

Chapter 20: The Last Good Day and Facing Mortality

Chapter Twenty begins with Hazel reflecting on the poignant concept of the "Last Good Day," a recurring theme in cancer narratives intertwined with the ever-present shadow of mortality. This term refers to the final, seemingly ordinary day before illness begins its unrelenting decline, a day that feels inconsequential until viewed in hindsight. Hazel revisits a specific moment in her life that, while mundane at the time, now stands out as a pivotal turning point in her deepening relationship with Augustus Waters. Despite the emotional toll of witnessing Augustus's health decline, Hazel briefly steps away from visiting him, only to be drawn back when Augustus reaches out with an unusual and heartfelt request.

Augustus invites Hazel to meet him at the Literal Heart of Jesus church, a place imbued with personal significance for both of them. His deteriorating health is painfully evident, and his request carries an emotional weight that Hazel struggles to bear—he asks her to prepare a eulogy for him. The gravity of his condition hits Hazel hard as she contemplates the purpose of this pre-funeral gathering, realizing it may be one of their last shared moments together.

Before leaving for the church, Hazel shares a charged interaction with her parents, a scene filled with tension and unspoken emotion. Her parents, who have stood by her side through her own health struggles, find themselves at a loss in how to navigate Hazel's bond with Augustus and the inevitability of his passing. Although physically weakened herself, Hazel chooses to prioritize Augustus's request, demonstrating the depth of their connection and her commitment to being present for him, no matter the cost to her own well-being.

This moment underscores the complexity of family dynamics in the shadow of terminal illness. Hazel's decision to prioritize Augustus reflects the profound love and understanding they share, but it also highlights the emotional strain on her parents as they wrestle with their fears for their daughter while respecting her autonomy. The scene adds layers of emotional tension, emphasizing the far-reaching impact of illness on relationships and individual priorities.

When Hazel arrives at the church, she finds herself in a deeply intimate and somber setting, orchestrated by Augustus despite his worsening condition. In a bid to confront mortality on his own terms, Augustus has arranged a pre-funeral, giving his loved ones the opportunity to share their eulogies with him while he is still alive to hear them. This bittersweet event becomes a space for raw reflection, laughter, and heartache as those closest to Augustus attempt to honor his life and legacy.

Isaac, their mutual friend and fellow cancer fighter, delivers a eulogy infused with humor and honesty. His speech captures Augustus's quirks, flaws, and the profound impact he had on his friends, offering a candid yet heartfelt tribute. Through his words, Isaac reminds everyone present that Augustus's life was filled with purpose and connection, even in the face of immense challenges.

When it is Hazel's turn to speak, she finds herself overwhelmed by the weight of her emotions. Her eulogy is shorter than she intended, a reflection of the difficulty in putting such profound feelings into words. She speaks of the deep love they shared, their unique bond forged through shared struggles, and the ways Augustus changed her life. In her tribute, Hazel conveys not only her admiration for Augustus but also the pain of knowing that their time together is slipping away.

This moment encapsulates the emotional complexity of love and loss, highlighting Hazel's strength in honoring Augustus while grappling with her own grief. Her words, though succinct, resonate deeply,

capturing the essence of their connection and the enduring legacy Augustus leaves behind.

The chapter closes with Hazel reflecting on the profound love she feels for Augustus and the looming reality of their separation. Through this pre-funeral ceremony, the narrative delves into themes of mortality, the desire to leave behind a meaningful legacy, and the human need to be remembered. Augustus's effort to control how he is celebrated, even in death, reflects a universal yearning to shape one's narrative and be seen for the impact they've had on others.

This chapter also explores the rippling effects of terminal illness on relationships and the delicate balance between love and grief. Hazel's interactions with her parents, Isaac, and Augustus illustrate how illness reshapes bonds, forcing individuals to confront their fears, prioritize their connections, and find ways to preserve the memory of those they hold dear.

Chapter Twenty is a deeply emotional meditation on the interplay of love, mortality, and legacy. Through Augustus's pre-funeral gathering, the chapter captures the raw vulnerability of facing death while celebrating the beauty of connection and shared moments. Hazel's reflections and actions reveal the resilience required to navigate profound loss while holding onto the love and memories that endure.

This chapter reminds readers of the power of love to transcend even the inevitability of death, offering a poignant exploration of what it means to honor someone's life while preparing to say goodbye. In the end, the human capacity for connection and memory becomes the ultimate tribute, ensuring that those we love remain a part of us long after they are gone.