between the mundane and the magical. His teacher, Mrs. Bristowe, instead insists on the pragmatic completion of math problems, unable to perceive the vibrant world in which Holden thrives. Her admonitions only draw him back to the harsh realities and drumming noises of the gym, reflecting his struggles with external expectations.



Through his reflective prayers, Holden reveals a profound understanding and empathy towards those around him, like Michael—a peer who lacks friends. Holden's wish to extend the warmth and understanding he shares with Ella to Michael illustrates his caring nature. In the quiet corners of his heart, Holden knows that some of the other students carry sadness or anger, unable to perceive the music and beauty he hears and sees.

Despite the disconnect between Holden's vivid imagination and Mrs. Bristowe's directions, he identifies the key to patience and peace within himself—prayer. His appeal to Jesus demonstrates his belief in a higher power capable of guiding him toward joy and the connection he so desires.

In the end, the chapter leaves Holden yearning for a world where he can engage with Ella freely, away from the noise and expectations of the structured world around him. His dreams, though not tangible to those around him, offer a glimpse into a heart full of hope, love, and the eternal bond between kindred spirits. For Holden, Ella represents more than a memory—she embodies the music and light that his heart yearns to share with those who need it most.





## Critical Thinking

**Key Point:** The Power of Imagination and Inner World

**Critical Interpretation:** In Chapter 6 of 'Unlocked,' Holden's reliance on his vibrant inner world—anchored by the comforting presence of Ella—illuminates the profound power of imagination and introspection. This key moment underscores the potential for a rich inner life to act as a refuge from the external demands and expectations that sometimes cloud our reality. By emphasizing the beauty, joy, and connection Holden finds within himself, the narrative invites you to treasure your own imagination as a source of solace and inspiration. Just like Holden, you can harness your inner world to find strength, empathy, and creativity, transforming your perspective on life's mundane or challenging moments. It inspires you to believe in the hidden wonders within your heart and to recognize the potential for joy and connection in unexpected places.

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## Chapter 7 Summary: Seven

### Chapter Seven Summary:

Tracy Harris faces the challenges of raising her autistic son, Holden. Once a month, she has a meeting with Holden's lead teacher, Mrs. Beth Bristowe, to discuss Holden's progress in school. Holden, now in his senior year, had shown significant progress when introduced to PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System) cards as a freshman, which helped some children achieve verbal communication and a semblance of normalcy. However, mid-way through his sophomore year, Holden hit a plateau, and Tracy fears he is regressing—a common occurrence in autistic children.

At home, Holden's behavior has changed; he guards his PECS cards, avoids eye contact, and seems agitated, except when watching a particular movie featuring himself and Ella Reynolds, an old family friend. Here, he's happy and at peace. Tracy worries that Mrs. Bristowe might confirm her suspicions of regression in today's meeting at the special needs wing of Fulton High School.

Tracy's husband, Dan, is battling pneumonia and dangerous conditions as a commercial fisherman. His phone call this morning sounded ominous, adding to Tracy's stress. She prays for strength and guidance from God,



hearing an internal reassurance to trust in Him.

During Tracy's meeting with Mrs. Bristowe, it becomes apparent that Holden has changed. An incident report reveals that Holden stopped to listen to music during a drama class, something unlike his earlier behavior. This music engagement excites Tracy as music has always been important to Holden. Frustrations arise from rigid school protocols, which don't allow Holden to stay. Instead, when forced to follow protocol, Holden reacted with noncompliance and seemingly regressive behaviors—spinning in circles and drop push-ups.

The meeting further uncovers that Holden might be getting picked on by other students, which could explain his reluctance to share his cards with others. This information shocks and troubles Tracy, fearing for her son's well-being in a mainstream school environment. However, amidst this, hope surfaces. A drama student who interacted with Holden during the musical display requested he be allowed to observe rehearsals. This request, supported by Mr. Hawkins, the drama instructor, offers Holden an opportunity for engagement in a space he might enjoy and provides a flicker of light in Tracy's otherwise grim perspective.

As the meeting concludes, Tracy leaves with renewed hope. At home, Holden remains in his world but shows slight changes during his routine with Kate, another young child around. As they watch Holden's favorite



movie, Tracy notices Holden and Kate turning in circles, mirroring their dance in the film with Holden closing his eyes. This revelation suggests Holden's 'regressive' behavior isn't regression but a joyful act of dancing, akin to when he was little with his friend Ella. Tracy is reassured by this new understanding that Holden is expressing joy, not deterioration.

Through prayer, perseverance, and a fresh insight into Holden's world, Tracy finds encouragement to face their challenges, hopeful for what the engagement with the drama class may bring. She nurtures a belief that maybe, just maybe, there's a pathway to a breakthrough—a way to bring Holden closer to the world around him, perhaps through the music he so loves.

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## Chapter 8: Eight

Chapter Eight begins with Ella leaving her English class, only to encounter a distressing scene in the hallway. Jake and Sam, two boys she knows well, have cornered Michael Schwartz, a quiet, artsy student who plays the flute and has a troubled home life. Despite Jake's earlier apology for a similar incident with another student, Holden, Ella witnesses Jake and Sam taunting Michael for his choice of a backpack design and insinuating homophobic remarks. Ella, who once enjoyed a special summer with Jake, feels a surge of anger and disappointment. Although tempted to intervene, she worries that doing so might exacerbate Michael's vulnerability.

The situation is defused when Brian Brickell, a fellow football player who stands out for his kindness and integrity, encourages Jake to back off. Despite the reprieve, Ella resolves to break up with Jake, unable to reconcile her feelings for him with his behavior.

Later, Ella confronts Jake between classes, expressing her disillusionment with his actions. Jake defends his behavior as harmless fun among the guys, but Ella is unconvinced. She avoids him and their usual crowd at lunch, instead reflecting on Holden, who she finds intriguing and whose genuine kindness she admires.

That evening, after a football victory, Ella reluctantly hosts a party at her



house, a tradition among her friends. Overwhelmed by the usual teenage drama and reflecting on the likes of Holden and Michael, she escapes to a quieter spot where she eventually encounters Jake once more. He apologizes, attributing his behavior to peer pressure, and reminisces about their past. Despite his apologies, Ella stands firm and ends their relationship, realizing that the Jake she liked doesn't align with the person she now sees.

In the solitude that follows, Ella ponders her family dynamics. The next day, they attend her father's baseball game, a disappointing outing that further exacerbates Ella's feelings of isolation and disconnection from her family. Her father is struggling in his career, her mother is preoccupied with appearances, and her brothers are distant, leaving Ella yearning for a sense of belonging and understanding.

Seeking solace, Ella stumbles upon old photo albums filled with memories of happier times. As she sifts through images of family trips and past friendships, she is shocked to find pictures of herself with a boy named Holden, who turns out to be the same Holden Harris at her school. Unlike the socially withdrawn Holden she knows now, the boy in the photos is full of life.

Perplexed, she remembers a card Holden once showed her that read "I see," suggesting perhaps Holden does remember their shared past. Driven by curiosity, Ella decides to research autism, keen to understand the





transformation in her once-friend and how their lives diverged. The chapter closes with her resolved to find answers, embarking on a journey to rediscover her lost connection with Holden and to comprehend the realities of his condition.

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on, and the mind maps help reinforce wh  
I've learned. Highly recommend!

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## Chapter 9 Summary: Nine

In Chapter Nine, Tracy sneaks into the back of a theater room to witness her son, Holden's first day observing a drama class. Holding her breath, she hopes that the class might unlock something deep within Holden, who is on the autism spectrum. Her enthusiasm was slightly dampened by a conversation with Dan, Holden's father, who is skeptical about the experiment's effectiveness. Still, Tracy remains hopeful, believing that the drama class's music might reach Holden in a way nothing else has.

