# Never Let Me Go

In *Never Let Me Go*, Kazuo Ishiguro weaves a haunting and introspective tale set in an alternate-reality **1990s England**, where **Kathy H.**, a **carer**, reflects on her childhood at **Hailsham**, an idyllic yet unsettling boarding school. As Kathy reunites with her former classmates **Ruth** and **Tommy**, she confronts the dark truth about their existence: they are **clones**, created solely to provide **organ donations** for "normal" humans until they "complete" (die).

The novel unfolds through Kathy’s nostalgic yet eerily detached voice, exploring:

- **The illusion of innocence**: Hailsham’s artistic projects and sheltered life masking a grim fate.
- **Love and jealousy**: Kathy’s complex bond with Ruth and Tommy, fraught with longing and betrayal.
- **Resignation vs. rebellion**: Why do the clones accept their fate without revolt?

A masterful blend of **speculative fiction and literary drama**, *Never Let Me Go* questions what it means to be human when society treats you as disposable.

## Chapter 1: One

Kathy H., a 31-year-old carer with over eleven years of experience, reflects on her prolonged tenure in the role. While she acknowledges that her extended service isn’t solely due to exceptional performance, she takes pride in her ability to keep her donors calm and facilitate their recoveries. She attributes her success to an instinctive understanding of when to offer comfort or space. Despite her competence, she humbly recognizes that other equally skilled carers receive less recognition, and she addresses

potential resentment over her privileges, such as choosing her donors, often favoring those from Hailsham, her childhood home.

Kathy explains that her preference for Hailsham donors stems from a natural inclination to connect with those who share her background, which helps sustain her emotional resilience. She recounts how reconnecting with Ruth, a childhood friend, reinforced the value of these bonds. Over time, however, fewer familiar donors remain, making her work increasingly challenging. This diminishing connection has led her to accept that her time as a carer is nearing its end, though she cherishes the memories and relationships she's maintained through her role.

A poignant moment with a dying donor highlights the significance of Hailsham in Kathy's life. The donor, nearing the end of his life, finds solace in Kathy's vivid descriptions of Hailsham, as if her memories could become his own. This encounter deepens Kathy's appreciation for her upbringing, realizing how fortunate she and her peers were. The donor's longing for her past underscores the emotional weight Hailsham carries for those who never experienced its comforts.

Now, as Kathy drives across the country, she often mistakes landscapes or buildings for Hailsham, particularly sports pavilions that evoke nostalgic memories. These structures remind her of the pavilion at Hailsham, a cherished place for solitude and camaraderie. The chapter closes with Kathy's lingering attachment to her past, as she continues to seek traces of Hailsham in the world around her, a testament to its enduring impact on her identity and emotions.

# Chapter 2: Two

The chapter begins with Kathy recalling an encounter with Tommy at Hailsham, a boarding school, where she approaches him as part of a self-imposed challenge. Their interaction occurs during a medical examination day, and Tommy apologizes for accidentally hitting her earlier. Despite Kathy's initial irritation, their brief conversation on the stairs marks the start of her growing interest in Tommy's struggles. The scene highlights the social dynamics among the students, particularly the pressure to conform to expected behaviors as they grow older.

Tommy's subsequent difficulties at Hailsham become a focal point. He faces frequent bullying and isolation, such as being excluded from running partners or having pranks played on him, some of which are cruel. Though physically strong, Tommy's temper and social awkwardness make him a target. Kathy observes these incidents but notes that no one intervenes, suggesting a collective indifference to his plight. This sets the stage for her deeper involvement in Tommy's life and the underlying social hierarchies at the school.

The chapter then delves into the importance of the Exchanges, a quarterly event where students trade artwork for tokens. These events shape social standing, as creativity is highly valued. Ruth, Kathy's friend, implies that Tommy's exclusion stems from his lack of participation in the Exchanges. The system reinforces peer validation, where artistic output determines respect and belonging. Kathy reflects on how this culture influenced their relationships, revealing the subtle pressures of conformity and the emotional weight placed on creative expression.

In the final section, Kathy and Ruth later reminisce about the Exchanges, acknowledging their significance in shaping Hailsham's unique environment. They discuss how even trivial creations, like poorly spelled poems, were treasured, highlighting the school's emphasis on art and mutual appreciation. However, Kathy

questions the logic behind valuing such items, hinting at deeper ambiguities in their upbringing. This reflection underscores the chapter’s exploration of memory, social norms, and the lasting impact of Hailsham’s culture on its students.

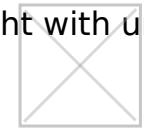
# Chapter 3: Three

The chapter opens with a description of the pond near Hailsham, a secluded yet oddly exposed spot where the narrator, Kathy, seeks out Tommy for a private conversation. Despite its tranquil setting with ducks and bulrushes, the pond is not ideal for discreet talks, as sound carries unpredictably and the house offers a clear line of sight. Kathy feigns an accidental encounter with Tommy, who is seated on a rock, and their initial small talk masks the tension from an earlier interrupted conversation in the lunch queue. The scene is set with careful observations of their clothing and surroundings, hinting at the guarded nature of their interactions.

