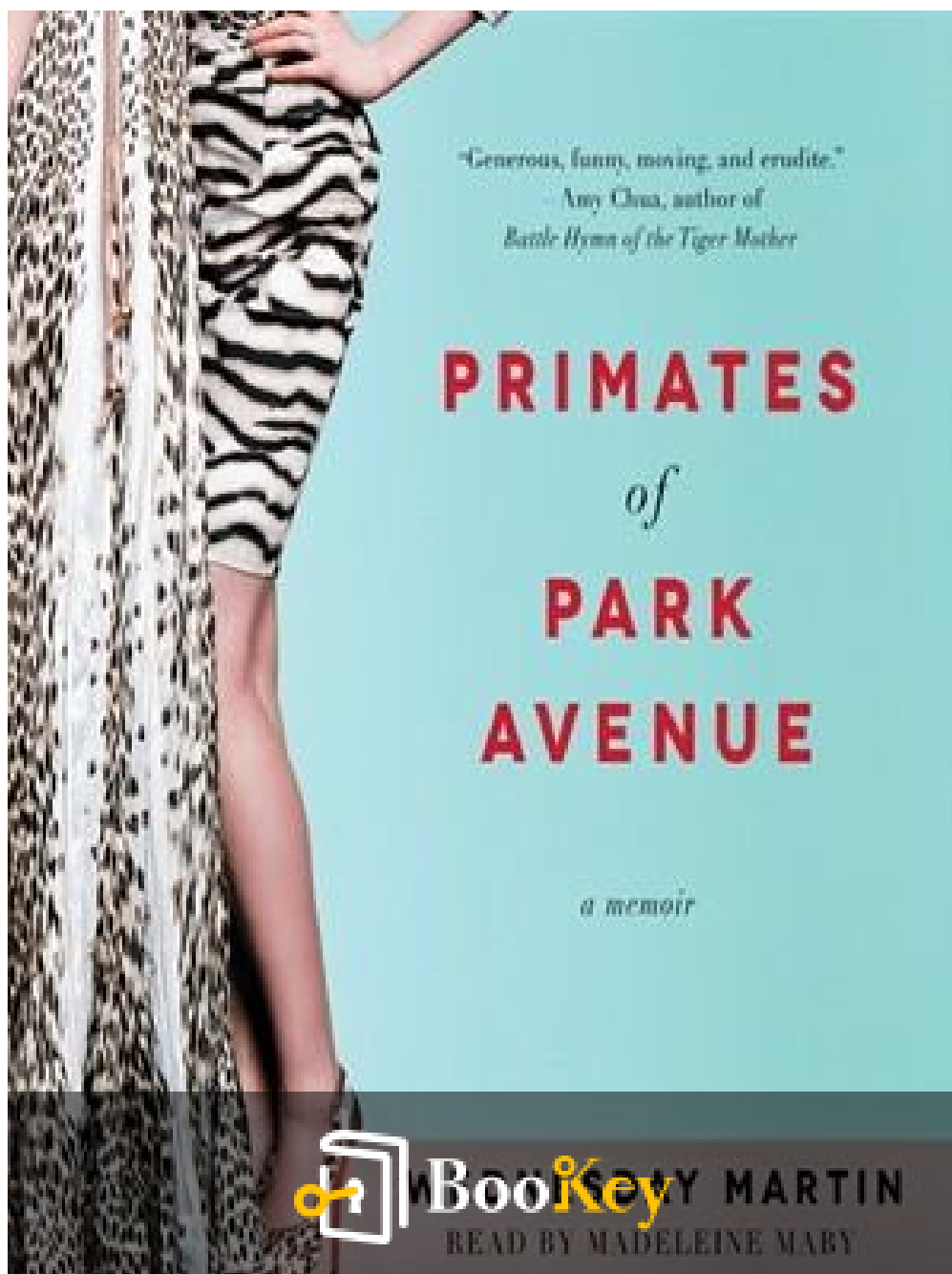


Primates Of Park Avenue PDF (Limited Copy)

Wednesday Martin



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Primates Of Park Avenue Summary

Exploring Upper East Side Motherhood Through an Anthropological
Lens.