As the class begins rehearsing a song, "Belle," Tracy is deeply moved. She notices Holden standing and turning in circles, a movement she recognizes not as disruptive behavior but as dancing. In Holden's world, music might indeed be a medium through which he expresses himself, and Tracy's heart swells with hope.

Mr. Hawkins, the drama teacher, takes a break to reflect on the rehearsal's success. Recently, he's been reminded of his lost passion for teaching—rekindled by the presence of Holden and his silent, captivating transformation during the rehearsals. Mr. Hawkins, though dissuaded from prayer in recent years due to personal disappointments, finds himself drawn to asking for divine assistance—to help Holden engage with the world and to breathe life into his struggling drama program.



After a brief pause, the students resume with another song, "The Mob Song." While singing, many of them become distracted by Holden's movements, mistaking his pacing and push-up routine for odd behavior. Tracy reassures them that it's just Holden dealing with nerves, which prompts some of the kids to imitate and tease him. Amidst the chaos, Mr. Hawkins sees something extraordinary in Holden, imagining him as the perfect prince for the drama's Beast character—a role that demands a royal presence, something he sees in Holden's physical appearance.

Nevertheless, by the end of the rehearsal, Mr. Hawkins wrestles with his lingering doubts about the futility of prayer and the reality that the drama department might not receive the miracle it hopes for. As he observes Holden flapping his arms and nodding his head, he is reminded of his own unfulfilled desires and unmet expectations. Though disheartened, Mr. Hawkins is left to ponder whether the echoes of hope kindled within him are an opening act to a miracle on the horizon or just whimsical shadows of dreams past.



## Chapter 10 Summary: Ten

In Chapter Ten, Ella, eager and excited, waits for her theater class to end so she can share a revelation with Holden—that they had been childhood friends. But during a particularly intense part of the class, Holden, who has autism, becomes overwhelmed, not fully aware of who Ella is anymore. Despite her desire to comfort him, Ella recognizes that her advances might not be welcome. She notices that Holden avoids direct eye contact, a common characteristic of autism, and reflects on the information she had gathered about the condition, understanding that those with autism often retreat into their own world.

Meanwhile, some classmates mock Holden, suggesting he might want to play the Beast in their production, teasing him about transforming. Ella bravely stands up for Holden, sternly advising the kids to give him a break. Mr. Hawkins, the teacher, also tries to rally the students to perform with more focus and seriousness.

After class, Ella plans to approach Holden, but notices a familiar woman in the back of the room—Holden's mother, from photos she'd seen in her parents' scrapbook. Ella has yet to inform anyone about her discovery that she and Holden had been best friends as young children, as she waits for the right moment to discuss it with her own parents and Holden's mother.



Ella moves closer to Holden, who has calmed down but still doesn't acknowledge her presence. She sits beside him, cautious not to frighten him, and introduces herself, reminding Holden of their once-close friendship. Holden doesn't immediately respond but instead pulls out a stack of flashcards, eventually showing Ella one that says, "I love music" — a sign that he might be attending the class because of his love for music. The moment touches Ella, and they share a brief connection.

Just then, Holden's mother approaches, thanking Ella for helping her son. Realizing the opportunity, Ella introduces herself by her full name, hoping Mrs. Harris would recognize her. At first confused, Holden's mother soon recalls their past connection, her expression shifting from surprise to a somber reminiscence. Ella, too, feels the emotional weight of the revelation and asks about what happened between their families. However, constrained by time, Mrs. Harris postpones a deeper conversation, leaving Ella with more questions than answers.

Before leaving, Holden surprises Ella by turning to look directly into her eyes for the first time, signaling a breakthrough, however small. His direct and meaningful gaze, filled with light and hope, rekindles Ella's belief that despite the barriers autism has erected around Holden, their renewed friendship can defy the odds and mark a new beginning.

Element	Description
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Element	Description
Chapter	Chapter Ten
Main Character - Ella	Initiates contact with childhood friend, Holden, aware of his autism and intrigued by their past friendship.
Main Character - Holden	An autistic boy overwhelmed during theater class; unaware of Ella's familiarity and past connection.
Classroom Incident	Holden is mocked by classmates during theater class; Ella defends him against their teasing.
Teacher Involvement	Mr. Hawkins, the theater teacher, encourages students to maintain focus and seriousness.
After Class Interaction	Ella attempts to connect with Holden but approaches cautiously due to his condition. Recognizes him as a childhood friend.
Connection Moment	Holden appreciates music, indicated by sharing a flashcard, which fosters a moment of connection with Ella.
Holden's Mother	Appears at class end, thanks Ella, and briefly discusses past family connections but defers deeper conversation.
Emotional Turn	Ella learns about challenges in their past friendship; experiences an emotional response from Holden by maintaining eye contact.
Conclusion	A glimpse of hope as a rekindled friendship seems possible despite hardships tied to Holden's autism.



## Critical Thinking

**Key Point:** Courage Overcomes Barriers

**Critical Interpretation:** Witnessing Ella's courage to stand up for Holden and to carefully bridge the gap between their worlds is an inspiration for anyone facing seemingly insurmountable obstacles. In your journey through life, you may encounter challenges where understanding seems distant and connection feels fragile. Yet, like Ella, you can find strength in empathy and perseverance, choosing to move forward with pure intentions and patience. By embracing courage and stepping into another's world with gentle support, understanding can blossom where ignorance once reigned. Ella's actions illuminate a path forward, one where compassion defeats prejudice, and friendship flourishes against all odds.

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## Chapter 11 Summary: Eleven

In Chapter Eleven, Holden is filled with excitement and gratitude over a life-changing day. This day holds special significance as it's the day he reunites with his childhood friend, Ella. As he and his mom leave a theater group event, Holden prays to God, expressing his thanks for a wonderful day. He acknowledges God's role in allowing him to be part of the group, calming the chaos during the play, and most importantly, in bringing Ella back into his life. The chapter reveals Holden's deep appreciation for the small miracles in his life and his faith that God loves him.

As they walk, Holden recalls a heartfelt conversation with Ella, who approached him with the warmth he fondly remembers. Their shared past is encapsulated in memories of running through fields and singing their favorite song, "Jesus Loves Me." This song serves as a metaphor for their lost friendship, now rekindled, spreading joy and a sense of community among schoolmates and beyond.

They discuss the play "Beauty and the Beast," highlighting a poignant contrast between outer appearances and inner goodness—a theme that resonates with Holden. To Holden, the Beast represents kindness and gentleness hidden beneath a rough exterior, unlike characters like Gaston who are seemingly nice but inwardly troubled. This reflects Holden's view of some of his peers, like those who wear football shirts, who may judge



based on appearances rather than understanding inner character.

As Holden, buoyed by the music and memories, shares his thoughts with his mom, he expresses a hope that their friendship will grow anew. The day culminates in a newfound hope encapsulated in a metaphorical song titled "Maybe Ella and I Will Have a Second Chance to be Friends." Holden's journey to therapy becomes a continuation of this hopeful narrative, underscoring his enduring faith and optimism for the future.

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## Chapter 12: Twelve

Chapter Twelve centers on Ella's emotional struggle as she tries to complete her algebra homework, distracted by the unresolved questions about her past connection with Holden Harris. Holden and his family were once close friends with Ella's family—until their bond dissolved when Holden began showing signs of autism. This chapter highlights Ella's journey to uncover the truth about the split between their families and confront her mother about it.

Feeling frustrated yet determined, Ella revisits a scrapbook filled with childhood photos of herself and Holden. Memories flood back as she sees pictures of them playing together, reflecting on the happy and healthy child Holden once was. Ella is troubled by the thought that these joyful moments were discarded along with their friendship.

When Ella's mother returns home and seems indifferent to Ella's emotions, Ella's anger toward her mother intensifies. Her mother, preoccupied with her appearance and apparent social life, avoids meaningful conversation with Ella, which only frustrates Ella more.

