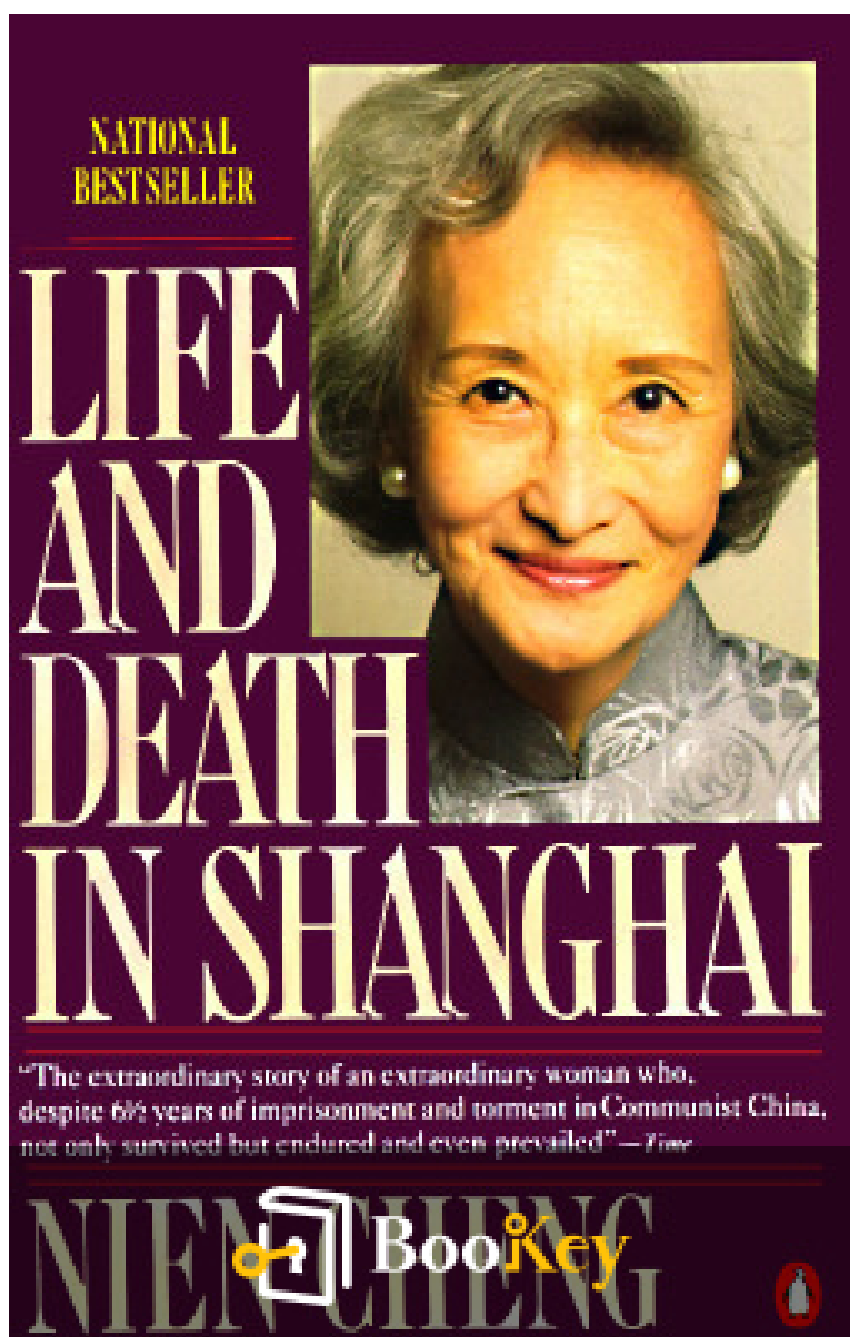


Life And Death In Shanghai PDF (Limited Copy)

Nien Cheng



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Life And Death In Shanghai Summary

One Woman's Courage Amidst the Chaos of Revolution

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About the book

In August 1966, Nien Cheng's life was irrevocably altered when a group of Red Guards descended upon her home. These fervent youth, part of the Cultural Revolution in China, were mobilized to root out perceived enemies of the state, and Cheng's privileged background made her a primary target. As a graduate of the London School of Economics, a widow of an official from the previous regime, and a former employee at Shell Oil, she was viewed as a symbol of the bourgeoisie—an entity to be dismantled in the revolutionary spirit of the time.

Despite intense pressure to confess to accusations of counter-revolutionary activities, Cheng resolutely maintained her innocence. This defiance came at a great cost: she was subjected to over six years of solitary confinement in harsh conditions, where her strength of spirit was relentlessly tested. "Life and Death in Shanghai" chronicles her remarkable journey through this oppressive landscape, illuminating her resilience and unwavering sense of justice against the backdrop of a chaotic and brutal political climate.

Through her narrative, Cheng not only recounts her own extraordinary bravery in the face of grave injustice but also encapsulates a significant chapter in twentieth-century history—one marked by political persecution, social upheaval, and the enduring resilience of the human spirit. Her memoir stands as a powerful testament to individual courage, providing insight into a

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dark era while emphasizing the struggle for truth and dignity in the shadow of tyranny.

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About the author

Nien Cheng's memoir, **Life and Death in Shanghai**, is a powerful testament to her experiences during China's Cultural Revolution, a tumultuous period marked by extreme political upheaval and social chaos initiated by Chairman Mao Zedong. As the manager of Shell's operations in Shanghai, Cheng soon found herself a target of the fervent Red Guards, youth mobilized by the Communist Party to root out perceived enemies of the state.

Cheng's life took a dramatic turn when she was falsely accused of being a British spy, a claim that exemplified the paranoia and brutality of the era. Instead of succumbing to the pressure of her captors, Cheng displayed remarkable courage during her six-and-a-half-year ordeal in prison. Throughout her harrowing confinement, she steadfastly resisted confessing to the fabricated charges against her, demonstrating an unyielding spirit even in the most dire circumstances.

The personal toll of her imprisonment was immense, profoundly impacting her family. Cheng's daughter, Meiping, a talented actress, became a tragic victim of the political climate, losing her life for standing by her mother during this turbulent time. This devastating loss illustrates the human cost of political persecution and the sacrifices made by individuals who dare to oppose oppressive regimes.

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Cheng's plight came to an end after the arrest of the Gang of Four, a political faction responsible for many of the atrocities during the Cultural Revolution. Following her rehabilitation, she made the significant decision to emigrate to the United States, where she sought refuge from the lingering threats posed by her adversaries. Her life took a new turn when she developed a close friendship with U.S. Ambassador Nelson T. Johnson and his wife, which further facilitated her integration into American society.

