

Savvy

Savvy by Ingrid Law tells the story of Mibs Beaumont, a young girl who discovers her magical "savvy" on her 13th birthday. As her family faces a crisis, Mibs embarks on an adventure to unlock her powers, learning about herself, family, and the true meaning of strength along the way.

Chapter I

In Chapter I of the story, we encounter the protagonist, who reflects on their family's recent move to a remote area due to a hurricane triggered by their brother, Fish. The family had lived by the coast, where the protagonist felt a strong affinity for the waves; however, Fish's connection to water was trouble, leading them to relocate deep inland. The hurricane coincided with Fish's thirteenth birthday, abruptly transforming the festive atmosphere into chaos as the storm wreaked havoc around them. Trees fell, windows shattered, and the family fought to keep Fish calm amidst the storm's fury.

Post-hurricane, the family settles in the isolated stretch of land between Nebraska and Kansas, affectionately dubbed Kansaska-Nebransas, where the absence of major water bodies could prevent big storms. Their home is away from neighbors, with the nearest town failing to boast even the most basic amenities. This isolation allows them a sense of peace, albeit mixed with nostalgia for their previous life.

The chapter also introduces Grandpa Bomba, who playfully recounts a whimsical story of how Idaho came into being on his thirteenth birthday. His tall tales are a source of amusement for his family, contrasting with the protagonist's anticipation of their own thirteenth birthday, which is expected to bring a personal, unique "savvy" or special ability. The family dynamic is further fleshed out with siblings Rocket, Fish, and the narrator. Rocket, at seventeen, claims that girls possess unremarkable savvies, while he has electric powers, demonstrating sibling rivalry and teasing.

As the narrator prepares for their imminent birthday, which they hope will be special, tension escalates unexpectedly during a family dinner. A phone call disrupts the evening, leading to devastating news: their father, Poppa, has been involved in a severe car accident and is unresponsive in the hospital. This revelation casts a shadow over the family, particularly on the narrator, who grapples with feelings of anger and disappointment about the potential ruin of their birthday, their joy overshadowed by the gravity of the situation around them. The chapter captures the blend of familial love, the innocence of childhood wishes, and the life-altering realities they face together.

Chapter II

In Chapter II, the narrator, Mibs Beaumont, reflects on her life at home after a traumatic incident involving her father. That night, while sharing a dark bedroom with her sister Gypsy, Mibs listens to the sounds around her—her sister's steady breathing, her mother's and brother Rocket's activity downstairs, and the rumbling of the earth itself. Momma and Rocket plan an early departure to Salina, where their father awaits care at the hospital. Mibs wishes to accompany them, longing for a brief escape and the novelty of motel soaps. However, she remains at home with Grandpa, who is troubled and restless.

The next morning marks a significant day for Mibs—the day before her thirteenth birthday. She feels burdened with responsibilities, including looking after her younger brother Samson, who is moody and quiet. On their long bus ride to school in Hebron, Mibs grapples with her peers' teasing due to her unusual name,

Mississippi, which has led to unkind nicknames and hurtful rumors about her family's troubles. Mibs anticipates that after her birthday, she'll be leaving Hebron Middle School for homeschooling, allowing her to escape the scorn of classmates like Ashely Bing and Emma Flint.

As the last day at school drags on, Mibs struggles to focus amid her worries about her father. The culmination of her emotions peaks when the teacher announces her departure from school. The other students respond with indifference, further deepening her feelings of isolation. Throughout the day, she hopes for a savvy that could silence her bullies or transform them.

Upon arriving home, Mibs finds a shiny gold minivan parked outside, belonging to Miss Rosemary, the preacher's wife. Known for her overzealous desire to keep things in order, Miss Rosemary has come to help the family in the wake of their father's accident. Mibs and Samson attempt to sneak inside, feeling the oppressive weight of Miss Rosemary's judgments as she insists on cleaning their home, underscoring the absence of maternal care in their lives. Miss Rosemary's comments about the need for a mother add to Mibs's anxiety, as she navigates the turmoil of family challenges and the impending changes in her life.

Chapter III

In Chapter III, the narrator grapples with the absence of their mother and the arrival of Miss Rosemary, who, despite her best intentions, cannot fill that void. Miss Rosemary arrives with her two younger children, Roberta and Will Junior, aiming to keep the narrator and their brother, Samson, company. However, the siblings are less than enthusiastic about this arrangement since they don't have a television for entertainment and are reluctant to engage with their guests.

As they enter the room, they find Bobbi, Miss Rosemary's sixteen-year-old daughter, expressing her disdain for being at the house. Bobbi's behavior is dismissive, as she rummages through their mother's unfinished artwork and shows little empathy toward the family's situation, particularly since their father is in the hospital. Will Junior, Bobbi's younger brother, tries to correct her behavior, urging her to be respectful in light of their father's circumstances.

Bobbi's teenage antics are on display as she complains and dramatically reclines on the sofa, adorned with eye shadow and a pierced eyebrow, which intrigues the narrator regarding Miss Rosemary's parenting decisions. Will Junior, who is well-groomed and appears more solemn, attempts to connect with the narrator and Samson, acknowledging their father's illness and expressing his hopes for recovery. While Will Junior's intentions seem kind, the narrator feels uncomfortable, caught between gratitude and a sense of shame for not having considered praying for their father.

As the chapter unfolds, Samson retreats with his deceased pet turtle, underscoring his emotional vulnerability during this tumultuous time. Will Junior's efforts to comfort the narrator with the mention of food, specifically meatloaf prepared by their mother, fall flat, revealing the narrator's realization that food cannot mend the deeper emotional wounds they are experiencing. Thus, the dynamics of the visit reflect the complexities of coping with loss, the discomfort of forced interactions, and the varying degrees of empathy in a challenging family situation.

Chapter IV

In Chapter IV, Miss Rosemary hints at a birthday celebration for Mibs, creating a tense atmosphere at the table as the Beaumont family grapples with their family traditions surrounding birthdays. While others seem to expect joy, Fish, Mibs' brother, is visibly strained by the talk of a party, indicative of the family's unspoken understanding that thirteenth birthdays are typically private affairs. Gypsy, being just three years old, is

blissfully unaware, expressing excitement for balloons and icing.

Despite Mibs' reluctance and truthfully stating she lacks friends, Miss Rosemary insists on organizing a party for her, using cheerful determination. Meanwhile, Mibs' sister Bobbi is dismissive and mocks their mother, revealing the family's friction as she emphasizes her disdain for the planned celebration. The conversation continues as Miss Rosemary attempts to convince Mibs to invite classmates, but Mibs inwardly wishes to avoid the public attention surrounding her birthday.

Reflecting on past celebrations, Mibs recalls a vivid memory of Rocket's thirteenth birthday, where their Grandma Dollop engaged them in canning radio waves—a whimsical task that included capturing sounds of songs and stories from the air. The day had been charged with an atmosphere of worry for Rocket, who feared inheriting an ordinary fate without special abilities, unlike his siblings who had shown promise. The memory culminates in a dramatic moment where Rocket discovers his own special talent, producing chaos and spectacular radio sounds during a power outage, marking him as unique within the family.

As Mibs prepares for her own significant birthday, she does not wish for extraordinary talents but instead fervently prays for solitude, hoping that no one will attend her party. This sets the stage for the emotional landscape of the chapter, highlighting the conflict between family expectations and individual desires, encapsulating Mibs' growing anxiety and desire for peace amidst family pressures.

Chapter V

On the morning of her thirteenth birthday, the narrator wakes up early, filled with anticipation but finds nothing magical happening just yet. Disappointed that she can't perform incredible feats, she ventures out of bed, careful not to disturb her younger sister, Gypsy, who loves the comfort of her stuffed animals. Once in the kitchen, the girl prepares a bowl of cereal and sits quietly on the sofa, where she suddenly hears a strange thumping noise. Investigating, she discovers that Samson's turtle, previously thought dead, is actually waking up from hibernation. This peculiar moment brings up unsettling feelings for her, emphasizing the urgency she feels about the day's significance.