Desperate for answers, Ella directly confronts her mother about their past friendship with the Harris family. This leads to a tense exchange, with her mother initially giving evasive responses. However, pushed by Ella's



persistence, her mother admits the painful truth: Holden's autism had made interactions awkward, leading to emotional distance between the families. Ella's mother acknowledges the pain of losing Holden, revealing a glimpse of past warmth and affection towards him.

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## Chapter 13 Summary: Thirteen

In Chapter Thirteen, Tracy reflects on her past, particularly on Fridays, as she follows her routine of picking up her son Holden from school. These Fridays serve as a painful reminder of the tangible aspects of Holden she misses due to his autism—like his touch and the comforting presence of his little-boy self. Her husband Dan's absence due to his work at sea and her own struggles with despair adds to her emotional burden, leaving her turning to prayer for hope and signs of progress.

Fridays are also significant because they represent a semblance of normalcy, a time when she could imagine herself as any other mother engaged in typical activities with her child. This perception is profoundly challenged by the stark reality of her situation, with Holden's autism posing unique challenges and deepening Tracy's longing for connection—with both her son and her past.

A twist of fate brings Holden back together with Ella, the daughter of Tracy's former best friend, Suzanne Reynolds. Despite the dissolution of her friendship with Suzanne years ago, Tracy feels a sense of divine intervention orchestrating this reunion at Fulton High. The rekindled bond between Holden and Ella acts as a beacon of hope and kindness, reminiscent of the friendship Tracy once shared with Suzanne.





As Tracy drives to Fulton High, her mind returns to a cherished memory from fifteen years ago: a day filled with sweet tea, laughter, and children playing without a care. Holden and Ella's spontaneous joy left an indelible impression on her heart. Amidst this nostalgic reflection, Tracy receives what she perceives as a divine reassurance, recalling a verse from Isaiah that she'd often prayed over Holden, marking a moment of clarity and hope.

Finally, she arrives at the school with a renewed sense of faith and gratitude, albeit tinged with the sorrow of bygone days. The convergence of past and present—through Holden, Ella, and Tracy's faith—suggests the unfolding of a greater plan that Tracy trusts will bring healing and connection.

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## Chapter 14 Summary: Fourteen

In Chapter Fourteen, Ella experiences a pivotal moment of connection and revelation involving Holden, a boy with autism whom she hasn't seen in years. During a theater rehearsal at school, Ella senses that Holden remembers her from their past, despite the many years that have passed. This realization is confirmed when Holden looks straight at her, and Ella is reminded of the old photographs in her scrapbook showing their childhood bond.

After rehearsal, Ella approaches Holden. As they connect, Holden's mother, Mrs. Harris, enters the scene. Despite a recognized sense of sadness in Mrs. Harris's eyes, there is also a kind of peace about her, perhaps rooted in faith or trust. Ella shares that she has spoken to her own mother about Holden, a topic that hits Mrs. Harris with a mix of emotions. This encounter is significant for Ella, as it rekindles memories not only of Holden but of the deep bond their families once shared, which was severed due to Holden's autism diagnosis and the resulting discomfort from Ella's mother.

Through a heartfelt conversation, Ella learns that Mrs. Harris and her mother were best friends, practically like sisters, until misunderstandings regarding Holden's condition drove them apart. Ella discovers more about her mother's past, including how their families were intertwined through friendships and milestones such as weddings and family gatherings. The conversation brings





to light the pain both families endured when their friendship ended, partly due to misunderstandings about autism and fear.

As Holden shows signs of recognition and connection by responding to Ella's presence, she becomes motivated to ensure he gets the chance to join the school play, despite the challenges his autism might present in a theater setting. Driven by the warmth of reconnecting with Holden and his mother, Ella wants to help Holden integrate into something he loves—music and performance. However, Mrs. Harris points out financial constraints as a barrier to this opportunity.

Determined to support Holden, Ella contemplates how she might overcome these obstacles, including the theater fees that Holden's family cannot afford. The conversation with Mrs. Harris ignites a desire within Ella to bridge the gap between what was and what could be, both for their families' lost friendship and Holden's participation in the play.

As Ella leaves school, she encounters Michael Schwartz, a fellow student often teased for his differences and who quietly looks out for Holden. Their brief exchange further motivates Ella to challenge the status quo upheld by popular students like Jake, who bully those who do not fit in. Ella's interaction with Michael serves as a reminder that everyone deserves understanding and a chance for change, reinforcing her resolve to support Holden and bring about an inclusive environment.



The chapter concludes with Ella contemplating the power of prayer and miracles, inspired by Mrs. Harris's faith. She believes that miracles might be possible if someone just believes—a sentiment that reinforces her commitment to find a way to pay Holden's theater fees, ensuring he gets the chance he deserves.

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## Chapter 15 Summary: Fifteen

In Chapter Fifteen, Holden is exuberant, filled with joy after reconnecting with Ella. Their impromptu dance in the classroom is a metaphor for the rekindling of their friendship, captured poignantly in Holden's favorite "Maybe Ella and I Will Have a Second Chance to Be Friends" song. The chapter opens with him practically dancing to his mother's car, leaving school.

Holden radiates happiness as he acknowledges the kindness in others, even those whose kindness is hidden behind tough exteriors like football players and overly giggly girls. He prays that their inner kindness will surface to make Fulton High a better place. His encounter with Ella has profoundly touched him, renewing his hope for friendship and community.

As they reach the car, Holden expresses his euphoria to his mother. Though she remains pragmatic, focused on driving, Holden is lost in thought, reflecting on his conversation with Ella. His mind drifts to how they've always had a unique bond, seeing each other truly and deeply even when words weren't spoken. His mother's presence in this joyful culmination of events makes it even more special.

A significant moment arises when Ella presents a photo album, stirring cherished memories. The photos catalyze a surge of nostalgia, particularly



recalling a day they spent blowing bubbles, hoping the bubbles would reach heaven. This memory encapsulates their innocent dreams and enduring connection. Ella's quiet yet vivid reminiscing, mirrored by the day's lively music in Holden's heart, further deepens the moment's impact. Michael, a friend who plays the flute, is subtly highlighted, as Holden associates the day's soundtrack with him.

The drive home is filled with hope and prayer. Holden thanks Jesus for the day's blessings, envisioning a community imbued with love and friendship—a vision he anticipates will become reality. He prays for Ella, trusting that divine guidance will reach her heart.

The chapter crescendos when the possibility becomes a certainty: Ella and Holden will be in the spring play, "Beauty and the Beast," together. Holden's mother supports the idea, reading Holden's love for the play and reinforcing their family bond through shared memories of the story's themes of home and heart.

Finally, the chapter closes with Holden's heart metaphorically resting in Mr. Hawkins' drama class. This spot signifies his emotional home for the moment, where dreams, friendships, and music intertwine, promising a future woven with kindness and community—all captured in their shared anticipation of the play.

Key Elements	Summary
Reconnection with Ella	Holden and Ella rekindle their friendship with an impromptu dance, capturing their joy.
Holden's Happiness	He feels immense joy and recognizes hidden kindness in others at Fulton High School.
Mother's Presence	Holden shares his happiness with his mother, adding to the day's special significance.
Photo Album	Ella shows a photo album, evoking nostalgic memories and reinforcing their bond.
Memorable Day	Holden remembers a cherished day of blowing bubbles, symbolizing their innocent dreams.
Michael's Influence	The soundtrack he associates with Michael enhances the day's memories.
Spiritual Element	Holden prays, hoping for a community filled with love and kindness.
Role in the Play	Holden and Ella will share a role in "Beauty and the Beast"; his mother supports this.
Emotional Home	Mr. Hawkins' drama class becomes a metaphorical home for Holden, filled with hope.