In a remarkable transformation, Cheng emerged as a prominent speaker, sharing her compelling story across the nation. Her experiences serve not only as a witness to a dark chapter in history but also as a source of inspiration for others. In a poignant acknowledgment of her legacy, Canadian musician Corey Hart created an instrumental tribute in Cheng's honor for his 1990 album **Bang!**, highlighting the enduring impact of her story on those far beyond her immediate circumstances. Through her resilience and bravery, Cheng's voice continues to resonate, reminding us of the strength found in the face of adversity.

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Chapter 1 Summary: 1 Witch-hunt

Chapter 1: Witch-hunt

In July 1966, Nien Cheng recalls her life in Shanghai as she sits in the familiar comfort of her home, a stark contrast to the escalating political chaos surrounding her. While her daughter sleeps peacefully nearby, Cheng reflects on how her family's fortunes—once plentiful—have dwindled, yet they have managed to uphold a semblance of stability amid the upheaval imposed by the Communist Party. Unlike many others in Shanghai, they cling to remnants of their past life.

As she scans articles laden with political rhetoric hinting at the forthcoming Cultural Revolution, Cheng's unease grows. This introspection is deepened by memories of her late husband, who had skillfully navigated the challenges of managing a foreign company during a time of great change in Communist China. Suddenly, her quiet existence is shattered when she is ordered to attend an urgent meeting with former colleagues the following morning, signaling the imminent eruption of widespread political strife that requires everyone's involvement, regardless of their past affiliations.

During the meeting, Cheng witnesses a grim spectacle: the public denouncement of Tao Feng, a former chief accountant for Shell. An official

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delivers a vehement speech condemning both Feng and the capitalist ideologies associated with foreign enterprises, underlining a terrifying climate of self-criticism and forced confessions. The atmosphere grows increasingly tense, raising alarm for Cheng as her ties to foreign interests place her under scrutiny.

After the meeting, she faces intimidation from party representatives, forcing her to navigate a perilous landscape filled with distrust while striving to maintain her dignity and seek clarity about the true goals of the Cultural Revolution. Despite her perseverance, she cannot ignore the looming threats facing her and her daughter, who now stand at the mercy of a society spiraling out of control.

Cheng's musings about her life weave together themes of personal loss, family connections, and the specter of change that looms ever closer. As she grapples with her shifting reality, this chapter lays the groundwork for her impending struggle against an oppressive political regime, foreshadowing the challenges ahead in a turbulent era.



Chapter 2 Summary: 2 Interval before the Storm

Chapter 2: Interval before the Storm

In this chapter, Nien Cheng paints a vivid picture of the rising tensions in China as the Cultural Revolution unfolds. Amidst the backdrop of a nation on the brink of chaos, Nien is pressured by Party officials to denounce her former employer, Shell, and her friends abroad, highlighting the environment of distrust and paranoia that permeates society. The clash between Maoists and moderates within the Communist Party exacerbates this turmoil, with Mao Zedong increasingly branding government leaders as counter-revolutionary and capitalist.

As Mao declares a Cultural Revolution, the fervor spirals into violence, with Red Guards—youth activists mobilized by Mao to enforce ideological purity—seeking out and punishing perceived enemies. In a poignant encounter with Mr. Hu, a former factory owner who now occupies a subordinate position within the state-run system, Nien receives sobering advice about surviving the shifting political landscape. Mr. Hu's disillusionment reflects the grim reality many face, recognizing that loyalty can carry dangerous consequences in this new order.

Throughout the chapter, Nien grapples with profound questions of loyalty,



integrity, and the instinct for self-preservation amidst an atmosphere thick with fear and ideological zeal. The narrative deepens as she shares her concerns for her daughter's future, encapsulating a mother's love against the backdrop of relentless societal upheaval and the oppressive demands of the Red Guards.

As Nien navigates her precarious situation, her reflections evoke a bittersweet nostalgia for a time before the chaos, underscoring the human cost of political turmoil and the sacrifices that come with survival in an increasingly hostile world.

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Chapter 3 Summary: 3 The Red Guards

Summary of Chapter 3: The Red Guards

Political Induction and Quiet Anticipation

As the Proletarian Cultural Revolution gathered momentum, political indoctrination sessions became a routine part of life. On August 30, Red Guards, composed largely of fervent high school students, descended upon Nien Cheng's home while her daughter was away. Cheng sat in tense silence, acutely aware that her sanctuary was about to be invaded and that her life was about to be irreversibly changed.

The Red Guards Arrive

The Red Guards, driven by a fervent commitment to Chairman Mao's teachings, quickly dismissed the Constitution of the People's Republic of China, claiming it had lost relevance. Despite Cheng's attempts to assert her rights and reason with the youths, they were impervious to her pleas, chanting revolutionary slogans and demonstrating their unwavering loyalty to Mao.

Destruction of Cultural Heritage

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As they ransacked Cheng's home, the Red Guards shattered valuable antiques and vandalized her cherished art, embodying a larger campaign against traditional culture and history under the guise of revolutionary action. Cheng's heart ached with each destruction, and in a moment of desperation, she confronted a Red Guard in a bid to save her prized porcelain, escalating tensions to a physical confrontation.

Diplomacy and Despair

Recognizing the need to adapt her strategy, Cheng endeavored to negotiate with the Red Guards. She argued for the significance of her possessions as part of national heritage, hoping to appeal to their sense of pride while ostensibly aligning herself with Maoist ideals. This tactic reflected a desperate yet strategic maneuver in a bid for her belongings' preservation.

Confrontation with Authority

Amidst the turmoil, a liaison officer from the municipal government arrived, reinforcing the narrative of class struggle by labeling Cheng as part of the capitalist class, whose standard of living supposedly exceeded that of the average worker. Under considerable intimidation, her possessions were sealed and closely guarded, leaving Cheng to grapple with anxiety and uncertainty about her future.



Daily Life and Rising Tensions

The atmosphere in the household grew increasingly strained, marked by divisions and distrust. Cheng reflected on her family's past while sharing quiet moments of nostalgia with her daughter, finding solace in their bond amidst the chaos. Their relationship stood as a poignant reminder of the enduring ties that would help them navigate this tumultuous period.

Resilience in Adversity

Despite the overwhelming trauma, Cheng clung to a sense of hope. She and her daughter reaffirmed their belief in a brighter future for China, embodying resilience in the face of crisis. Their unwavering optimism served as a testament to the human spirit's ability to endure and seek change, even amid the deepening shadows of the Cultural Revolution.