Later, the family prepares to head to the church in Hebron for the planned party. The narrator, clad in a special dress selected by her father, recalls the sweet memory of receiving the dress and the bittersweet reality of her father's absence following her grandmother's death. As they travel, she worries about her father, who remains unresponsive in the hospital. Despite having no supernatural abilities like her brothers, she believes her unique gift lies in her capacity to awaken things, inspired by the turtle's emergence.

Upon arriving at the church, the narrator is shocked to find the party in full swing, exceeding her expectations of a simple gathering. However, anxiety builds when her brother, Fish, warns her about the risks of using her ability in a crowded place. Defiantly, she expresses confidence that she can indeed help her father with her unique talent. Just as she is about to explain, she is interrupted by Will Junior, who distracts her, leading her into the chaotic birthday celebration filled with life and noise, and away from her contemplations regarding her father and her newly realized potential .

Chapter VI

In Chapter VI, the protagonist steps into the church, only to encounter Ashley Bing and Emma Flint, both dressed for a party and a painful reminder of her past at Hebron Middle School. Hoping to avoid them forever, she feels out of place as Ashley's gaze lingers on Will Junior, a boy she admires. Summoning her bravery, she confronts Ashley, who dismissively insults her. Ashley's remark embarrasses her, especially with Will present, but Fish, a friend, scowls at the bullying girls, showing his displeasure.

Will Junior, with a sympathetic smile, tries to ease the tension and reassures her that she's better off without friends like Ashley and Emma. He leads her away from the uncomfortable encounter towards the party room. The atmosphere in the room is underwhelming, decorated with sagging streamers and only a chocolate cake, indicative that people are still uncertain about the celebration.

As Will gives her a birthday gift—a pen set—she feels uncertain about the proper etiquette of opening it right away. They continue to the kitchen, where Bobbi and her stylish friends prepare refreshments. Bobbi's dismissive attitude towards the protagonist's birthday dress makes her feel younger and insecure, realizing she no longer felt special at thirteen.

Amidst the preparations, a peculiar sound calls for her attention, leading her to feel a strange clarity about her upcoming journey to Salina. As she contemplates and experiences a bizarre sensation, she accidentally knocks into Will Junior, causing chaos with a fallen tray of sandwiches. During the commotion, she notices Bobbi's tattoo, an angel with a mischievous grin, which ignites her curiosity and concern about how Bobbi obtained it.

The moment becomes surreal when the tattoo seems to come alive, speaking to her in a whisper that reveals the character's loneliness. Overwhelmed by the unfolding events and the unexpected communicative power of the tattoo, the protagonist faints, signaling a turning point in her experience and emotional state during this pivotal birthday gathering.

Chapter VII

In Chapter VII, the scene unfolds in Pastor Meeks's office, where the protagonist wakes up to a cacophony of disputes. Disoriented, she finds herself on a blue plaid sofa, witnessing Pastor Meeks furiously arguing with a thin deliveryman bearing a large pink Bible. The pastor, exasperated, criticizes the color of the Bibles, questioning their suitability for his congregation. The deliveryman, appearing meek and sad, attempts to explain he's merely following orders, but is quickly overshadowed by the pastor's wrath.

Simultaneously, a heated exchange occurs between her brother Fish and Miss Rosemary. Fish insists that Mibs doesn't need a doctor and should simply go home, while Rosemary struggles to retain control over a telephone, desperate for adult intervention. The chaos escalates, with Fish disrupting the office by climbing over the pastor's desk to rally their grandpa, who, unfortunately, is asleep and oblivious to the turmoil.

Amidst the bickering, the protagonist's internal struggle begins. She hears two distinct voices in her head, engaged in an argument that mirrors the external chaos. As she grapples with her confusion, flashes of a prior encounter come to mind, particularly a moment involving Bobbi's tattoo that inexplicably spoke to her. Feeling overwhelmed by the noise and unable to concentrate, she yearns for quiet to focus on her own aspirations.

The commotion in the room makes her feel unnoticed and trapped; she yearns to escape to Salina Hope Hospital to connect with her father and activate her latent abilities. The tension around her swells, with contrasting arguments about pink Bibles and emotional appeals to adults spiraling out of control. Noticing an opportunity to flee, she quietly slips away, relieved to leave behind the disarray and the torment of the voices tormenting her thoughts.

Outside the pastor's office, she encounters Will Junior, who shows concern for her well-being and holds the birthday pen set she lost. In desperation, she implores him for a means of escape, reflecting her urgent need for freedom from the chaos around her.

Chapter VIII

In Chapter VIII, Mibs expresses her urgent need to reach Salina and insists on leaving the church where she has just fainted. Despite Will Junior's concern, she is steadfast in her determination to go alone. The church party continues without her, as she steps outside, ready to run the ninety miles if necessary. Spotting the Heartland Bible Supply bus, she feels a surge of hope, believing that if the bus came from Salina, it might be heading back there. Ignoring her mother's warnings about riding with strangers, she feels compelled to board the bus.

As Mibs prepares to climb onboard, she encounters Bobbi, who mocks her but is quickly defended by Will Junior. Their exchange hints at tension between Bobbi and Will, suggesting familial rivalry and rebellion. Despite Bobbi's dismissive attitude toward the idea of Mibs's journey, Will Junior remains resolute, insisting they can make it to Salina together. However, their plans are challenged when Fish appears, angry about their intentions.

Climbing into the bus, Mibs sees its cluttered interior filled with crates and boxes, and she decides to hide in the back. Bobbi, fueled by determination to avoid being responsible for her brother and Mibs getting into trouble, joins them, asserting her role as a caretaker. A sense of urgency escalates as the deliveryman approaches, prompting a panicked scramble to conceal themselves from Miss Rosemary, who is surveying the parking lot. Their hiding place proves cramped, revealing more surprises, including Samson, who had been reading quietly in a corner.

As the bus begins to move, the siblings and Bobbi cling to their seats, tensions rising as the bus turns away from the desired direction toward Kansas. Mibs's entire plan hangs in the balance as she grapples with the uncertainty of their journey, underscoring the themes of youthful rebellion, familial bonds, and the quest for self-discovery. The chapter closes with a cliffhanger, questioning the fate of their adventure as they head in the wrong direction.

Chapter IX

In Chapter IX, the characters find themselves on a bus journey deeper into Nebraska, creating a tense atmosphere among them. Fish and the narrator are anxious, exchanging glances that communicate apprehension. Bobbi, however, appears unfazed, lounging on a cot and indulging in Bubble Tape and a National Geographic magazine. The magazine's cover, depicting a human heart, prompts the narrator to reflect on the fragility of life, mirroring Bobbi's strong yet soft demeanor.

As the bus rolls onward, Fish occupies a spot far from Bobbi, embodying the protective role of an older brother while grappling with inner turmoil. He seems haunted by memories of past experiences, particularly a hurricane, feeling immense responsibility.

The narrator, seated on the floor next to Will Junior, tries to remain optimistic, believing that the bus will soon return to Salina, Kansas, where their father is hospitalized. Despite the lively surroundings, an angelic voice whispers anxiously into the narrator's thoughts, echoing their worries. This voice triggers further tension, as they recall a previous encounter with a troubled man, suggesting that stress may be affecting their mental state.

Outside, the landscape slips by in monotonous stretches of countryside, devoid of life but marked by occasional structures like silos and water towers. The mood within the bus shifts when Bobbi, bored and mischievous, kicks Fish off the cot. In retaliation, Fish unleashes his fury, sending magazines flying—a chaotic display of emotions. The narrator intervenes, trying to calm Fish, and just as the situation reaches a boiling point, Samson, a calm presence, diffuses the tension with a gentle touch.

The bus grows eerily silent as it suddenly comes to a stop. The deliveryman, previously appearing lost and distracted, now confronts the kids with a stern demeanor. The chapter ends on an unsettling note, as both the

children and the deliveryman sense that trouble is brewing, leaving the reader anticipating what comes next.

Chapter X

In the intense stillness, the deliveryman seemed to deliberate over what to do about the baby mice he had discovered nesting amongst his Bibles. His expression suggested options of poison or drowning, or perhaps even feeding us to a cat. He removed his wilted carnation and loosened his pink necktie, revealing rolled-up sleeves and a gaunt chest beneath his faded overalls. As he crossed his arms, two names appeared on his arms: **Carlene**, inscribed above a black rose, and **Rhonda**, beneath a heart marked with “Mom”.