## Critical Thinking

**Key Point:** Rekindling Lost Friendships

**Critical Interpretation:** In Chapter Fifteen of 'Unlocked,' Holden's rekindled friendship with Ella serves as a heartfelt reminder of the power and beauty of rediscovering and nurturing lost connections. You see, their spontaneous dance in the classroom isn't just a joyful act; it's a powerful metaphor for the joy and renewal that come from rebuilding relationships that may have been neglected or strained. By reaching out and finding common ground, you can foster an environment of warmth and camaraderie, much like Holden and Ella, and even make your surroundings better by acknowledging and celebrating the kindness beneath the surface of those around you. These moments can lead to a more enriched life, filled with hope, community, and the delightful promise of shared memories, much like what Holden envisions for himself and those at Fulton High.



## Chapter 16: Sixteen

### Chapter Sixteen Summary:

Ella found herself grappling with a mix of angst and determination as she made a difficult decision. After taking care of her mother's cleaning bill, she moved to a quieter section of the parking lot intending to call her father, Randy. This was unusual for her, as they hardly interacted, whether in person or by phone. She hesitated, her heart filled with anxiety, before finally dialing his number.

When Randy answered, he didn't immediately recognize her voice, underscoring the emotional distance between them. In the background, the noise of a gym suggested that Randy's attention was elsewhere, occupied by his social circle rather than family matters. Ella longed to ask her father for more than just financial aid—a meaningful relationship, perhaps love and concern. Instead, she pushed past her feelings and asked him for \$200, the amount needed for Holden's production fees that would allow him to join the play. The conversation left her feeling foolish and resolute; her father wouldn't be her source for the money. Instead, she decided to sell her iPod Touch, confident that one of her friends would buy it. This decision ignited in her a sense of independence and possibility; securing the funds herself meant that Holden could participate in the theater production class, which



she believed could open doors for both of them.

Meanwhile, Suzanne, Ella's mother, confronted her own struggles and a deteriorating marriage with Randy. Memories of past advice from her mother and best friend Tracy surfaced, highlighting the dichotomy of choices Suzanne had made. Her mother's counsel to "stay thin and look the other way" resonated with the athletic lifestyle of Randy, who was set to be a professional athlete—a world where superficial standards often overshadowed emotional fulfillment.

On the other hand, Tracy, a devout Christian and Suzanne's once-closest friend, advised her to prioritize love for God before her husband, invest genuine effort into her marriage, and maintain open communication. These instructions had initially fortified their relationship, especially when Randy had engaged with church activities. However, neither she nor Randy ever fully committed to these beliefs, and their weak faith eventually withered after a falling out with Tracy and Dan. Randy, now constantly consumed by his struggles in sports, had become indifferent towards their family life.

Facing this emotional turmoil, Suzanne watched her appearance in the bathroom mirror, feeling the weight of her dissatisfaction. Her reflection showed eyes that bore the sadness of unfulfilled desires and a marriage that had become a mere formality. Despite efforts to maintain her appearance and ignore her husband's neglect, she felt trapped in a cycle of trying to preserve





an image that overshadowed her self-worth and identity.

Recalling her mother's standards left Suzanne even more disillusioned. She pondered if her mother's death from lung cancer hadn't ended her judgment—had she been alive, perhaps she would have approved of Suzanne's current life, mistaking superficial success for true happiness. The realization that she had lived by her mother's flawed advice filled Suzanne with despondency. Her place as Randy's wife, her identity tied to his career and renown, seemed empty and recognition among her social circles a charade, a reality she continued to face every day as she upheld the façade her mother had once celebrated, leaving her isolated in a life that felt more like a stage than a marriage.

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## Chapter 17 Summary: Seventeen

In Chapter Seventeen, we find ourselves on a stormy day with Dan, a seasoned shrimp fisherman in Alaskan waters. Recently, fishing has been profitable enough for his family to manage their bills and therapy expenses for their autistic son, Holden. The looming storm, however, demands their attention. Despite the foreboding clouds, Dan remains committed to his work, knowing the bigger the catch, the greater the reward.

His brief respite comes through a phone call from his wife, Tracy. She updates him on their son, Holden, who has shown glimpses of change due to reconnecting with an old acquaintance, Ella Reynolds. Ella and Holden's unexpected reunion at Fulton High has apparently sparked a positive turn for Holden, who typically struggles with engagement. Ella, recalling fond memories through a scrapbook, has encouraged Holden to join in on rehearsals for the upcoming school musical, "Beauty and the Beast."

Though Dan is skeptical—given Holden's ongoing challenges with autism like his difficulty with eye contact—Tracy insists that something greater may be at work, suggesting divine intervention. Their conversation ends abruptly as a rogue wave threatens their boat, forcing Dan into immediate and terrifying action. The wave, mighty and unforgiving, sweeps Dan into the icy abyss of the ocean, rendering him helpless against nature's force. In those critical moments, Dan finds himself bargaining with God, pledging to



leave fishing behind if it means seeing even the slightest improvement in Holden's condition.

Miraculously, Dan survives the ordeal and makes it back onto the ship as the sea calms, realizing that two fishermen and a deckhand have perished in the tumult. This experience leaves Dan questioning his future, contemplating whether to return home permanently to support his family.

News about the rogue waves spreads nationwide, further emphasizing the peril Dan faced. Reflecting on the incident and his prayer, Dan wonders if Tracy might be right. Perhaps God is indeed working a miracle in Holden's life. Moving forward, Dan is filled with renewed hope and courage to embrace whatever comes next, including the possibility of reuniting with his family to witness the potential changes in Holden's life.

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## Chapter 18 Summary: Eighteen

In Chapter Eighteen, Ella undertakes a significant act of kindness by selling her iPod to pay for Holden Harris's theater fees. Holden, a student with autism, is not officially a member of the theater program at Fulton High. His past interactions and behaviors reflect significant challenges related to his autism. Nonetheless, Ella is unwavering in her determination to integrate him into the theater world, hoping it might offer him a new form of expression and connection.

The story unfolds with Ella approaching Ms. Henley at the school business office to submit the theater fees. Ms. Henley, known for her rigidity and skepticism, is initially dismissive, reminding Ella of the complexities and challenges associated with Holden's autism. However, Ella's sincere determination and heartfelt approach eventually convince Ms. Henley to accept the payment, with the possibility of Holden participating in the theater program if things align.

Despite holding back on informing Mr. Hawkins, the drama instructor, about the payment, Ella's motivation is driven by the subtle yet notable changes she observes in Holden during rehearsals. These observations include Holden making eye contact and lip-syncing to the music, indicating possible engagement with the material.



As interactions unfold, Ella speaks with Holden's mother, learning more about the nature of his autism and the challenges he faces. Mrs. Harris reveals that Holden has not engaged in touch since he was a small child, underscoring the depth of his disconnect. This insight deepens Ella's resolve, as she recognizes the therapeutic power of touch and human connection.

In the subsequent weeks, Ella focuses on delivering her best performance in hopes of contributing positively to Holden's progress. Gains in Holden's behavior become evident when he starts singing during a rehearsal, his voice a sign of breakthrough. This development is both celebrated by Ella and noted by Mr. Hawkins, though with cautious optimism.

Parallelly, the narrative shifts to Holden's home life, depicting his interactions with his mother, Tracy. A significant moment occurs when Holden, for the first time in many years, responds to his mother's statements about his involvement in theater by nodding, indicating comprehension and connection. This interaction is transformative, as Holden later sits beside his mother during a movie, eventually reaching out to hold her hand. This tender moment marks a significant emotional milestone and cements the budding hope that Holden is gradually emerging from his shell.

The chapter captures themes of perseverance, hope, and the transformative power of compassion and belief, illustrating the profound impact Ella's and Tracy's love and dedication have on Holden's journey.





## Chapter 19 Summary: Nineteen

In this chapter, Holden's influence on Ella becomes transformative as they navigate the challenges of high school together. Entering November, Ella adjusts her schedule to spend more time with Holden, walking him to classes for special-needs students and going with him to rehearsals. Her new routine provides solace from the tumultuous social dynamics at school, especially after a messy breakup with her boyfriend, Jake, whose negative comments about her being "boring" only strengthen her resolve to distance herself from her past group and focus on more meaningful connections.