Tommy reveals a pivotal moment involving Miss Lucy, one of the guardians at Hailsham, who reassured him that his lack of creativity was not a failing. Unlike other guardians who pressured him to improve, Miss Lucy emphasized that he shouldn’t be punished or judged for it. This conversation, which Tommy recalls in fragments, stood out because of Miss Lucy’s uncharacteristic intensity—she was visibly shaking with anger, though not directed at him. Her words deeply affected Tommy, giving him a newfound confidence and sense of validation, which Kathy notices has improved his demeanor in recent weeks.

The discussion between Kathy and Tommy delves into the implications of Miss Lucy’s words. Tommy struggles to articulate why her reassurance mattered so much, but it’s clear her support was transformative. He insists Kathy keep the conversation secret, though Miss Lucy never explicitly asked for confidentiality. The chapter subtly underscores the unusual dynamics at Hailsham, where guardians like Miss Lucy occasionally break from the institution’s norms, offering moments of unexpected solace to the students. Tommy’s relief and Kathy’s curiosity about Miss Lucy’s motives hint at larger, unspoken tensions within the school.

The chapter closes with Tommy’s insistence on secrecy, emphasizing the fragility of the trust Miss Lucy placed in him. Kathy agrees, but the encounter leaves her unsettled, pondering the significance of Miss Lucy’s actions. The scene captures the delicate balance of power and vulnerability at Hailsham, where small acts of kindness or defiance carry weighty implications. The pond, initially a backdrop for an awkward meeting, becomes a symbol of the students’ constrained lives—visible yet isolated, serene yet fraught with unspoken rules and hidden emotions.



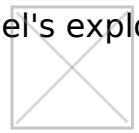
# Chapter 4: Four

The narrator, Kathy, reflects on her impending transition from being a carer, a role she has held for years, and her desire to revisit memories of her time at Hailsham, particularly those involving her friends Tommy and Ruth. She acknowledges how events at Hailsham profoundly shaped their later lives, including their curiosity about Madame, a mysterious figure who collected students' artwork. This curiosity, initially playful, grew into a significant preoccupation, though the students avoided probing too deeply, sensing the topic was fraught with unspoken complexities. The mention of Madame became rare, yet the idea of the "Gallery," where their art might be displayed, lingered in their minds.

The chapter delves into the "tokens controversy," a pivotal moment during their time at Hailsham when students began questioning the fairness of Madame taking their artwork without compensation. As the children grew older, they became more possessive of their creations, valuing them for their exchange value in tokens, the school's currency. The controversy erupted when students, led by Roy J., demanded tokens for artworks taken by Madame, sparking debates among both students and guardians. The guardians eventually compromised, offering minimal tokens, but the decision satisfied no one, highlighting the tension between honor and ownership.

During this period, Polly T. boldly asked Miss Lucy why Madame collected their artwork, breaking an unspoken taboo. Miss Lucy's cryptic response—that there was a "very important reason" beyond their current understanding—left the students both intrigued and unsettled. This moment, along with other hints, planted seeds of doubt and curiosity in Kathy's mind, which resurfaced years later during a conversation with Tommy. The chapter underscores how these early experiences at Hailsham were layered with unanswered questions, foreshadowing deeper revelations about their lives and purpose.

The chapter also touches on the students' "collections," personal treasures stored in wooden chests under their beds, which symbolized their growing attachment to material possessions. This shift in attitude contrasted with their earlier reverence for having artwork selected by Madame, reflecting their maturation and increasing awareness of value and loss. The tokens controversy and Miss Lucy's enigmatic words serve as early indicators of the larger mysteries surrounding Hailsham, setting the stage for the novel's exploration of identity, memory, and destiny.



# Chapter 5: Five

The chapter recounts the narrator's childhood memories of a "secret guard" formed by a group of students, led by Ruth, to protect their favorite guardian, Miss Geraldine, from a supposed kidnapping plot. The group, which fluctuated in size, believed the woods near Hailsham House were central to the conspiracy, fueled by eerie rumors and their own vivid imaginations. The woods, a constant ominous presence, were the subject of terrifying stories, including one about a ghostly former student. Despite their fears, the group's efforts to defend Miss Geraldine were largely passive, focusing on gathering "evidence" rather than taking action.

The secret guard's activities were dominated by Ruth's authority, as she claimed privileged knowledge of the plot from before others joined. This allowed her to control the group's decisions, such as expelling members or identifying conspirators. The narrator reflects on how the group, including herself, willingly sustained the fantasy, avoiding confrontations and keeping their suspicions from Miss Geraldine. The dynamic within the group highlights Ruth's manipulative tendencies and the others' complicity in prolonging the elaborate game, even as they likely sensed its fragility.

A pivotal moment in the chapter involves the narrator's attempt to learn chess from Ruth, who had portrayed herself as knowledgeable. Ruth's inability to teach the game properly—mistakenly describing chess as a variant of draughts—reveals her tendency to bluff and maintain an image of superiority. This incident underscores the narrator's growing awareness of Ruth's flaws and the gap between her self-presentation and reality, adding depth to their complex relationship.

The chapter blends childhood innocence with darker undertones, as the students' playful conspiracy is shadowed by their fear of the woods and the unsettling rumors surrounding Hailsham. The narrator's retrospective perspective adds layers of irony and nostalgia, emphasizing how the group's fantasies were both a refuge and a

reflection of their underlying anxieties. The woods, as a symbol of the unknown, loom large in their collective psyche, shaping their behavior and interactions.

