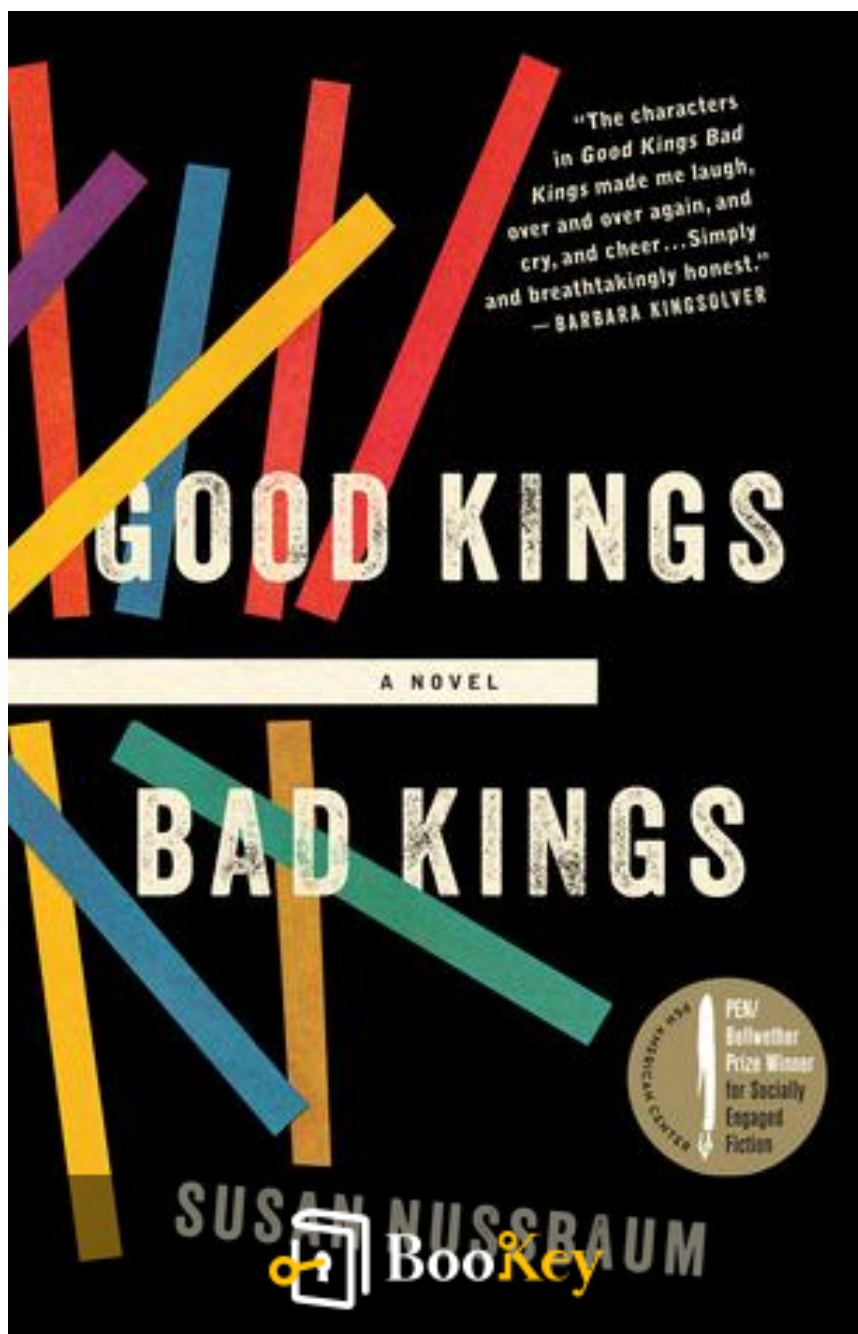


# Good Kings Bad Kings PDF (Limited Copy)

Susan Nussbaum



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## **Good Kings Bad Kings Summary**

Unseen Alliances and Resilience in a Hidden Community

Written by New York Central Park Page Turners Books Club

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## About the book

In "Good Kings Bad Kings," Susan Nussbaum immerses readers in the vibrant yet challenging environment of the ILLC, a residential facility for youth with disabilities located on the South Side of Chicago. This poignant tale unfolds through the perspectives of its diverse residents, each possessing unique backgrounds, struggles, and dreams. Through their voices, Nussbaum explores the themes of friendship, trust, love, and resilience, highlighting how these young individuals navigate the complexities of their lives.

The characters include a mix of residents, each facing their own battles against societal prejudice and personal hardships. As they come together in the ILLC, these friendships become a lifeline, providing the emotional support needed to confront and overcome their adversities. The narrative showcases their collective strength as they challenge mistreatment from caregivers and the systemic barriers imposed by a society that often overlooks their humanity.

As the story progresses, readers witness the transformative journey of these young people as they reclaim their voices and assert their rights. Their experiences are depicted with authenticity, shedding light on not only the struggles they face but also the joy and hope that arise from their resilient spirits. Nussbaum's narrative serves as a powerful reminder of the importance of community, empathy, and the fight for dignity, effectively

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illuminating the significant yet often invisible lives of those with disabilities.

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## About the author

In "Good Kings Bad Kings," Susan Nussbaum presents a poignant and powerful narrative centered around the lives of young people with disabilities living in a residential facility named the Illinois Center for Rehabilitation and Education (ICRE). The novel unfolds through the perspectives of several characters, each bringing their unique voice and experience, creating a rich tapestry that highlights the challenges and triumphs faced by individuals with disabilities.

The story begins with a vivid introduction to the ICRE, a place meant to provide care and rehabilitation but that often feels more like a prison due to its restrictive environment and the authority figures who manage it. Key characters include Yessenia, a spirited girl with a strong will; her friend's deeply introspective reflections fuel the narrative as they push against the societal constraints placed on them.

As the chapters progress, readers are introduced to a range of compelling figures, from the empathetic yet flawed staff members to the other residents. Each character's personal stories reveal the complexities of living with disabilities, battling societal stigma, and the struggle for autonomy. Nussbaum explores themes of identity, friendship, and the quest for freedom in a world that often marginalizes those who are different.

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Mostly narrated through the residents' voices, the chapters delve into significant experiences, such as the awakening of their desire for independence and breaking free from the oppressive environment. They grapple with issues such as the lack of understanding from the outside world and the limitations imposed by those in power, including the sometimes well-meaning but misguided adults working at the center.

Throughout the novel, Nussbaum skillfully addresses social justice issues, shining a light on the need for empowerment and advocacy for individuals with disabilities. Her nuanced portrayal encourages empathy and understanding, challenging readers to reconsider their perceptions of disability and the importance of inclusivity.

The narrative arc builds toward a climactic confrontation with the institution's authority, pushing both the characters and readers to reflect on the systemic barriers faced by individuals with disabilities. By the end, the characters' growth encapsulates the essence of resilience and the need for change, making a profound statement about the fight for dignity and self-determination.

Nussbaum's debut not only captivates through its storytelling but also serves as a call to action, reinforcing her role as an advocate for marginalized voices. With a keen understanding of the human spirit, she crafts a narrative



that is both heartbreaking and hopeful, ultimately leaving readers inspired to embrace diversity and champion the rights of all individuals, regardless of their abilities.

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# Summary Content List

Chapter 1: Yessenia Lopez

Chapter 2: Joanne Madsen

Chapter 3: Ricky Hernandez

Chapter 4: Michelle Volkmann

Chapter 5: Yessenia Lopez

Chapter 6: Teddy Dobbs

Chapter 7: Ricky Hernandez

Chapter 8: Jimmie Kendrick

Chapter 9: Ricky Hernandez

Chapter 10: Mia Oviedo

Chapter 11: Joanne Madsen

Chapter 12: Yessenia Lopez

Chapter 13: Ricky Hernandez

Chapter 14: Michelle Volkmann

Chapter 15: Jimmie Kendrick

Chapter 16: Joanne Madsen

**More Free Book**



Scan to Download

Chapter 17: Teddy Dobbs

Chapter 18: Jimmie Kendrick

Chapter 19: Michelle Volkmann

Chapter 20: Mia Oviedo

Chapter 21: Teddy Dobbs

Chapter 22: Yessenia Lopez

Chapter 23: Joanne Madsen

Chapter 24: Ricky Hernandez

Chapter 25: Jimmie Kendrick

Chapter 26: Yessenia Lopez

Chapter 27: Mia Oviedo

Chapter 28: Joanne Madsen

Chapter 29: Teddy Dobbs

Chapter 30: Ricky Hernandez

Chapter 31: Michelle Volkmann

Chapter 32: Yessenia Lopez

Chapter 33: Jimmie Kendrick

**More Free Book**



Scan to Download

Chapter 34: Ricky Hernandez

Chapter 35: Yessenia Lopez

Chapter 36: Michelle Volkmann

Chapter 37: Teddy Dobbs

Chapter 38: Ricky Hernandez

Chapter 39: Mia Oviedo

Chapter 40: Yessenia Lopez

Chapter 41: Teddy Dobbs

Chapter 42: Yessenia Lopez

Chapter 43: Michelle Volkmann

Chapter 44: Joanne Madsen

Chapter 45: Jimmie Kendrick

Chapter 46: Michelle Volkmann

Chapter 47: Mia Oviedo

Chapter 48: Yessenia Lopez

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## Chapter 1 Summary: Yessenia Lopez

In the opening chapter of "Good Kings Bad Kings," we are introduced to Yessenia Lopez, a spirited girl grappling with life's harsh realities. She reflects on a saying from her beloved tía Nene, which warns that three bad events herald a change in luck. Unfortunately, Yessenia finds herself confined in the unpleasant environment of the Illinois Learning Center for children with disabilities, feeling overwhelmed by her string of misfortunes.

Yessenia reminisces about her challenging time at Herbert Hoover High School, where students like her, who contend with various physical and mental disabilities, are often marginalized. A significant incident occurs when she clashes with Mary Molina, a fellow student who taunts her. Fueled by a need to assert herself, Yessenia uses her wheelchair as a tool of empowerment, leading to a spirited altercation that ultimately results in disciplinary action. For Yessenia, this conflict is just another entry in her long list of adversities; she equates it to bad luck, especially since the fallout sees her sentenced to three months in juvenile detention—a consequence that weighs heavily on her heart, particularly in the wake of her tía's death, which she views as the most devastating blow.

As Yessenia adjusts to life in the Illinois Learning Center, a place she despises even more than juvenile detention, she wrestles with her notions of good and bad luck. Her introspection reveals a fierce resilience and a flicker



of hope that, perhaps after several setbacks, better days might lie ahead. The chapter powerfully encapsulates themes of identity, the quest for dignity, and the systemic adversities faced by individuals with disabilities. Through Yessenia's perspective, we experience her frustration, strength, and unwavering determination to rise above her circumstances.

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## Chapter 2 Summary: Joanne Madsen

In Chapter 2 of "Good Kings Bad Kings," we are introduced to Joanne Madsen, a young woman living with quadriplegia who is seeking both purpose and connection in her life. Struggling with her condition, Joanne stumbles across a job advertisement for a data-entry clerk position at the Illinois Learning and Life Skills Center (ILLC), a nursing facility designed for young people with disabilities. Although data entry is not her dream job, she believes it may offer the low-pressure environment she needs given her current situation.

Joanne reflects on the complexities of her life—being wheelchair-bound presents both physical and societal challenges, particularly the stigma of job discrimination. Her family, while well-meaning, does not fully grasp the extent of her struggles, often pressuring her to aspire to greater heights. Yet, Joanne is also cognizant of her financial stability, which allows her a comfortable lifestyle despite her limitations. The isolation she frequently experiences in her apartment begins to weigh heavily on her, prompting her to take the leap and apply for the job.