As I observed, the letters animated themselves, morphing into the likenesses of the two bickering women. Carlene argued that Rhonda was to blame for Lester’s perceived softness, claiming he lacked fight. Rhonda retaliated by blaming Lester’s weak father and claimed Carlene demanded every penny he earned from delivering Bibles, limiting his chances to succeed. This generated a surreal atmosphere, reminiscent of comic strips come alive, contributing to my growing unease as I recalled my mission—to awaken Poppa.

At that moment, I felt a gentle touch from Samson, grounding me as I acknowledged the persistent bickering around me. The deliveryman’s jittery yet melodic voice broke the silence, as he asked what we were doing. Carlene urged Lester to show backbone, while she mocked his lack of gumption.

I cautiously stepped forward, inquiring if he was headed to Kansas, explaining our need to reach Salina. Lester fumbled his words, seeming overwhelmed, giving the impression that he was not quite quick on the uptake. He ultimately stated we could not be on his bus, though his finger, pointing shakily toward us, suggested uncertainty.

I persisted, explaining that my parents were in Salina and that he would be helping us if he let us ride. Carlene taunted Lester, claiming he would cave in, while Rhonda lamented his timid nature. As I pleaded with him, it was clear I was pushing Lester to a breaking point between compassion and fear of repercussions from his boss.

In a moment of hesitation, Lester slumped into a seat, clearly wrestling with his reluctance. Finally, he inquired where we were from, reflecting a surrender of his previous resolve as he faced the inevitable reality of helping us.

Chapter XI

In Chapter XI, Lester Swan, the bus driver, enjoys chatting with his passengers. He encourages everyone to sit at the front, while Bobbi and Will Junior sit uncertainly beside him. Mibs and Fish, who are eager to reach Salina because their father is in poor health, sit across the aisle. As Lester drives the delivery bus, he rambles about its quirks and a past incident where it broke down. Fish interrupts anxiously, asking how long until they reach Salina, prompting a tense realization among the group about the urgency of their journey.

Lester checks his watch, realizing he’s running late for a stop in Bee before continuing on to Wymore and Manhattan to deliver money to a friend. Despite their protests that tomorrow is too far away, Lester insists he cannot sacrifice his job for their urgent need, making Mibs feel guilty for asking the driver for a favor that could jeopardize his livelihood.

As they arrive in the tiny town of Bee, they find the sole church locked and dark, and Lester grows increasingly agitated. Mibs reflects on memories of her mother, who taught her that no one is truly perfect and shared warmth and life lessons while cooking together, reinforcing the idea that the Beaumont family

experiences both joy and sorrow like everyone else.

Distracted, Mibs steps outside, distancing herself from the complaints surrounding her in the bus. She thinks fondly of the past moments with her family, particularly the dream of a porch swing that her father wanted to build. As Mibs sits on the porch of an old, abandoned house, Will Junior finds her and inquires about her experiences on the bus. Mibs tries to deflect his curiosity, revealing her secretiveness but ultimately finding solace in sharing a light moment about his nickname.

Their conversation shifts as Will Junior offers a birthday gift, a pen set Mibs hadn't opened yet. As she tries to draw on his hand, a sun sketch miraculously comes to life, surprising Mibs and marking the beginning of her blossoming abilities. The chapter encapsulates a blend of urgency, childhood innocence, family bonds, and the unfolding of Mibs's unique powers.

Chapter XII

In Chapter XII, the narrator finds herself overwhelmed by the chaos erupting around her and the noise of conflicting voices in her head. She begins by fleeing from Will Junior and the dilapidated house, rushing past her friend Lester Swan and Bobbi. After ignoring the discomfort of seated kids, she hides beneath a cot in the back of the bus alongside Samson, trying to block out the turmoil by plugging her ears and humming. Unfortunately, the incessant chatter persists, along with a new voice belonging to Will Junior, who entices her with secrets.

In a moment of desperation, she yells at Will, insisting he needs to wash his hand, appealing to him while feeling the weight of secrets she is reluctant to share. As confusion mounts, Fish, her brother, reacts to her distress without asking for context. He engages Will Junior, whom he perceives as a threat, leading to a physical altercation. Amid the brawl, the narrator screams for Will Junior to wash his hand, heightening the tension. The consequences of Fish's escalating emotions manifest through climate change—the bus windows start to shatter as his power surges.

Once outside, she witnesses Fish's confrontation with Will Junior, whose ink-doodled palm starts to symbolize deeper issues as storm clouds form overhead. In a climactic moment, acknowledging her distress, Fish spits into Will Junior's hand to smear away the ink drawing—a messy yet profound act of solidarity and protection. With this act, Will's secret vanishes, leaving only the echoes of the narrator's own conflicting versions of reality.

As order is restored, Will Junior, visibly flawed with a blackened eye from Fish's earlier punch and spitting incident, wipes off the ink while the narrator reflects on the burdens of adolescence. Finally, overwhelmed and weary, she slips her thoughts away, wishing for reprieve from her troublesome teenage existence as support from her brother allows her to relax for the first time. Carlene and Rhonda, voices in her mind, quip about the usual trouble that seems to follow everyone involved.

Chapter XIII

In Chapter XIII, the emotional turmoil surrounding Mibs intensifies as she deals with her father's accident while on a bus driven by Lester Swan. Mibs struggles with feelings of guilt and despair, crying aboard the bus after vowing to be better in exchange for reassurance about her father's health. The atmosphere on the bus grows tense with voices criticizing Lester; Rhonda and Carlene express disdain for him, and Mibs finds herself drawn to the gentle, reassuring presence of her friend Samson, who offers comfort without words.

As Mibs watches Lester futilely attempt to secure damaged windows, the chapter highlights the dynamics among the group, revealing underlying tensions and loyalties. Lester's reliance on Mibs to tend the injuries of their fellow passengers demonstrates a shift in responsibility that she takes on, weighed down by her own feelings of inadequacy. Bobbi's sarcasm further emphasizes the collective discomfort, yet Mibs steps forward to help Lester, eager to redeem herself in both God's eyes and her own.

Mibs navigates the chaos of the bus and attempts to care for Will Junior, who has sustained an injury. Their interaction reflects her self-doubt, as she insists she is not a freak, despite being aware of how others perceive her. Will's curiosity about the Beaumont family's unique abilities adds another layer of complexity, as Mibs grapples with the pressure of her family's legacy and her own identity.

The chapter culminates in Mibs' internal conflict about her abilities and the way they shape her relationships, particularly with Will. His insistence on understanding her family's special qualities sharpens her struggle with self-acceptance and the burden of their expectations. Amid chaos and critical voices, Mibs seeks clarity and connection, striving to navigate her feelings and duties in a fractured setting .

Chapter XIV

In Chapter XIV, the narrator reflects on the unique talents of the Beaumont family, acknowledging that their differences are intrinsic to their identity. The narrator recalls a formative experience with Grandpa, who explained the family's extraordinary abilities shortly after the loss of Grandma Dollop. Grandpa shared stories of their ancestors and how their special "savvies" were inherited, much like physical traits. He illustrated this by recounting tales of various relatives, some of whom used their talents for good while others, like Grandma Dollop's sister Jubilee, wasted hers on theft.

Grandpa emphasized that a savvy isn't supernatural but rather an innate gift that manifests along with the challenges of family life. The narrator notes how her mother, Momma, believed that many ordinary people possess savvies but fail to recognize them, with examples illustrating diverse skills such as making exceptional jam or avoiding mosquito bites. The understanding of savvies evolved; they were not merely peculiar talents but more of a distinct kind of know-how.

As the narrator converses with Will Junior, explaining their family's general characteristics, she highlights the common thread—the Beaumonts are like others but have unique abilities that make their experiences distinct. Yet, when pressed for specifics about her savvy, the narrator hesitates, recalling familial rules about discretion and sharing only with those they trust the most.