# Chapter 6: Six

The chapter explores the strained yet unspoken tension between the narrator and Ruth following a conflict involving a pencil case and the Sales Register. Ruth’s subdued reaction—marked by shame rather than anger—leaves the narrator uneasy, as she feels unable to address the issue directly. Despite attempts to subtly reassure Ruth by highlighting her favor with Miss Geraldine, the unresolved conflict lingers, leaving the narrator frustrated and remorseful. The situation reaches a turning point when Midge A. innocently questions Ruth about the pencil case, and the narrator intervenes to deflect attention, earning Ruth’s silent gratitude.

Ruth’s relief and subsequent warmth toward the narrator signal a shift in their relationship, though neither openly acknowledges the incident. The narrator senses Ruth’s desire to reciprocate the kindness, creating a quiet anticipation between them. This unspoken bond contrasts with the earlier tension, offering a glimpse into the complexities of their friendship. The chapter also introduces the narrator’s sentimental attachment to a Judy Bridgewater tape, a possession tied to memories of Hailsham, foreshadowing its significance in later events.

The narrative shifts to reflect on Miss Emily’s geography lessons, which shaped the students’ perceptions of England’s counties through vivid calendar images. These lessons left a lasting impression, influencing how the narrator views the world even as an adult. The absence of a Norfolk calendar becomes a recurring joke among the students, hinting at its eventual symbolic importance. This nostalgic reflection underscores the chapter’s themes of memory and the enduring impact of childhood experiences.

The chapter concludes with a sense of unresolved emotions and anticipation, as the narrator hints at future events involving the lost tape and Norfolk. The interplay between past and present, along with the delicate dynamics of friendship, creates a

poignant atmosphere. The narrator’s introspective tone and attention to detail highlight the significance of seemingly small moments, weaving together personal history and emotional growth.

# Chapter 7: Seven

The narrator reflects on their final years at Hailsham, ages thirteen to sixteen, which they describe as a distinct and darker period compared to the earlier, more idyllic years. While not unhappy, this era felt more serious, marked by rapid changes and a shift in perspective. A pivotal moment was a conversation with Tommy by the pond, which prompted the narrator to start questioning things more deeply, particularly about their guardian, Miss Lucy. This talk served as a turning point, leading the narrator to observe Miss Lucy more closely for clues about the unspoken truths of their existence.

Miss Lucy’s behavior becomes a focal point for the narrator, who notices subtle anomalies in her actions and words. One instance occurs during an English class where students joke about electrified fences in prison camps, prompting a strange, somber reaction from Miss Lucy. Her quiet remark about accidents at Hailsham goes largely unnoticed by others but lingers with the narrator. These small, unsettling moments begin to paint Miss Lucy as different from the other guardians, hinting at deeper concerns she harbors about the students’ futures, though the narrator admits they may not have fully understood their significance at the time.

A more dramatic incident unfolds during a rainstorm at the pavilion, where Miss Lucy interrupts the students to address a conversation about future aspirations. Her tone is urgent as she chastises the boys for discussing unrealistic dreams like becoming actors or moving to America. She reveals that their lives are already predetermined, contradicting the vague hints they’ve been given about their futures. This moment underscores the tension between the students’ naive hopes and the harsh reality they are shielded from, with Miss Lucy emerging as the only guardian willing to confront this dissonance openly.

The chapter culminates in Miss Lucy’s unresolved revelation, leaving the students—and the reader—with a sense of foreboding. Her insistence that they must “know properly” suggests a grim truth lurking beneath the surface of Hailsham’s routines. The narrator’s retrospective perspective adds weight to these events, implying that these moments were early signs of the darker destiny awaiting them. The chapter masterfully builds tension, blending nostalgia with unease, as the students inch closer to understanding their constrained futures.

# Chapter 8: Eight

The chapter begins with the narrator, Kathy, recalling an incident at Hailsham when she was sixteen. After returning to a classroom to retrieve something, she engages in her secret game of imagining the school as a quiet, empty space. While absorbed in this activity, she hears a strange hissing sound and investigates, discovering Miss Lucy in a dimly lit room. Miss Lucy is frantically scribbling over pages of neat handwriting, her actions filled with anger and frustration. The encounter leaves Kathy feeling uneasy, though she struggles to articulate why, and she leaves abruptly, overwhelmed by shame and confusion.

Kathy becomes convinced that something significant—and possibly troubling—is about to happen involving Miss Lucy. Days pass without incident, but she later learns that Miss Lucy had a confrontation with Tommy, leaving him visibly upset. Kathy reflects on how her relationship with Tommy has grown distant, attributing his erratic behavior to his complicated dynamics with Ruth and others. She regrets not reaching out to him sooner, realizing she missed signs of his distress. The chapter hints at underlying tensions at Hailsham, with guardians like Miss Lucy seemingly harboring unspoken frustrations.

Tommy’s behavior becomes increasingly volatile, contrasting sharply with his usual demeanor. In one instance, he reacts with unexpected anger to a lighthearted comment from Laura about mud on his back, startling everyone. Another time, Kathy tries to share Patricia C.’s prized calendar with him, hoping to connect, but the moment is overshadowed by his moodiness. These incidents suggest Tommy is struggling internally, though the exact reasons remain unclear. Kathy’s narration underscores the growing emotional distance between them and the unresolved tensions simmering beneath the surface of their relationships.