Upon starting her position at ILLC, Joanne is confronted with an unsettling reality. What she initially perceives as a nurturing environment reveals itself to be a facility that houses many young individuals against their will, filled with sadness and stark challenges. This poignant realization deepens her





empathy as she observes the hardships faced by the children—many are grappling with multiple disabilities and traumatic pasts.

Among these children, Joanne forms special bonds with Mia, a girl confined to her chair, and Teddy, an exuberant boy whose vivacity brings light even amidst adversity. Through her role, Joanne gains the opportunity to interact with these young individuals, which fills her with a sense of belonging and purpose that she longs for.

As Joanne adapts to her new role, she battles the emotional weight that comes with working in a nursing home contrasted by the comfort found in the familiar surroundings of her own apartment, adorned with personal treasures. Yet, through her interactions with Mia, Teddy, and others, she discovers fleeting moments of joy amid the challenges, ultimately recognizing that her work provides her life with newfound meaning and direction. Embracing her responsibilities, Joanne acknowledges the importance of her job; she now has a place to go each day and a story to share—she is part of a world that needs understanding and compassion.

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## Chapter 3 Summary: Ricky Hernandez

In Chapter 3 of "Good Kings Bad Kings," we are introduced to Ricky Hernandez, a dedicated staff member at a school for children with disabilities, who navigates the complexities of working with students facing significant emotional and behavioral challenges. Central to this chapter is Pierre, a fourteen-year-old boy grappling with ADHD and PTSD, whose hyperactivity and turmoil create a volatile classroom dynamic. His demand for a Baby Ruth candy bar leads to an outburst that disrupts the lesson, prompting Ricky to step in.

Ricky's approach is marked by empathy, drawing from his own experiences growing up, where discipline often manifested as physical punishment. This background informs his commitment to treat the children with respect and care, recognizing that behaviors like Pierre's are often responses to deeper emotional pain rather than intentional mischief. As they navigate the chaos of the classroom, Ricky reflects on the importance of communication and kindness—not only as strategies for management but as essential components in fostering healing.

To help Pierre calm down, Ricky guides him to the time-out room—a space laden with unpleasant odors—where he continues to engage him in conversation, learning about Pierre's passion for pizza as a means to connect. Throughout this interaction, we learn that Pierre's frail physical



condition, hinted at being tied to rickets, symbolizes the neglect and hardships he faces.

Ricky's insights into Pierre's plight reveal the systemic challenges children like him encounter; they often become trapped in a cycle of misbehavior leading to punitive responses that overlook their basic need for understanding and emotional nourishment. As Pierre begins to settle, Ricky contemplates giving him a chance to join his peers for lunch, but his conversation with Mrs. Schmidt exposes the harsh reality of punitive measures that sometimes deprive children of social and emotional interactions they desperately need.

This chapter effectively underscores vital themes of empathy, the generational cycle of trauma, and the inadequacies of punitive educational frameworks that fail to cater to individual needs. Ricky's compassionate approach serves as a poignant reminder of the transformative power of kindness in a system that could otherwise isolate and punish vulnerable children, emphasizing that true support goes beyond discipline—children require compassion and understanding to flourish.



## Chapter 4: Michelle Volkmann

In Chapter 4 of "Good Kings Bad Kings," we are introduced to Michelle Volkmann, a dedicated recruiter for Whitney-Palm Health Solutions, who faces the daunting task of finding new clients among the homeless population. The chapter opens with Michelle attending a parents' resource fair at Oscar Mayer Children's Hospital, where her commitment to helping vulnerable individuals is evident. Following the fair, she visits a nearby women's shelter, looking to connect with potential recruits for the Illinois Learning and Life Skills Center—a facility designed to provide care and support for those in need.

Michelle's passion for her work is palpable as she reflects on her motivations and background. She shares personal anecdotes about her family, particularly her mother, who works long hours at Aldi while struggling with health issues but remains hesitant to seek help. This dedication to her own family's resilience reinforces Michelle's commitment to her role, where her compensation is directly tied to the successful placements she makes, adding pressure to her already challenging job.

While at the shelter, Michelle meets Cheri, a fifteen-year-old girl with visible disabilities, including a limp and a twisted hand. Cheri has been recently expelled from her home after a distressing incident involving a boy. Despite her difficult circumstances, she exhibits a remarkable honesty and



resilience that immediately resonates with Michelle. As their conversation unfolds, Michelle learns that Cheri has schizophrenia, a revelation that surprises her given the girl's previously understated demeanor.

Their interaction serves as a critical moment, showcasing Michelle's

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## Chapter 5 Summary: Yessenia Lopez

In Chapter 5 of "Good Kings Bad Kings," we delve into the life of fifteen-year-old Yessenia Lopez, who is navigating the challenges of being in an institution known as the ILLC (Independent Living Learning Center). Frustrated by her surroundings, Yessenia laments being stuck with younger children whom she perceives as immature and unclean. This sense of confinement prompts her to reflect on her past experiences in juvenile detention, where she met other troubled girls like Yoyo, who struggled with addiction, and Maricela, whose trauma weighed heavily on her. These encounters strengthen Yessenia's appreciation for her late aunt, Tía Nene, who provided her with love and support amid the chaos.

At ILLC, Yessenia's routine is filled with the mundane aspects of life, including school and bus rides, yet she finds solace in her friendship with Cheri. Their shared experiences and laughter in the face of adversity create a bond that offers Yessenia a glimpse of hope in her bleak reality.

Yessenia's family dynamics are complex; while she mourns the loss of Tía Nene, she remains indifferent toward her biological parents. Her sessions with her counselor, Ms. Flowers, reveal her internal struggle between a desire for independence and resentment towards the idea of being placed with a foster mother. Tía Nene represents Yessenia's true maternal figure, making her yearning for autonomy even more poignant.



Through Yessenia's perspective, this chapter poignantly highlights themes of resilience, friendship, and the quest for identity amid systemic challenges and personal trauma. It showcases her ongoing battle to maintain her sense of self and connection to those she cherishes despite overwhelming obstacles in her life.

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## Chapter 6 Summary: Teddy Dobbs

In Chapter 6 of "Good Kings Bad Kings," we delve into the thoughts and aspirations of Teddy Dobbs, a resident at a facility for disabled youth, as he devises a plan to escape before he is relocated to an old folks' home at the age of twenty-two. Teddy's desire for freedom is intensified by haunting memories, particularly a disturbing incident involving a pantless man in a wheelchair that he experienced during a visit with his father.

As Teddy grapples with his escape plan, his thoughts often drift to Mia, a girl who has become more than a friend to him. Mia, who has cerebral palsy, has been a part of Teddy's life since he began living at the facility. Their bond is rooted in shared experiences, with Teddy reflecting on their time together and his infatuation with her. He adores Mia despite the challenges she faces, including a faulty wheelchair and the emotional weight of being separated from her family since entering the facility.

The chapter also provides a glimpse into life within the facility, where Teddy and his friends receive meager allowances—often insufficient after their basic needs are accounted for. His friendship with Bernard, who shares his rebellious spirit, highlights the camaraderie among the residents as they bond over small rules they break together, such as smoking.

While Teddy confronts the hurtful label of being "retarded," he steadfastly



refuses to be defined by it. Instead, he draws strength from his relationships, particularly with Mia and Bernard. Their companionship illuminates the themes of longing for freedom, the challenges of fitting into societal expectations, and the vital support found in friendship amid adversity. With Teddy's affection for Mia acting as his primary motivator, he becomes increasingly determined to realize his dream of escaping the confines of the facility, striving for a brighter future.

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## Chapter 7 Summary: Ricky Hernandez

In Chapter 7 of "Good Kings Bad Kings", readers are introduced to Ricky Hernandez, a kind-hearted employee at a care center in Chicago, as he faces the stormy weather of the city. Amidst the rain, he reflects on a new colleague, a secretary who uses a wheelchair, showcasing his thoughtful nature. Concerned for her wellbeing in the inclement weather, Ricky decides to check on her. This act of kindness not only illustrates his character but also sets the stage for a meaningful connection between the two.

Ricky's encounter with the secretary reveals her positive adjustment to her new job, and their conversation becomes a rich tapestry of shared experiences and insights. Through Ricky's vivid storytelling, he reminisces about his past as a cab driver, humorously detailing the diverse personalities he encountered. Their exchange highlights the deeper challenges individuals with disabilities often face, such as restrictive policies that prevent children at their center from having the autonomy that power wheelchairs could provide.

As they drive through the storm, their bond deepens, punctuated by laughter and light-hearted exchanges that draw them closer together. Ricky admires the secretary's authenticity—unencumbered by the societal pressures of appearance, she captivates him with her genuine personality. This attraction hints at more than just a friendship, as Ricky values her for who she truly is.



Upon reaching her home, their connection solidifies with a handshake, a gesture signaling mutual respect and the promise of a budding friendship. Ricky's invitation for her to join him on the drive back to work suggests an eagerness to nurture this newfound relationship. The chapter closes on a hopeful note, leaving readers with a sense of anticipation for the next step in their camaraderie.

Overall, this chapter weaves themes of empathy, human connection, and the shared experiences that foster understanding, all set against the backdrop of a chaotic Chicago storm. Through Ricky and the secretary, the story emphasizes the importance of kindness and the potential for relationships to flourish even in challenging circumstances.

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## Chapter 8: Jimmie Kendrick

In Chapter 8, we are introduced to Jimmie Kendrick, a charismatic yet troubled character grappling with homelessness in the bustling streets of New York City. Despite his difficult situation, Jimmie maintains his dignity, opting for a duffel bag to hold his belongings instead of the more commonly used shopping cart. He finds solace and support from Linda, a compassionate friend who, despite the challenges of being a single mother, allows him to shower in her cramped apartment and occasionally shares meals with him.

Jimmie's life on the streets is fraught with difficulties, yet he navigates it with resilience and a keen awareness of his environment. He shares harrowing and vivid anecdotes, particularly one involving a sketchy interaction at a fast-food restaurant that exemplifies the perils of urban survival. Through these experiences, he underscores the oddities and dangers that come with life on the streets.

Reflecting on his past, Jimmie recounts his aspirations as a singer—the very reason he moved to New York after being encouraged by Daphne, a woman who presented herself as a record producer. However, this promising relationship soured, leading him to a struggle for survival that ultimately resulted in his homelessness.



Just as hope seems dim, Jimmie's sister Jackie intervenes, bringing him back to Chicago, his hometown, in an effort to help him regain stability. There, he reconnects with his friend Joanne, who offers him a potential job at her nursing home, reigniting Jimmie's dreams of rebuilding his life. With determination and a growing support system, he looks forward to finally having a place of his own—a sanctuary of solitude and peace.

This chapter delves deeply into themes of resilience, friendship, and the human craving for belonging. Jimmie's journey serves as a poignant reminder of the strength of the human spirit in the face of adversity, illuminating the critical role of community support and the enduring hope for a better tomorrow.

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## Chapter 9 Summary: Ricky Hernandez

In Chapter 9, Ricky Hernandez finds himself in a tense and unsettling situation during a late-night shift at the facility where he works. It is midnight, and the atmosphere is quiet and eerie as he makes his way to deliver a paycheck to Candy, one of the houseparents. During his visit, he encounters Jerry, another houseparent known for his loquaciousness, who begins to ramble on about his financial difficulties, relationships, and eventually veers into troubling territory with his aggressive and crude views on sex.

As Ricky listens, he experiences an internal struggle, grappling with Jerry's disrespectful language and the potential influence it may have on the vulnerable young residents nearby. Rather than confronting Jerry directly about his inappropriate comments, Ricky chooses to withdraw from the conversation, illustrating the moral dilemmas that arise in daily interactions and the challenges of addressing toxic behavior within a professional environment.

