

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 begins with the narrator reflecting on her upbringing in a home overwhelmed by paperwork and documentation. The clutter surrounding her daily life became a defining characteristic of her family's history, with invoices, old subscriptions, and her mother's Cambodian passport serving as tangible pieces of evidence of their past. This environment shaped her identity, fostering a deep-seated obsession with archiving and organization. It's this early experience that influenced her later career choice as a civil servant, where structure and bureaucracy are integral to her professional life. The constant presence of paperwork became more than just a backdrop—it instilled in her the belief that everything must be recorded, documented, and preserved, shaping her worldview and approach to life.

As the chapter unfolds, attention shifts to the narrator's relationship with Graham, an expat who is struggling to adjust to modern life. While Graham embraces certain aspects of the 21st century, such as appreciating classical composers like Bach and Tchaikovsky, he is also highly critical of contemporary culture and art. His disdain for modern films frustrates the narrator, leading her to reflect on the cultural divide that separates them. Graham's refusal to engage fully with the present day creates tension in their interactions, as the narrator's desire for connection with him is complicated by his reluctance to embrace the world around him. This dynamic underscores a broader theme of how individuals adjust—or fail to adjust—to new environments and the difficulties of reconciling the past with the present.

As the narrative progresses, the expats are subjected to tests that assess their empathy and honesty, resembling psychological evaluations. These tests serve to expose the psychological struggles and tensions that exist among the group, highlighting their varying degrees of resistance to the notion of modernity. Some expats express outright disdain for the contemporary world, showing a deep-seated

inability to adapt. Graham's reaction to the testing process, in particular, signals underlying issues, suggesting that his emotional distress is a result of the challenges he faces in adjusting to life in this new time. His reactions draw attention to the emotional toll of their existence as time travelers, unable to fully connect with the world they now inhabit. This adds layers to the story, as it becomes clear that the struggles of the expats go far beyond their external circumstances and delve into their inner emotional battles.



The chapter then delves into the shared experiences of the expats as they attempt to navigate life together. However, their isolation is accentuated by their distinct historical backgrounds, making it difficult for them to truly bond with one another. The idea of communal dinners is introduced as a potential solution to these isolation issues, offering a chance for the expats to come together and connect on a more personal level. These dinners highlight the stark differences in how expats from different eras approach social interaction and identity. The gulf between the past and present becomes increasingly evident, as the expats struggle to find common ground and understand one another, often feeling disconnected from the world around them. The tension between historical identities and the need for modern socialization becomes a key point of conflict within the narrative.

Amid these struggles, the narrator also reflects on her own identity, shaped by the financial prudence of her past. This reflection is colored by a desire for recognition from Graham, further complicating their dynamic. As a heatwave begins to settle in, the uncomfortable weather exacerbates the tensions between the characters, creating a sense of unease that spills into their relationships. In an attempt to bridge the gap between her and Graham, the narrator buys him a new bike, hoping to forge a connection through shared experiences. This gesture highlights her longing for connection, yet it also exposes the limitations of their relationship, as Graham's initial ineptitude on the bike underscores his difficulty adjusting to modern life. His fascination with the past becomes evident through his conversations, revealing his struggle to reconcile his experiences with the present world around him. Their shared

attempts to adapt to their new lives, though meaningful, expose both their vulnerabilities and limitations.

The chapter closes with an unsettling mystery surrounding one of the expats, introducing a sense of intrigue that adds depth to the narrative. This mystery hints at deeper, potentially sinister issues within the time-travel project, raising questions about the true nature of the expats' experiences. The unresolved tension surrounding this plot point leaves readers intrigued, suggesting that there is more to uncover as the story progresses. As the chapter ends, the emotional complexity of the characters' relationships, combined with the mounting sense of mystery, lays the groundwork for the next phase of the narrative. The reader is left eager to discover how the expats will continue to navigate their time-traveling existence, and what consequences may arise from their struggles to adapt to their new lives.