The narrative transitions to a moment from the past when the narrator's parents met during a carnival. Momma, who was effortlessly skilled at tossing rings, intrigued Poppa, leading to an amusing exchange filled with charming banter. This further showcases the family's delightful mix of talents and quirks. The chapter culminates in the present as the bus ride reveals tensions between the boys, hinting at the narrator's desire for peace and the looming dynamics of her special family legacy, all as they navigate the complexities of their lives amid ordinary events.

Chapter XV

In Chapter XV, we meet Fish, Bobbi, Will, and the narrator on a bus, watching Lester, the bus driver, get out to assist a woman whose car has broken down. The woman, Miss Lill Kiteley, appears in an oversized coat over her waitress uniform, contrasting with Lester's smaller frame. As they interact, the children speculate about the reasons for Lester's sudden stop. They're initially apprehensive when Lester introduces Lill, as they fear her presence will complicate their journey to see their Poppa in the hospital.

Lester's cheerful demeanor seems to illuminate the situation despite the children's moans about another adult's intrusion. Lill's awareness of the kids' expressions shows her perceptiveness, and she engages them with gentle inquiries. The tensions among the children surface through snarky comments aimed at Lester's tendency to pick up strays, highlighting their reluctance to share their adventure with an outsider. The children share a fabricated story about Lill's role, attempting to convince her of the legitimacy of their journey while catering to Lester's understanding.

As Lill takes a seat beside Lester, her keen observation picks up on the bruises on the kids' faces, which she humorously remarks might indicate they're "bad kids." Bobbi quips that they are merely "misfits," to which Lill responds with a smile, indicating she's ready to blend in rather than judge. This scene encapsulates the children's camaraderie and their bond with Lester, even while dealing with the pressure of an unexpected companion.

The chapter concludes with a mix of apprehension and acceptance, as the children prepare to continue their journey with Lill, who seems more adaptable than initially perceived. The interaction showcases the dynamics of their group as they navigate relationships and the complexities of their situation.

Chapter XVI

In Chapter XVI, the narrative introduces Lill Kiteley, a charismatic waitress whose cheerful disposition immediately endears her to the children on the bus, even managing to lighten Bobbi's mood. Lill, with her lighthearted nature and absence of tattoos, contrasts sharply with the somber situation surrounding them. She finds herself stranded on the roadside after her dilapidated car breaks down en route to her job at a truck-stop diner. Fortunately, Lester Swan rescues her by stopping the bus, enabling her to continue her journey alongside the children.

As the journey unfolds, Lill assumes a maternal role, tending to the children's needs while making sure to clean and bandage Fish's injuries. This nurturing instinct provides a comforting atmosphere as she fusses over them, echoing the care a mother would bestow. One poignant moment occurs when Lill helps adjust the protagonist's dress, which had become rumpled. As Lill compliments the dress—picked out by the protagonist's father—the protagonist reflects on the meaningful connection to her father and the special memories associated with it, despite feeling a pang of embarrassment due to the teasing from others.

As they converse, the protagonist shares her feelings about her father's health and her desire to help him, comparing her role to that of "Sleeping Beauty," emphasizing her belief in her ability to awaken him. While Lill expresses concern about these lofty hopes, the protagonist dismisses her worry. This exchange reveals the deeper emotional undercurrents as the protagonist grapples with fear and hope, linking her father and their shared memories with her current struggles.

Lill's understanding contrasts with the judgment the protagonist feels from peers, particularly regarding her dress and growing feelings for a boy, Will. Lill reassures her that self-worth is not tied to others' perceptions. By the chapter's conclusion, Lill has transformed from a stranger into a comforting figure, almost an angel, embodying support and understanding in a tumultuous time. The chapter captures the intricacies of childhood emotions, familial bonds, and the significance of hope in the face of adversity.

Chapter XVII

In Chapter XVII, the group, having traveled towards the town of Emerald, encounters Samson, one of the narrator's brothers, who appears quietly beside Fish while holding an empty bag of potato chips. Lill, surprised by Samson's arrival, learns he is seven years old and not very talkative. Fish expresses their hunger,

noting it's well past supper. In response, Lill, a waitress at the Emerald Truck Stop Diner, acknowledges her own tardiness and expresses sympathy towards the group after hearing about their troubles. She offers to treat them to a meal, including banana cream pie, which surprises everyone, especially Samson, who rarely speaks. His husky voice, full of longing for banana cream pie, lightens the mood and brings laughter among the group.

Arriving at the diner, they find it illuminated by neon lights and bustling with vehicles, indicating a busy setting. Lester, the bus driver, parks in a back alley cluttered with garbage, apologizing for not letting them off closer to the restaurant. Lill guides the children through the neglected alley, and they find Samson walking confidently between Lill and Lester, although he is still anxious.

As they near the parking lot, the narrator spots a hand emerging from a pile of soiled clothes behind a dumpster, triggering alarm and concern. Despite Will's apprehension that the man might just be drunk, the narrator insists on checking the man's condition, recalling the state of their own father, Poppa. Ignoring Will's urging to move on, the narrator kneels beside the homeless man and reaches out to feel for a pulse, concentrating on waking him up.

However, instead of hope, the narrator hears a voice of despair echoing in her mind, revealing the man's deep-seated pain and regret. This realization shatters her belief in her ability to help, bringing a profound sense of uselessness and sorrow. The encounter leads her to despair over her savviness, wrestling with the wish that she could be like her father, free from the burdens of ability, hope, and subsequent heartache.

Chapter XIX

In Chapter XIX, the tension escalates as Bobbi confronts a troubling reality and leaves abruptly, leaving her friends, Mibs and Fish, shocked. As they watch, their photographs flash across a small television screen labeled "ALERT! MISSING!" This moment heightens the sense of danger surrounding them. Just as Fish attempts to turn off the TV, Ozzie, the intimidating manager of the Emerald Truck Stop Diner and Lounge, bursts in, reprimanding Mibs and Fish for being in a restricted area. Despite their explanation that they were allowed in by Lill, Ozzie shows no leniency and threatens her job.

The atmosphere in the diner quickly shifts as Ozzie's anger escalates toward Lill, berating her publicly. This conflict draws the attention of all patrons in the diner, creating a palpable tension. Lill, despite her professionalism, is on the verge of tears as Ozzie tosses her last paycheck at her, belittling her in front of customers.

Just when it seems Ozzie's tyranny cannot worsen, chaos ensues; when Lester intervenes to help Lill, a surprise bite from Samson, Mibs' pet, disrupts Ozzie's control, causing him to lose grip on a banana cream pie. In the ensuing chaos, Mibs and Fish react instinctively, pushing Ozzie and tripping him through the pie. The scene erupts, with everyone aware of the sudden shift in power dynamics.

Amidst the turmoil, Bobbi, Will, and others rally together, hurrying to collect money and escape the diner. Lill, though humiliated, demonstrates a sense of camaraderie urging them to seize burgers and leave quickly. In a moment of rebellion, Lester returns triumphantly with another pie, adding to the chaos. The group bursts out of the diner, leaving Ozzie floundering behind them.

This chapter encapsulates the themes of resilience and friendship amidst adversity, emphasizing the characters' growing bond as they navigate overwhelming challenges together.

Chapter XX

In the crisp spring night, the protagonist and their companions fled a diner, escaping the chaos inside. The relief of stepping outside was palpable, with the sounds of cars akin to gentle waves, contrasting the loudness of the restaurant. As they navigated through potholes towards an alley, the group stayed vigilant for any pursuers, particularly Ozzie. However, he seemed to remain behind, either overwhelmed by embarrassment or the remnants of his pie incident.

A moment of reflection struck as the protagonist noticed a destitute man by the dumpster, prompting a sense of sorrow. In a gesture of compassion, they placed their burger basket and a cherished purple ribbon flower next to him, feeling a connection that acknowledged his existence. This small act symbolized awareness and empathy, contrasting with the self-absorption of their group.

Upon returning to the bus, the lingering buzz from the diner was evident among the friends. Yet Bobbi, her demeanor calm yet probing, silently persisted, prompting the narrator to react. The internal dialogue was disrupted by Fish, who sought clarity amidst Bobbi's relentless thoughts. The tension built when Bobbi's teasing escalated, annoying both the protagonist and Fish.