Later in the chapter, Ricky has a conversation with Joanne, a character who provides a counterpoint to Jerry's views. Their discussion evolves into a candid dialogue about sexual encounters and the complexities surrounding consent, exploitation, and individual autonomy. Joanne pushes back against Ricky's more casual attitudes, bringing up serious issues such as sex



trafficking, an important topic that resonates in society today. Their exchange combines serious themes with a touch of light-hearted banter, suggesting a deeper connection and mutual respect between them, which adds a layer of complexity to their dynamic.

Overall, this chapter exposes the nuanced realities faced by the workers at the facility, highlighting their moral complexities and the relationships they forge. Through the lens of Ricky's challenges, it also delves into significant societal issues surrounding consent and exploitation, making it clear that these themes are often interwoven in both personal and professional contexts.

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## Chapter 10 Summary: Mia Oviedo

### Summary of Chapter 10 from "Good Kings Bad Kings"

In this gripping chapter, we are immersed in the traumatic experiences of Mia Oviedo at the hands of her abuser, Jerry. The narrative begins with a chilling recollection of a night when Jerry intrudes on Mia's personal space, using intimidation and physical force to assert his dominance. This encounter leaves Mia feeling utterly powerless and terrified, instilling a deep sense of fear that permeates her life and undermines her sense of safety and autonomy.

As the chapter unfolds, we witness Mia's struggle with pervasive feelings of isolation and anxiety. She vividly recounts distressing experiences that highlight Jerry's predatory nature, preying on her vulnerability. Throughout this turmoil, Mia grapples with a stifling silence; she fears that speaking out will incite Jerry's wrath, subjecting her to further harm. This inner conflict starkly contrasts with her interactions with others, such as Jimmie, who provides kindness and care without realizing the darkness that envelops Mia's life.

Mia's biological changes—marked by her first period—add another layer of complexity to her adolescent experience. Instead of celebrating this natural





milestone, she faces it with confusion and dread, signifying a loss of innocence as she navigates the harsh expectations of young womanhood against a backdrop of trauma. Teddy, another character, tries to infuse some joy into Mia's day, but his attempts at lightheartedness feel disconnected from the depth of her distress.

Throughout the chapter, Mia's resilience shines through as she strives to survive the painful memories of her abuse. The chapter concludes with Mia reflecting on the cruel nickname "Papi" that Jerry has imposed on her, highlighting the manipulation and degradation she endures at his hands.

Overall, this chapter poignantly explores themes of trauma, survival, and the quest for autonomy, deeply rooting readers in Mia's emotional experience while accentuating the stark contrasts between her internal struggles and the moments of normalcy that exist around her.



# Chapter 11 Summary: Joanne Madsen

## Summary of Chapter 11 from "Good Kings Bad Kings"

In this chapter, Jane Madsen, who works at the ILLC (a facility for children with disabilities), grapples with the daunting task of sorting through a chaotic mountain of paperwork that documents the health and care of the children at the institution. This paperwork, riddled with inconsistencies and illegible details, chronicles everything from medical appointments to daily routines, revealing the chaotic administrative state of the center.

As Jane delves deeper into the records, she uncovers disturbing statistics: thirty-two out of the eighty children at the ILLC had been hospitalized within just seven months. This shocking revelation leads her to confront the unsettling realities of the facility's operations, emphasizing the lack of adequate medical care and the alarming prevalence of infections and pressure sores among the children. Her reflections raise significant concerns about the overall standards of care and the practices that prioritize bureaucratic red tape over the well-being of the kids.

Outside her professional challenges, Jane finds moments of connection with her colleague Ricky. Their shared dinners become a space for candid discussions about the realities of living with disabilities, exploring themes of



family dynamics and societal perceptions. Ricky extends an invitation to his nephew's birthday party at Chuck E. Cheese, but Jane declines, revealing her discomfort with social environments that involve families and the judgments that may arise regarding her disability. Their conversations often blend humor with vulnerability, enriching their bond as they open up about their personal stories and experiences.

This chapter illuminates themes such as the struggles within a flawed healthcare system that fails to prioritize the needs of children with disabilities, the complexity of building relationships while facing social barriers, and the quest for identity and dignity in a world that frequently overlooks marginalized individuals. Through Jane's journey, the narrative underscores the vital importance of empathy and connection in fostering understanding and support for those navigating the challenging landscape of disability.

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## Chapter 12: Yessenia Lopez

In Chapter 12 of "Good Kings Bad Kings," Yessenia Lopez, affectionately called Yess, faces the complexities of life in a group home. The chapter opens with a tumultuous scene, where Yess finds herself in a heated confrontation with another resident, Benedicta—whom she mockingly nicknames "Shamu"—over the theft of her cherished black nail polish. This incident highlights the ongoing tension between them, with Yess frustrated by Benedicta's penchant for provoking conflict while simultaneously portraying herself as a victim.

The situation escalates to the point where three aides—Beverly, Jimmie, and Louie—intervene to separate the two. Jimmie, one of the aides, suggests that a separation may be beneficial, a prospect that fills Yess with relief and excitement, as she has been longing to move out since her arrival. Despite initial reluctance from Beverly, the aides agree to facilitate Yess's move, which emphasizes Jimmie's supportive nature and hints at potential layers to his character, including a possible queer identity that complicates the staff dynamics.

Upon relocating to a new room, Yess experiences a wave of happiness as she is now sharing her space with her friend Cheri. Their bond deepens as they share personal stories and provide emotional support to one another, especially during vulnerable moments such as Cheri's unsettling nightmare.



This camaraderie showcases the importance of friendship amidst the challenges presented by their environment.

The chapter also critiques the restrictive rules governing the group home, which dictate that residents must pass tests to access basic freedoms like

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## Chapter 13 Summary: Ricky Hernandez

Chapter 13 of "Good Kings Bad Kings" presents the viewpoint of an unnamed caregiver navigating the challenges surrounding Ricky Hernandez Pierre, a student who has been placed in time-out at school. The chapter opens with the caregiver's frustration toward Mrs. Schmidt, the teacher, who dismisses Ricky's distress as mere attention-seeking behavior. This reaction triggers the caregiver's empathy, as they reflect on their own difficult school experiences and the lasting effects of negative authority figures.

As Ricky resists the situation, expressing himself through physical actions like karate chops and vocal outbursts, the caregiver sees parallels between Ricky and their nephew, Pucho, who has fallen into the turbulent world of gang life and run-ins with the law. This connection fuels the caregiver's determination to support Ricky, hoping to steer him away from a similar fate. They are deeply aware of the systemic challenges facing young people in hostile environments.

The narrative then transitions to the caregiver's visit to Pucho in juvenile detention, painting a stark picture of the prison system's harsh realities. The stark descriptions highlight the emotional toll of incarceration, as well as Pucho's struggles, underscoring the complex nature of family loyalty amidst poor choices. Despite the caregiver's frustration with Pucho's life decisions, they remain committed to supporting him, demonstrating the intricacies of



familial bonds in challenging circumstances.

Amidst these reflections, the caregiver also confronts their developing relationship with Joanne, who deals with insecurities about her disability and societal perceptions of beauty. This personal layer adds depth to the caregiver's character, illustrating their protective instincts not only towards Ricky but also towards those they care for in their personal life.

The chapter culminates with the caregiver's decision to check on Ricky, illustrating their dedication to his well-being despite the neglectful school environment. In a tender moment, the caregiver gently wakes Ricky, a stark contrast to any harsh treatment he may have previously encountered, and guides him to lunch. This act serves as a small yet significant gesture of kindness and understanding, encapsulating the caregiver's commitment to nurturing relationships and advocating for vulnerable individuals in a system that often overlooks their needs.

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## Chapter 14 Summary: Michelle Volkmann

In Chapter 14 of "Good Kings Bad Kings," we delve into the daily experiences of the narrator, who is employed at Whitney-Palm, a facility known for its commitment to employee relations under the leadership of Tim, their boss. Recently back from a Caribbean vacation with his wife, Tim showcases his generous nature by treating the staff to a delightful spread of coconut-rum drinks and an extravagant Greek buffet. His thoughtful approach extends beyond mere treats; he frequently rewards employees with gala tickets to reinforce their value and boost morale.

Amidst this atmosphere of generosity, the narrator reflects on a cringe-inducing encounter with Dr. Caviolini, a somewhat disreputable doctor associated with their operations. His inappropriate jokes and Mafia references serve as a reminder of the darker facets of their environment, prompting the narrator to ponder their childhood filled with parental conflicts. These early experiences taught them to compartmentalize stress, a skill that remains vital in their current work life.

As Tim entrusts the narrator with expanded recruitment duties, they are tasked with filling beds at nursing facilities, including those in the unfamiliar South Side of Chicago. The prospect of navigating this area is daunting, yet Tim's allurement of a navigation system, bonuses, and even a new Smart car for meeting ambitious targets ignites a spark of determination in the narrator.



Later, the narrator visits Oscar Mayer Children's Hospital for a parent night, which suffers from low attendance. There, they witness firsthand the emotional turmoil experienced by families grappling with illness. This experience starkly contrasts with the narrator's own yearning for simplicity against the backdrop of a rigorous work schedule that often reduces life to a cycle of work and sleep.

Ultimately, this chapter skillfully intertwines themes of generous leadership, the pursuit of personal fulfillment, and the complexities of family relationships, set against the harsh realities faced by patients and their loved ones at the hospital.

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## Chapter 15 Summary: Jimmie Kendrick

In Chapter 15 of Susan Nussbaum's "Good Kings Bad Kings," readers encounter an emotionally rich exchange between Jimmie Kendrick and Yessenia, affectionately known as Yessie. This chapter delves deeply into Yessie's heartfelt memories of her late tía Nene, who tragically lost her battle with cancer the previous year. Jimmie's discovery of a cherished photograph depicting a young Yessie with her beloved aunt serves as a poignant reminder of the bonds that shape our lives, as well as the profound void left by loss.

Yessie's initial reticence to speak about her grief speaks volumes about her inner turmoil. Jimmie, who has endured a similar fate in losing his mother to breast cancer, recognizes her struggle and approaches her with empathy. This shared experience of loss becomes a bridge, linking their individual stories through a common understanding of sorrow and longing.

As Jimmie offers comfort, he provides valuable insights into the grieving process, suggesting that while the pain of losing a loved one may never fully disappear, it can transform over time into a more bearable ache, allowing space for cherished memories to thrive. Their heartfelt dialogue underscores the importance of talking about those we've lost, reinforcing the idea that remembering loved ones can foster healing rather than prolong suffering.



Through their interactions, a budding friendship emerges, grounded in mutual support and shared experiences. Yessie opens up to Jimmie, revealing her innermost feelings and the weight of her grief. This connection illustrates the transformative power of empathy in the face of loss, reinforcing the narrative's themes of friendship, healing, and the enduring impact of love.

This chapter poignantly captures the journey through grief, emphasizing that even amidst sorrow, the bonds we forge with others can provide solace and foster resilience.

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## Chapter 16: Joanne Madsen

In Chapter 16 of "Good Kings Bad Kings" by Susan Nussbaum, we gain an insightful glimpse into the life of Joanne Madsen, a staff member at ILLC (Independent Living Learning Center), which serves young people with disabilities. Joanne's personal journey is intertwined with her professional environment, revealing both her emotional struggles and her deep concern for the residents she works with.

Joanne's relationship with Ricky serves as a focal point, exposing her insecurities rooted in a past relationship with Dennis, who consistently undermined her self-worth. As she navigates her feelings towards Ricky, she grapples with jealousy and anxiety over his interactions with other women, which brings to light her cautious approach to relationships fueled by past experiences. This emotional vulnerability is a recurring theme, reflecting the complex dynamics of trust and insecurity that often accompany intimate partnerships.

Her reflections on her work at ILLC reveal the significant challenges faced by the young residents, such as Teddy and Mia, who are on the brink of aging out of the system. Joanne is particularly concerned about the shortcomings of the Independent Living Skills classes, which are designed to equip these youths with essential skills for independence but often fall short, leading to a prolonged state of dependency. This inadequacy emphasizes the



urgent need for meaningful support and resources that genuinely prepare them for life beyond the facility.