The chapter closes with Kathy’s nostalgic reflection on Patricia C.’s calendar, a cherished artifact depicting scenes of Hailsham life. Its loss later symbolizes the fragility of their memories and connections. The narrative weaves together themes of secrecy, emotional turmoil, and the fleeting nature of childhood bonds, leaving readers with a sense of foreboding about the characters’ futures. Kathy’s retrospective voice adds depth, hinting at the inevitable changes and losses that lie ahead for her and her peers.

# Chapter 9: Nine

The chapter begins with Kathy reflecting on a conversation in the Art Room, where Cynthia E. casually mentions that Kathy is the "natural successor" to Ruth in Tommy's life. This remark unsettles Kathy, as it suggests an outside perspective on her relationship with Tommy, complicating her feelings. Around the same time, Hannah points out Tommy sitting alone, further fueling Kathy's confusion about the assumptions circulating among their peers. These interactions disrupt Kathy's previous plans to pursue a physical relationship with Harry, as she becomes preoccupied with the idea of being Tommy's next partner.

Kathy's initial resolve to be with Harry wavers as the "natural successor" notion takes hold. She recalls her careful preparations to approach Harry but now finds herself avoiding him, making excuses whenever they meet. Later, she reflects on this period with regret, realizing Harry might not have even been interested, and her behavior could have seemed absurd. The chapter then shifts to a poignant encounter years later, where Kathy briefly meets Harry at a recovery center after a donation. The interaction is bittersweet, as Harry doesn’t recognize her, leaving Kathy with a sense of gratitude for his past decency.

The narrative returns to Kathy's youth, describing the summer trend of sharing Walkmans among friends in the fields. These moments of communal music listening create a sense of camaraderie, contrasting with the underlying tension in Kathy's personal life. During one such session, Ruth approaches Kathy with a request: she wants to reunite with Tommy and asks Kathy to mediate. Ruth admits she trusts only Kathy to communicate her sincere intentions to Tommy, emphasizing their shared history and Kathy's unique influence over him.

Kathy agrees to help, though she is surprised by Ruth's sudden change of heart. The chapter ends with Ruth outlining her desire for a fresh start with Tommy,

acknowledging their past mistakes. Kathy, though conflicted, reassures Ruth of her support, setting the stage for the emotional complexities to come. The chapter captures the delicate dynamics of friendship, loyalty, and unspoken desires among the characters at Hailsham.

# Chapter 10: Ten

The chapter reflects on the narrator's memories of transitioning from Hailsham to the Cottages, focusing on the symbolic importance of their unfinished essays. Initially assigned as a long-term project, the essays seemed trivial until the move, when they became a comforting link to their past. The narrator revisits these thoughts while driving, musing on alternate approaches to the essay, though acknowledging it’s now just nostalgic daydreaming. The essays once provided stability in their new environment, but over time, their significance faded into mere reminiscence, akin to recalling childhood achievements or missed opportunities.

The Cottages, a repurposed farm, housed eight former Hailsham students, who initially viewed it as an extension of their old school. The dilapidated buildings and the grumpy caretaker, Keffers, created a rustic, often uncomfortable living situation. Despite the cold, leaky roofs, and muddy floors, the group adapted, finding excitement in their newfound independence. Keffers’ disdainful attitude contrasted sharply with the guardians’ care, reminding them they were now responsible for themselves—a transition Hailsham had prepared them for, albeit with lingering nostalgia for their former mentors.

The narrator’s close friends from Hailsham remained together at the Cottages, while others dispersed to different locations. Though they fantasized about visiting their peers, the group rarely ventured beyond the farm initially, daunted by the unfamiliar freedom. The veterans’ casual trips seemed unimaginable to them at first, highlighting their sheltered upbringing. The narrator reflects on how quickly they adapted, eventually embracing solitude and even learning to drive—a far cry from their initial bewilderment upon arrival.

The chapter closes with the group’s first day at the Cottages, standing together in uncertainty as Keffers ignored them. The setting, though picturesque with overgrown

grass, felt eerily off, like a distorted version of Hailsham’s familiar landscape. Ruth, usually confident, appeared uneasy, mirroring the group’s trepidation. This moment captures the dissonance between their past and present, foreshadowing the challenges and growth awaiting them in their new, unguided lives.

# Chapter 11: Eleven

The chapter delves into the complex dynamics of Kathy and Ruth’s friendship during their early months at the Cottages. Despite frequent quarrels, their bond was sustained by intimate nighttime conversations in Kathy’s attic room, where they confided in each other with a mutual understanding of confidentiality. This unspoken agreement was shattered when Ruth referenced Kathy’s private confession about her sexual experiences during an argument, leaving Kathy feeling betrayed. The incident highlights the fragility of their trust and the tension between their daytime conflicts and nighttime closeness.

Sex at the Cottages is portrayed as more mature and straightforward compared to their time at Hailsham, devoid of gossip or secrecy. However, Kathy reflects on its functional and often uncomfortable nature, describing encounters in freezing rooms under piles of makeshift bedding. This contrasts with her initial plan to form a meaningful relationship, as she instead found herself in unplanned one-night encounters. Her confusion and emotional turmoil led her to confide in Ruth, seeking reassurance about her feelings and desires.

Ruth’s response to Kathy’s confession was sympathetic but ultimately unhelpful, leaving Kathy unsettled. The chapter underscores the disparity between Ruth’s daytime persona—ambitious and eager to impress the veterans—and her nighttime self, who remained Kathy’s trusted confidante. Kathy’s realization that these two versions of Ruth might merge during their argument marks a turning point, as Ruth’s casual reference to Kathy’s private struggles felt like a breach of their sacred trust.