Ella's evolving friendship with Holden offers her a new perspective on "normalcy" and acceptance, challenging her previous notions. Despite Holden's autism, she notices significant progress in him, including moments when he maintains eye contact and lightly converses with her. These small but meaningful interactions give Ella hope for his continued development.

Holden's singing, although sometimes out of sync with their surroundings, comforts him during anxious moments, such as when they chance upon a confrontation near the outdoor cafeteria. Concerned, Ella diverts their path to avoid the scene, an environment Holden would find distressing. Here, she realizes the profound impact their bond has on both their lives.

As they witness a bullying incident involving Michael Schwartz, Ella's sense



of justice ignites. She cannot ignore Jake's and his friends' mistreatment, which mirrors the broader issues of bullying at Fulton. Ella intervenes, helping Michael, who is grateful yet anxious about potential repercussions. Although Michael expresses a desire to avoid further help to prevent escalating the situation with Jake and the others, Ella feels compelled to act.

Ella decides to report the bullying, fully aware of the possible futility of her actions against entrenched social hierarchies. Despite this, she knows she must stand against unfairness. Bolstered by her interactions with Holden and his mother's faith, Ella contemplates prayer, a new frontier in her quest for change and support.

Her prayer is heartfelt and simple, asking God for guidance in combating the cruelty rampant at school and aiding Holden's continued progress. This spiritual act leaves Ella feeling unexpectedly uplifted, illuminating her path forward. Above all, she recognizes that while she can't singlehandedly alter the school climate, she can offer steadfast friendship to Holden, report injustices, and continue to seek divine assistance through prayer, becoming an advocate for kindness and understanding in her community.





## Chapter 20: Twenty

In Chapter Twenty, we dive deep into the life of Suzanne, who feels trapped behind the facade of her seemingly perfect life. Married to Randy Reynolds, a professional baseball player, Suzanne grapples with the emptiness masked by material success—a luxury car, a grand home, and societal status.

However, none of these have provided her with genuine fulfillment. As she reflects on her life, Suzanne is haunted by a sense of meaningless routine, exacerbated by Randy's frequent absences as he trains for his sports contract negotiations. Her dissatisfaction is so profound that she fears a breakdown unless something dramatically changes.

This Sunday morning unfolds a pattern familiar to Suzanne—putting on a charade of happiness through material possessions. However, her introspection takes her to a darker place, reminiscing about the movie "The Stepford Wives." In the film, women of a town are replaced with perfect, emotionless robots, a stark metaphor that Suzanne identifies with. She acknowledges how she has become like a Stepford wife, a shell of her former self, obsessed with maintaining a superficial image.

As Suzanne navigates her home, she confronts the reality of her family life. She remembers the vibrant albums filled with memories from a happier past—before her daughter Ella turned four—and realizes how those joyous times have faded. The glue binding their family, once strong, now lies in



disrepair due to the disintegration of love and shared laughter. She fears Randy's inevitable departure and the prospect of growing old without the respect or affection of her children.

Suzanne's mind drifts back to her friendship with Tracy Harris, a relationship once bound by shared experiences and faith. Tracy had always emphasized the importance of relying on faith and the assurance of God's love, suggesting that closeness to Jesus minimizes life's falls. Yet, as Suzanne's life unraveled, their friendship faltered, largely due to the tragic changes in Tracy's son Holden.

Holden had been a healthy child but began exhibiting signs of autism, retreating into a world of silence and predictability. Suzanne recalls the misunderstandings and subsequent tensions this created between her and Tracy. While Holden's condition was misinterpreted as mere defiance or developmental delay, the reality was much more complex—a neurological divergence demanding deeper empathy and understanding. Suzanne regrets her inability to support Tracy during those challenging times, recognizing her own preoccupation with how Holden's condition might affect Ella.

The final memory Suzanne contemplates is a joyful photograph of her and Tracy, a moment captured before the onset of Holden's transformation. It symbolizes all that they have lost—the friendship, family connections, and faith that once anchored her life. This loss set off a domino effect,



contributing to Suzanne's current existential crisis.

In a parallel narrative, Tracy navigates her Sunday morning with Holden. Despite the challenges, Tracy is determined to remain connected to her faith, knowing it provides a source of strength for both her and Holden. On this

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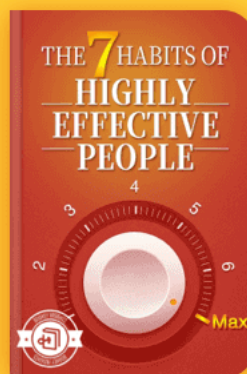
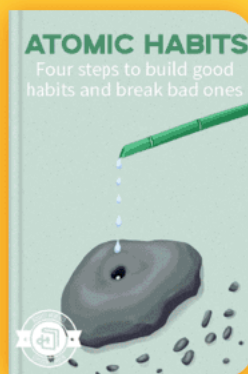
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## Chapter 21 Summary: Twenty-One

In Chapter Twenty-One, we witness a profound turning point in Ella's life, catalyzed by a visit to church. Ella, feeling an unexplainable urge, decides to attend a church service that Holden, a non-verbal friend with deep spiritual insight despite his inability to speak, has indirectly encouraged. This decision is unexpected for her family—her mother is notably stunned as religion seems absent from their lives.

Ella's family once attended church regularly, but as their attendance dwindled, so did their faith, leaving Ella and her siblings without a religious foundation. Yet, Ella finds herself intrigued by the idea of having a relationship with Jesus, a concept introduced to her by Mrs. Harris, Holden's compassionate and earnest mother. Ella recalls a conversation with Mrs. Harris, explaining how God communicates through scripture and leaves truths within our hearts—a notion that resonates deeply with Ella.

Entering the church, Ella reflects on her questionable past associations with unkind peers and questions whether her life glorifies God. Pastor Jeff's sermon reinforces this introspection, as he speaks about being a living sacrifice for God. He illustrates his message with a poignant demonstration involving his son, TJ, who represents the ultimate sacrifice God made for humanity. This display hits home for Ella, making her realize that God's love is unfathomable and that she desires to know more about this love.



As the service concludes, Ella becomes aware of Holden's unique form of communication—it dawns on her that when Holden moves his hands and elbows in what seems like a playful manner, he is actually praying. Ella is amazed by Holden's silent, constant prayer for those around him, a realization that deeply moves her.

In a touching conversation post-service, Ella shares her newfound understanding with Mrs. Harris. They explore the dual purpose of Holden's gestures: a defense mechanism as well as his way of praying. The level of compassion and sincerity in Holden's actions exemplifies a purity of faith and earnest pleas for everyone, even the people who are often cruel to him.

The chapter closes with Ella feeling profoundly touched and inspired by Holden's ability to communicate with God and advocate for others quietly. This awakening nudges her closer to understanding her faith and pursuing a deeper relationship with Jesus, marking the commencement of Ella's spiritual journey alongside Holden and his family.

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# Chapter 22 Summary: Twenty-Two

## Chapter Twenty-Two Summary

Over the course of two weeks, Ella becomes increasingly fascinated with Holden, driven by a yearning to understand his inner world. After discovering Holden's soulful prayers, she is convinced there is more to the quiet, introverted boy than meets the eye. During one pivotal afternoon in the theater room, Ella finds herself alone on stage practicing lines when Holden arrives early, escorted by a teacher's aide. After the aide leaves, Ella assures Holden she's his friend, soothing his apparent agitation.

Ella begins singing a song from the play, "Beauty and the Beast," and to her astonishment, Holden stands up and joins her on stage. He starts singing with her, revealing a stunningly pitch-perfect, melodic voice that leaves Ella awestruck. His performance is profound, and for a brief moment, he connects deeply with Ella. However, as soon as the music ends, Holden reverts to his usual mannerisms, wringing his hands and seeking comfort in the familiar rhythm of his flashcards.