Written by New York Central Park Page Turners Books Club

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About the book

In "Primates of Park Avenue," Wednesday Martin invites readers into the opulent yet competitive world of Upper East Side mothers, weaving her personal experiences with keen anthropological perspectives. Upon marrying into this affluent community, Martin draws on her academic background in anthropology and primatology to explore the complex social structures that govern the lives of these elite women.

The narrative begins with Martin's initial observations, likening the frantic morning school drop-offs to the social behavior of olive baboons, highlighting the fierce competition inherent in this tightly-knit circle. As she navigates her new environment, she documents the obsession with status symbols, such as the elusive Hermes Birkin handbag, which serves not merely as a luxury item but as a marker of social standing and acceptance.

Beneath the veneer of wealth and privilege, Martin uncovers a shared emotional landscape among these mothers. They grapple with universal hopes and dreams for their children, revealing an unexpected vulnerability amidst the glamour. This exploration of motherhood transcends socioeconomic boundaries, illustrating that the aspirations and fears of these elite mothers are resonant with those of mothers everywhere.

Amidst the challenges of fitting into this high-pressure milieu, Martin

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emphasizes the importance of female friendship. She portrays how these relationships provide support and solace in a world often characterized by anxiety and the fear of inadequacy. With a blend of intelligence, humor, and poignancy, Martin's memoir presents a captivating microcosm of Manhattan motherhood, revealing both the allure and the complexities of this unique communal experience.

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About the author

In her influential book **Stepmonster: A New Look at Why Real Stepmothers Think, Feel, and Act the Way We Do**, Wednesday Martin, Ph.D., delves into the complex emotional landscape faced by stepmothers, drawing from her personal experiences as a stepmother and extensive research in social behavior. The book is divided into chapters that systematically explore the unique challenges, societal pressures, and psychological dynamics of stepmotherhood.

Martin begins by establishing the societal stereotypes surrounding stepmothers, often depicted as wicked and jealous figures, which starkly contrasts with the reality of many women who take on this role. She emphasizes the importance of recognizing these harmful tropes to foster a more nuanced understanding of stepmothers' experiences.

In the subsequent chapters, Martin shares stories from herself and other stepmothers, illustrating the emotional turmoil and identity struggles they often face. This personal narrative serves as a foundation for discussing broader themes such as loyalty, love, and the quest for acceptance within blended families. She highlights the need for stepmothers to navigate complex relationships with their stepchildren, biological mothers, and their own partners, emphasizing the importance of communication and empathy.

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Throughout the book, Martin also examines the impact of external expectations and how they shape stepfamilies' dynamics. She breaks down the psychological toll of living up to unrealistic standards, often leading to feelings of isolation and inadequacy for stepmothers. By sharing research findings alongside personal anecdotes, Martin creates a relatable and informed discussion, providing validation and insights for stepmothers.

As she progresses through her exploration, Martin introduces concepts such as the "wicked stepmother" archetype, the "loyalty bind" that often traps children in divided loyalties between their biological and stepfamilies, and the importance of establishing boundaries for healthy relationships. She advocates for support networks and open dialogue as crucial elements in overcoming the challenges stepmothers face.

Ultimately, Martin's work acts as both a manual and a mirror for stepmothers, inviting readers to reflect on their experiences while offering practical advice for navigating the complexities of blended family life. By imbuing her scholarship with personal narrative, Martin forges a connection with readers, empowering them to embrace their unique roles within the larger tapestry of family.

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Chapter 1 Summary: Comme Il Faut

Chapter One: Comme Il Faut

This chapter introduces an isolated island community characterized by its unique environmental conditions, including harsh winters and sweltering summers. The temperate climate has facilitated a flourishing lifestyle for the wealthy residents, while deep socioeconomic divides continue to create struggles for the less fortunate. This disparity has given rise to complex social behaviors among the affluent, who often engage in elaborate customs and maintain intricate social networks.

