

# Chapter Three

In Chapter Three, the narrator reflects on her upbringing in a household overwhelmed by paperwork and documentation. This clutter filled her life with a sense of identity shaped by the tangible evidence of her family's history, encapsulated in invoices, old subscriptions, and her mother's Cambodian passport. Growing up in this environment instilled in her an obsession with archiving and organization, influencing her career as a civil servant.

Throughout the chapter, the focus shifts to the narrator's relationship with Graham, an expat adjusting to modern life. Despite embracing certain aspects of the 21st century—like music from composers such as Bach and Tchaikovsky—Graham displays a reluctance toward assimilation, often critiquing contemporary culture and art. His dismissal of films frustrates the narrator, making her reflection on their cultural differences more pronounced.

As the narrative unfolds, the expats undergo tests for empathy and honesty, reminiscent of psychological evaluations. The experiments reveal tensions; some test subjects resist the notion of modernity, revealing their psychological struggles. Graham's adverse reactions to the testing procedures hint at deeper issues, drawing attention to the emotional toll of their current existence.

The chapter transitions into the shared experiences of the expats as they navigate life together, which accentuates their isolation from each other due to their distinct historical backgrounds. Communal dinners become a potential solution for building connections, highlighting the appalling disparities among different eras of expats regarding social interaction and identity.

The narrator reflects on her own identity and financial prudence stemming from her past, coupled with her desire for acknowledgment from Graham. As the heat wave begins, it introduces discomfort and exacerbates tensions in the relationships, leading the narrator to buy a new bike for Graham, hoping to forge a connection through shared experiences.

Graham's initial ineptitude on the bike demonstrates his struggle with modern life, while his fascination with the past emerges through his conversations. Their shared attempts at adjustment expose both limitations, blending the historical with the contemporary while exploring themes of adaptation and empathy through their evolving interactions. The chapter closes with an unsettling mystery regarding one of the expats, hinting at deeper, potentially sinister issues within the time-travel project, reinforcing the narrative tension that underscores their journey.