In hindsight, Kathy considers Ruth’s perspective, acknowledging that her own criticism of Ruth’s behavior might have provoked the betrayal. This reflection adds nuance to their conflict, suggesting that Ruth may have felt equally wronged. The chapter captures the fragility of their friendship, the challenges of navigating adulthood, and

the blurred lines between loyalty and self-preservation in their evolving relationship.

# Chapter 12: Twelve

The chapter begins with Kathy reflecting on the Norfolk trip, setting the stage for a deeper exploration of the concept of "possibles." She recalls a conversation with Ruth, who mentions that their friends Chrissie and Rodney claim to have spotted Ruth’s "possible" in a town called Cromer. This sparks Kathy’s skepticism, as she questions the motives behind Chrissie and Rodney’s story. The idea of "possibles"—individuals who might be the original models from whom they were cloned—is introduced, revealing its taboo yet fascinating nature among the students at Hailsham and later at the Cottages.

The chapter delves into the students' theories about "possibles," highlighting the lack of consensus on how to identify them. Some believe models would be older, resembling parental figures, while others argue age is irrelevant. The debate often fizzles out as it veers into uncomfortable territory. The underlying belief is that finding one’s model could offer insight into their identity and future, though this is more symbolic than literal. Despite some dismissing the idea as irrelevant, the fascination with "possibles" persists, and reported sightings often come in waves, stirring curiosity and speculation.

Kathy recounts Ruth’s detailed account of Rodney’s alleged sighting of her possible in an office with a glass front. Ruth is torn about whether to investigate further, while Kathy remains doubtful, suspecting Chrissie and Rodney of fabricating the story. Kathy’s skepticism stems from her observations of Chrissie’s manipulative behavior, such as her tendency to separate the group and her excessive interest in their Hailsham past. Rodney, though likable, is portrayed as overly influenced by Chrissie, further casting doubt on their credibility.

The chapter concludes with Kathy questioning the validity of the sighting, emphasizing her distrust of Chrissie and Rodney’s intentions. She reflects on their personalities,

noting Chrissie’s odd demeanor and Rodney’s subservience, which reinforce her belief that the story might be a ploy. This skepticism sets the tone for the upcoming Norfolk trip, hinting at underlying tensions and the emotional complexity surrounding the search for "possibles." The chapter masterfully blends personal dynamics with the broader existential themes of identity and destiny.

# Chapter 13: Thirteen

The chapter begins with a disrupted plan for a trip to Norfolk, as Rodney's arrangement to borrow a car falls through at the last minute. Ruth, who had previously acted indifferent about the trip, reacts strongly to the news, revealing her hidden investment in the journey. Despite her earlier claims that she was only humoring Chrissie, her visible distress suggests she cares deeply about finding her "possible"—a person from her past. The narrator, Kathy, attempts to cover for Ruth's reaction, hinting at the underlying tensions and unspoken emotions among the group.

Once the car issue is resolved, the group sets off early the next morning. Ruth's behavior during the ride becomes a source of tension as she monopolizes conversation with the veterans, Chrissie and Rodney, isolating Kathy and Tommy. When Kathy suggests rearranging seats to ease the awkward dynamic, Ruth reacts defensively, accusing her of causing trouble. This confrontation highlights Ruth's preoccupation with projecting a certain image to the veterans, revealing her insecurities and the group's fragile dynamics. The tension lingers, but Kathy reluctantly acquiesces to avoid further conflict.

Upon arriving at the seaside town, the mood lightens as the group enjoys the freedom and excitement of the trip. The scenic beauty and cheerful atmosphere temporarily overshadow their original purpose. A shared moment of laughter over a quirky café sign briefly restores the bond between Kathy and Ruth, offering a fleeting respite from the earlier strain. However, this harmony is short-lived, as the underlying tensions soon resurface.

The chapter concludes with the group avoiding the main reason for their trip—the search for Ruth's "possible." Instead, Chrissie and Rodney dominate the conversation with nostalgic stories about their friend Martin, leaving Kathy and Tommy feeling excluded. Their laughter feels performative, masking the unspoken discomfort and

highlighting the group’s disjointed priorities. The chapter underscores the complexities of their relationships and the unresolved emotions simmering beneath the surface.

# Chapter 14: Fourteen

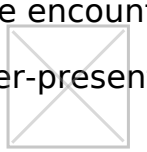
The chapter begins with Kathy and her friends leaving their accommodation in a somber mood, their initial excitement faded. Tensions are palpable, particularly between Ruth and Tommy, while Rodney and Chrissie seem suspicious that Kathy and the others are hiding secrets about Hailsham. The group navigates narrow streets before reaching the bustling High Street, where Rodney and Chrissie suggest buying birthday cards in bulk at Woolworth’s. Ruth is visibly annoyed, but the group enters the store, where Kathy finds comfort in the cheerful atmosphere. Meanwhile, Ruth and Chrissie engage in a private conversation about a rumored Hailsham secret, which Kathy inadvertently interrupts, worsening the group’s strained dynamics.