As Lester wrestled with the bus door while juggling stolen pie, the atmosphere grew intense. Bobbi playfully challenged Fish, igniting a fierce response from him. The scene intensified as a sudden wind storm erupted, swirling around them as Fish unleashed his powers, creating chaos and pushing Bobbi back.

Amidst the storm's fury, the protagonist remained untouched, shielded by Fish's fierce gusts. This striking contrast highlighted their unique family dynamic. Bobbi and Will Junior stood awestruck, finally grasping the reality that the Beaumont kids were not just different—they were extraordinary. The revelation sent ripples through their understanding of normalcy, showcasing the protagonists' remarkable abilities and their place in the world, regardless of the chaos surrounding them.

Chapter XXI

In Chapter XXI, the narrator reflects on a lesson taught by their mother, Momma, about the concept of "scumbling"—an artistic technique symbolizing emotional expression. She explains that using the right amount of paint allows one's unique qualities, or "savvy," to shine without overshadowing everything else in life. The lesson resonates with the narrator, especially in light of their brother Fish's struggles with his powerful savvy, likened to a tempest requiring care and control.

As the scene unfolds in Emerald, the environment grows chaotic with Fish's wind intensifying. The narrator experiences distress as they realize the absence of familiar comforts from home and the uncertainty of their journey. This culminates in a moment of danger when a "No Parking Any Time" sign flies through the air due to Fish's storm. However, Fish demonstrates newfound control over his powers by deflecting the sign, an event that grants him a feeling of achievement and reassurance.

With Fish feeling calmer, the group, including Bobbi and Will, begins to rally together, sharing in a moment where they sense Fish's growing mastery over his abilities. Despite the chaos outside, a sense of unity emerges as they all make an effort to support each other. They board a bus with Lester, who seems oblivious to the turbulent weather. Lill Kiteley proposes to join their journey towards Salina, potentially to find their father, reassuring the children amidst the unpredictability.

The chapter also highlights Lester's anxiety over his deliveries and job security, prompting a tension between the children's needs and his obligations. Lill urges him to prioritize the children's urgency to reach Salina. The culmination of the chapter shows Lill's determination to seek clarity in their circumstances, emphasizing their shared situation and calling for transparency about their next steps, as she senses an underlying tension among them.

As they continue, the characters grapple with the conflict between personal desires and responsibilities, painting a vivid picture of their journey in an unpredictable world filled with challenges and emotional growth.

Chapter XXII

In Chapter XXII, the characters experience a mix of anxiety and uncertainty after sneaking aboard Lester's bus, believing they would head to Salina. As they recount the journey, Lill, one of the companions, reacts with noticeable silence, leaving an air of tension among the group. Reflecting on their predicament, the children express their fears, especially as Bobbi's tattoo ominously repeats, "We're dead."

Lill eventually resigns herself to their circumstances, lamenting her losses, including her job and car. She asserts her authority by outlining a plan to head east towards Lincoln, seeking a motel to ensure their safety on the highways at night. Lill intends to call their parents to inform them of their safety. The narrator feels a heavy responsibility for the adults and acknowledges that getting to Poppa might have to wait until morning, even though it weighs heavily on them.

As time passes, Lill and the children solidify their alliance, promising to call home once they find a safe place. They notice Lill counting her cash and deduce that it should be enough to secure motel rooms, which Lester promptly offers to arrange. Despite his reluctance to join them in a room, he takes Lill's cash and secures their accommodations at the "Lincoln Sleepy 10," a secluded motel.

The atmosphere in the motel is filled with relief for the children as they find it nearly empty. However, the narrator harbors apprehension about being spotted after their image appeared on TV. A brief moment of tension arises when they question if Lester will abandon them, to which he insists he won't leave.

Upon arriving at the second floor, Fish eyes the closed swimming pool, a symbol of childhood freedom that elicits mixed emotions. Lill commands the group, propelling them onwards, but secretly, the narrator confides in Bobbi and Fish about their intent not to call home, leading to whispered exchanges about the plan they've devised to keep their secret from Lill. Amidst the humor and tension, the chapter concludes as they approach their rooms, emphasizing the precarious balance of their decision to journey in the shadows.

Chapter XXIII

In Chapter XXIII, the central challenge revolves around orchestrating a convincing deception—specifically, fooling Lill into believing they had called home. The narrator recalls past moments related to Lill's parenting, including Bobbi's imitation of Lill and previous incidents that led Bobbi to cover for herself at school using Lill's voice. With two motel rooms prepared, the narrator feels hopeful about successfully executing this scheme for Lill's benefit, to prevent any complications from calling home too early.

Lill inspects the motel rooms and assigns the girls and boys to separate accommodations. The narrator instructs her brother, Fish, on how to handle an incoming call without revealing anything. Lill then encourages Bobbi to contact her parents, noting their worry over the children's whereabouts. However, as Bobbi approaches the phone, with Lill momentarily distracted in the bathroom, the narrator provides guidance on what Bobbi should say.

Bobbi hesitantly makes the call, pretending to converse with her mother while Fish listens silently on the other line. Bobbi skillfully plays her role, providing fabricated details about their safety and plans towards the hospital in Salina. Eventually, she passes the phone to the narrator, who now must impersonate a calm but shaky version of herself.

During the call, Lill anxiously awaits her turn to talk with Bobbi, who cleverly adopts her mother's stern tone when the call transitions back. Lill, trying to reassure Bobbi's mother, gives the motel's details, indicating that they're prepared to care for the children. As the conversation wraps up, Lill appears relieved, expressing optimism about the mother's character, while the narrator feels guilt over the deceit.

When Bobbi and the boys return, they exude triumph, oblivious to Lill's lingering concerns. This chapter highlights the layers of deception and familial care, threading along complex relationships and the thematic nuances of growth, trust, and the lengths one might go to protect loved ones.

Chapter XXIV

In Chapter XXIV, Lill expresses her newfound enthusiasm about shopping for supplies, suggesting that she will take care of the kids until the next day. She offers to cross the road to a Mega Mega Mart and asks if anyone would like to join her, but the children prefer to stay behind, wary of the situation they are in. As she prepares to leave, Fish playfully grabs the remote control, leading to a brief moment of levity among the group. Lill reassures them about their safety, promising to return quickly.

Once Lill is gone, the children breathe a sigh of relief, realizing they have successfully kept their whereabouts a secret. However, their moment of triumph is short-lived when Fish turns on the TV, revealing a news alert featuring their photos as missing children. This news shocks Bobbi and Will, who had not seen this development before, and the reality of their situation sets in. They discuss the repercussions of contacting home, with Bobbi asserting that it would complicate things for their guardians, Lester and Lill, especially with the involvement of the state troopers.

As they anxiously watch the news report, the gravity of their circumstances becomes even clearer when they learn that their father is one of the victims from a recent accident. Overwhelmed, one of the children seeks comfort in the reassurances of the others. Bobbi silences the television, emphasizing the need to avoid panic.

Lill returns after almost an hour, brimming with excitement and loads of supplies from the Mega Mega Mart. She reveals her haul, filled with an array of fun items, some practical and others just for enjoyment, such as candy, clothing, toiletries, and even a first aid kit. She encourages the kids to enjoy themselves, mentioning a pool and suggesting that every child deserves some fun, even amidst their troubles. The children are amazed and bewildered at Lill's cheerful demeanor and the abundance of things she brought back. She encourages them to change into their swimsuits and prepare for fun, expressing her hopes for Lester as well. Lill's optimistic attitude, juxtaposed with the children's fears, suggests a glimpse of normalcy and joy amidst their chaotic lives.

Chapter XXV

In Chapter XXV, the scene is set at a pool where two girls, Mibs and Bobbi, prepare to change into their swimsuits. Mibs struggles with her swimsuit fitting poorly, feeling vulnerable and self-conscious, a stark contrast to her previous confidence. Bobbi, who appears grown-up in her cherry red bikini, helps Mibs adjust the straps of her purple one-piece, positively influencing Mibs's confidence.