Joanne's conversations with her friend Zora, an activist passionate about disability rights, highlight her own internal struggles with activism and complacency. Zora's fervent advocacy serves as a stark contrast to Joanne's past inaction, leaving her feeling haunted by her own hesitations to stand up for the rights of her young friends. Her desire to seek legal help for Teddy and support Mia in advocating for her needs underscores Joanne's growing awareness of the systemic challenges faced by individuals with disabilities.

The chapter unfolds with a board meeting at ILLC, which starkly contrasts the concerns of the residents with the priorities of the board members. The discussions are dominated by financial implications and lawsuits against the institution, while the welfare of the young residents takes a backseat. Joanne, serving as the note-taker, is unsettled by this disconnect, as the meeting's focus on profit and efficiency starkly juxtaposes the pressing needs of those under their care. This moment vividly illustrates the institutional neglect that disabled individuals often endure, further instilling a sense of powerlessness in Joanne.

Through Joanne's lens, Chapter 16 encapsulates significant themes of dependency, institutionalization, and the struggle for personal agency. Her story intertwines with the pressing need for activism and compassion in



addressing the very real challenges faced by individuals with disabilities, highlighting the vital intersection of personal relationships and systemic issues in the broader social landscape.

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## Chapter 17 Summary: Teddy Dobbs

In Chapter 17, titled "The Gang's Mischievous Adventure," we delve into the playful lives of Teddy Dobbs and his friend Bernard, who find themselves bored at their living facility one evening. To break the monotony, they linger around the cleaning supply cart, seeking a spark of excitement. Bernard proposes a humorous scheme to contact a TV show to address bullying, which sets the tone for the mischief that follows.

Their camaraderie deepens when they encounter Yessie and Cheri in the elevator, quickly forming a dynamic group. Together, they brainstorm a series of light-hearted pranks to entertain themselves, such as pouring soap into a pop machine and creating chaos in the staff bathroom. Each character brings their unique personality to the table, with Cheri often dozing off and Yessie known for his audacious suggestions, while Bernard and Teddy bond over shared experiences and challenges stemming from their difficult family situations—specifically, both having fathers in prison.

As the adventure unfolds, the group infiltrates the staff bathroom, orchestrating a playful plan to clog the toilets with toilet paper and spill soap everywhere. Their antics are fueled by lively banter, which not only highlights their lightheartedness but also provides insight into their lives and struggles. The narrative subtly emphasizes the depth of their friendship, as they find joy in each other's company amidst their shared adversities.



The climax arises when Cheri cleverly distracts Ms. Phoebe, allowing the others to carry on with their mischievous deeds unnoticed. The thrill of their escapade reinvigorates their spirits, and after a successful getaway, they solidify their bond by pledging to sit together during dinner the following day.

Throughout this chapter, Teddy grapples with the feelings of rejection stemming from Mia, a girl he had grown fond of, who has distanced herself from him. However, the joy of his friends offers him solace and a sense of empowerment, helping him to embrace his identity and face the future with renewed confidence. By the chapter's end, a strong sense of community has flourished among the group, as they revel in their friendship and look forward to brighter days together.



# Chapter 18 Summary: Jimmie Kendrick

## Summary of Chapter 18: Good Kings Bad Kings

In this vibrant chapter, Jimmie Kendrick embarks on an exciting field trip with Yessie, planning to celebrate Valentine's Day at a lively event. However, the night takes a delightful turn as they arrive not at the expected Navy Pier but at a spirited lesbian gathering on the West Side, where Jimmie is set to perform. Yessie, who is both exhilarated and a tad anxious about delving into the gay scene, showcases her playful and adventurous spirit throughout their escapade.

The chapter begins with Jimmie picking up Yessie, who defiantly opts to go without a coat despite the biting cold. Their witty exchanges highlight Yessie's youthful energy and her eagerness to challenge conventional norms. As they journey together, Yessie probes Jimmie about her unique style, prompting a thoughtful discussion on gender expression and identity. Jimmie's approachable demeanor fosters a connection, allowing Yessie to explore her curiosity in a safe environment.

Upon arrival at the party, Yessie is mesmerized by the vibrant atmosphere, filled with women of diverse backgrounds joyfully dancing and celebrating. Amidst her pre-performance jitters, Jimmie draws strength from the



electrifying energy of the crowd. The festivities crescendo with lively song performances, bringing Yessie a sense of belonging as she revels in the attention from fellow party-goers.

While Jimmie performs, she gives Yessie a heartfelt acknowledgment from the stage, further enriching their bond and bolstering Yessie's self-assurance. The atmosphere overflows with laughter and camaraderie, reflecting the supportive community surrounding them. Following a series of engaging acts, Jimmie is approached by numerous admirers, provoking a light-hearted response from Yessie that underscores the joy of the evening.

As the night winds down, Jimmie walks Yessie back to their residence, illustrating the deepening of their friendship through shared reflections on past traumas and losses. Jimmie's protective instincts shine as she ensures Yessie feels settled and safe for the night.

Navigating through the quiet halls, Jimmie encounters other residents, revealing her nurturing nature despite the challenges posed by Candy, a strict houseparent known for her authoritarian demeanor. The chapter concludes with Jimmie balancing her responsibilities while maintaining a joyful outlook, embodying resilience in the face of institutional hurdles.

**Themes:** This chapter intricately weaves themes of friendship, identity exploration, communal joy, and the nuanced transition between childhood



and adulthood, making it both captivating and resonant for readers.

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## Chapter 19 Summary: Michelle Volkmann

In Chapter 19, we follow Michelle Volkmann through a tumultuous day where her professional responsibilities clash with her personal turmoil. Recently diagnosed with gonorrhea—not an easy pill to swallow for someone who thought she was taking precautions—Michelle grapples with overwhelming embarrassment and anxiety, particularly about the potential risk of HIV exposure. This health scare looms large over her, casting a shadow on her work life.

Amidst accounting tasks for a project at the Illinois Learning and Life Skills Center, Michelle encounters not only the disorganization of the files but also the frustrating dismissiveness of her ex-boyfriend and the obliviousness of a well-intended nurse-practitioner. These interactions intensify her feelings of isolation and stress.

Adding to her emotional complexity, Michelle engages with her mother, who is struggling with her feelings about Michelle's father remarrying. This exchange reveals the underlying tension in her family dynamics. While Michelle attempts to support her mother, she battles her own apathetic feelings about her father's new relationship, demonstrating her struggle to reconcile familial loyalty with her personal indifference.

At the Learning and Life Skills Center, Michelle's initial judgments about



the inadequacies of the staff, particularly in her tense exchange with a defensive data entry worker, are juxtaposed against the backdrop of the children's needs. As she navigates through her biases and confronts the realities the center faces, Michelle begins to foster greater empathy for both the staff and the vulnerable children they serve.

This chapter is pivotal for Michelle's development, as it highlights her journey from judgment to understanding. It weaves together themes of personal struggle, family conflict, and the responsibility that comes with community engagement, encapsulating a rich portrait of a woman in the process of finding her place in both her personal and professional life.

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## Chapter 20: Mia Oviedo

In Chapter 20 of "Good Kings Bad Kings," we are drawn deeply into the emotional turmoil of Mia Oviedo, a young girl grappling with the aftermath of trauma and isolation. Set against the mundane backdrop of a classroom, Mia finds it increasingly difficult to remain alert and engaged, with Mr. Sokolsky, her teacher, being the sole person to notice her fatigue. He suggests she visit the school nurse, but Mia declines, feeling that it wouldn't help, a reflection of her internal struggle and exhaustion.

Mia's nights are plagued by haunting visions of a dark-feathered bird that communicates her fears and memories, particularly those associated with a figure named Jerry, who has caused her significant emotional pain. This ominous bird symbolizes her unresolved traumas, echoing the hurtful experiences that prevent her from finding peace. During the day, the emotional weight of this suffering makes her feel isolated, leaving her unable to connect fully with her friends or articulate her feelings.

Though her friends Yessie and Beverly reach out with concern, Mia masks her struggles with fabricated reasons, claiming allergy issues rather than disclosing her inner turmoil. She feels emotionally numb and burdened by a sense of sorrow—especially for her friend Teddy, who also shows signs of distress. Joanne, another friend, probes into the situation, particularly curious about the end of Mia and Teddy's relationship. This inquiry forces Mia to





confront her reality, yet she remains reluctant to divulge her experiences, fearing the stigma of being labeled a "snitch."

This chapter poignantly captures Mia's battle against her past and her quest for connection, showcasing themes of vulnerability, the lasting impact of abuse, and the complexities present in friendships. As she navigates a world that feels overwhelmingly lonely, Mia's story highlights the intricate dynamics of trauma and the pressing need for understanding and support.

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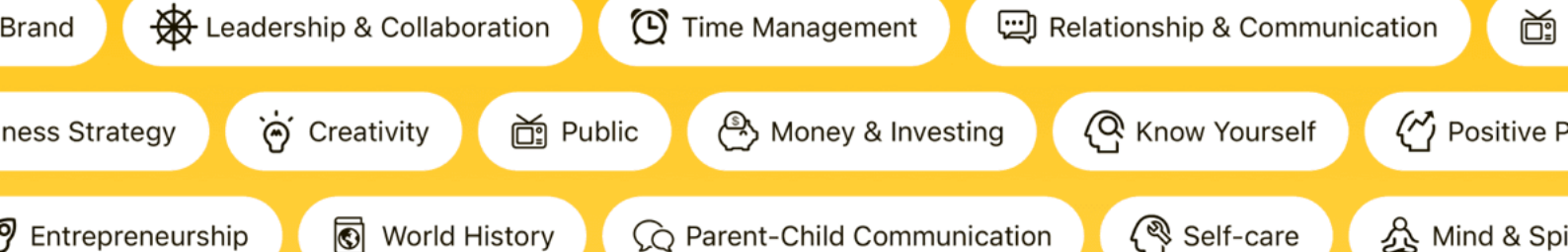




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## Chapter 21 Summary: Teddy Dobbs

### Summary of Chapter 21: Teddy Dobbs' Struggles

In this gripping chapter, Teddy Dobbs confronts a harrowing moment as he faces his bully, Louie. Teddy, who relies on a wheelchair due to a physical disability, showcases his fierce determination by ramming it into the wall in an attempt to break free from Louie's grasp. However, beneath his bravado lies profound hurt and anger — not only directed at Louie but also stemming from the overwhelming situation he's caught in, including his complicated feelings for Mia, who has suddenly started to ignore him.

As Louie drags Teddy to the time-out room, Teddy's sense of isolation grows. This dismal space becomes a symbol of his frustration, deepening his emotional turmoil. It is in this dreary room that Teddy escapes into dark fantasies of revenge against Mrs. Phoebe, the authority figure supervising him. His thoughts spiral as he grapples with the painful prospect of being sent away to a new home, far from his father, and potentially losing touch with Mia, a person he longs for in his life.

Throughout the chapter, Teddy's emotional struggle is palpable. He feels betrayed by Mia's withdrawal and begins to fantasize about running away, yearning for autonomy and the stability he once experienced while living



with his dad. The narrative vividly portrays the challenges faced by young individuals in group homes, highlighting the devastating effects of bullying, isolation, and the universal quest for connection and acceptance.

In essence, this chapter encapsulates the themes of resistance against bullying, the deep-seated desire for belonging, and the yearning for love, all while painting a poignant picture of Teddy's intense emotional landscape as he navigates a tumultuous chapter in his life.