Their theater teacher, Mr. Hawkins, witnesses the miraculous performance from his office and is equally stunned. Although tempted to offer Holden a role, Mr. Hawkins hesitates, knowing the precarious standing of the theater



department and fearing that casting a student with autism might jeopardize the quality and reception of their production. Ella pleads with Mr. Hawkins, stressing Holden's potential as the best male vocalist in the group, but her efforts are met with reluctance.

Despite the boundary of Holden's retreat after performing, both Ella and Mr. Hawkins are captivated by the occurrence. Ella resolves to continue supporting Holden, fostering more opportunities for his emergence through music. Simultaneously, Mr. Hawkins, while grappling with doubt, feels a significant pull towards giving Holden a chance. The chapter closes with Mr. Hawkins battling his internal conflict between adhering to societal norms and embracing the possibility of something extraordinary with Holden's undeniable talent.

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## Chapter 23 Summary: Twenty-Three

In Chapter Twenty-Three, Ella faces a pivotal moment of reflection and courage while dealing with personal and social challenges at her high school. At the outset, we learn that Ella has distanced herself from the social scene, particularly after falling out with her ex-boyfriend Jake and pulling away from her old friends. Her friend, LaShante, persuades her to attend a basketball game to avoid being alone among the drinking crowd that gathers beforehand.

Prior to the game, Ella considers visiting Holden, her childhood friend who is autistic. Recently, Holden has shown remarkable progress in his musical abilities, which Ella discusses with LaShante on their way to the game. Holden's singing talent, reminiscent of famous singers like Michael Bublé, has begun to open him up, and Ella notes a profound connection he has with music. This development offers hope and joy for both Holden's family and Ella herself, as she is renewed by their friendship and support.

At the game, LaShante shares troubling rumors about Jake, who is spreading hurtful gossip that Ella and Holden are romantically involved. Even worse, Jake has made a bet to sleep with Ella before graduation, a revelation that leaves her feeling betrayed and disillusioned. Despite the unsettling news, Ella resolves to maintain her distance from Jake and his crowd, finding solace in her true friends, LaShante and Holden.



As the night progresses, a cruel incident involving Michael Schwartz, a fellow student, unfolds. Jake and his friends mock and bully Michael outside the gym for being different, targeting him for his music preferences and perceived queer identity. Ella and LaShante intervene, with LaShante making a bold stand against the bullies, highlighting Jake's shameful behavior.

After the confrontation, Ella and LaShante try to comfort Michael by offering him a ride home, but he politely declines, wary of further attention. The encounter triggers an introspective moment for Ella, realizing that the popular crowd at her school perpetrates a toxic culture of bullying and exclusion. As LaShante and Ella part ways for the evening, they form a pact to be allies for those who need support, like Michael and Holden. In doing so, they lay the groundwork for a change at Fulton High, vowing to challenge the status quo and create a more inclusive environment.

Ultimately, Ella's resolve to stand by her friends—those who are often marginalized by the school's social hierarchy—and LaShante's fierce loyalty mark a turning point. Together, they are determined to shift the dynamics at their school, paving the way for a more compassionate community where every student can feel seen and valued.



## Chapter 24: Twenty-Four

Chapter Twenty-Four opens with Michael Schwartz arriving home, breathless and feeling ill, after a bike ride to his apartment complex. His mother sits at the kitchen table, weary and accompanied by a glass of cheap wine. She comments on his lateness, expecting him back from practice earlier. Michael explains he stayed late for flute practice, preparing for the upcoming Christmas concert. The conversation shifts to the topic of drums, which Michael's father used to play, but Michael insists his interest lies with the flute.

Michael's relationship with his absent father casts a long shadow. His father left them three years prior after admitting to an affair and a second family. Michael resents mentions of him or his drums, preferring the flute, which his mother grudgingly accepts. The memory of his father teaching him drums briefly surfaces, with the long-lost hope of a shared bond. This memory is tinged with bitterness, as Michael knows his father has moved on to a new family.

Michael's mother works tirelessly as a nurse's assistant, often pulling double shifts. Their interaction reveals a routine worn down by financial strain and the absence of Michael's father. Despite the situation, Michael tries to offer help and support to his mother, who responds with a brief but weary appreciation.



In the solitude of his modest room, Michael struggles with feelings of inadequacy and anger, often resorted to jumping rope to cope. He contemplates the social pressures from peers like Jake Collins, who mock him for playing the flute. The taunting echoes in his thoughts, linking the flute to accusations of being gay—an unfounded stereotype that haunts him. His treasured flute—a source of solace—is juxtaposed with the hurtful labels thrust upon him.

The narrative reaches a critical juncture when Michael, overwhelmed by despair, considers ending his life. His mind brims with thoughts of relief from the relentless pain of feeling unwanted, both by his father and peers. As he experiments with the idea of using his jump rope and chin-up bar for this grim purpose, he reflects on the flute—a symbol of the hope his teacher instilled in him, suggesting a bright future playing music.

At this pivotal moment, Michael's will to live surfaces. The melody and message of "O Holy Night" play in his mind, bringing an unexpected sense of hope. He envisions a future where he proves Jake Collins wrong, one where he achieves success through his passion for the flute. Yet, caught in his moment of desperation, the practical escape he crafted tightens dangerously against him.

As consciousness fades, a sense of peace and clarity comes from thoughts of



a Savior, a faint connection to a divine promise of love and freedom from oppression. In his final moments of struggle, Michael clings to this newfound belief, praying for salvation and expressing regret for seeking an irreversible solution.

The chapter closes on this conflicted prayerful note, capturing Michael's internal battle between despair and hope, underpinned by the enduring melody of "O Holy Night," which speaks to a universal yearning for redemption and peace.

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## Chapter 25 Summary: Twenty-Five

Chapter Twenty-Five unfolds on a somber Saturday morning in the suburbs of North Atlanta, where the tragic news of Michael Schwartz's apparent suicide sends shockwaves through the community and Fulton High School. Manny Hawkins, Michael's English teacher, grapples with the loss and the nagging guilt over not intervening in instances of bullying he witnessed. Michael, though a quiet and seemingly typical student, becomes a haunting symbol of the unseen struggles that some students face. The school environment is depicted as one where bullying is prevalent, and students often appear indifferent and self-centered, heightening Manny's despair for the future of the youth he teaches. However, he holds onto hope and purpose through two exceptional students, Ella Reynolds and Holden Harris, whose compassion and kindness stand out as beacons in a seemingly bleak environment.

Ella Reynolds is introduced amidst her mundane activities, preparing to meet her friend LaShante for a Christmas charity shopping spree. Their goal is to bring joy to underprivileged children, highlighting Ella's empathetic nature. However, her day takes an emotional turn upon hearing about Michael's death from her mother. The news stirs memories of seeing Michael endure bullying and Ella's regret for not having stepped in to prevent his tragic end. In her grief, a poignant reconciliation begins with her mother, offering a glimmer of healing and connection.



Meanwhile, Holden Harris, an autistic student and one of the few who befriended Michael, offers a unique perspective. His morning with his cousin Kate is filled with innocent conversation and shared moments over breakfast, illustrating the simplicity and sincerity with which he views the world. At school, Holden senses the pervasive sadness but finds solace in song, specifically "Jesus Loves Me," which he sings to calm himself and Ella. His keen perception and coping mechanisms indicate a depth of understanding that transcends the typical reactions to grief and loss.

The chapter also introduces Holden's father, Dan Harris, a fisherman off the Alaskan Peninsula. Upon learning of the tragedy and his son's transformation, Dan rushes home, hopeful of witnessing the positive changes in Holden that Tracy, Holden's mother, eagerly describes. The anticipation of seeing Holden's newfound communication and connection with Ella fills Dan with hope, as he dreams of reclaiming his relationship with his son amid the backdrop of tragedy.