Housing on the island is a competitive affair, particularly in exclusive areas where living arrangements are vertical and crowded. Female residents, notably the primaparas—women who play a pivotal role in family stability and positioning—are essential in securing desirable homes, frequently relying on "dwelling shamans," who serve as advisors and community knowledge-bearers.

The island's inhabitants come from diverse backgrounds, including indigenous people who often enjoy heightened social status due to their heritage. This multicultural blend influences social interactions and identities throughout the island. Externally, the islanders are perceived as



aloof yet intellectually adept, showcasing remarkable negotiation skills and cultural traditions.

Despite their wealth, traditional gender roles are prevalent; men are generally seen as providers of intangible resources, while women juggle career responsibilities with child-rearing, often with the assistance of external caregivers. This division underscores the intricate social fabric of the island, defined by its division into four quadrants: Up, Down, Right, and Left. Each quadrant harbors distinct cultural identities and influences family life, with transitions between these areas fraught with anxiety and superstition.

The protagonist, seeking a better environment for her child, contemplates moving to the Upper East Side, a region laden with social stereotypes about affluent homeowners. Her reflections on gender roles in Manhattan's real estate reveal that women predominantly lead home searches, especially in high-status neighborhoods.

As she navigates the challenging real estate landscape, her solo efforts expose the intricacies and nuances of Upper East Side living. Through interactions and property viewings, she gains insights into the community's intricate social codes and the importance of private education and domestic support in shaping identity. The distinctions between co-ops and condos further illustrate systemic societal hierarchies.

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The chapter culminates in the protagonist's engaging experience of the stringent home-buying process, which includes application procedures and interviews reflective of the community's exclusivity. Ultimately, as she settles into their new Park Avenue residence, she realizes the crucial oversight of not having applied for nursery school, underscoring the challenges of adapting to a highly structured and competitive environment. The journey through the complexities of homeownership and community integration paints a vivid picture of the social dynamics at play, setting the stage for deeper explorations of identity and belonging.

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Chapter 2 Summary: Playdate Pariah

Chapter 2: Playdate Pariah

Transitioning to the Upper East Side

The author's family makes a significant shift from the West Village to the Upper East Side, confronting a starkly different social and cultural landscape despite the geographical proximity. This new environment is characterized by wealth and exclusivity, where neighbors maintain meticulously curated appearances and a formal demeanor, signaling a shift from their previous, more relaxed lifestyle.

Emphasis on Wealth and Social Standing

In this affluent enclave, the obsession with wealth becomes evident. The author describes residents competing over social status, discussing elevator hierarchies and indulging in high-end children's boutiques. Within this community, a clear social hierarchy emerges, where families with the most resources wield the greatest power.

Intensifying Pressure for School Admissions

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As urban families opt to remain in the city rather than relocating to the suburbs, the competition for nursery school placements escalates. The author poignantly recounts her personal anxiety about securing a spot in a prestigious preschool, illustrating the cutthroat environment where social connections and educational choices have profound implications for a child's future.

Motherhood in an Elite Context

The author grapples with the challenges of motherhood in this elite setting. Feelings of inadequacy and pressure to meet societal expectations for parenting create significant anxiety. She reflects on the demands placed on parents to ensure their children's success in a competitive landscape, where parenting is viewed through a lens of achievement.

Historical Perspectives on Childhood and Parenting

The chapter delves into the historical context of childhood, highlighting that it traditionally served practical functions, particularly in resource-scarce communities. The author contrasts this with contemporary Western parenting, where affluent children are often sheltered from responsibility, leaving mothers burdened with the task of driving their children's success and fulfilment.



Challenges of Fitting In

Struggling for acceptance, the author feels like an outsider amongst the other mothers in this tight-knit community. The pursuit of playdates for her son devolves into a humiliating ordeal, showcasing the competitive and often exclusionary nature of parenting circles on the Upper East Side.

