

Chapter 18: Eighteen

The chapter explores the emotional and psychological challenges faced by carers, focusing on the narrator Kathy's perspective. While she adapts well to the role, others like her former friend Laura struggle with the isolation and emotional toll. The job involves long hours of solitary travel, fleeting interactions, and the constant proximity to suffering, particularly when donors die unexpectedly. Kathy reflects on how some carers, like Laura, become demoralized and unable to cope, while she herself has learned to manage the hardships, maintaining a sense of purpose despite the difficulties.

Kathy describes the profound solitude of being a carer, contrasting it with the communal life she once knew. She acknowledges the exhaustion and the way the job changes a person's demeanor, yet she has grown to appreciate the quiet moments of introspection. Her routine, including small pleasures like browsing shops or admiring her collection of lamps, helps her cope. However, unexpected encounters, such as running into Laura, disrupt this solitude and force her to confront the emotional weight of her past and the realities of her friends' struggles.

The reunion with Laura reveals the toll their work has taken on her. Laura appears worn down, her spirited personality diminished, and their conversation revolves around her exhaustion and frustrations with donors and medical staff. They cautiously avoid discussing their shared past until the topic of Ruth arises, hinting at unresolved tensions. Laura's suggestion that Kathy become Ruth's carer sparks a brief moment of connection, but the conversation quickly returns to Laura's struggles, underscoring the emotional distance between them.

The chapter ends with an unspoken tension between Kathy and Laura, hinting at deeper, unaddressed issues from their past. Their interaction is marked by a mix of nostalgia and avoidance, as neither fully engages with their shared history. Kathy's

reluctance to reconnect with Ruth, despite Laura's encouragement, suggests lingering unresolved conflicts. The encounter leaves both characters—and the reader—aware of the emotional gaps they carry, even as they navigate the demands of their roles as carers.