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Chapter 4: 4 House Arrest

House Arrest Summary

In the gripping narrative of Nien Cheng's life during the Cultural Revolution, the initial chapter, “Waking to a Rainy Morning,” paints a poignant picture of her desolation. As she observes her garden, now littered with debris from the violent incursions of the Red Guards—youths who fervently followed Mao Zedong's vision for a communist society—she grapples with feelings of loss and uncertainty about her future. The once vibrant life she led is now upended, and she remains anxious for the Red Guards' return.

The subsequent chapter, “The State of Affairs,” reveals increasing tensions in Shanghai. A recent article in the Shanghai Liberation Daily calls for the revolutionary masses to root out “capitalist-roaders” who oppose Mao’s doctrines. The chilling rhetoric escalates fears of violence against anyone labeled an enemy of the state. Concerned for the safety of her loyal servants, Nien Cheng urges them to leave; however, their steadfast loyalty compels them to stay and support her amidst the turmoil.

“Tensions Rise” captures the chaos as Red Guards become more radicalized, besieging municipal buildings to dismantle protective measures for the capitalist class. The installation of a new local revolutionary leader heightens



fears among those linked to Jiang Qing, Mao's wife. Nien Cheng contemplates escape routes for herself and her daughter, although a friend's warning about the severe consequences of such actions weighs heavily on her mind.

The confrontation with the Red Guards intensifies in the chapter “Confrontation with Red Guards.” One night, they invade her home, accusing her of being a class enemy and inquiring about hidden wealth. Despite enduring a physical assault and humiliating searches, she remains resolute, offering no confessions while being taunted. A moment of levity arises when her cat unexpectedly attacks one of the Red Guards, providing a slight reprieve from the tense atmosphere.

In “New Reality of House Arrest,” Nien Cheng experiences the limitations of her new existence as she becomes a prisoner in her own home. A rotating group of Red Guards monitors her closely, yet she finds solace in the rare exchanges of notes with her daughter and news from devoted servants like Lao-zhao. These snippets of information keep her aware of the escalating political climate outside.

The situation deteriorates further during “The Struggle Meetings,” where Nien Cheng is coerced into attending a gathering aimed at denouncing her as a class enemy. False accusations surface, insinuating her family’s ties to foreign powers, while representatives from her former employer, Shell,



succumb to fear and pressure, adding to the collective hysteria. Despite the chaos and rampant falsehoods, she remains steadfast in her innocence.

Finally, in “Facing Consequences,” the story reaches a critical juncture. Nien Cheng’s unwavering defiance leads her to reject the demands for a false confession, despite the hostile environment around her. This resolute stand ends with her being handcuffed and taken away in a police jeep, marking a decisive moment in her harrowing journey through the Cultural Revolution. As she faces an uncertain future, her courage in the face of tyranny resonates, underscoring the personal battles fought during this tumultuous period of Chinese history.

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Chapter 5 Summary: 5 Solitary Confinement

Solitary Confinement: An Account of Persecution during the Cultural Revolution

The Cultural Revolution's Atmosphere

Shanghai during the Cultural Revolution bursts with revolutionary zeal, as Red Guards rally crowds to denounce perceived enemies of the state and destroy "bourgeois" literature. Nien Cheng, a victim of this chaotic fervor, reflects on her wrongful treatment, perceiving herself as a casualty of a brutal class struggle. The overarching political climate, driven by fervent ideological purges, creates an environment where accusations are rampant, and innocence is no defense.

The Experience of Being Transported

As Cheng is forcibly taken away in a police vehicle, she becomes acutely aware of her status as a "class enemy" in the eyes of an onlooking public, symbolizing the societal distrust and paranoia pervasive during the Cultural Revolution. In this era, guilt was determined by class background, resulting in widespread persecution where many innocent individuals like Cheng faced unjust convictions, rising from the regime's oppressive scrutiny.



Admission to the No. 1 Detention House

Arriving at the infamous No. 1 Detention House, Cheng endures a dehumanizing intake process, where she is stripped of her identity and assigned a number. The stark contrast between her bleak surroundings and her inner resolve creates a powerful narrative of survival. Despite the institutional cruelty enveloping her, Cheng clings to hope and refuses to confess to crimes she did not commit, showcasing her determination in the face of adversity.

Daily Life in Detention

Cheng chronicles her grim cell conditions—dark, filthy, and oppressive. Yet, in the midst of despair, she cultivates small moments of solace through routine and cleanliness. Her interactions with the prison guards illustrate the psychological manipulation inherent in the system, where the oppressive environment forces individuals towards compliance and coerced confessions, intensifying Cheng's struggle for autonomy.

Moments of Resilience

Amid the desolation of confinement, Cheng finds inspiration in a spider weaving its web. This small creature's resilience amidst adversity serves as a



metaphor for Cheng's own internal struggles. By drawing strength from this connection to nature, she nurtures her spirit and perseverance, finding an uplifting presence in an otherwise isolating and demoralizing situation.

Facing Illness and Interrogation

With the arrival of winter, Cheng's health declines, compounding the psychological challenges she faces. The guards misinterpret her illness as a sign of weakness, subjecting her to increased scrutiny and harsh interrogation. However, Cheng's steadfast refusal to confess affirms her dignity and highlights her resilience against the brutal political repression of the era.

Conclusion

Through her harrowing experiences of captivity, Nien Cheng emerges with a fortified sense of self and a profound understanding of the socio-political climate in which she lives. The trials of her detention not only deepen her insights into the injustices around her but also cultivate a remarkable inner strength, solidifying her identity as a courageous survivor of profound persecution.



Chapter 6 Summary: 6 Interrogation

Summary of Chapter 6: Interrogation

In this chapter, we find Nien Cheng in her dreary prison cell on a cold winter morning, reflecting on her daily routines, including the monthly laundry. The monotonous existence is suddenly disrupted when a guard summons her for an interrogation, signaling a pivotal moment in her confinement.

With a mix of excitement and hope, Cheng anticipates a reasonable and knowledgeable government interrogator, a stark contrast to her previous encounters with aggressive Red Guards. However, her expectations are quashed when she enters a dimly lit interrogation room, where she is met by two indifferent men dressed in Maoist uniforms, embodying the oppressive regime that holds her captive.

The session begins as the interrogator commands her to read a quotation from Mao, triggering distressing memories of her prior experiences. He challenges her perception of her imprisonment, accusing her of crimes against the "People's Government." This accusation thrusts Cheng into a psychological battle where she must defend her integrity, arguing that the charges against her are baseless since she has never committed any wrongdoing.



What follows is a philosophical clash between Cheng and her interrogator. She argues for justice founded on social unity and progress, clashing with his unyielding Marxist ideology rooted in class struggle. This intellectual duel highlights the stark divide between their worldviews, illustrating Cheng's commitment to her beliefs in the face of oppressive propaganda.