Once dressed, they join the boys, Will and Fish, near the pool. The description of the pool area is vivid, revealing both its charm and the chaos that unfolds as the boys begin to play. Will is already swimming, while Fish, a bit more reserved, prepares to engage with his brother. The atmosphere lightens when a water fight breaks out, playful banter exchanged between the boys. Will's unexpected kiss for Mibs adds a layer of complexity to their interactions, leaving her both flustered and confused, especially when Fish warns Will about behaving around Mibs.

As the boys engage in more water play, Mibs finds herself caught in a whirlwind of emotions, contemplating her feelings for Will. Bobbi notices the dynamic and teases Mibs about Will's affections, prompting Mibs to reflect on her own feelings—her responses fluctuate between shyness and curiosity.

Bobbi reveals her own struggles as the preacher's daughter, hinting at an ongoing desire for freedom and normalcy amidst societal expectations. Their candid conversation allows them both to connect on a deeper level, discussing their identities and aspirations. The chapter powerfully juxtaposes the innocence of childhood against the burgeoning complexities of adolescence, leaving Mibs questioning her role and feelings as she experiences life's fleeting moments.

In a concluding exchange, Mibs and Bobbi float together, contemplating the notion that life can feel surreal, echoing a shared sentiment that perhaps they are navigating a strange dreamscape as maturity approaches. This chapter illustrates their transformation as they grapple with their evolving identities in the context of friendship and familial responsibilities.

Chapter XXVII

In Chapter XXVII, the group arrives in Wymore just as the morning church service concludes. Lester parks the bus in front of the church, preparing to deliver pink Bibles, which Lill believes will be better received by the minister's wife. She encourages Lester with supportive words and a kiss for good luck, which leaves him blushing but proud as he steps out to make the delivery. Lill has been coaching him on how to present himself confidently, which visibly influences his demeanor.

As Lester walks away, Lill anxiously observes him from the bus, displaying her affection for him. Meanwhile, Fish and Will engage playfully, disrupting the atmosphere until Lester returns with exuberance. He announces that not only did the minister accept the Bibles, but the Wymore Women's Guild also ordered three additional cases, relieving Lester of previous worries regarding unsold inventory.

With newfound confidence, Lester recruits Fish and Will to help carry in the boxes. They attempt to hide their identities, wary of being recognized from news reports, but they emerge with cash and donuts after the delivery. Despite the sugary treats, a shadow of unease lingers over Fish, who grows increasingly troubled as Lester reveals they will make a detour before heading to Salina. The uncertainty of the journey begins to weigh on their spirits, especially for Mibs and the others awaiting their father's return.

As Mibs navigates these mixed emotions, she finds herself transfixed by a crumpled magazine cover depicting a heart, contemplating its fragility. This reflection sparks a personal moment with Will, who she confesses her feelings to. Mibs admits she likes him but isn't ready for a romantic relationship. This important conversation evolves into a pivotal moment of vulnerability and growth as Mibs hands her cherished birthday pen back to Will, feeling a mix of disappointment and growth. As Will promises to wait for her, Mibs internalizes her feelings while observing the world outside the bus window, signifying a transitional phase in her journey of self-discovery and emotional maturity.

Chapter XXVIII

In Chapter XXVIII, the journey south from Nebraska continues as the characters remain miles from Salina. Despite the Beaumonts urging them to head directly to Salina Hope Hospital, Lester remains obstinate about making a final detour. The group occupies their time eating snacks from the Mega Mega Mart while trying to avoid thoughts of Poppa, who is in the hospital.

As they near Manhattan, a police siren causes the children to tense up, but they soon realize it's not related to them. They observe Lill and Lester, who are preoccupied with each other. Fish, sensing something amiss, announces he can smell water, which prompts concern among the kids. Lester confirms their proximity to Tuttle Creek Lake, which reassures Fish.

In an attempt to boost Fish's confidence after his traumatic experience during a hurricane, the narrator reminds him he is in control. As they approach their next destination, Carlene's name comes up, which prompts a startled reaction from Lester. The girl's unintended revelation about Lester's tattoos leads to a discussion about Carlene, who has a dubious reputation for abandoning pets, causing tension within the bus.

Lester initially appears contemplative and is affected by the harsh voices of Rhonda and Carlene echoing in his head. Mibs, frustrated with the negative influence, admonishes him. Despite Lester's discomfort, he realizes the truth behind his relationship with Carlene, acknowledging her deception and recognizing that she was the one who secured his job and the bus.

In a moment of vulnerability, Lester expresses a desire to settle his debts with Carlene before he can focus on Lill. Lill's supportive response softens Lester, and he feels as though he has found a guiding light in her, bringing a sense of hope. The chapter captures themes of personal conflict, the struggle against negative influences, and redemption as Lester reclaims his sense of self amid his struggles with self-doubt and the shadows of his past.

Chapter XXXI

In Chapter XXXI, the narrator searches frantically for a silver happy birthday pen amidst chaos, only to find it's missing. Will Junior is in the back bedroom, arguing with Carlene, who yells at him for messing with her blankets. The narrator observes two police officers approach the trailer through the rain, prompting immediate fear and urgency. They lock the front door and barricade it with a chair, hoping for an escape route.

Rushing through the trailer, the narrator encounters Fish, who is struggling emotionally in the bathroom, and Bobbi, who is rummaging through the washer and dryer. Fish eventually joins the narrator and Bobbi in Carlene's bedroom. As tensions rise, Carlene becomes unmanageable, screaming for help. To quell her shouts, Bobbi uses Bubble Tape gum to silence Carlene, who retaliates with flailing limbs and kicks. The narrator quickly draws a face on Carlene's foot with the pen once it is retrieved from Will, seeking answers about their missing brother, Samson.

Carlene's defiance continues as she attempts to shout for help. Nevertheless, the narrator persists, questioning Carlene about Samson's whereabouts. A newfound voice, presumably belonging to Samson, echoes through the narrator's mind, saying he is "in the wall." As the urgency peaks with police banging on the door, the narrator discovers uneven panels in the wall and manages to slide one open after some effort.

Inside, they find Samson nestled among clutter, blissfully drawing on himself with a pen. His doodles fill the narrator's thoughts with noise and colors, a chaotic but joyful representation of his inner world. They embrace, relieved to have found him, but their moment is short-lived as Carlene emerges threateningly with a broom.

The chapter captures the urgent, chaotic atmosphere as the family navigates the threat of the police and the unpredictable nature of Carlene, all while trying to unite and protect Samson.

Chapter XXXII

In the chaotic aftermath of the situation involving Carlene's trailer, a sense of disorder prevailed as police officers, state troopers, and paramedics flooded the scene. The rain had subsided, revealing curious neighbors who gathered outside, eager to witness the unfolding drama. Inside, adults—Lester, Lill, and Carlene—were questioned by officers while children hovered protectively nearby. Bobbi, Will, and Fish occupied Carlene's sofa, with Bobbi feigning boredom and Will keenly observing the officers' movements. Fish appeared worn out, his earlier distress subsiding with the discovery of Samson.

On the floor, Samson and I shared a moment of connection, his ink-stained hand clasping mine as his thoughts formed a comforting, melodic background. Paramedics arrived, distributing blankets and checking on the children. In the midst of the chaos, I felt an urgent need to explain to the officers and caseworker that it was my idea for the group to embark on this journey to see our Poppa, fearing we were wasting precious time. Despite my insistence that I was to blame, the adults responded with polite nods but seemed unconvinced.

I became anxious about the ramifications for Lester and Lill, feeling sick with worry and guilt over the deception that led us here. My concern extended to Carlene, though I considered her merely a rotten apple in our troubled mix. Inquiring after our Poppa, I was met with practiced responses from the caseworker, furthering my anxiety about our uncertain future.

As Kansas state troopers joined the scene, the prospect of being taken back to Hebron loomed ominously. I felt a growing determination not to lose the progress we had made. Just then, a familiar figure emerged among the troopers—Bill, Will and Bobbi's older brother. His presence brought relief, prompting joyful interactions as he embraced his siblings. Observing this reunion unveiled a secret about Will that reshaped my understanding of their family dynamic.

Finally, seizing an opportunity to share my perspective, I approached Officer Meeks, hoping he would listen to my account of the events and my deep yearning to see Poppa. Overcome with emotion, I implored him to understand that everything that had transpired was my fault, leading to an outpouring of tears.