Navigating Social Hierarchies

Drawing parallels to primate social structures, the author compares her experience of seeking acceptance to lower-ranking females vying for alliances with higher-ranking counterparts to enhance their social mobility. This observation underscores the instinctual struggle for connection and status.

A Turning Point: Connection with the Alpha Dad

A significant shift occurs when the author interacts with an "Alpha Dad," who possesses considerable social influence. This newfound connection opens doors to a broader network, illustrating how parenting intertwines with social connections and community dynamics.

Through these experiences, the chapter sheds light on the pressures of social acceptance in elite communities while navigating the challenges of



motherhood in a contemporary urban context. The author captures the complexities of parenting and the societal expectations that dictate behavior in the Upper East Side, highlighting a microcosm of societal dynamics.

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Chapter 3 Summary: Going Native: Mommy Wants a Birkin

Chapter Three: Going Native: Mommy Wants a Birkin

In this chapter, the author delves into the anthropological concept of "going native," which describes the process by which researchers immerse themselves in the cultures they study. Originally seen as a less-than-admirable practice, this immersion has evolved into a valuable means of understanding diverse human experiences, as exemplified by influential anthropologists like Bronislaw Malinowski and Paul Rabinow. By integrating this notion into her exploration of Upper East Side motherhood, the author becomes both an observer and a participant, grappling with her desire to belong while striving to maintain an analytical lens.

As she navigates the competitive landscape of motherhood in this affluent community, the author faces social rejections and alarming behaviors, such as reckless driving—a reflection of the self-absorbed milieu that permeates her surroundings. This setting reveals deep-seated cultural dynamics at play, particularly concerning status and acceptance.

A pivotal moment occurs when the author encounters a woman adorned with

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an Hermès Birkin bag, a striking emblem of social hierarchy within her community. The bag becomes a symbol of not just luxury, but competition—signaling success and validation among Upper East Side women. The author's observation of female interactions exposes a culture of subtle domination, where handbags function as tools of power and protectiveness in a complex social arena.

This obsession with the Birkin bag transcends mere fashion; it embodies the aspirations and anxieties of many women today, encapsulating broader societal pressures surrounding wealth and femininity. The author's reflection on her burgeoning desire for the Birkin illustrates how such possessions reflect individual value and social identity.

However, the challenges tied to acquiring a Birkin—marked by social rituals and expectations—reveal the absurdities inherent in luxury consumption. The author wrestles with feelings of impostor syndrome and fear of judgment over her purchase, underscoring the intertwined nature of self-worth and societal approval.

In conclusion, the much-anticipated ownership of the Birkin bag does not bring the anticipated fulfillment. Instead, it amplifies the author's internal struggles and insecurities, illuminating the intricate relationship between material possessions and emotional well-being. The fulfillment of her desire ultimately encourages a deeper examination of value, belonging, and female



dynamics within the Manhattan scene, suggesting that the path to acceptance may be more complex than the acquisition of status symbols.

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Chapter 4: Manhattan Geisha

Chapter Four: Manhattan Geisha

In this chapter, the author explores the complex social landscape of the Upper East Side of Manhattan, particularly focusing on the implications of a significant sex ratio imbalance where reproductive females outnumber males two to one. This demographic shift not only influences male behaviors, making them more selective, but also alters the dynamics among women, who find themselves navigating a highly competitive environment.

Expectations of Pregnancy

The societal pressures placed on pregnant women in this affluent neighborhood are immense. The author illustrates the unrelenting expectations to maintain an active social life and a polished appearance, often prioritizing these desires over personal health and comfort. Through personal reflections, she reveals feelings of inadequacy when comparing herself to her impeccably styled peers, embodying the societal ideals of motherhood and self-care that dominate her surroundings.