The interrogator's request for an autobiography reveals his intention to mine her personal history for information that can be weaponized against her. Despite her anxieties about writing, Cheng resolves to protect herself through her words, careful to guard against manipulation, yet aware of the potential consequences.

As she navigates the bleakness of her situation, Cheng finds unexpected solace in observing a small spider in her cell, drawing parallels between their mutual struggles for survival. This moment of introspection fortifies her resolve to maintain her integrity and mental resilience amid harsh conditions.

Once she completes her autobiography, she faces the interrogator's dissatisfaction and threatening ultimatums, which plunge her into a cycle of anxiety about her uncertain future. The themes of power, identity, and the intricacies of personal history permeate the chapter, leaving her with a profound mixture of vulnerability and determination.



The chapter concludes with Cheng plagued by nightmares that encapsulate her fears and the psychological toll of her imprisonment. The oppressive environment, compounded by the constant scrutiny she endures, exacerbates her anxiety, underscoring her fight for inner peace amidst relentless intimidation.

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Chapter 7 Summary: 7 The January Revolution and Military Control

The January Revolution and Military Control

In this chapter, Nien Cheng recounts her harrowing experience during a tumultuous period in China's history marked by the January Revolution and the rise of military power. The atmosphere in the prison is tense as Cheng anxiously waits for the unfolding events outside. The noticeable shift in the guards' behavior—filled with anxiety and discussions about joining the revolution—hints at a profound transformation taking place in the country. The interruption of newspaper deliveries marks a definitive turning point, signifying the radical upheaval that is shaping her life and those around her.

As the month progresses, the influence of the Red Guards — a youth militia mobilized during the Cultural Revolution aiming to root out counter-revolutionary elements — becomes increasingly evident. They orchestrate an audacious attempt to break into the prison to liberate their comrades, signaling the breakdown of authority within the prison walls. Cheng observes a growing sense of camaraderie among the inmates as the guards' commitment to their roles wavers, hinting at potential fractures in the regime's control.

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Amidst the chaos, the formation of the "Gang of Four," a radical leadership faction, marks a significant consolidation of power, heightening Cheng's dread of an uncertain fate as violent revolutionary sentiment sweeps across the nation. The military, initially seen as a stabilizing force, begins to ally with the radicals, leading to an increase in brutality and fear as prisoners face harsh punishments for dissent.

Cheng's struggle with illness deepens during her confinement, forcing her to reflect on the human costs of the Cultural Revolution. Despite her suffering, she finds moments of connection, particularly with a supportive fellow detainee who shares food. These interactions reveal glimpses of humanity amidst the harsh conditions, suggesting that even in the darkest times, compassion can persist.

As her health deteriorates, Cheng is transferred to the prison hospital, a place that mirrors the decay of society at large. Here, she forges bonds with fellow patients, sharing stories of loss and resilience that highlight the personal tragedies wrought by the revolutionary fervor. The compassion shown by her doctor, despite the tumult of her own life, stands out as a beacon of hope, underscoring the enduring spirit of humanity against oppressive forces.

Following her recovery, Cheng returns to the No. 1 Detention House, where the cycle of suffering seems to continue unabated. The chaos of the Cultural Revolution looms large over her fate, forcing her to grapple with the



uncertain future that lies ahead as the revolution reshapes not only her life but the very fabric of Chinese society. Thus, the chapter encapsulates the turmoil of the January Revolution, weaving together personal struggles with the broader socio-political upheaval of the era.

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Chapter 8: 8 Party Factions

In Chapter 8 of Nien Cheng's narrative, titled "Party Factions," the author traces her harrowing experiences during the winter of 1967, marked by a profound decline in both her physical and mental health due to malnutrition and isolation. The psychological burden of solitary confinement leads Cheng into despair, amplifying her fear of losing her mental clarity more than her worsening physical condition.

Outside the prison walls, political turmoil intensifies, characterized by violence among the Red Guards and Revolutionaries, which results in growing neglect of her case. The surrounding chaos heightens Cheng's anxiety as she grapples with uncertainty about her fate.

In a bid to endure her confinement, Cheng adopts a regimen of physical and mental exercises, despite the inherent risks. She also immerses herself in memorizing Mao Zedong's writings to prepare for her interrogations but finds greater solace in reciting poetry from the Tang dynasty, which offers a brief escape from her grim reality.

Amidst her suffering, Cheng engages in verbal exchanges with the prison guards, using these confrontations as a necessary outlet to combat her overwhelming sense of isolation. She resolutely maintains her innocence, refusing to accept the legality of her imprisonment.



Politically, significant events unfold as Mao Zedong, the leader of Communist China, attempts to regain control over the factions he has empowered. His gesture of gifting mangoes to students, coupled with the dissolution of the Red Guards, reflects a changing narrative during the Cultural Revolution.

As psychological and physical strains mount, Cheng faces a health crisis marked by excessive bleeding, deepening her mental distress. Although she receives minimal medical attention, her skepticism toward the authorities remains unshaken.

The chapter also delves into the dynamics of her interrogations, where Cheng strategically navigates the harsh realities of her situation. She challenges the legitimacy of Liu Shaoqi's denouncement, a prominent figure within the Party who faces condemnation, hinting at underlying sympathies among Party members that question the official narrative.

Cheng's resilience shines through as she balances defiance with a survival instinct during her interrogations, reflecting on the profound absurdities of being manipulated as a pawn in the political landscape. Throughout this tumultuous period, a noticeable shift in the treatment by her guards occurs, likely influenced by her defense of Liu Shaoqi, highlighting the complexities of loyalty and survival amid an oppressive regime.



This chapter culminates in a dramatic health incident, following a particularly contentious interrogation session. Cheng's deterioration necessitates her transportation to the prison hospital, underscoring the severe physical toll that her prolonged confinement has inflicted on her body and illustrating the grim realities faced by those ensnared in the political upheaval.

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Chapter 9 Summary: 9 Persecution Continued

Chapter 9: Persecution Continued

In this chapter, Nien Cheng provides a harrowing account of her continued persecution during the Cultural Revolution in Shanghai. The chapter unfolds as she is transported to a detention center, where her deteriorating health and the suffering of fellow prisoners become focal points. Cheng faces relentless interrogation and the humiliating spectacle of public struggle sessions designed to force her into a confession and denounce her supposed crimes.

Ambulance Ride and Hospital Stay

The chapter opens with Cheng's grim ride in a filthy ambulance, plagued by anxiety over her health and the possibility of a malignant growth. As she reflects on her painful separation from her daughter, the oppressive atmosphere surrounding her deepens her sense of isolation. Once at the prison hospital, she is among other surgical patients, where the provision of better food contrasts sharply with her previous conditions. Here, Cheng's indomitable spirit emerges; she resolves to survive despite the harsh realities. A sympathetic doctor plays a crucial role in her recovery, managing to secure better nourishment for her in a system otherwise dominated by the Red Guards.