Chapter XXXIV

The journey towards Salina revealed a vivid transformation from rolling prairie to lush farmland. After finding Samson behind the paneled wall in Carlene's trailer, the storm that had consumed Fish over Tuttle Creek Lake faded away. Despite the warm spring sunshine illuminating the world outside, my thoughts were consumed by concern for Poppa.

Will Junior and I occupied the front of the bus, watching for his father's patrol car while Fish and Bobbi engaged in their own distractions. Bobbi, absorbed in painting her nails, cursed the bumps on the road, while Fish appeared deep in thought, likely contemplating Poppa just as I was. Officer Meeks's haunting words about the need for Poppa's family lingered in my mind, amplifying my fears.

Samson found comfort curled up with Lill in front, where she diligently scrubbed away the remnants of ink from his hands. Each stroke seemed to distill the chaos that filled my head into a singular focus—being strong for Poppa. Time ticked agonizingly slowly as we traveled the final stretch of interstate before Bill Meeks guided the bus toward the hospital, my heart racing at the sight of the stark white "H" sign indicating our destination.

Arriving at Salina, we encountered a city still grappling with the aftermath of Rocket's havoc; traffic crawled as repairs were underway. With every signal light out, Bill navigated expertly through the chaos, utilizing his siren when necessary. As we approached the hospital, the sky darkened ominously, yet the cloud merely loomed overhead without releasing any rain.

Upon arrival, we were met by families—Pastor Meeks and Miss Rosemary appeared torn between relief and frustration, while Rocket and Momma looked weary and distraught. The emotional reunion unfolded as Momma rushed to embrace us, her worry manifesting in tight, protective hugs. Rocket attempted to brush off his concerns with bravado, but I sensed the weight he carried for all of us, particularly for Poppa.

Grandpa Bomba, visibly emotional, held onto one of Grandma Dollop's jars, and I felt an overwhelming urge to assure him we were together again as a family. As the initial wave of joy subsided, Momma addressed the unspoken concern about Poppa, her smile fading momentarily before she reassured us of our presence being needed.

In the waiting room, emotions surged; the family dynamics were palpable as tears flowed and prayers were offered. The moment was bittersweet; friendships were strained by circumstance, and as the visit came to a close, I exchanged goodbyes with Bobbi and Will, hoping our paths would cross again.

As the bus prepared to depart, I felt a mixture of relief and sorrow. Although I had finally arrived in Salina, I carried the weight of an impending farewell deep within me, yearning for everything to be right once more .

Chapter XXXV

In Chapter XXXV, the tension and emotional atmosphere rise as the Beaumont family arrives at Salina Hope Hospital's critical care unit. Momma embraces her children—Rocket, Fish, Samson, and me—while expressing her worries about Poppa. As she holds us close, Rocket inquires about my recent birthday, not truly seeking details about celebrations, but perhaps trying to gauge how I am coping with my newfound savvy.

Momma's concern is palpable as she seeks to learn about my experiences since we were last together, especially regarding my savvy. When Samson mentions Poppa, Momma's smile betrays her sadness, her eyes filling with tears as she nods in acknowledgment of their father's situation. The family approaches the nurses' station with heavy hearts, and the nurses' sympathetic expressions reflect their understanding of their distress.

A nurse in cheerful blue scrubs addresses Momma, who introduces her children as "delinquents—my wandering adventurers." I plead for the chance to see Poppa, and Momma emphasizes how much we need to see him soon. The nurse allows us into the room.

As we move past a maintenance man and toward Poppa's room, emotions run high. Fish's question about whether Poppa has woken up reveals the tension and fear inherent in the situation. Momma gently informs us that Poppa hasn't awakened and that the doctors indicate he might not wake at all. This news strikes like a blow, leaving me feeling unsteady, but Fish surprisingly maintains his composure.

Rocket, desperate not to be left out, insists on entering Poppa's room, saying it would be worse to stay outside. Momma, torn yet committed to keeping her family united, reluctantly agrees. When she turns to me for reassurance, I feel powerless and helpless, knowing I lack control over my savvy and its potential to help Poppa.

Ultimately, Momma pushes open the door to Poppa's room, and the family enters quietly, prepared to face the reality of his condition, where he lies without the vitality of Sleeping Beauty, evoking deep feelings of vulnerability and hope amidst the uncertainty.

Chapter XXXVI

In Chapter XXXVI, the family gathers around Poppa's hospital bed, a somber scene filled with anxiety and love. Poppa appears unrecognizable, with his bald head wrapped in bandages and numerous medical devices connected to him. Each family member holds onto someone else's hand as they inch closer to him. The atmosphere is heavy; the protagonist struggles to breathe and fears her emotions might spill over as tears.

Grandpa Bomba tries unsuccessfully to open a jar, and Rocket helps him, letting out the familiar love song of Momma and Poppa. The protagonist tenderly touches Poppa's face and reflects on the contrast between Poppa's situation and that of a homeless man she once saw, who had no one to care for him. As she recalls Poppa's faded tattoo of a mermaid – Miss Mermaid – she feels a desperate longing to connect with him and hear his thoughts.

Despite her attempts to listen for the mermaid's voice or any sign from Poppa, there is silence, amplifying the sense of hopelessness. Fish and Samson rely on her to glean any insight, yet she's unable to hear anything encouraging. Fish eventually walks out, followed by Momma, leaving the protagonist listening to the relentless beeping of machines.

In a moment of whispered encouragement, she reassures Poppa that he has a "savvy," emphasizing his fighting spirit. As she expresses her love and wishes for his recovery, faint signs of response begin to emerge from Poppa. The room erupts in commotion as alarms sound and machines go haywire, signaling a crisis. Despite the chaos, she persists in speaking to him, urging him to wake up and come home to fulfill promises like building a porch swing.

As Poppa's fingers twitch and his eyes flutter open in response to her voice, a wave of hope floods the room, signaling that all might be well again. The chapter concludes on a hopeful note, connecting love, family, and the magic of belief in moments of despair.

Chapter XXXIII

In Chapter XXXIII, the narrative begins with the protagonist, Mibs, overwhelmed by her emotions as she sits on the floor, separated from her family, particularly her father, who is in the hospital. She is comforted by her brother Will and a caseworker, Bill, who recognizes her distress. Bill gently engages with Mibs, validating her feelings and suggesting that they should go to the hospital to find their father, eliciting surprise from those present.

As they share their story, Mibs and her siblings recount the chaotic events they've experienced recently. Bill listens empathetically and then delivers somber news about their father's condition, emphasizing the need for family during difficult times. Mibs's brother, Fish, acknowledges the gravity of the situation, suggesting they all need to be strong.

Bill addresses the group about the troubles they've caused, reflecting on how their actions have led to concern among their families. He reassures them about the lack of legal repercussions for their guardians, Lester and Lill, who had taken care of them during their crisis, and notes that he needs their help in transporting the children to Salina.

Relieved by this news, Mibs silently thanks Bill for his kindness, wishing her feelings could be conveyed without words. After a brief discussion, it's decided that the journey will involve an armed officer for safety, to accompany the children back to their father. Lill comforts Lester as they embark on this journey, continually encouraging him.

As they prepare to leave, Bill offers Will the chance to ride in the patrol car, a tempting offer that fills Will with conflict. Ultimately, he chooses to stay with his siblings, revealing the depth of family loyalty amidst uncertainty. The chapter closes with Mibs reflecting on the intertwining nature of good and bad experiences,

pondering the unpredictability of life and its lessons.

Chapter XXIX

In Chapter XXIX, the narrative introduces Carlene, a woman whose imposing presence contrasts with her petite appearance. She is depicted vividly with big hair, teeth, and long fingernails, exuding an eccentric charm. As Lester pulls the big pink Bible bus into Tuttle Terrace Trailer Park, Carlene, clad in a satin robe, displays a mix of surprise and annoyance at the sight of Lester and his passengers.

Lester hesitates as he informs the group to stay put, but Samson, a child needing the bathroom, prompts a series of comical yet tense events. Bobbi, unexpectedly volunteering to assist Samson, leads him to Carlene's trailer despite her initial dismissal of their request. Inside, the trailer is dim and filled with a strange mix of mothball and candle scents, overwhelming the children as they encounter Carlene's gaudy decor and cluttered environment.