Inside Woolworth’s, the group disperses to explore different aisles, and Kathy overhears Ruth and Chrissie discussing the rumored secret. Chrissie presses Ruth about why she hasn’t pursued the mystery, to which Ruth responds that Hailsham students have always known they could investigate if they wanted. When Kathy is noticed, Ruth gives her a hostile look, deepening the tension. The group eventually leaves the store, and Rodney leads them on a frustrating search for an office where he claims to have seen Ruth’s “possible”—a woman who might be her genetic predecessor. After several wrong turns, they finally spot the office, which resembles a cozy, modern workplace.

Through the glass front, they observe a woman in her fifties who shares some physical traits with Ruth, including her hairstyle and facial expressions. The group watches intently until office workers notice them, causing them to flee in playful panic. Outside, they excitedly discuss the resemblance, relieved that the woman aligns with Ruth’s expectations. Ruth remains quiet but seems cautiously pleased, and the others support her, hoping the discovery will lift her spirits. The chapter hints at a temporary reprieve from the day’s tensions, as the group believes the encounter has validated

Ruth’s hopes.

However, Ruth suggests they wait and observe the woman again, revealing her lingering uncertainty. Chrissie agrees a bit too eagerly, hinting at unresolved tensions beneath the surface. The chapter ends on an ambiguous note, leaving open whether this discovery will truly resolve Ruth’s inner conflict or if the group’s underlying issues will resurface. The encounter with the “possible” serves as a pivotal moment, blending hope with the ever-present shadows of their shared past and unspoken grievances.



# Chapter 15: Fifteen

In Chapter Fifteen, Kathy and Tommy share a quiet moment together after the others have left, discussing Ruth’s recent behavior. Tommy dismisses her comments as mere venting, insisting that their origins or "models" don’t define them. Kathy agrees, though her mood is subdued. Their conversation shifts when Tommy reveals he had been searching for a replacement for Kathy’s lost Judy Bridgewater tape, a sentimental item from their time at Hailsham. His earnest but clumsy efforts to find it in a Woolworth’s store earlier that day end in failure, as he couldn’t recall the tape’s details. Kathy is touched by his thoughtfulness, and their shared nostalgia lightens the atmosphere.

The pair decide to embark on a spontaneous search for the tape in Norfolk, playfully embracing the idea of it being the "lost corner of England." Tommy’s childlike belief in the possibility of finding it amuses Kathy, but she humors him, suggesting they look in second-hand shops. Their quest becomes less about the tape and more about the joy of spending time together, exploring dusty stores filled with eclectic items. The experience rekindles a sense of carefree connection, as they lose themselves in the thrill of the hunt, momentarily forgetting the weight of their circumstances.

As they rummage through various shops, their focus shifts from the tape to the simple pleasure of each other’s company. Kathy describes the warmth she feels during this shared adventure, a rare moment of uncomplicated happiness. Tommy’s enthusiasm is infectious, and even when their initial searches prove fruitless, they continue with lighthearted determination. The chapter captures the bittersweet beauty of their bond, as the search becomes a metaphor for their deeper longing for meaning and connection in a world that often denies them both.

The chapter culminates in Kathy’s unexpected discovery of the tape in a second-hand shop. Her reaction is mixed—surprise, hesitation, and even a fleeting desire to ignore

it, as its appearance threatens to end their joyful escapade. When she finally shows it to Tommy, his skepticism mirrors her own ambivalence. The moment is poignant, underscoring how the tape symbolizes both their shared past and the fleeting nature of happiness. The chapter ends on an unresolved note, leaving their emotions and the significance of the find open to interpretation.

# Chapter 16: Sixteen

After returning from their Norfolk trip, Kathy, Ruth, and Tommy avoid discussing it, leaving others to speculate. Ruth remains silent, possibly due to embarrassment or a desire to maintain mystery, and the others follow her lead. This secrecy allows Kathy to hide the fact that Tommy bought her a Judy Bridgewater tape, though she occasionally wishes to share it with Ruth. The tape becomes a guilty secret, and its eventual discovery by Ruth happens at an unfortunate time, adding to the tension between them.

As spring arrives, more veterans leave the Cottages to begin training, creating a mix of envy and unease among those who remain. The departures of Alice F. and Gordon C., both from Hailsham, mark a shift in the atmosphere, making the reality of their futures more palpable. Rumors about deferrals for couples in love resurface, but the group who went to Norfolk, including Chrissie and Rodney, now avoid such discussions. The "Norfolk effect" lingers, even affecting Kathy and Tommy’s conversations about his Gallery theory.

One exception occurs when Tommy shows Kathy his intricate drawings of imaginary animals in the dilapidated goosehouse. The drawings, far more detailed than Kathy expected, reveal Tommy’s creativity and vulnerability. Though she struggles to offer wholehearted praise, she is drawn to the creatures, sensing Tommy’s underlying worries about their impracticality. The mention of Madame, a figure from Hailsham, creates an awkward moment, hinting at unresolved tensions about their past and future.

Tommy contemplates whether to keep his artwork private or share it more openly, as other veterans do with their creative pursuits. Kathy’s hesitation to praise him reflects her uncertainty about the drawings’ significance and her concern for Tommy’s emotional state. The chapter underscores the growing unease among the characters

as they grapple with their identities, relationships, and the looming inevitability of their roles in society.