Interrogation Process

During her time in detention, Cheng confronts constant interrogation, wherein she is coerced to write confessions under extreme psychological pressure. The interrogators label her a "criminal," wielding insults as weapons. In a display of defiance, Cheng crafts counter-arguments and reminisces about her past to frustrate her captors. Despite the oppressive environment, she manages to receive vitamins from some sympathetic guards, while others, consumed by their militant zeal, resent her perceived favoritism.

Struggle Sessions

As the narrative progresses, Cheng is taken to struggle sessions, grand spectacles of public humiliation where she is denounced by former colleagues and falsely accused of espionage. These sessions are laden with orchestrated outrage, and despite the physical and psychological brutality, Cheng proudly resists their demands for a confession. Her ability to find dark humor amidst the inhumane treatment underlines her resilience.

Reflecting on Survival

Cheng endures several struggle sessions, each one testing her spirit through

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relentless psychological intimidation and physical discomfort. She battles despair but remains resolute, determined to withstand the systematic attempts to crush her spirit. The chapter culminates with her reflections on the broader implications of the Cultural Revolution, illustrating her tragic personal narrative against a backdrop of collective suffering and societal trauma under Mao's totalitarian regime.

Conclusion

Ultimately, this chapter not only recounts Cheng's struggles but also serves as a poignant commentary on the pervasive absurdity and brutality of the political climate during this tumultuous period. Her tale of endurance encapsulates the struggle for dignity amidst a regime that seeks to suppress individual voices and rewrite personal narratives.



Chapter 10 Summary: 10 My Brother's Confession

Chapter 10 Summary: My Brother's Confession

In this poignant chapter, Nien Cheng reflects on the oppressive atmosphere of her prison environment during Shanghai's rainy season, where increasing dampness exacerbates her declining health. Struggling with joint pain and severe gum inflammation, she maintains a sense of hope amidst grim circumstances, largely fueled by the relentless interrogations concerning her case.

Cheng recounts the intense interrogation sessions that she faced, where she was compelled to meticulously detail her relationships with relatives and friends. The interrogators imposed significant pressure for her to condemn others, particularly her friend Huang Zuolin, thus reflecting the ruthless political climate prevalent during the Cultural Revolution. Despite the vehemence of the accusations against her associates, Cheng stands firm in her defense of their loyalty to China, though her arguments are routinely dismissed by her captors.

The narrative then zeroes in on Huang Zuolin, a respected film director and Cheng's former ally. He has become a target for the regime due to his alleged associations with past political movements, specifically as a Shell



comprador—a term referring to individuals perceived to have collaborated with foreign interests. Cheng grapples with the challenge of defending him against baseless charges, while enduring relentless harassment from authorities seeking confessions that support their political agenda.

Amidst this backdrop, Cheng reveals a shocking incident involving her brother in Beijing. Under the intense strain of harassment, he succumbs to pressure and falsely confesses to having connections with the Kuomintang, the Nationalist party that the Communist government vehemently opposes. This moment serves as a stark illustration of the psychological toll exerted by the regime, showcasing how the immense pressure can cause individuals to blur the lines between reality and fabricated truths.

The chapter presents a broader historical context of Mao's regime, emphasizing the heightened paranoia and class struggles that propelled a relentless campaign against perceived enemies. Cheng reflects on the ravaging effects of the revolution on personal relationships, creating an environment fraught with suspicion and fear.

In the concluding passages, Cheng expresses a profound understanding of her brother's predicament, rooted in compassion rather than resentment. Their reunion reveals the deep, lasting scars left by the Cultural Revolution, as they navigate their differing responses to trauma—her brother's inclination towards conformity for survival clashing with Cheng's steadfast



commitment to her principles. Ultimately, the chapter encapsulates the poignant emotional turmoil brought about by the repressive political climate, leaving Cheng filled with sorrow over her brother's disillusionment and the uncertain future awaiting China amidst constant ideological shifts.

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Chapter 11 Summary: 11 A Kind of Torture

Chapter 11, titled "A Kind of Torture," delves into Nien Cheng's harrowing experience of prolonged detention and interrogation, triggered by an incident involving her brother, which intertwined with the broader political turmoil of 1970s China. Cheng's narrative begins with almost seven months of relentless questioning, where she is scrutinized in detail about her past, relationships, and connections. This exhaustive interrogation reflects not only a personal ordeal but also the government's oppressive tactics to instill fear and maintain control over the populace during a time of deep economic distress and political strife.

As the interrogations come to an abrupt halt, Cheng's situation deteriorates due to inadequate medical care and increasingly dismal living conditions, including rationing of basic necessities like soap and toilet paper. This microcosm of her suffering mirrors the widespread hardships faced by the Chinese people amid famine and economic collapse, creating a vivid backdrop of despair.

Cheng's resilience becomes evident as she navigates the psychological and physical trials of her confinement. The political landscape is further complicated by the internal rifts within the Communist Party, marked by the downfall of prominent figures such as Chen Boda and Lin Biao, which serves to heighten the atmosphere of fear and uncertainty that Cheng



experiences.

The narrative shifts to a particularly brutal interrogation session, where Cheng endures both physical and psychological torture designed to break her spirit and coerce a confession. She faces extreme methods, including painful restraints that lead to lasting injuries. Yet, through this brutality, Cheng's spirit remains unyielded as she steadfastly refuses to admit to any fabricated crimes.

Her unwavering conviction is seemingly fueled by her desire for justice and hope for a brighter future, even amid the oppressive indoctrination that pervades her environment. Ultimately, this chapter portrays not only the physical ramifications of torture but also its deep psychological scars, laying bare the impact of the Communist regime's methods on individuals like Cheng during a period marked by systemic violence and political instability.

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Chapter 12: 12 Release

Chapter 12 Summary: Release

A Somber National Day

In 1971, as Nien Cheng grappled with her health challenges and awaited news from the shifting political landscape of the Maoist regime, the National Day of the People's Republic of China arrived quietly and without celebration. Unlike previous years, the day passed unnoticed in official announcements and media, leaving a sense of confusion and concern among the populace.

Shifting Political Allegiances

Amidst this backdrop, Cheng experienced a significant moment of unease when a guard confiscated her book of Mao's quotations, removing the preface authored by Lin Biao, a high-ranking Communist leader. Cheng's suspicions were piqued, for Lin Biao had recently been criticized indirectly in media reports as a traitor, implying a precarious shift in the balance of power within the Communist Party and foreshadowing political turmoil.