This chapter weaves together several narratives – Mann's regret, Ella's compassion, Holden's innocence, and Dan's hope – to paint a picture of a community and family grappling with loss, bullying, and the possibility of redemption and transformation.

Aspect	Details
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Aspect	Details
Setting	North Atlanta suburbs, Fulton High School
Incident	Michael Schwartz's apparent suicide
Main Characters	Manny Hawkins, Ella Reynolds, Holden Harris, Dan Harris
Manny Hawkins	English teacher grappling with guilt over not intervening in bullying situations
Ella Reynolds	Compassionate student who feels regret for not stepping in to prevent bullying
Holden Harris	Autistic student who befriended Michael and finds solace in music
Dan Harris	Holden's father, a fisherman learning of his son's transformation and rushing home with hope
Key Themes	Bullying, regret, hope, community grief, redemption
Narrative Arcs	Manny's regret, Ella's empathy, Holden's innocence, Dan's hope



## Chapter 26 Summary: Twenty-Six

### Chapter Summary:

In this chapter, Ella takes pivotal steps to honor the memory of her classmate Michael Schwartz, who tragically died by suicide. Her actions highlight the impact of bullying and the collective responsibility of the school community in preventing such tragedies. After meeting with Principal Randi Richards, they plan an all-school memorial, a first for the institution, intending to spark change and save future students like Michael. The memorial includes performances by the school choir and band, with Ella as the keynote speaker, emphasizing the urgency of addressing the root causes of bullying.

Parallel to this, Ella reconnects with her autistic friend Holden Harris, whom she seeks to help in the aftermath of Michael's death. Drama teacher Mr. Hawkins, dealing with his own grief over Michael, sees potential in Holden and offers him the role of the Prince in the school play, a move symbolizing redemption and second chances. Despite Holden's struggles with communication and social interaction, Ella supports and believes in him, knowing that he has it in him to succeed.

During rehearsal, Holden surprises everyone by embodying the Prince with a stunning performance, including singing and dancing, which leaves the class



and Mr. Hawkins in awe. Ella sees this as a breakthrough, a chance to showcase Holden's hidden talents and counter the prejudices he often faces.

Later, Ella takes Holden home, becoming part of his daily routine. To her amazement, Holden's daily ritual includes watching home movies of their childhood friendship, a time captured on film where they sang and danced together. The scenes mirror their innocence and bond before life's complexities pulled them apart. The realization of how deeply Holden treasures these memories moves Ella to tears, but she finds solace as Holden, showing a profound understanding, comforts her by holding her hand.

Through these events, Ella learns about the depth of Holden's inner world and realizes that, despite appearances, he perceives and feels much more than people assume. The chapter closes with Ella contemplating the profound connection she and Holden share, a bond that transcends time and challenges, reinvigorating her resolve to bring understanding and compassion to those around her.



## Chapter 27 Summary: Twenty-Seven

### Chapter Twenty-Seven Summary:

In this pivotal chapter, we witness a transformative moment in a community grappling with the recent loss of one of their own, Michael Schwartz. The narrative unfolds around a memorial service organized by Ella, a determined and empathetic student who takes on the task of honoring Michael's life and impact. With Holden, a fellow student with autism whose newfound gift of singing emerges as the chapter's emotional centerpiece, Ella aims to spark change and awareness among her peers.

The memorial service is a tapestry of love, sorrow, and hope. Ella greets Michael's grieving mother, who expresses gratitude for the remembrance of her son, revealing the loneliness Michael endured. This scene sets the tone for the rest of the chapter, highlighting the profound disconnect between Michael and his peers. As students take their seats, oblivious to the gravity of the moment—engaging in trivial conversations—Ella hopes for a change of heart.

The service begins with a slideshow of Michael's life accompanied by a poignant performance of Rascal Flatts' "Why," a song about the unbearable pain of losing someone to suicide. The images and music slowly break



through the students' inattentiveness, beginning to tug at their hearts, but not entirely.

Ella orchestrates a powerful climax by inviting Holden to the stage. Despite whispering and laughter from the crowd, Ella's unwavering conviction gives Holden the courage to perform "O Holy Night," a song Michael dearly loved. As Holden sings, a miraculous transformation occurs. His performance, filled with raw emotion and clarity, captivates everyone. The beauty of his voice underscores the message that everyone has a song within them and a unique value, despite their differences, like Michael and Holden.

Amidst the striking performance, Ella pours out her heart, confronting her peers about their failure to acknowledge Michael's gift and urging them not to repeat the same mistake with Holden or any other marginalized student. Her emotional plea resounds through the gym, reaching out to those who have been indifferent or cruel. Ella's call to action is a simple yet profound request—to come and support their upcoming school musical, "Beauty and the Beast." The play, symbolizing the theme of looking beyond appearances to see inner beauty, becomes a vessel for ongoing memorial and hope.

As the service concludes, Holden gives Michael's sheet music to his mother, a gesture that bridges the past and future, signifying that Michael's spirit and message still resonate. The chapter ends with Ella and Holden leaving the auditorium, hopeful yet anxiously awaiting to see if their message took root,



to surface, perhaps, opening night of the play.

This chapter encapsulates the themes of transformation, unity, and hope. It illustrates the potential impact of a compassionate heart in mending fractured communities and healing individual psyches, all while pointing to the redemptive power of music and love.

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## Chapter 28: Twenty-Eight

### Chapter Twenty-Eight Summary:

In this poignant chapter, Tracy experiences a deeply unexpected and emotional moment as her son Holden stands before a gym full of his peers and beautifully sings "O Holy Night." This miracle, something she'd never dared dream of, is a moment of healing not just for Holden, but for Tracy's entire family. Her husband, Dan, who's been distant and burdened with guilt, is present to witness this moment, offering them both a chance at mending their fractured lives.

Tracy reflects on her loneliness during the years Dan worked in Alaska, chasing away the pain of losing Holden to the silence of his autism diagnosis. Today, as Dan holds her hand and tears stream down his face, Tracy feels a shift—perhaps he's ready to be the steady, present husband and father their family needs. She hopes fervently that Dan will choose to stay with them in Atlanta, ending his running from their shared pain.

In the sea of emotion, Tracy is shocked to spot Suzanne Reynolds among the attendees—a former best friend turned stranger after Holden's diagnosis. Their eyes meet briefly, and Tracy's world shakes with unearthed emotions and unresolved histories. The chapter captures the essence of long-lost



friendships and the passage of time, where their shared laughter and love seem both distant and just yesterday.

Holden's performance leads to a touching moment when Dan expresses pride in his son, words that had gathered dust since Holden's early childhood. Though real-life interaction isn't like in the movies, meaningful words exchanged between Dan and Holden suggest a breakthrough that's both a blessing and a step toward healing.

After the service, Tracy braces herself to face Suzanne, their old wounds woven with the fabric of lost years. In a heartfelt meeting, both women acknowledge the regrets that have bubbled beneath their surface since they drifted apart. Suzanne, visibly altered by life's pressures and estrangement, is struggling in her marriage to a fading public figure, Randy Reynolds, and with her role, feeling like nothing more than his wife. Her disenchanted monologue reveals she's lost herself along the way.

Amidst Suzanne's admission of her life's emptiness, she and Tracy find a fragile common ground in the shared history of their children—Holden and Ella—who have found their way back to each other. As they tentatively plan to reconnect over coffee, Tracy offers her empathy and willingness to rebuild some semblance of their friendship.

This chapter intricately weaves together themes of miracles, redemption, and





the relentless passage of time, spotlighting God's quiet, transformative work in their lives. Tracy recognizes that the miracle unfolding isn't just about freeing Holden from his silence; it's a chance for all of them to find healing and connection once more.