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## Chapter 22 Summary: Yessenia Lopez

In Chapter 22, titled "Good Kings Bad Kings," we delve into the inner world of Yessenia Lopez, a young woman on parole who is required to attend counseling sessions with Mr. Bonelli. During these sessions, Yessenia opens up about her feelings for Jimmie, a gifted singer known for his distinct style, highlighting their budding connection. However, when Mr. Bonelli inquires about her sexuality, Yessenia's defensiveness surfaces, prompting her to reflect on society's tendency to judge individuals based on external appearances—paralleling her own experiences as a person who uses a wheelchair.

As Yessenia navigates her friendships, a pivotal relationship is with Veronique, who struggles with her own discomfort about Yessenia's identity as a lesbian. This tension complicates Yessenia's feelings toward her friend. In contrast, Yessenia finds solace in her bond with Cheri, who embodies loyalty and understanding. Their friendship deepens when they encounter someone from Cheri's past—an encounter that stirs anger in Cheri, prompting her to confront her former acquaintance. Witnessing Cheri's fierce strength, Yessenia also feels a protective instinct toward her friend.

The chapter delves into Cheri's personal battles with schizophrenia, emphasizing the impact of mental health on her life. In a poignant moment, Cheri's overwhelming thoughts surface, and Yessenia's concern drives her to



seek external support. The presence of Nurse Lorraine, who offers reassurance to Cheri, serves as a comforting reminder to Yessenia of her beloved Tía Nene, grounding the narrative in themes of care and familial love.

Overall, Chapter 22 captures the complexities of identity, the importance of friendship, and the challenges of mental health. Through Yessenia's perspective, the chapter blends humor, vulnerability, and strength as she embarks on a journey of personal growth and navigates her evolving relationships.

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## Chapter 23 Summary: Joanne Madsen

### Summary of Chapter 23 from "Good Kings Bad Kings"

In this chapter, Joanne Madsen navigates the complexities of her relationship with Ricky, a connection that brings her joy but also raises concerns about potential dependency. Joanne humorously refers to this feeling as the “white man’s burden,” indicating her awareness of the dynamics at play in their relationship and her apprehension that the initial excitement could fade over time.

As she anticipates meeting Ricky, Joanne takes a moment to review the file of a troubled boy named Pierre Washington. Pierre's history is a poignant one, marked by adversity from a very young age. Abandoned and then placed in foster care due to his disabilities, he has faced a series of traumatic experiences, including harsh treatment at a residential facility that led to additional diagnoses such as PTSD and oppositional defiant disorder. Joanne reflects on the significant influence of both nature and nurture—how inherent challenges and environmental factors have shaped Pierre’s anger and behavior.

Before heading out to meet Ricky, Joanne interacts with her friends Demetria and Patricia, who excitedly offer to give her a makeover. Although



they have plans for her hair, Joanne decides to postpone the change, illustrating her desire for autonomy. As she breezes through the night air in her wheelchair, Joanne savors a sense of freedom, reflecting on her surroundings near the old stockyards, which contrasts sharply with the struggles she faces daily.

Upon meeting Ricky, the two share a tender moment filled with affection, culminating in a heartfelt kiss that deepens their bond. This connection, while fraught with challenges, still brings them happiness. As they contemplate dinner together, Joanne deftly balances the warmth of their relationship with the realities of their lives, emphasizing that even amidst struggles, the importance of connection and love remains paramount.

### **Key Themes:**

- The intricacies of interpersonal relationships and the fears of dependence.
- The grim realities faced by children in the foster care system, particularly those with disabilities.
- The significant role of upbringing and environment in shaping emotional and behavioral outcomes.
- The vital need for personal connections to navigate and overcome life's challenges.





## Chapter 24: Ricky Hernandez

In Chapter 24 of "Good Kings Bad Kings," the emotional landscape intensifies as Ricky Hernandez grapples with the distressing situation involving his friend Pierre, a fellow resident at their facility. After a challenging day unloading the kids from Hoover, Ricky confides in Jimmie about Pierre's recent troubling behavior, which has prompted a shift in his treatment plan. Jimmie reveals that Louie, one of the staff members, has been withholding Pierre's meals and has reportedly become aggressive toward him, raising alarm bells about Pierre's well-being.

As Ricky internalizes this alarming news, his anxiety mounts. Pierre, already vulnerable, has been subjected to isolation in a time-out room, a punitive space meant to manage behavioral issues, but which can leave residents feeling abandoned. Disturbed by this treatment, Ricky is compelled to check on Pierre personally.

When Ricky enters the time-out room, he finds Pierre in a curled-up position, seemingly unresponsive. In a heartfelt gesture of friendship and support, Ricky offers companionship by sharing his collection of vintage cards, a move that gradually draws Pierre out of his shell. This moment highlights a central theme of the narrative: the significance of friendship during difficult times. Their connection deepens as they transition to the cafeteria for dinner, reinforcing the idea that even small acts of kindness can



combat loneliness and despair.

However, as they settle in, Ricky becomes aware of the potentially negligent presence of Jerry, an unsupervised staff member on duty that evening, which raises further concerns for Pierre's safety. Determined to advocate for his

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## Chapter 25 Summary: Jimmie Kendrick

### Summary of Chapter 25: "Good Kings Bad Kings"

In this chapter, we delve into the life of Jimmie Kendrick, a devoted caretaker at a facility for children with disabilities. Jimmie faces an arduous day managing eight children alone, as his usual support is absent. This daunting task weighs heavily on him, both physically and emotionally. Despite his appreciation for his colleague, Beverly, the challenge of meeting each child's needs—ranging from personal care to emotional support—creates significant stress.

A critical subplot revolves around a younger resident, Heaven, who unexpectedly finds herself with six dollars. This seemingly innocuous event takes a turn when Yessie, an older girl in the facility, fabricates a story about intending to give Heaven a teddy bear. Sensing something awry, Jimmie steps in to address the situation. His confrontation takes him to Yessie's room, where instead of acknowledging her lie, Yessie resorts to excuses when confronted with the truth.

Jimmie's determination to uphold honesty becomes apparent as he asserts that he recognizes Yessie's deceptive behavior. He emphasizes to her the significance of trust—between the children and within the fragile



environment they inhabit. Jimmie reflects on his own childhood experiences, particularly how his mother could see through his dishonesties, to guide Yessie towards understanding the value of integrity.

Through Jimmie's perspective, the chapter highlights the intimate struggles of both caregivers and children within the facility, revealing themes of compassion, accountability, and the intrinsic need for connection. His commitment to confronting dishonesty not only seeks to cultivate trust among the children but also reinforces the essence of integrity needed to navigate their complex community.

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## Chapter 26 Summary: Yessenia Lopez

In Chapter 26 of "Good Kings Bad Kings," we delve into the lives of Yessenia Lopez and her friend Cheri as they pause on their way to grab some Pepsi to visit Joanne's office at the ILLC, an institution designed to support individuals with disabilities. Yessenia is immediately taken by the pleasing decor of Joanne's office, which features attractive bowls and photographs, including one of a striking young man.

As they converse, Cheri shares her backstory, revealing the influence of another girl named Michelle, who played a crucial role in convincing Cheri's parents to send her to the institution after her diagnosis of schizophrenia. This backstory underscores the complexities of mental health treatment and familial relationships. Joanne, while compassionate, candidly discusses the challenges of her job, which often involves institutionalization, making her cautious about how she can assist Cheri. She emphasizes the importance of keeping their discussions confidential, highlighting the delicate nature of their situation.

Cheri opens up further about her past, recounting a childhood incident that led to her diagnosis. Though heavy, the conversation also holds a note of hope, particularly as Cheri's spirit seems to lift during their exchange. Yessenia lightens the atmosphere by inquiring about the attractive protestor's photo on the wall, revealing that he is involved in activism against nursing



homes. This revelation sparks Yessenia's imagination as she fantasizes about potential romantic scenarios with him, adding a youthful layer of levity to the chapter.

The chapter culminates in playful banter about Joanne's casual use of the term "crips" to refer to disabled individuals, leaving Yessenia feeling included in this identity.

Overall, this chapter weaves together themes of friendship, hope, and the intricacies of mental health, illuminating the deepening bond between Yessenia and Cheri. It illustrates the duality of life within the ILLC—grappling with serious issues while also cherishing moments of joy and connection. Joanne serves as a caretaker caught in the challenging dynamics between providing support and navigating institutional realities, while Yessenia's playful nature infuses warmth and camaraderie into their struggles, suggesting that even in difficult circumstances, the joys of youth and friendship can prevail.



## Chapter 27 Summary: Mia Oviedo

In Chapter 27 of "Good Kings Bad Kings," the focus shifts to Mia Oviedo, who finds herself trapped in the infirmary grappling with intense and overwhelming pain that she likens to burning. Beverly, a compassionate caregiver, assists Mia by bringing her to see the nurse, assuring her she will return once the examination is complete. Mia's anxiety is palpable; she wishes for the solace of sleep to escape her troubled reality.

Upon the arrival of Nurse Donna, the examination process begins, quickly turning uncomfortable for Mia. A sense of shame washes over her as she faces the vulnerability of her body in a clinical environment. Despite Mia's protests, Nurse Donna insists on conducting a pelvic exam to identify the source of her suffering. This moment heightens Mia's fear and anxiety, compelling her to navigate the invasive nature of the examination while attempting to maintain her composure.

During the exam, Mia is confronted with alarming news: she has contracted a venereal disease. This revelation sends waves of shock and fear coursing through her. As Nurse Donna probes into Mia's sexual history, the tension escalates. Mia grapples with deep shame and the fear of potential consequences associated with revealing uncomfortable truths about her past.

The chapter effectively captures Mia's inner turmoil, emphasizing her





vulnerability in a situation that should evoke safety but instead feels invasive and judgmental. The stark contrast between the innocent imagery on the wallpaper—bunnies and seals—and Mia's distress highlights the collision between childhood innocence and stark adult realities.

Ultimately, this chapter delves into profound themes of vulnerability and the complexities surrounding sexual health. Mia's desperate longing for comfort and security amidst the overwhelming circumstances underscores her sense of isolation. Her experiences reflect a broader commentary on the difficulties faced by youth in navigating their identities and health in a world fraught with judgment and misunderstanding.

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## Chapter 28: Joanne Madsen

### Summary of Chapter 28 of "Good Kings Bad Kings"

In this chapter, Joanne Madsen takes a sick day to visit Elaine Brown at the Center for Disability Justice (CDJ) with her new driver, Leo. Joanne reminisces about her past experiences hiring drivers, contrasting Leo's reliability with a previous odd encounter involving a pirate-themed driver whom she had to dismiss. Leo's presence allows Joanne to feel more independent and enables her to focus on her work at the ILLC (Illinois Life and Learning Center).

Upon arriving at CDJ, Joanne is inspired by a mural that celebrates activism for disability rights. However, she feels it inadequately reflects the real experiences of the kids she supports, particularly in light of the recent trauma surrounding Mia's abuse. At ILLC, the children are coping with the aftermath in various ways; while friends like Joey and Yessie offer support to Mia, others like Ricky and Jimmie grapple with feelings of guilt for not having prevented the incident.

During her meeting with Elaine and Teddy, who is approaching age 22 and facing the daunting transition to a nursing home, Joanne witnesses the transformative impact of advocacy. Elaine, a dedicated lawyer, shares



insights into Teddy's rights and the potential for independent living, which ignites hope in Joanne. This moment reinforces her belief that advocacy and support play a crucial role in the lives of those with disabilities.

As the day concludes, Joanne reflects on Teddy's hesitance to discuss Mia and recognizes the vital connections and support their community needs during this challenging period. The chapter poignantly illustrates themes of independence, the power of advocacy, and the essential role of community in supporting individuals with disabilities.

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## Chapter 29 Summary: Teddy Dobbs

In Chapter 29 titled "Good Kings Bad Kings," we delve into the turmoil experienced by Teddy Dobbs as he navigates feelings of betrayal and confusion revolving around his fiancée, Mia. Teddy is devastated to learn that Mia may have begun dating Jerry, a person he regards as unconventional and difficult to understand, which amplifies his feelings of anger and hurt. Seeking guidance, he confides in his friend Bernard, who attempts to provide perspective on the emotional landscape of their situation.