Fleeting Hopes and Personal Requests

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As rumors of Lin Biao's potential removal circulated, Cheng felt a tentative sense of hope regarding her own circumstances. With winter approaching, she made numerous requests for warm clothing, yet encountered apathy from the prison guards. After persistent efforts, she received an assortment of clothing items that alarmingly belonged to her daughter. This development exacerbated her anxiety, as it raised troubling questions about her child's well-being.

Confronting Loss

The arrival of her daughter's belongings forced Cheng into a painful realization. The immaculate condition of the clothing led her to believe that her daughter had likely died. Despite her attempts to glean information from the guards, their evasive responses only deepened her sense of despair as she entered the bleakness of winter, feeling increasingly isolated and hopeless.

Declining Health and Reexaminations

Cheng's health deteriorated further, leading to another hospitalization in late 1972. This period prompted the authorities to reevaluate her situation. During her improved conditions, she encountered a familiar interrogator who persistently questioned her about her past, highlighting the erratic and capricious nature of the political system she was ensnared in.



Release and Uncertain Reunion

Eventually, Cheng received the news of her release, but not without the caveat of a false implication of guilt regarding her imprisonment. She resolutely contested this presumption, demanding recognition of her innocence and an official apology. Despite her overwhelming desire to reunite with her daughter, she was escorted away and found not her child waiting for her but rather her goddaughter. This unexpected encounter left her in a state of suspense and uncertainty about her daughter's fate, deepening the emotional toll of her ordeal.

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Chapter 13 Summary: 13 Where Is Meiping?

Chapter 13 Summary: Where Is Meiping?

In this emotionally powerful chapter, Nien Cheng returns to Shanghai after her release from the No. 1 Detention House, only to be confronted by the heartbreaking news of her daughter Meiping's tragic suicide. This revelation leaves Cheng grappling with intense grief and the disorientation of re-entering a world marked by neglect and loss.

Arrival and Reality of Loss

Cheng's return is met by her goddaughter, Hean, who struggles to communicate the shocking truth about Meiping. As they enter Cheng's dilapidated home, the degradation of her surroundings mirrors her emotional turmoil, forcing her to confront the weight of her loss. Hean's hesitance to speak about Meiping indicates the overwhelming nature of this reality, suggesting that even small discussions about the past are fraught with pain.

Conversations with Hean

During their conversation, Hean updates Cheng on the political changes since her imprisonment, including the deaths of significant figures, reflecting



the ongoing turmoil in China. As the topic shifts to Meiping, Cheng learns that her daughter took her life following an interrogation—a revelation that ignites Cheng’s determination to uncover the truth behind Meiping’s death amid a backdrop of political tension and personal despair.

Cheng's Condition and Everyday Struggles

Navigating her new life proves challenging for Cheng, whose health has deteriorated due to her confinement. Now, she must confront the harsh realities of her finances, living conditions, and the constant surveillance imposed by the state. Despite these hardships, Hean and her family rally to support Cheng in daily activities, including medical visits, providing a glimmer of hope amidst her struggles.

Secretive Political Landscape

Kong, a former acquaintance of Meiping, introduces Cheng to a more sinister view of her daughter’s demise, suggesting that the official story is a veil for deeper political repression during the Cultural Revolution. This unsettling conversation further fuels Cheng’s resolve to seek out the truth about Meiping’s fate, deepening her understanding of the dangers lurking in the political landscape.

Intrusion of Government and Community

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Cheng's interactions with local authorities, particularly through the Residents' Committee, reveal the persistent scrutiny of her life. The omnipresence of officials compels her to maintain a facade of compliance, shielding her true emotions from a society that may judge her vulnerability. The memory of her daughter's death haunts her, complicating every interaction as she reflects on the societal pressures surrounding her.

Reflections on Freedom

As the chapter progresses, Cheng's thoughts turn to the oppressive atmosphere enveloping Shanghai, where political intrigue and her profound grief lead her to fantasize about escape. The idea of leaving China becomes a beacon of hope and liberation, an urgent desire to break free from the confines of a reality that has become intolerable. This contemplative moment underscores Cheng's struggle for autonomy in a world that feels increasingly stifling.



Chapter 14 Summary: 14 The Search for the Truth

Chapter 14: The Search for the Truth

In this chapter, titled "The Search for the Truth," we delve into Nien Cheng's harrowing quest for answers regarding the tragic fate of her daughter, Meiping. Cheng is plagued by nightmares that depict her daughter experiencing horrific torment, intensifying her anguish and determination to uncover what really happened to Meiping. In her pursuit of truth, she resolves to visit Nanjing Road, the site that holds the key to her daughter's death, where Meiping is believed to have died under mysterious circumstances.

Navigating a packed bus ride, Cheng wrestles with her anxiety but ultimately arrives at the transformed landscape of her city, now adorned with Communist slogans and propaganda. As she surveys the area, she struggles to locate the window from which Meiping was said to have jumped, only to find it faces a dark alley, igniting doubt about the official suicide narrative.

In her exploration of the People's Park, Cheng engages with a local woman who reveals that the building where Meiping died was under repairs at the time of her alleged suicide. This new information deepens Cheng's conviction that her daughter's death was not a suicide, but possibly a



cover-up, compelling her to seek justice and uncover the truth behind the tragedy.

The narrative shifts to focus on Cheng's interactions with the Zhu family, who have recently moved into her apartment building. Their story unfolds against the backdrop of the Cultural Revolution, revealing the struggles faced by many families during this tumultuous period. Cheng's relationship with the Zhus is strained by trivial issues, like disagreements over bills, which symbolize the broader class tensions that simmer beneath the surface in post-revolutionary China. Confrontations arise, particularly when Mrs. Zhu's son disrupts Cheng's space, further complicating their living situation and highlighting the challenges of coexistence in a society rife with upheaval.

In addition to contending with her neighbors, Cheng reconnects with old acquaintances from her past, including her former gardener, who provide glimpses into her daughter's life leading up to her death. This exploration leads her to suspect that Meiping may have been abducted by the Revolutionaries, a notion that weighs heavily on her heart.

Cheng's involvement in Resident Committee meetings reveals the propaganda that permeates the Cultural Revolution, illuminating the disconnect between official narratives and the true sentiments of the populace. As she navigates the bureaucratic challenges in her community,



she confronts the pervasive corruption and informal economies that have arisen as citizens strive to improve their lives amidst adversity.

In her quest to reclaim her private space, Cheng undertakes the construction of a wall, reaching out to various people for assistance. Through these interactions, she encounters kindness and compassion, reaffirming her belief in the resilience of humanity even within an oppressive political framework.