The tension escalates as Carlene confronts Lester over money, rejecting his offer while angrily questioning his motives. Their tense exchange is disrupted when Carlene's unexpected wrath leads to a chaotic scene where snacks are thrown and the atmosphere thickens with frayed tempers. This moment reveals darker undertones of their relationship, particularly how Lester feels cornered and belittled.

Lester finally explodes, asserting he won't return to Carlene or comply with her demands. The silence that follows signifies a tense shift in power dynamics. However, this moment of confrontation is shattered when Carlene realizes the children are the missing kids from the news, sparking immediate concern and prompting her to call the police.

In a frantic rush, the children instinctively rally to prevent Lester's arrest, pushing him back to the bus. Their desperate escape from Carlene's trailer is driven by their urgency to reach Salina, amplifying the chapter's tension. The group is left anxiously watching for signs of the police as they depart, underscoring the stakes of their predicament. The chapter concludes with a chilling revelation as the protagonist suddenly realizes the absence of Samson, heightening the sense of urgency and fear for his safety.

Chapter XVIII

In Chapter XVIII, Mibs struggles emotionally after a troubling encounter. Weak and shaken, she is supported by Will, who tries to distract her by leading her to the Emerald Truck Stop Diner and Lounge, where their friends await. Upon entering, Mibs is overwhelmed by a cacophony of thoughts pouring from the patrons, making her feel dizzy and nauseous. The presence of tattooed bikers and truckers amplifies her discomfort. As she stumbles, Fish and Will rush to steady her, showing concern for her state. Lill, their friend, offers help but faces her own troubles with a nagging waitress.

Mibs is then led to a cramped storeroom filled with the scents of ketchup and pickles, which reminds her of their home in Mississippi. In the storeroom, Lill encourages Mibs to rest on the sofa while she attends to her duties, leaving Fish to check on Mibs. Still distracted by the disturbing noise inside her head, Mibs struggles with her sense of failure regarding her savvy, as she grapples with the hope of bringing back their father, Poppa, who is away.

Fish, concerned about his sister, insists she explain her abilities. Reluctantly, she reveals that her savvy seems linked to ink on skin, hinting at her ability to read minds. This revelation complicates her feelings further, as she longs for a normal life away from her unusual powers. To demonstrate her ability, Mibs uses a silver pen given by Will Junior and asks Fish to think of a number. As she draws a symbol on his palm, she transcribes

his thoughts without his prompting, confirming that she can indeed hear what he's thinking.

Just as she begins to process this truth, Bobbi interrupts, curious about Mibs' newfound ability, "So you read minds, do you?" This confrontation leaves Mibs feeling exposed and troubled, setting the stage for deeper exploration of her powers and their implications on her family and friendships.

Chapter XXX

In Chapter XXX, the group is in a frantic search for Samson, who has been left behind in the Tuttle Terrace Trailer Park. The atmosphere is tense as they realize he is not on the bus, despite searching every nook and cranny for him. As panic sets in, the crew—comprising Lill, Fish, and others—insists that they need to turn around despite Lester's initial hesitation. He feels cornered, fearing legal repercussions for his decisions while trying to help.

Lill, taking on a maternal role, urges everyone to remain calm and insists that they must retrieve Samson. She confronts Lester, who is reluctant to return after hearing that the police have been called. Eventually, under pressure, he makes a sharp U-turn, navigating the bus back to the trailer park. The weather turns ominous, with dark clouds rolling in and a storm brewing, mirroring the escalating tension within the group.

Upon arrival, they quickly disembark and head toward Carlene's trailer, where she stands with an air of defiance, blocking the doorway. She smugly informs them that the police are on their way and that Samson is locked up inside, eliciting outrage from Lill and the others who demand his release. Carlene's confrontational demeanor only escalates the situation as she relishes their desperation, hinting that Samson has a talent for hiding.

Fish, overwhelmed with anger and panic for his sibling, uses his powers to push Carlene away, allowing them to enter the trailer in search of Samson. The distress intensifies as they scour every corner of the trailer—under beds, behind furniture, in closets, and even the oven—yielding no results. Meanwhile, Fish's fury whips the wind into chaos, echoing the turmoil within the group as they scramble against time, searching for any trace of Samson before the police arrive.

In a moment of realization, the narrator thinks of a way to extract information from Carlene, believing that all they need is a pen to make her reveal where Samson is hiding. The chapter closes on this cliffhanger, culminating in the anxiety of impending arrival of the authorities and the uncertainty of Samson's fate.

Chapter XXXVII

In Chapter XXXVII, the narrative unfolds around the protagonist's family life after a traumatic event involving Poppa, who is gradually recovering from an accident that left its marks on his memory and demeanor. As the protagonist turns fourteen on a bright spring day, the unfolding scene is infused with warmth and nostalgia. Momma prepares a cake—a reminder of a year earlier when the cake held more significance to the protagonist, though now it feels overshadowed by deeper experiences.

The protagonist and Poppa share a moment on their porch swing, which symbolizes comfort and connection. Their swing, while not grand or beautiful, represents the best of their home, infused with love and belonging. The scene is lively with interactions among family members: Grandpa Bomba dreams on a chair, while Fish watches over their younger sister, Gypsy, who engages in her whimsical antics with dandelions.

Poppa's ongoing recovery is emphasized; although he struggles with memory loss, this day is significant since he recognizes the protagonist, providing a moment of joy amidst uncertainty. Fish provides playful

pushes to the swing, and Momma, busy in the kitchen, checks in on the family, revealing that Rocket, the older brother, is preparing to leave for a summer with Uncle Autry. Rocket's decision to leave is tinged with sadness, marking a change in the family dynamics as he grapples with his identity and abilities following the incident at Salina Hope Hospital.

Amid the lighthearted exchanges, the protagonist reflects on her own development and the friendships she has formed, particularly with Will and Bobbi, who are now integral to her life. Despite the anticipated changes, a secret looms—a potential new addition to the family, hinted at by Momma's writing a recipe on her hand, often forgotten amidst the everyday chaos.

The chapter ends on a contemplative note, suggesting quietude for now, with the protagonist wishing her savvy could manifest her happiness externally. Overall, this chapter encapsulates themes of resilience, familial love, and the profound but often unspoken complexities of growing up within a vibrant and ever-evolving household.

Chapter XXVI

In Chapter XXVI, the scene unfolds in a motel where several characters seek comfort and connection amidst emotional turmoil. Samson, a child in the boys' room, has created a makeshift bed under a table, draping a motel bedspread like a tent, while the protagonist shares a bed with Lill, whose nighttime murmurs spark contemplation. Lill reflects on the unpredictability of life, hinting at the emergence of good from bad experiences.

The protagonist struggles to sleep, pensive thoughts racing about past losses, especially her Grandma Dollop's death. She recalls the unique and chaotic funeral attended by family members, including Aunt Dinah, Uncle Autry, and Grandma's notoriously light-fingered sister, Jubilee, who caused her mother to hide valuables during the wake. The funeral transformed into a vibrant, surreal celebration as nature seemed to respond to the sorrowful event.

As memories flood her mind, the protagonist wrestles with the motivations behind her recent decision to run away, questioning if her flight was solely for her Poppa or also an escape from her changing life. This self-reflection keeps her awake throughout the night, as she grapples with the realization of potentially running away from her own adolescence and the accompanying complexity.

The next morning, as the group prepares to leave the motel, Will Junior and the boys bring breakfast and jovially interact, showcasing a lighthearted dynamic among them. Amidst the morning chaos, Lill and Lester share a tender moment, highlighting their budding relationship, while the protagonist muses on the impact of others' voices in shaping one's self-perception, particularly in Lester's case.

As they board the Heartland Bible Supply bus, the protagonist observes the interactions among the adults, particularly how Lill's support seems to elevate Lester. This connection fosters hope for Lester, suggesting that Lill might be a transformative presence in his life. The chapter closes with the group journeying toward Wymore, framed by the awakening of spring, presenting a sense of renewal and the desire for her Poppa to recover as well.

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