During their discussion, Bernard underscores the fact that individuals express emotions differently, suggesting that Mia may not have fully grasped how to articulate her feelings. This revelation highlights Teddy's deep frustration about Mia's choice to keep her new relationship a secret, which leaves him feeling both abandoned and misunderstood. Their conversation touches on the layered difficulties of communication in relationships, especially when fear complicates transparency.

As the dialogue deepens, Bernard reflects on broader issues, particularly the challenges faced by girls like Yessie, who allegedly dealt with undue pressure from Jerry. This poignant observation introduces themes of consent and the societal pressures that complicate personal relationships, reminding the reader of the darker undertones of such dynamics.



The chapter takes a turn as Bernard reveals his own struggles, contemplating moving back in with his mother due to her deteriorating diabetes. Teddy expresses genuine concern for Bernard's situation, offering him a place to stay once he secures his own residence. This exchange reveals the weight of familial responsibility that Bernard carries, adding depth to their friendship.

In conclusion, the chapter encapsulates a moment of solidarity between Teddy and Bernard, emphasizing the importance of friendship amid emotional adversity. Their shared reflections on the complexities of relationships, the weight of personal struggles, and the necessity of open communication leave the reader with a sense of hope, even in the face of their challenges.



## Chapter 30 Summary: Ricky Hernandez

In Chapter 30 of "Good Kings Bad Kings," we are introduced to Ricky Hernandez, a dedicated staff member at a special facility for children with disabilities. He deeply cares for the kids, especially a shy eleven-year-old girl named Cleo, who stands out due to her unusual hairstyle designed to distract from her pointed head. While her classmates engage in gym class, Cleo prefers solitude, prompting Mrs. Velasquez, a substitute teacher, to send her to the time-out room for her reluctance to participate.

Ricky, skeptical of punitive measures, feels a strong empathy for Cleo. He attempts to brighten her day by engaging with her through the window of her time-out confinement. However, when he briefly nods off, he is taken aback to find Cleo has covered herself in purple magic marker from head to toe. Despite this act of self-expression, Cleo remains silent, illustrating her withdrawn nature.

The narrative shifts to Ricky's reflections on his life outside the facility. He recalls a physically demanding job unloading trucks that he initially found difficult but grew to appreciate. Now, he struggles with feelings of inadequacy in his role, lamenting the need to discipline children instead of providing the support he believes they truly need.

Ricky's inner turmoil is revealed through a heartfelt conversation with his



partner, Joanne. He expresses his darker thoughts—fantasies of revenge against a troubling individual named Jerry—questioning whether such feelings make him a bad person. Joanne's reassuring response highlights the tenderness of their relationship and their mutual navigation of life's challenges.

As the chapter concludes, Ricky plans to buy coffee and doughnuts for the children as a small gesture of care when picking them up from school. This thoughtful intention underscores the warmth of his concern for the kids, contrasting with the frustrations and complexities he faces in his role, alluding to the broader themes of care and struggle within the lives of those working with vulnerable youth.

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## Chapter 31 Summary: Michelle Volkmann

In Chapter 31 of "Good Kings Bad Kings," the narrative takes on a tense and unsettling tone as it addresses the aftermath of a disturbing incident at Riverwood, a facility for mental health treatment. The chapter centers around Michelle, a staff member at Riverwood, who reflects deeply on the mysterious death of a resident girl found tied to her wheelchair, hours after having passed away. This incident raises serious concerns regarding the potential negligence and abusive practices that may exist within the institution.

As Michelle navigates her thoughts, she engages in a conversation with her colleague Margo, discussing various theories that could explain the girl's tragic death. They contemplate the roles that medication side effects and improper restraint techniques might have played, highlighting a pervasive sense of apathy among their peers regarding such incidents. While another colleague, Tim, expresses outrage at the situation, Michelle remains skeptical about the chances of a thorough investigation, recognizing the institution's ties to powerful political figures and the systemic corruption that often goes unchallenged.

During a staff meeting, Michelle is tasked with reporting on the operational efficiencies of the Whitney-Palm facilities, owned by the corporation overseeing Riverwood. Tim proposes a controversial strategy to increase



profits by overcrowding the already tight living spaces with more beds, demonstrating a troubling prioritization of financial gain over the well-being of the residents. Although Michelle is hesitant about this approach, she feels pressured to explore its feasibility as per Tim's directives.

The conversation also touches on another facility, Pine Hills, where a scandal involving a sexual predator highlights the widespread failures in the care provided to vulnerable individuals. Tim dismisses the gravity of death as a common aspect of their work and focuses instead on maintaining a positive image, striving to cultivate pride among the staff. Despite his efforts, Michelle's concerns about the health and safety of the residents loom large, particularly when she raises alarming reports related to another institution, ILLC. Tim's nodding agreement to her concerns does little to reassure Michelle, as she doubts his commitment to pursuing necessary investigations.

This chapter delves into the themes of neglect within the healthcare system, the ethical dilemmas facing those who work in such institutions, and the harsh realities that residents endure. As Michelle grapples with these complexities, her growing awareness of the injustices present around her reflects a broader commentary on the moral implications of profit-driven healthcare practices. This exploration of her internal conflict underscores the necessity for accountability and compassion within institutions meant to support the most vulnerable members of society.



## Chapter 32: Yessenia Lopez

### Summary of Chapter 32: Good Kings Bad Kings

Chapter 32 opens with Yessenia Lopez returning to her room at a care facility after school, only to find that her close friend, Cheri, has mysteriously disappeared. Instantly unsettled, Yessenia learns from Toya, another resident, that Cheri was transferred to a hospital for "better care," a location Yessenia describes with disdain as "el manicomio," implying it's a place of confinement rather than healing. Initially, Yessenia fears the worst—Cheri's death—before realizing she has been sent away due to her previous escape attempts, which highlight the struggles many residents face in the facility.

Cheri constantly grapples with homesickness, yearning for her parents and little brother, yet feels trapped within the institution's limits. Yessenia reflects on Cheri's ongoing battles with mental health, her dependence on medication, and her frustrating attempts to gain freedom, often stifled by the facility's stringent regulations. Despite Cheri's difficulties, their friendship brings light to her dark days, as Yessenia finds solace in their shared moments of laughter and support.

With Cheri gone, Yessenia feels a profound void in her life. She gazes



around their shared space, which now feels emptier and more isolating, reminding her of the companionship they once shared. As dinner approaches, the weight of Cheri's absence casts a shadow over Yessenia, pushing her to recall their history together—moments that provided both girls a sense of escape from their harsh realities.

The chapter culminates as Yessenia looks at a picture on her wall of a boy in a wheelchair, who embodies strength and resilience. This image serves as a beacon of hope, motivating Yessenia to cling to her own dreams of freedom and connection despite the oppressive nature of their surroundings. Overall, this chapter poignantly explores themes of friendship, the challenges of mental health, and the universal desire for liberation within the confines of a care facility.

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## Chapter 33 Summary: Jimmie Kendrick

In Chapter 33 of "Good Kings Bad Kings," we are introduced to Jimmie Kendrick, a dedicated houseparent working the late shift at a care institution for youths with disabilities. As he reflects on his responsibilities, he becomes increasingly concerned about Mia, a young girl showing signs of emotional distress. Jimmie is haunted by his inaction, feeling guilty for not doing more to support Mia, as he has been prioritizing his tasks over building meaningful connections with the children in his care.

Mia's situation serves as a catalyst for Jimmie's exploration of accountability within the institution. During a conversation with his colleague Joanne, they discuss the pervasive systemic issues that plague their workplace, such as inadequate resources and neglectful policies. Joanne argues that many problems arise from these systemic failures, rather than solely from the actions of individuals. This notion troubles Jimmie, especially when considering Jerry, the person responsible for a violent incident that harmed Mia. He contemplates whether the systemic context offers absolution for personal accountability, illustrating the complex interplay between external circumstances and individual actions.

As Jimmie wrestles with these themes, he also reflects on his relationship with another girl at the institution, Yessenia. Though Yessenia appears strong and resilient, he recognizes her inner turmoil and vulnerability. This duality



in both Mia and Yessenia emphasizes the fragility of the children under his care and deepens Jimmie's protective instincts, further complicating his role as a caregiver.

Throughout this chapter, Jimmie grapples with a profound internal conflict: how to balance his duty to foster personal connections with the harsh realities of a flawed institutional system. His journey touches on the broader themes of connection, responsibility, and the societal structures that shape the lives of vulnerable youth, ultimately urging readers to consider the intricate dynamics between individual and systemic accountability in the contexts of caring for at-risk children.

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## Chapter 34 Summary: Ricky Hernandez

In Chapter 34, titled "Ricky Hernandez," the narrative unfolds as Ricky realizes he has left his notebook at his workplace, the ILLC cafeteria. This notebook contains not only his personal writings but also forty-six dollars in cash, underscoring the tangible stakes of his return. As he makes his way back, he inadvertently eavesdrops on a conversation between two staff members, Louie and Candy, whose complicated roles in the children's lives compel Ricky to reflect deeply on adult behavior.

Louie, a former prison guard who carries an intimidating presence, discusses the manipulative nature of children, suggesting that they often play adults against one another. Ricky's thoughts drift to the convoluted psychology surrounding notions of victimhood, especially as Louie seems to revel in his authority over the children, while simultaneously being embroiled in his own troubled past that disqualified him from his previous role.

Candy's responses to Louie further explore this theme, as she expresses disdain for the treatment of vulnerable kids like Pierre Washington. Through their dialogue, the chapter addresses the troubling power dynamics between staff and the children they are supposed to care for, emphasizing how adults can often view kids through a lens of skepticism rather than empathy.

Upon entering the cafeteria, Ricky senses an air of tension, particularly with





Louie, who seems to harbor resentment towards him. Despite feeling frustrated and resigned about the atmosphere created by Louie and Candy, Ricky maintains his composure. Collecting his notebook, he reflects on the absurdity of Louie's position—someone considered too problematic to serve as a prison guard yet tasked with overseeing vulnerable youth.

Overall, this chapter delves into themes of power, victimhood, and the ethical responsibilities of adults toward children. Ricky emerges not only as a witness to the unsettling dynamics at play but as a critical voice, keenly aware of the implications of how these relationships are formed and maintained in an environment that should be nurturing, yet often falls short.

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## Chapter 35 Summary: Yessenia Lopez

In Chapter 35 of "Good Kings Bad Kings," titled "Good Kings Bad Kings," Yessenia Lopez navigates the tumultuous atmosphere of lunchtime alongside her friends Fantasia, Amber, and Ree Ree. Throughout the chapter, Yessenia, who is portrayed as a wise yet frustrated older peer, tries to manage the childish antics of her roommate Ree Ree while also keeping an eye on the unfolding chaos around them.

The narrative quickly escalates when Louie, a menacing figure with a reputation for intimidation, confronts the smaller and weaker Pierre Washington over a lunch tray. This conflict highlights the stark power dynamics in their environment, where physicality often speaks louder than words. Mr. Hudson, their empathetic teacher, attempts to de-escalate the situation, yet Louie's aggression spirals out of control, culminating in Pierre's desperate act of defiance when he stabs Louie in the chest with a pencil.

Amidst the chaos, Jimmie, a strong and respected character in Yessenia's eyes, intervenes heroically. She physically restrains Louie, showcasing her loyalty to Pierre and earning the admiration of her peers as the cafeteria erupts into cheers. However, while Pierre sustains a serious injury, resulting in a broken jaw, Louie ends up with only a minor wound, underscoring the unpredictable nature of such violence.