As the chapter draws to a close, Cheng reflects on the impending Christmas season, a time traditionally associated with joy and family. Despite her ongoing grief and the surrounding systemic cruelty, she finds comfort in the shared humanity of her neighbors. In a society grappling with the fallout of the Cultural Revolution, these moments of connection and support serve as a balm to her sorrow, reminding her of the enduring capacity for kindness in the face of hardship.

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Chapter 15 Summary: 15 A Student Who Was Different

Summary of Chapter 15: A Student Who Was Different

In this chapter, Nien Cheng embarks on a quest through Shanghai's bookshops, seeking English textbooks for her students amid a politically charged atmosphere. Her search at the Foreign Language Bookshop proves fruitless; it is stocked solely with political literature, as is the nearby Xinhua Bookshop, which largely features propaganda works reflective of the Communist Party's ideologies.

Faced with the lack of resources, Nien adapts her teaching by focusing on students who already have their own materials. Among them is Da De, a former Red Guard whose past is marred by the radicalism of the Cultural Revolution. Despite his history of involvement in violent political activism, Da De exhibits a dispassionate attitude, neither reveling in his former actions nor expressing remorse. This enigmatic stance piques Nien's curiosity. His motivations for studying English remain unclear, but he often shares his candid observations about the evolving political landscape, shedding light on the challenges that brew beneath the surface of society.

As tensions intensify across China, Nien becomes increasingly aware of shifts within the Communist Party. Recent developments indicate a move

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towards rehabilitating previously purged officials and distancing from the extreme agendas of the Cultural Revolution, though the specter of past trauma still looms over daily life.

Within this tumult, Nien reflects on her personal loneliness, especially during the New Year—a time that amplifies her sorrow over the loss of her daughter, Meiping. The stark contrast between the warmth of past family celebrations and her current isolation deepens her sense of grief.

Amidst her solitude, Nien reconnects with Mr. Hu, an old friend of her late husband. Their discussions reveal vital insights into the current socio-political climate, highlighting the struggles for power within the Party and its implications for ordinary citizens. Mr. Hu's respect for Nien's resilience leads to a strengthening of their friendship, providing her with both support and camaraderie.

However, Nien's life is further complicated by the visit of Liu Xing, a young man claiming to be a friend of Meiping. His arrival, coupled with gifts, raises Nien's suspicions, leading her to question his true intentions. Their conversation veers into dangerous territory, as Liu suggests vengeance for Meiping's death, which Nien firmly rejects, fearing the repercussions of political persecution.

Throughout these turbulent experiences, Da De becomes a frequent visitor,



bringing gifts and sharing his cynical perspective. His complex nature and harsh truths about the political situation add to Nien's inner conflict regarding trust and the dangers lurking in her social relationships.

In conclusion, Chapter 15 encapsulates Nien's navigation through a treacherous political landscape filled with suspicion and resilience. Her relationships with her students and friends, set against the backdrop of personal loss, highlight the profound effects of the Cultural Revolution, as she strives to find a sense of belonging and purpose amid chaos.

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Chapter 16: 16 The Death of Mao

Summary of Chapter 16: The Death of Mao

In this chapter, Nien Cheng grapples with the aftermath of her daughter's tragic death, as her home turns into a unwelcome hub for visitors claiming a connection to her late daughter, Meiping. Their incessant inquiries and discussions surrounding Meiping's demise weigh heavily on Cheng, leaving her feeling stalked and drained. Her caretaker, A-yi, sympathizes with Cheng's plight and suggests a temporary relocation to minimize the relentless disturbances.

To regain her peace, Cheng arranges for A-yi to live with her cousin while still assisting her in the mornings, hoping that this adjustment will afford her quiet afternoons. She crafts a notice to discourage unsolicited visitors, but it is swiftly destroyed, believed to be a deliberate act by a neighbor, Mrs. Zhu. Cheng grows increasingly suspicious of possible police involvement in her harassment, although she lacks concrete evidence of direct governmental persecution.

Despite her attempts at fostering tranquility, the harassment escalates. Cheng endures ridicule from local children, whom she chooses to ignore, indicating her resilience in the face of adversity. Although a cardboard sign she creates



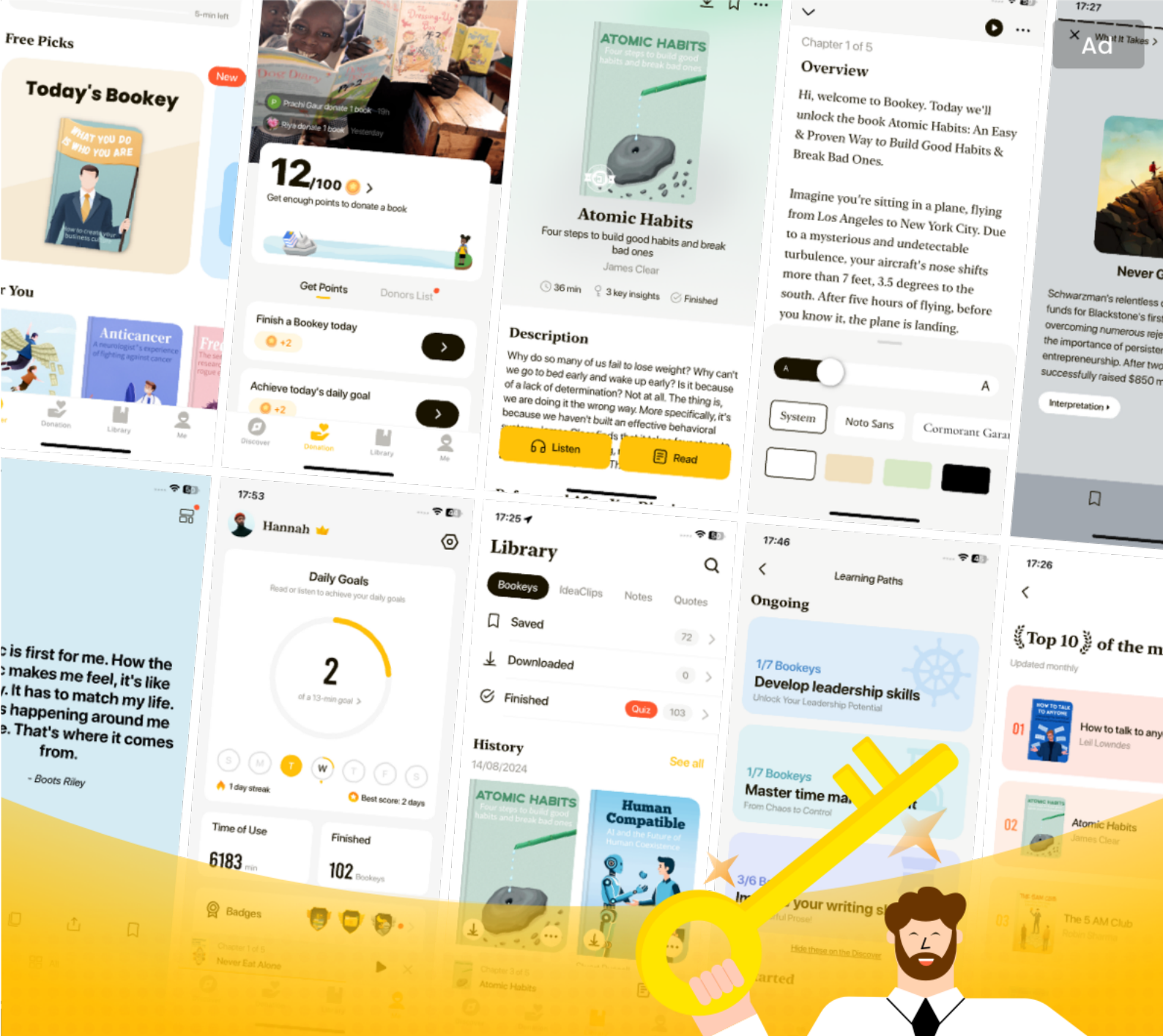
remains intact, the encounters with the community grow more confrontational, reflecting the societal unrest and suspicion fueled by the political climate in post-Mao China.