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## Chapter 29 Summary: Twenty-Nine

Chapter Twenty-Nine unfolds as Dan decides to make a life-altering change, choosing to stay home with his family rather than return to the Alaskan seas. He applies for a maintenance job with the local school district, valuing stability and the chance to be with Tracy and their son, Holden, who has autism. Dan's decision reflects his commitment to his family, even though being home presents its own challenges. Despite an ongoing struggle for familial connection, particularly with Holden, Dan's marriage with Tracy deepens as they confront the emotional distance they've experienced in their family life.

Holden, who rarely communicates verbally with Dan, often expresses himself through humming, singing, and dancing, yet Dan remains hopeful for a breakthrough. Tracy provides steadfast support, having long battled the daily battles of therapy appointments and years without clear progress, which deepens Dan's admiration for her strength. During a poignant Christmas, Dan and Tracy share a heart-to-heart, and Dan grapples with guilt for being an absent father and husband for so long. Tracy reassures him with love, emphasizing that love doesn't abandon ship, urging Dan to focus on the present and their growing son.

As seasons change, Dan fully commits to being part of Holden's life, actively participating in activities like picking him up from school drama



rehearsals. A breakthrough occurs one day when Holden initiates a conversation with Dan, calling him "Dad" and asking about his time fishing in Alaska. Dan is overcome with joy as this marks a significant step in their relationship. Despite Holden's atypical speech patterns and reliance on music for communication, Dan embraces the opportunity to engage with him, realizing that music serves as Holden's bridge to the world around him.

Holden's ability to recite words Dan used during his childhood – when impressing the young Holden with push-ups – highlights a crucial connection. Holden's actions imply a deep, personal link between father and son, despite the years of seeming disconnect. As they talk, Holden shares memories and acknowledges Dan's past absence with striking insight.

Tracy, holding onto a cherished photograph from when Holden was three, reflects on the profound changes that came after his autism diagnosis. This picture symbolizes who Holden was before the disorder drastically altered their lives. She keeps the photo as a private reminder of a time when Holden's eyes shone with unabashed joy and life. Inspired by her niece, Kate, who connects naturally with Holden, Tracy understands that although their son isn't the child in the picture anymore, he is still present, albeit in a different way.

The narrative concludes with Tracy hopeful for Holden's future, the increasing signs of his independence bringing a sense of optimism. The



chapter closes with Tracy determined to never stop praying for Holden's complete return, drawing strength from the photo and the newly witnessed milestones in his development. Her commitment to seeing Holden with new eyes mirrors the hope she has for their family's future, emphasizing the power of love, patience, and perseverance.

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## Chapter 30 Summary: Thirty

### Chapter Thirty Summary:

Months of preparation led to the opening night of Fulton High's drama club production of "Beauty and the Beast." Ella, one of the leads playing Belle, was in the final stages of preparation, both excited and anxious. The drama department had been struggling, with reduced performances becoming the norm, and this show represented a swan song, not just for the students, but for Mr. Hawkins, the beloved drama teacher who was to retire. Hawkins had given passionate speeches to his students, encouraging them to invite friends to fill the seats, though he remained uncertain about the turnout.

Holden, who played the Prince, had undergone significant personal growth, thanks in no small part to his friendship with Ella. He was a quieter, introspective soul, navigating the world through an autistic lens. Despite these challenges, he found comfort in music and Ella's company, using heartfelt gestures and music to communicate his feelings.

As the cast prepared for the performance, Ella worried about Holden's readiness amidst the bustling chaos. She found Holden in the prop room, rehearsing his role with imaginary partners, and gently brought him back to the main ensemble with calm reassurance.



The apprehension in the air was palpable, especially since the auditorium seemed empty with no audible noise from an audience settling in. Ella was concerned that their collective efforts might go unseen, threatening to undermine the future of the drama program and her relationship with Holden. However, Holden's innocent belief in his prayer for an audience of 1,053 hinted at the faith Ella needed to carry through.

Tracy and Dan, Holden's parents, arrived dressed in their best, filled with nerves about how their son would perform. Tracy compared the years of Holden's distance—a puzzle unlocked by tonight's efforts—as akin to a kidnapping, hoping now to finally "find" her son in his performance.

Mr. Hawkins, inspired by the students, especially Holden and Ella, had begun to believe in the unimaginable through witnessing faith's power and the transforming nature of love and acceptance. He encouraged the cast to circle up for a prayer led by Ella before the curtain rose, a shared moment of poignancy that underscored the miracle they were part of together.

As Mr. Hawkins stepped on stage, he was greeted by unexpected thunderous applause; the auditorium was filled beyond capacity. Students from all cliques, community members, and Holden's parents were present, reflecting the unity and spirit ignited by the events leading up to this night. Even a significant student who had passed away, Michael, was remembered and



subtly honored, as LaShante—a new member—played in his place in the band.

The atmosphere before the curtain rise was one of excitement and emotional catharsis, as Mr. Hawkins prepared to announce the beginning of the show, heralding it not just as a school play, but as a manifestation of miracles and bridge-building accomplished through the arts, friendship, and the community.

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## Critical Thinking

**Key Point:** Power of Community and Faith

**Critical Interpretation:** The key point of holding faith in the power of community and belief shines brightly through the journey of the drama club at Fulton High. As you reflect on this chapter, consider how the collective strength and unwavering belief of students, teachers, and family members came to life in the form of a packed auditorium. It's a testament to the faith and determination of people coming together for a shared purpose, transcending boundaries and limitations. Whether in an ensemble cast preparing for an acting debut or in life, the potential for creating something incredible emerges when you unite with others, driven by a shared vision and unshakable belief. Thus, embracing the strength of community and faith in something greater than yourself can manifest miracles, bridging gaps and highlighting the beauty that exists in cooperation and love.



## Chapter 31 Summary: Thirty-One

In this chapter, the performance at Fulton High takes center stage as the students gather to honor Michael Schwartz through a musical, using the power of music and community to bring everyone together. Ella feels a profound sense of gratitude as she performs, overwhelmed by the energy of playing to an audience filled to capacity, each attendee united by different motivations but ultimately there to support Holden Harris, a student known for his kind, loving nature despite his autism.

Throughout the play, Ella is particularly attentive to Holden, who sits in the wings, rocking gently — a reminder of how far he has come since they first met. Concerned for Holden, she devises a plan with her friend LaShante to have the flute section play "Tale as Old as Time" early during a crucial transformation scene, hoping the familiar tune will comfort him.

The narrative builds to a pivotal moment as Holden steps onto the stage to transform from the Beast into a prince. Despite the pressure, Holden delivers a line he had never uttered during rehearsals, revealing a newfound confidence and self-awareness. As the crowd erupts in applause, Ella realizes that Holden isn't merely acting; he is genuinely embracing his role in a way that defies his autism.

Suzanne, Ella's mother, experiences a flood of emotion witnessing the



transformative impact Holden has had on her family, her husband Randy's unexpected attendance adding another layer of hope and healing. The story highlights the struggles Suzanne's family has faced and hints at a future where they might reconnect on deeper terms, each realizing their own vulnerabilities and strengths.

After the performance, the audience's standing ovation signifies the impact Holden and the cast have made. As the characters embrace, Suzanne feels a renewed sense of hope and reconciliation, particularly drawn to her daughter Ella's strength and compassion. In the process, Holden continues to embody a miraculous transformation, showcasing that beauty and true strength often stem from within, beyond any disabilities or external challenges.

Holden's reflective prayers reveal his gratitude for the performance and his strong bond with Ella, highlighting his wish for everyone to have their hearts in the right place. His cousin Kate, a source of familial love, acknowledges Holden's impact, reinforcing the power of connection and understanding.

Ultimately, the story closes with a heartfelt moment between Holden and Ella, encapsulating the theme of friendship transcending challenges, as both share in the music that continues to connect them deeply. Their hug symbolizes a mutual understanding and acceptance, reflecting the culmination of Holden's journey toward self-discovery and the community's broader lesson in seeing beyond appearances to appreciate the beauty within.