# Chapter 17: Seventeen

The chapter reflects on a pivotal moment in the relationships between Kathy, Ruth, and Tommy, revealing how a seemingly minor conflict in the churchyard marked the beginning of their emotional distance. Kathy initially dismisses the incident as trivial but later realizes it symbolized deeper tensions pulling them apart. The bonds formed at Hailsham, once unbreakable, begin to fray as their priorities shift, particularly with more students leaving to become carers. Kathy’s attempts to maintain their shared academic pursuits feel increasingly futile, highlighting the erosion of their collective identity.

The dynamics between the trio grow strained, especially between Ruth and Tommy, who maintain a superficial closeness despite growing apart. Kathy observes their fading connection but finds it difficult to address directly, as open communication has become fraught. Tommy’s sensitivity about his artwork and Ruth’s dismissive attitude create unresolved tension. Kathy regrets not resolving the conflict earlier, recognizing that time and changing circumstances have made reconciliation more complicated, particularly with Tommy’s new relationship with Lenny adding another layer of distance.

A candid conversation between Kathy and Ruth in an abandoned bus shelter exposes underlying tensions. Ruth admits to mishandling her relationship with Tommy, acknowledging his hurt over her comments about his art. The discussion takes a sharper turn when Ruth reveals her belief that Tommy would never see Kathy as a romantic partner, citing his preference for inexperienced girls. This revelation stuns Kathy, who masks her hurt with detachment. Ruth frames the disclosure as necessary honesty, but it leaves Kathy reeling, unable to respond meaningfully.

The chapter underscores the inevitability of change and the fragility of relationships as the characters navigate adulthood. Kathy’s introspection reveals her growing

awareness of how their shared past at Hailsham no longer shields them from conflict or emotional drift. Ruth’s blunt honesty, though painful, forces Kathy to confront realities she had avoided. The bus shelter conversation becomes a microcosm of their unraveling connections, marked by missed opportunities, unspoken feelings, and the lingering weight of unresolved history.

# 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.

# Chapter 19: Nineteen

The chapter begins with the narrator and Ruth arriving at the Kingsfield recovery centre, a poorly maintained and inconveniently located facility. Unlike Ruth’s well-equipped centre in Dover, Kingsfield is described as unfinished, with inadequate amenities and a lack of comfort for its donors. The narrator reflects on a photograph discovered later, showing the centre’s past as a vibrant holiday camp with a swimming pool, now replaced by a desolate square. The contrast between the joyful past and the bleak present underscores the centre’s unsettling atmosphere, symbolized by the remnants of a diving board frame, evoking imagery of a diver crashing into cement.

During their visit, the narrator and Ruth encounter Tommy, who appears healthier but carries a faint medical odor. The reunion is awkward, with Ruth hesitating to exit the car and later observing Tommy and the narrator with a detached, almost frozen expression. Tommy’s initial embrace with the narrator creates tension, and the donors watching from a distance add to the unease. The scene highlights the strained dynamics between the three characters, with Ruth’s silent scrutiny and Tommy’s discomfort hinting at unresolved emotions and past conflicts.

As they drive through the countryside, the sun breaks through the clouds, and Ruth wears a quiet smile. The conversation remains superficial, avoiding deeper topics, though Tommy mentions his health struggles and missed opportunities to visit a boat. Ruth’s prolonged gaze at Tommy and her rambling anecdote about an unknown donor create an uncomfortable silence. When the narrator interrupts her, Tommy’s sudden laugh of agreement creates a fleeting moment of connection between him and the narrator, leaving Ruth withdrawn and distant. This moment reignites a sense of closeness between the narrator and Tommy, contrasting with Ruth’s isolation.

The chapter concludes with the group arriving at a wooded area, where the narrator hesitates at the choice of paths. The unresolved tension between the characters

lingers, mirroring the uncertainty of their journey. The chapter captures themes of memory, loss, and the fragility of relationships, set against the backdrop of a decaying recovery centre and the haunting remnants of its happier past. The emotional undercurrents suggest deeper complexities in the characters’ histories and futures.

# Chapter 20: Twenty

The chapter begins with Kathy becoming Tommy’s carer at Kingsfield, a year after their trip to see the boat. Tommy is recovering from his third donation and is given a spacious but oddly shaped room, which they adapt to comfortably. Their days are peaceful, filled with reading classics like *The Odyssey* and casual conversations, rekindling their bond. Despite the idyllic atmosphere, there’s an underlying tension as they navigate their new roles and the unspoken weight of their past.

Their relationship takes a new turn as they begin a physical intimacy that had been absent for years. Kathy initiates it cautiously, aware of Tommy’s recovery and their shared history. While the act brings them closer, it’s tinged with melancholy, as if they’ve missed their chance for a deeper connection earlier in life. Tommy’s quiet acceptance and the lingering sadness hint at the inevitability of their circumstances, even as they try to lose themselves in passion.

The chapter also explores Tommy’s continued fascination with his imaginary animal drawings, a creative outlet from his youth. Kathy notices his meticulous work on a frog-like creature, sparking curiosity about his artistic process. The sketches, detailed and imaginative, serve as a reminder of their shared past at the Cottages. Yet, the topic remains delicate, as it’s tied to unresolved emotions and the possibility of seeking a deferral, a plan once suggested by Ruth.

Throughout the chapter, the contrast between their tender moments and the looming reality of their roles as donors creates a poignant tension. The frosted glass of Tommy’s room, the sounds of other donors outside, and Tommy’s occasional remarks about his declining vitality underscore their fleeting time together. Their attempts to hold onto each other, both physically and emotionally, highlight the bittersweet nature of their relationship, caught between love and inevitability.