The chapter also delves into the societal fears and tensions that underpin

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Chapter 17 Summary: 17 Rehabilitation

Chapter 17 Summary: Rehabilitation

In the aftermath of Mao Zedong's death, the narrator finds herself at a crossroads, grappling with unresolved grief over her daughter's tragic fate. While teaching a disabled student, she reflects on how her student's disability has provided a form of refuge from the political upheaval that claimed her daughter's life. The narrator contemplates seeking justice through the People's Government but is uncertain of the right time to act.

Her life takes another turn when her student alerts her to an unexpected military mobilization, warning of looming conflict. Initially skeptical, the narrator seeks clarity from the radio, but finds no information revealing the truth of the situation. Later that evening, attending a Residents' Committee meeting, she learns of the arrest of the Gang of Four, a significant political development marking the beginning of a new era.

The community's response to these arrests is measured; fear of political backlash stifles open expression. Despite her hesitation, the narrator joins a parade rallying behind the new Party leadership, doing so out of a sense of necessity rather than enthusiasm, as the parade reflects the disillusionment shared by many.



With the Gang of Four behind bars, the political landscape shifts, sparking hopes for reform and justice for the victims of the Cultural Revolution. The narrator diligently pursues petitions for her own rehabilitation and for justice regarding her daughter's death, but encounters bureaucratic obstacles and officials hesitant to address her situation fully.

As dissatisfaction within the populace grows, more citizens begin voicing their grievances, inspiring Hua Guofeng, the new leader, to acknowledge the urgency of addressing past injustices. The narrator's petitions gain some traction but are met with vague assurances, as she becomes increasingly aware of the intricate realities of the evolving political environment.

By 1978, her case finally sees some progress, resulting in her official rehabilitation. Yet, the mystery surrounding her daughter's death remains unresolved. She rebuffs attempts to dismiss the tragedy merely as collateral damage from the Gang of Four's regime, seeking recognition of individual accountability.

Simultaneously, societal changes begin to take root. The narrator observes a revival of consumerism and a burgeoning interest in learning English. An offer to teach arises, yet with plans to leave Shanghai behind, she opts for a quieter path forward.



The chapter culminates with the narrator preparing to apply for a passport to the United States, leveraging her sisters' residence there to claim a familial visit. The bureaucratic journey proves challenging, but she approaches it with resilience and determination.

Overall, Chapter 17 of "Life and Death in Shanghai" captures the narrator's emotional struggle and resolve amidst the turmoil of political change, highlighting her relentless pursuit of justice for her daughter while also revealing the broader societal transformations unfolding in China.

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Chapter 18 Summary: 18 Farewell to Shanghai

Chapter 18 Summary: Farewell to Shanghai

Official Interview and Looted Goods

Nien Cheng, having applied for a passport, receives an invitation to an interview at the "Bureau for Sorting Looted Goods." During this gathering, she learns that several pieces from her cherished porcelain collection have been located in a warehouse. The Shanghai Museum is interested in acquiring fifteen of her items. Cheng is struck with mixed emotions upon discovering the condition of her treasures, which have suffered extensive damage due to years of neglect and improper handling.

The Return of Porcelain

Accompanied by Little Fang, Cheng visits the warehouse to identify her porcelain pieces. Even though the sight of many chipped and cracked items is heartbreaking, she feels a sense of relief knowing that they are still intact. In a noble gesture, Cheng decides to donate the fifteen pieces to the museum, on the condition that display stands be constructed to showcase her remaining collection effectively.



Ceremony at the Museum

Cheng's donation is formally acknowledged during a ceremony held at the museum. She receives a certificate of merit and a scroll in recognition of her contributions, attended by government officials and private collectors. The vice-mayor emphasizes the patriotic spirit exhibited by collectors like Cheng. However, despite the accolades, Cheng feels a sense of bittersweet loss as she parts with her beloved porcelain.

New Opportunities through Women's Federation

Following the ceremony, Cheng is invited to join a study group within the Federation of Women, an organization that brings together women intellectuals and offers a network of influential connections. Engaging with officials and participating in political study sessions, she expresses her yearning for justice for her daughter's tragic fate.

Hints of a Troubled Past

As she discusses her daughter's murder, Cheng becomes aware of potential movement within the bureaucratic system regarding her case. However, she recognizes the challenges of navigating this politically charged climate, especially when many former revolutionaries now occupy government positions. Cheng's path to justice appears fraught with complexities, creating



a sense of urgency but also frustration.

A Shift in Perception

As the day of her departure from Shanghai approaches, Cheng wrestles with a tumult of emotions—sadness, nostalgia, and a profound sense of loss.

Though she is respected for her contributions to society, she is acutely aware of the political tensions and hypocrisies that persist in the backdrop of her life, influencing her complex feelings towards her homeland.

Departure from Shanghai and Farewell

On her final day in Shanghai, Cheng bids farewell to friends and colleagues, reflecting on the dramatic transformations she has experienced. Although she looks forward to a new beginning abroad, the heavy burden of her past, particularly the loss of her daughter, weighs on her heart. As she sets sail, Cheng feels a deep connection to her homeland, acknowledging the painful memories intertwined with her identity, marking the end of a significant chapter in her life.