Habituation and Social Conformity

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As she integrates into this community, the author notes a gradual shift in her standards, influenced by the cultural norms of Upper East Side mothers. This adaptation results in her relinquishing her former identity, aligning her aesthetics and behaviors with those of her social circle, ultimately demonstrating the power of conformity in shaping personal identity.

Labor Exploits and Body Image Post-Birth

Following childbirth, the author confronts the pressing societal demands to reclaim her pre-pregnancy physique. The pervasive slogan of "getting your pre-baby body back" reveals the unrealistic expectations that haunt new mothers, emphasizing a cultural tendency to overlook the significant and often transformative changes that accompany motherhood.

Physical Fitness Pursuits

The chapter delves into the formidable fitness culture of the Upper East Side, where companies like Lululemon and popular fitness trends such as barre and spin classes define social interactions. Here, exercise becomes not just a personal endeavor but also an initiation into a social tribe, granting women cultural capital and reinforcing their commitment to appearance.

Comparative Analysis of Fitness Tribes

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The author differentiates between two main groups within this fitness culture: the Physique 57 women, who aspire to aesthetic perfection, and the Soul Cycle tribe, characterized by its exuberant and spirited exercise approach. Through this comparison, she examines how identity is constructed within these workout cultures, often reflecting deeper themes of ambition, aggression, and the yearning for belonging.

Cultural Reflections on Femininity and Aging

Drawing an intriguing parallel, the chapter connects contemporary fitness rituals with the historical practices of geishas, who underwent rigorous training to achieve idealized femininity. The author notes how today's women undergo similar quests to sustain beauty and fitness, resisting the natural aging process, a stark contrast to the experiences of earlier generations.

Community and Social Dynamics

The competitive nature of interactions among Upper East Side women comes into sharp focus, revealing a community where playful flirtation is largely absent. This dynamic extends to summer vacations in the Hamptons, where social bonding among women takes precedence over male engagement, illustrating the emphasis on performance and competition in these interactions.

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Conclusion

Ultimately, the pressures surrounding physical appearance and fitness are deeply intertwined with the identity and sense of belonging for the women in this social milieu. Their collective pursuit of a flawless exterior not only highlights societal expectations but also reveals an underlying yearning for genuine connections marked by flirting and intimacy. Through this examination, the author uncovers the complexities of contemporary female relationships and personal identity in a demanding cultural landscape.

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Chapter 5 Summary: A Girls' Night In

CHAPTER FIVE: A Girls' Night In

In this chapter, the author reflects on her growing acceptance within the exclusive social circle of Upper East Side mothers, culminating in an invitation to a dinner hosted by Rebecca, an influential figure in the community. This invitation marks a significant turning point, as it symbolizes the author's transition from outsider to participant in the intricate dance of social dynamics that define the group.

The invitation itself, delivered via email, highlights the evolving nature of the author's relationship with Rebecca, whose initial reserved demeanor has given way to a budding friendship, particularly after discussions surrounding the author's book project. With the backdrop of both public personas and private struggles, the mothers reveal varying degrees of openness. Some share personal challenges, while others maintain a facade of competition and guardedness, reflecting the complex nature of their interactions.

As the dinner date approaches, the author grapples with the high sartorial standards expected in such settings. Seeking fashion advice, she soon realizes that casual attire may not suffice; sophistication is key among her elegantly dressed peers. Navigating these cultural pressures exposes the



significant lengths to which these women go to uphold their appearances, a reflection of the rigorous beauty standards prevalent in their social milieu.

The pursuit of beauty among Upper East Side mothers comes with a staggering financial toll, with the author estimating an annual cost exceeding \$95,000 for upkeep and high-end fashion. This statistic reveals the intense societal pressure women face to conform to certain aesthetic ideals, underscoring the intricacies of self-presentation in this elite environment.

Upon arriving at Rebecca's opulent home, the author is immersed in a world of affluence and art. The dinner unfolds into intimate conversations that transcend superficial pleasantries, allowing for genuine connections formed through shared vulnerabilities and acknowledgment of personal struggles. This deeper engagement challenges the stereotype that the lives of these women are nothing short of idyllic.