Yessenia's reflections post-incident delve deeper into the themes of vulnerability and protection, drawing parallels between their current struggles and her past experiences with violence and loss among friends. A poignant moment occurs between Yessenia and Jimmie in the parking lot, where Yessenia expresses her admiration for Jimmie's bravery; however, Jimmie humbly downplays her actions, emphasizing her desire to safeguard her peers.

This chapter intricately weaves the complexities of adolescence, showcasing how friendships are forged and tested amid conflict. It underscores the importance of strong, protective figures—like Jimmie—in navigating a world filled with both peril and camaraderie, leaving a lasting impression of resilience and solidarity among the children.



## Chapter 36: Michelle Volkmann

### Summary of Chapter 36: "Good Kings Bad Kings"

In this chapter, we follow Michelle Volkmann as she reluctantly makes a visit to Riverwood Juvenile Mental Health Hospital. This unexpected trip weighs heavily on her, primarily due to the recent tragedies associated with the facility and the indifferent attitude of her boss, Tim. As she drives, Michelle reflects on her life, grappling with financial struggles, a toxic friendship with Ariel, and dissatisfaction with her modest salary. She rehearses how to ask Tim for a raise but feels resentment knowing he enjoys financial security.

Upon her arrival, Michelle quickly encounters the cold, bureaucratic environment of the hospital. She is forced to surrender her personal items and navigate a system where the staff are unhelpful, heightening her anxiety. The hospital's bleak atmosphere intensifies her dread as she prepares to assess the facility.

During her assessment, she meets a group of seemingly ordinary young patients, challenging her preconceived notions of mental illness and the individuals affected by it. Her moment of clarity is shattered when she finally sees Cheri Smith, a girl she recognizes from another facility. Cheri's



unresponsive and distant demeanor leads to a deep sense of despair for Michelle, pushing her to confront the harsh realities of the mental health care system.

Overwhelmed and anxious, Michelle ultimately seeks an escape. The chapter concludes with her hastily leaving the hospital, feeling a pressing urgency to distance herself from the unsettling experience and the grim realities faced by those within the mental health system.

### **Character Developments and Themes:**

- **Michelle Volkmann:** This chapter deepens our understanding of Michelle as a complex character who balances ambition with significant personal and professional stressors. Her compassion for the young patients contrasts starkly with her feelings of fatigue and undervaluation at work.
- **Theme of Mental Health:** The narrative offers a sobering glimpse into the conditions of mental health care facilities. It highlights prevailing stigmas and misunderstandings surrounding mental illness while emphasizing the need for empathy and reform.
- **Power Dynamics:** Michelle's interactions with the indifferent staff underline systemic issues within mental health care, particularly the neglect



and authority challenges. The power imbalance resonates not just in her experience at the hospital but also in her professional environment with Tim, further amplifying her feelings of isolation.

Overall, this chapter not only captures Michelle's personal turmoil but also elucidates the broader societal issues facing individuals in the mental health system, evoking reader empathy and a longing for change.

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## Chapter 37 Summary: Teddy Dobbs

### Summary of Chapter 37: Good Kings Bad Kings

In this poignant chapter, we explore the nightly musings and restlessness of Teddy Dobbs, a young resident of a care facility grappling with insomnia. Teddy's attempts to wake his roommate, Bernard, for late-night snacks ultimately lead him to realize the solitude of his situation. He reflects on the staff members around him; Beverly stands out as a compassionate ally who understands Teddy's struggles, in stark contrast to others like Candy, who dismiss his needs.

While tossing and turning, Teddy hears a familiar voice — it's Yessie, who stealthily enters his room. Their playful exchange highlights a strong friendship built on mutual support. Yessie shares her misadventures with a boy she met online, revealing the unexpected complexities of modern communication — her attempt to connect with him ultimately leads to a conversation with his discontented mother instead. Through their lighthearted teasing, they reveal deeper vulnerabilities, discussing dreams of independence and the anxieties of being confined within the facility's walls.

Their conversation shifts to mutual friends like Cheri and Pierre, both of whom are struggling with the harsh realities of mental health facilities.





Frustrated by their restrictive environment, Teddy and Yessie contemplate protest as a means of asserting their rights and seeking change. This act of rebellion underscores the broader themes of their youth against a backdrop of institutional limitations.

The chapter takes a turn when George, a new staff member, enters and reminds Yessie of the rules, emphasizing the oppressive nature of their surroundings. Despite this interruption, Teddy and Yessie's bond remains strong, illuminating the resilience and camaraderie that can flourish under challenging circumstances.

In essence, this chapter delves into themes of independence, friendship, and the youthful spirit of rebellion against a restrictive system, showcasing how Teddy and Yessie navigate the complexities of their lives within the care facility.

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## Chapter 38 Summary: Ricky Hernandez

In Chapter 38, titled "Good Kings Bad Kings," we delve into the poignant experience of Ricky Hernandez as he navigates his feelings about a young boy named Pierre. Following an ambulance ride, Pierre finds himself at Children's Hospital rather than the more familiar St. Theresa. With his jaw wired shut, he can only consume food through a straw, which worries Ricky, especially given the hospital's limited dietary options. In a bid to uplift the boy's spirits, Ricky brings a smoothie to share, emblematic of his desire to connect.

Ricky shares snippets of his own backstory, revealing his family's immigrant journey from Puerto Rico and his personal struggles with health during childhood. This context enriches his relationship with Pierre, highlighting a deep-seated empathy and understanding, even as he grapples with his hesitance to fully take on the role of caregiver.

When Ricky visits Pierre, he is struck by the boy's frail condition but attempts to lighten the atmosphere with humor. However, as he observes Pierre's challenges, his concern deepens. He wishes fervently for someone to care for Pierre in a way that addresses both his physical and emotional needs.

The narrative takes a troubling turn when Ricky learns from his partner, Jo,



that there are plans for Pierre to be transferred to an institution for mental health treatment. This revelation disturbs Ricky, prompting discussions with Jo about the need to intervene. Their conversation reflects Ricky's growing sense of responsibility and highlights the challenges of advocating for a vulnerable child within an often indifferent system.

The chapter culminates in a tender moment as Ricky watches Pierre sip the smoothie and eventually fall asleep, clutching the straw. A crayon drawing he notices—depicting Pierre alone in a cave with food—further underscores feelings of isolation and a yearning for connection and care.

Themes of compassion, the complexity of caregiver relationships, and the impact of institutional decisions on vulnerable youth resonate throughout this chapter. Ricky's internal conflict illustrates his struggle with emotional attachment and commitment, enriching the bond he shares with Pierre and illuminating the broader challenges faced by children like him.



## Chapter 39 Summary: Mia Oviedo

In Chapter 39 of "**Good Kings Bad Kings**," we delve into Mia's inner world as she grapples with her past trauma following a distressing incident. The chapter opens with Mia's anxiety being symbolized by a bird, which represents her deep-seated fears that echo her previous experiences. Irrespective of her surroundings, Mia finds it hard to concentrate during class taught by Mrs. Schmidt, who is discussing banking. Her mind frequently drifts to Teddy, her friend who brings her joy and comfort amidst her turmoil.

Mia's affection for Teddy shines through as she recalls his infectious smile and their tentative friendship. A humorous exchange in class, where Teddy jokingly claims that Pop-Tarts are a healthy food choice, lightens the mood and draws shared laughter from their peers. This moment underscores the significance of friendship as a source of solace and connection during her struggles.

Amid her feelings of anxiety, we learn that Mia is in therapy, where her therapist gently encourages her to confront her scars and the traumas they represent. Though such discussions are challenging for Mia, there are glimmers of hope as she begins to articulate her feelings.

The chapter concludes on a heartwarming note in the cafeteria when Teddy



approaches Mia, easing her transition into the bustling environment. His reassurance helps to lift her spirits, emphasizing the bond they share. Mia's expression of missing Teddy encapsulates their friendship, providing her with a moment of respite from the challenges she faces.

Overall, this chapter explores themes of friendship, the journey through trauma, and the small joys that can illuminate even the darkest periods. Mia's story poignantly illustrates the vital role of connection and support in the healing process.

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## Chapter 40: Yessenia Lopez

### Summary of Chapter 40: Good Kings Bad Kings

In this poignant chapter, Yessenia Lopez navigates the challenges of living in a facility, grappling with feelings of loneliness and concern for her friend Cheri, who is confined in a place colloquially known as "el manicomio," or the insane asylum. Cheri's difficult situation weighs heavily on Yessenia, exacerbated by the inefficacy of the legal system to provide assistance, despite efforts from Joanne, a compassionate figure in Yessenia's life who has sought legal help.

Amidst her struggles, Yessenia finds a source of inspiration in a magazine called \*Plume Serpent\*, which features powerful imagery of protests led by disability activists advocating for their rights. She is particularly drawn to a striking activist with light-colored eyes and flowing hair, fantasizing about a romantic encounter where they could share their experiences and fight for independence together. This yearning for deeper connections is a central motif, emphasizing her desire to join the collective struggle for dignity faced by people with disabilities.

Yessenia also interacts with her new roommate, Ree Ree, whose incessant questions often lead to comedic moments that remind Yessenia of a strict



teacher from her past. This dynamic reveals Yessenia's quest for personal space and autonomy amidst the chaos of the facility, highlighting the challenge of maintaining personal boundaries in a crowded environment.

The absence of Joanne at times leaves Yessenia feeling abandoned,

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## Chapter 41 Summary: Teddy Dobbs

In Chapter 41 of "Good Kings Bad Kings," we delve into the tumultuous day of Teddy Dobbs, a resident at a facility for youth with disabilities. Teddy typically finds comfort in his connection with Beverly, a compassionate houseparent who supports him, especially on a day when staff members are notably absent. Beverly, who has a warm rapport with Teddy, is preoccupied with her son's birthday but makes sure to give Teddy some extra time in bed, fostering a sense of care and normalcy.

As Beverly assists Teddy in taking a shower, he excitedly shares news of his rekindled romance with Mia, expressing aspirations of a future wedding. However, disaster strikes when the water suddenly turns scalding hot. In a moment of sheer instinct and resilience, Teddy manages to crawl away from the source of heat despite suffering burns, a testament to his inner strength and determination.

After the incident, Teddy finds himself in a hospital, grappling with intense pain and confusion, as he becomes semi-conscious while hooked up to a ventilator. This disorienting experience is punctuated by feelings of despair and worry about the implications of his injuries, particularly concerning his father's awareness of the incident. When his father arrives, it brings a glimmer of comfort to Teddy's distress, as he expresses love for both his dad and Mia amidst the chaos.



This chapter poignantly explores themes of resilience in adversity, the complex dynamics of relationships, and the day-to-day struggles of living with a disability. Teddy's experiences illuminate both his remarkable inner strength and the emotional and physical hurdles he faces in an often overwhelming world. Through Teddy's journey, readers gain insight into the significance of support systems and the power of love and connection.

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## Chapter 42 Summary: Yessenia Lopez

### Summary of Chapter 42: Good Kings Bad Kings

In this emotionally charged chapter, Yessenia finds herself at Teddy's funeral, grappling with a cascade of memories that remind her of the joyful, innocent child he was, just eight years old and dressed formally for the occasion. The palpable grief of Mr. Dobbs, a central figure in Teddy's life, illustrates the profound relationships that shaped Teddy's existence, underscoring the deep bonds of love and friendship that surrounded him. Yessenia's reflections delve into the complexities of loss, as she contrasts the abruptness of accidental death with the slow decline of illness, contemplating the heavy toll of Teddy's tragic demise.

Mia, overwhelmed by sorrow, struggles to process her emotions, leading Yessenia to distance herself to prevent an emotional eruption of her own. Following a heartfelt sermon by Mrs. Phoebe, a figure of authority in their lives, Yessenia feels anger toward the clichéd sentiments that obscure the harsh realities they face. In the wake of Teddy's passing, they receive an unexpected day off from school, prompting a mix of grief and the need for action among the youth.