Social etiquette plays a significant role throughout the evening, as the women engage in a ritual of compliments and gracious deflections, reinforcing social bonds while subtly maintaining the hierarchy. This interplay serves as both a means of belonging and a skillful dance that navigates the delicate balance of praise and humility.

Employing an anthropological lens, the author notes the segregated social lives of men and women in this elite circle, highlighting the economic



reliance women have on their husbands. Despite the facade of empowerment projected by these women, their autonomy is often undermined by their dependence on male financial support, illustrating the complexities of power dynamics within their glamorous lifestyles.

In conclusion, the chapter unveils the intricate interplay of relationships, societal expectations, and economic factors observed during the gathering. While the women may project confidence and charm, the author's observations reveal that their true power is often tethered to their relationships with men, reflecting a persistent structure of male dominance that underpins their privileged existence.

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Chapter 6 Summary: A Xanax and a Bloody Mary: Manhattan Moms on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown

Chapter Six: A Xanax and a Bloody Mary: Manhattan Moms on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown

In this chapter, Wednesday Martin investigates the world of Upper East Side mothers grappling with anxiety and stress, painting a vivid picture of their lives through rich metaphors from the animal kingdom. Dressed in a stylish yet functional manner for her observations, Martin likens her study of these mothers to that of a biologist observing specimens in their natural habitat, revealing their thinness and frenetic energy as indicators of deeper unease.

The chapter opens in a luxury department store, where Martin scrutinizes the physical manifestations of stress in these women. Their tight faces and alert eyes suggest a constant state of fight-or-flight, driven by the relentless social pressures prevalent in their elite community. As Martin interacts with these mothers, she reveals a shared experience of anxiety tied to their roles as wives and mothers, exacerbated by societal expectations and competitive dynamics among peers. Everyday events—a loud noise or a deviation from routine—often act as triggers for acute anxiety, highlighting the intense psychological burden they carry.

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Delving further into the roots of their anxiety, Martin explores socio-economic factors influencing this community. Despite their financial privilege, these women face significant emotional challenges, navigating a landscape defined by social hierarchies and competition for status. The concept of "intensive mothering" comes into play, with pressures to devote extensive time and resources to child-rearing, often harming their mental health in the process.

Martin also examines the complex dynamics of wealth and dependence within their marriages, where instability can amplify their anxiety. This precarious balance contributes to a pervasive culture of shame concerning appearances and social standing, as these mothers strive to present a perfect facade.

Amid these pressures, the chapter introduces coping mechanisms such as alcohol and prescription medications, which have become normalized among these women. The juxtaposition of wine and anti-anxiety medications illustrates their dependence on substances to manage the unrelenting stress.

Ultimately, Martin highlights the psychological toll of striving for perfection within an honor/shame culture, leading to feelings of dependency, heightened anxiety, and a fragmented sense of self. The chapter portrays the hidden struggles behind the glamorous façade of Upper East Side motherhood, emphasizing that beneath their polished exteriors lies a



profound and challenging journey filled with psychological challenges.

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Chapter 7 Summary: A Rainy Day

Chapter Seven: A Rainy Day

In this chapter, the author delves into her transformative journey as a mother residing in the affluent Upper East Side, where societal expectations regarding parenting loom large. She reflects on her profound sense of disconnection from her former self and friendships, now consumed by her commitment to her children and the prevailing cultural narrative of intensive mothering. This narrative emphasizes that motherhood often demands complete devotion, sometimes at the expense of personal identity.

The author grapples with the notion that motherhood is inherently linked with sacrifice and can involve an underlying fear of loss. Although she appears to embody the ideals of her social milieu—juggling her children's numerous activities while maintaining her own polished image—she confronts the sobering reality that loss is an inseparable part of being a parent, one that often goes unacknowledged until it becomes a personal crisis.

A pivotal moment arises when the author discovers she is unexpectedly pregnant at the age of forty-three, a surprise that initially stirs disbelief and resistance within her, as she had previously decided against having more



children. However, as she gradually embraces the prospect of another child, she is abruptly thrust into a harrowing confrontation with reality when serious complications during her pregnancy lead her to face the looming loss of her unborn daughter, Daphne. This journey unfolds within the confines of the hospital, where her emotional struggle with grief and acceptance intensifies, leaving her yearning for connection amidst the overwhelming despair.

Drawing a poignant parallel, the author reflects on the historical and evolutionary dimensions of motherhood, highlighting that the fear of loss has been a core aspect of parental instinct throughout time. Even in the seemingly secure and comforting environment of upscale Manhattan, she recognizes that tragedy can strike unexpectedly, residing just beneath the polished surface of privilege.

Ultimately, the chapter emphasizes the unexpected camaraderie she finds among other mothers who have also confronted loss. Their shared experiences forge a deep sense of communal strength, illustrating that amidst personal heartbreak, there is solace in connecting with others who understand the complexities and vulnerabilities that accompany motherhood. Through this lens, the narrative encapsulates the multifaceted nature of motherhood, revealing the delicate balance of care, vulnerability, and the ever-present specter of loss.



Chapter 8: Summary Fieldnotes

Chapter Eight: Summary Fieldnotes

Fieldwork Experience on the Upper East Side

After six years of immersing myself in the lives of 150 mothers on Manhattan's Upper East Side, I developed a profound connection with this social group. My journey began as an outsider, facing difficulties assimilating due to cultural differences, a lower social status, and initial hostility from established members. However, much like nonhuman primates, human social hierarchies can be dynamic. Through dedication and effort, I gradually forged relationships and enhanced my standing within the community.

Transformation Through Shared Experience

A significant turning point in my integration occurred following the loss of my pregnancy. This event elicited unexpected compassion from the other mothers, underscoring the essential evolutionary traits of empathy and mutual support among women—similar to the cooperative breeding practices seen in some animal species where communal care fosters survival and bonding.



Reflections on Anthropological Perspectives

I reflected on the works of the renowned anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski, who documented his own feelings of cultural displacement during his field studies. Like Malinowski, I wrestled with alienation and resistance in my social interactions but eventually discovered companionship and support, leading to a deeper understanding of the community dynamics at play.

Examples of Compassion in Animals

The insights of primatologist Frans de Waal highlighted the empathetic behaviors observed in nonhuman primates. His research illustrated that animals like chimpanzees display comforting behaviors and engage in altruistic acts, reinforcing the notion of empathy as a shared trait across species, including humans.

Observations on Maternity and Community Care

Applying de Waal's findings, I examined how maternal instincts are linked to social advantages, highlighting communal childcare practices that foster emotional connections. The passion for nurturing transcends individual motherhood, as evidenced in the collaborative dynamics found within

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monkey groups that thrive through shared caregiving.

Transition to the Upper West Side

Upon my family's move to the Upper West Side, I noticed a shift in cultural dynamics, characterized by a more relaxed and approachable atmosphere among mothers. This transition allowed me to broaden my understanding of motherhood and community ties, enriching my experiences further.

Reflections on Motherhood and Writing

Balancing the responsibilities of motherhood while nurturing friendships brought both joys and challenges. Moments of personal triumph were often met with continued empathy from fellow mothers, yet I also faced judgment from some peers, highlighting the complexities of social interactions in parenting.

Confrontation with the 'Queen Bee'

During a social gathering, I encountered an assertive figure among the mothers whose dominating presence challenged my views on social hierarchies. I envisioned directly confronting her arrogance but chose to prioritize my son's well-being over engaging in conflict, reflecting a central theme of motherhood that often involves making difficult choices.



Conclusion

The chapter concludes with contemplations on community, empathy, and the evolving nature of both motherhood and self-identity within a constantly changing social landscape. I express gratitude for the friendships forged and the personal growth achieved amid the challenges of navigating motherhood in an intricate urban setting.

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