Back at the Innovative Living Learning Center (ILLC), Yessenia attempts to



regain a sense of normalcy as she and her friends engage in discussions about personal styles and beauty rituals. However, the mood swiftly shifts when Yessenia devises a bold plan: a protest to spotlight the issues plaguing their group home. Displaying her tenacity, she literally attaches herself to a tree in front of ILLC, brandishing a sign that bluntly states, “THIS PLACE ABUSE AND KILL CHILDREN.” This moment channels both humor and the harsh reality they live within, encapsulating the camaraderie that unites Yessenia, Mia, and their supporters from beyond ILLC.

As the protest gains momentum, it attracts the attention of a news crew and a lawyer named Elaine, who expresses her commitment to investigating the troubling conditions at ILLC. Yessenia's poignant interview with journalist Marjorie Davies becomes a pivotal moment, allowing her to articulate the struggles and urgent need for protection that should be afforded to them in what should be a safe environment.

The chapter poignantly addresses themes of friendship, grief, activism, and the longing for dignity. With a mixture of frustration and empowerment, Yessenia emerges as a voice for change, determined to honor Teddy’s memory through her actions. By the chapter's conclusion, the atmosphere shifts from desolation to a glimmer of hope as community members rally around the youth, solidifying their collective fight for justice. Yessenia amusingly recalls the inspiration behind her protest, cleverly drawing connections between art and activism in the face of their serious struggles,



offering a bright note amidst the chaos.

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# Chapter 43 Summary: Michelle Volkmann

## Summary of Chapter 43: A Tense Board Meeting

In this intense chapter, we find ourselves at an urgent board meeting of ILLC, a residential institution dedicated to caring for disabled children. The narrator, Michelle Volkmann, attends primarily to take notes, feeling somewhat out of place amidst the gravity of the situation.

The atmosphere is charged with tension following the tragic death of Teddy Dobbs, a young resident who sustained severe injuries due to negligence. This heartbreaking incident has ignited outrage, particularly after one of the residents sparked a protest, drawing significant media attention that has further complicated the facility's standing.

Key figures in the meeting include Tim, the unofficial leader who guides the discussion from the shadows; Howard Anderson, the somewhat detached president of Whitney-Palm, the larger organization behind ILLC; and Dr. Caviolini, whose inappropriate humor does little to help the situation. The board deliberates how best to navigate the fallout from Teddy's death, with the lawyer suggesting strategies that cast a shadow over the incident by emphasizing the children's fragility while minimizing the impact of recent tragedies.



As the discussion evolves, Michelle grapples with mixed feelings. While she recognizes the importance of the media attention on the protest, she also empathizes with the challenges that come with managing a facility like ILLC, understanding the complexities involved in providing care for vulnerable children.

The board's conversations reveal a pragmatic yet cold approach to a profound tragedy, focusing on reshaping public perception through various tactics—such as using sympathetic parents as spokespersons and even including children in their public relations strategy. This highlights a troubling theme of institutional neglect, where the lives of individuals seem secondary to protecting corporate image and interests.

Throughout the meeting, Michelle becomes more overwhelmed by the stark realities of their discussions and her own role in them. As she contemplates the absurdity of the situation, she even considers leaking her notes to reporters, illustrating the tension between corporate interests and the urgent need for genuine compassion. This chapter poignantly addresses the harsh realities faced by the disabled community and those who work tirelessly on their behalf, exposing a world where empathy is all too often overshadowed by corporate concerns.



## Chapter 44: Joanne Madsen

In Chapter 44 of "Good Kings Bad Kings," Joanne Madsen grapples with her evolving relationship with Ricky while they work together on home repairs, particularly focusing on weather stripping. Their interactions reveal a mix of gratitude and inner conflict; Joanne appreciates Ricky's help but is torn by a strong desire for independence—a feeling deeply rooted in her struggles since her injury. This strain is compounded by her recent job loss, leaving her anxious about her self-worth and the potential burden she may place on others.

As they engage in light-hearted banter, the conversation shifts towards more serious topics. Joanne contemplates writing an article reflecting on her experiences at a nonprofit organization that supports disabled individuals, which helps her address her worries regarding unemployment. Ricky, in turn, expresses his own uncertainties about his job at a group home and even considers the possibility of returning to school for a new career path.

Their dialogue flows into discussions about Ricky's aspirations, including his desire to work with youth or in a juvenile facility. Joanne encourages him, recognizing the potential impact he could have on the lives of at-risk youth, though she also warns of the emotional challenges that such work might entail. Their playful back-and-forth showcases a deepening bond, illustrating the mutual understanding and support that form the foundation of





their relationship.

As they decide to take a walk, Joanne's anxiety resurfaces regarding an upcoming family picnic hosted by Ricky's family, known for their strong religious convictions. She fears judgment stemming from differences in their lifestyles. Yet, amidst all the uncertainties they both face, there remains a comforting sense of companionship between them, hinting at the resilience of their relationship in weathering life's challenges. This chapter poignantly explores themes of identity, the struggle for self-sufficiency, the emotional weight of unemployment, and the essential role of supportive connections in overcoming adversity.

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## Chapter 45 Summary: Jimmie Kendrick

In Chapter 45, Jimmie Kendrick recounts the dynamic shifts happening at the ILLC, primarily ignited by the arrival of a new girl, Yessie. This chapter unfolds in a backdrop of hope and chaos, fueled by the introduction of two new houseparents and a lively psychologist. These changes inspire optimism among the residents, particularly Mia, who is thrilled by the news that she will receive a pink power chair, an achievement made possible by the advocacy of the organization Access Now. Jimmie captures Mia's exuberance, highlighting the joyful bond forming between her and Joanne as they revel in this exciting news together.

However, these positive developments are shadowed by an undercurrent of anxiety. Whispers of a potential closure of ILIC circulate among the residents, inciting fears that the children might be uprooted from their home. This uncertainty weighs heavily on Yessie, who has already experienced significant loss with the recent passing of her tía. Concerned about her future, she grapples with the fear of being displaced again. Jimmie empathizes with Yessie's situation and yearns to support her, while also ensuring Yessie understands she is not a replacement for her family. Jimmie's commitment to Yessie is heartfelt, as she contemplates fostering a deeper bond with her, either as a mother figure or a close friend.

In an effort to solidify their connection and provide Yessie with a sense of



stability amid the chaos, Jimmie orchestrates a surprise dinner. This personal gesture signifies her affection for Yessie and her desire to help her navigate the uncertainties that lie ahead. Jimmie aims to reassure Yessie that she has options and, regardless of ILLC's fate, a potential home with her. The chapter poignantly explores themes of connection, uncertainty, and the yearning for belonging, all set against the backdrop of their rapidly changing world.

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## Chapter 46 Summary: Michelle Volkmann

### Summary of Chapter 46 from "Good Kings Bad Kings"

In Chapter 46, we delve into the tumultuous life of Michelle Volkmann, who is navigating the aftermath of a night filled with excess following her resignation from Whitney-Palm, a retail job she once coveted. Battling a fierce hangover, Michelle reflects on her chaotic escapades alongside her friend Farrah, whose bold and rebellious nature—evident in their antics, such as shouting about being “one hundred percent American” from a cab—highlights the contrast between the friends. While Farrah embraces the thrill of nightlife, Michelle grapples with disillusionment about her career.

Once filled with aspirations to work on Oak Street, Michelle now harbors disdain for her previous position. The negativity she faced from difficult customers and a toxic work culture has left her feeling jaded. Upon visiting Riverwood to see Tim, her former boss, Michelle confronts her guilt for abandoning him during a tumultuous time for the company, despite his well-wishes for her future.

The narrative takes a serious turn as Michelle discusses the scandal involving Dr. Caviolini, a doctor implicated in insurance fraud, which amplifies her frustrations with the healthcare system. She is outraged that



financial resources continue to be directed toward nursing homes while disabled individuals are neglected and denied essential care. This realization encapsulates a deeper theme of systemic injustice that runs through the chapter.

As Michelle's reckless activities culminate in a harrowing morning after a dangerous mix of medications, she finds solace in the upcoming visit from her mother, a source of support during her turbulent times. Amidst her confusion and feelings of being lost, Michelle resolutely declares her aversion to pursuing a career that conflicts with her values. Her candid reflections illuminate her struggle to forge a personal and professional identity in a world that often feels unfair and overwhelming, leaving readers intrigued by the possibilities that lie ahead for her.

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## Chapter 47 Summary: Mia Oviedo

In Chapter 47 of "Good Kings Bad Kings," the narrative centers around Mia Oviedo as she shares her weekly therapy session with her compassionate therapist, Connie. Every Thursday, Mia looks forward to these meetings, which take place in Connie's flower-filled office, creating a warm and inviting atmosphere. The core of their discussions often revolves around Teddy, a deeply cherished figure in Mia's life who has since passed away. As she recounts their affectionate relationship, Mia reflects on the joy that Teddy brought her, especially during her most challenging moments.

Connie plays a pivotal role in gently challenging Mia's feelings of unworthiness, reminding her of the profound love Teddy had for her. This dialogue becomes a catalyst for Mia to confront her grief, focusing not just on her sadness but also on the treasured memories she holds dear. Connie reassures Mia that the essence of Teddy's love persists, offering her a sense of comfort as she navigates her emotions.

Outside of therapy, Mia is actively involved in her community through Access Now, a program dedicated to empowering individuals with disabilities. By attending leadership classes, she forges new friendships and hones her advocacy skills for disabled rights—an important aspect of her identity. Mia's new pink electric wheelchair, emblazoned with a "Power to the People" sticker, symbolizes her growing sense of empowerment and



independence.

A touching moment occurs when Mia receives a special gift from her friend Joanne—a pink backpack brimming with thoughtful surprises, including a photograph of Mia and Teddy that captures a joyous memory. This gesture deepens Mia's connection with Joanne and serves as a poignant reminder of her bond with Teddy.

Throughout the chapter, themes of love, loss, and self-discovery resonate as Mia balances her grief with the excitement of forming new connections and finding her voice. As she prepares for her next therapy session, she takes the initiative to jot down questions and reflections, underscoring her journey of personal growth and her determination to move forward in life despite her challenges.

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## Chapter 48: Yessenia Lopez

### Summary of Chapter 48 of "Good Kings Bad Kings"

In this chapter, Yessenia Lopez finds herself grappling with the aftermath of newfound fame following her appearance on television. Despite the external recognition, her life at the Institution for Learning and Living Center (ILLC) feels increasingly confining and desolate. The absence of her friends—Joanne having been fired, Mia frequently away, and Cheri in a psychiatric facility—leaves her feeling isolated and unsupported. Plagued by the fear of losing her connection with Jimmie, Yessenia decides to flee in search of freedom and connection.

Her escape takes her to the vibrant streets of downtown Chicago, where she experiences the thrilling energy of urban life for the first time. In a leap of faith, she boards a bus to Milwaukee to meet Pedro, an online acquaintance. Initially apprehensive about their meeting, Yessenia gradually warms to Pedro during a shared meal. However, their date takes an unexpected turn when he kisses her, causing her to react by asserting her boundaries and pouring her drink on him. Despite this rocky moment, they find enjoyment in each other's company, bonding over shared interests in soccer and life experiences.



As they navigate this budding relationship, Yessenia experiences a significant moment of intimacy with Pedro, marking the loss of her virginity. This encounter is layered with excitement and confusion, as she contemplates what it signifies for her sense of self and future.

By the end of the chapter, after an emotionally charged day, Yessenia returns to ILLC and reflects on the relationships she cherishes and the losses she has endured. Her return is bittersweet but hopeful, especially when she is warmly greeted by Jimmie, which rekindles her desire for authentic connection in an environment often overshadowed by loneliness and despair. The chapter poignantly explores themes of the search for freedom, the intricacies of relationships, and the ongoing quest for identity in the face of adversity.

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