# Chapter 21: Twenty-One

Kathy and Tommy arrive in Littlehampton after a fraught journey marked by car troubles, delayed medical tests, and Tommy’s carsickness. Despite their exhaustion, they press on, searching for Madame, a figure from their past at Hailsham. As they walk through the town, Tommy spots her dressed in her signature grey suit, and they follow her at a distance. The straight, sunlit seafront road makes it easy to track her, and the rhythmic sounds of their footsteps and Tommy’s bag create an eerie tension as they trail her toward her home.

Upon reaching Madame’s house, Tommy grows agitated and speeds up, forcing Kathy to restrain him. Madame initially seems unaware of their presence until Kathy calls out, startling her. Her reaction is cold and wary, as if she recognizes them as former Hailsham students but views them with discomfort. After a tense exchange, Kathy reassures her they mean no harm, and Madame reluctantly invites them inside. The narrow, dimly lit hallway and the faint sounds from upstairs add to the unsettling atmosphere as they enter.

Inside, the house feels frozen in time, with Victorian furniture and a sealed fireplace. A poorly lit watercolor of Hailsham sparks a quiet argument between Kathy and Tommy about its accuracy, revealing their lingering attachment to their past. The tension escalates when they hear voices upstairs, including Madame’s, suggesting someone else is present. The chapter ends with Kathy and Tommy waiting uneasily in the front room, uncertain of what will happen next, as Madame’s cryptic words and the house’s eerie silence deepen the mystery.

The chapter captures a pivotal moment of confrontation and unresolved tension. Kathy and Tommy’s journey to find Madame reflects their desperation for answers, while her ambiguous reaction hints at deeper secrets. The setting—both the town and Madame’s home—mirrors their emotional state: worn, uncertain, and haunted by the past. The

unresolved ending leaves readers questioning Madame’s motives and the significance of the voices upstairs, setting the stage for further revelations.

# Chapter 22: Twenty-Two

In Chapter Twenty-Two of *Never Let Me Go*, Kathy and Tommy reunite with Miss Emily, a former guardian from Hailsham, who is now elderly and confined to a wheelchair. Miss Emily reminisces about their time at Hailsham, acknowledging their growth and expressing pride in their accomplishments. She reveals that she and Madame (Marie-Claude) have become disillusioned with their past efforts, though Miss Emily still believes their work deserves respect. The conversation takes a somber turn as Miss Emily prepares to leave momentarily, insisting on supervising the removal of a cherished bedside cabinet from her Hailsham days, highlighting her attachment to the past.

Kathy and Tommy confront Miss Emily about a long-standing rumor among Hailsham students: the possibility of deferring their fate as donors. Miss Emily dismisses the rumor, explaining that it has persisted for years but has never been true, despite occasional hopeful couples seeking confirmation. She admits feeling regret for those who genuinely believed in the rumor but maintains that it served as a harmless fantasy for most. Her tone suggests a deeper, unspoken truth, leaving Kathy with a sense that there may be more to the story than Miss Emily is revealing.

Tommy presses further, questioning why Hailsham collected students' artwork if the rumor of deferrals was false. Miss Emily confirms the existence of the Gallery, now housed in her home, though scaled down. Kathy then raises a more profound question: why were they educated and encouraged to create art if their ultimate fate was inevitable? Madame interjects, echoing this existential inquiry, asking, "Why Hailsham at all?" This moment underscores the central mystery of their upbringing and its purpose, hinting at unresolved tensions between the guardians' ideals and the harsh reality of the students' lives.

The chapter ends with Miss Emily reflecting on her longstanding skepticism about Hailsham’s mission, contrasting it with Madame’s recent disillusionment. She implies that she was the only one who questioned their efforts from the beginning, while others, like Madame, only began to doubt after the Morningdale scandal. The exchange leaves Kathy and Tommy with more questions than answers, deepening the novel’s exploration of identity, purpose, and the ethics of their existence.

# Chapter 23: Twenty-Three

In Chapter Twenty-Three of *Never Let Me Go*, Kathy observes subtle but significant changes in Tommy’s behavior following their trip to the Cottages. While he continues drawing his animal pictures, he becomes secretive about doing so in her presence, which she interprets as an attempt to avoid awkwardness. Their relationship remains strained, though they still share intimate moments, including occasional sex. However, Kathy notices Tommy increasingly aligning himself with fellow donors, often redirecting conversations to their experiences. This shift creates a growing emotional distance, as Tommy seems more invested in his donor friendships than in their shared past.

One poignant moment occurs when Kathy arrives at Kingsfield and finds Tommy engrossed in a conversation with other donors. Despite noticing her, he delays joining her, leaving her feeling excluded. This incident highlights Tommy’s deepening connection to the donor community and his subtle resentment toward Kathy’s role as his carer. The tension between them lingers even when they retreat to his room, marking a departure from their earlier dynamic. Kathy acknowledges her own feelings of resentment, recognizing parallels between Tommy’s donor group and her former clique at Hailsham, which stirs unresolved emotions.

Tommy’s attitude toward Kathy’s non-donor status becomes another source of friction. He occasionally dismisses her perspectives, joking that she wouldn’t understand certain things until she becomes a donor herself. While these remarks are often lighthearted, they underscore the growing divide between them. A more serious conflict arises when Tommy insists on handling his own laundry, implying Kathy’s care is unnecessary. These small clashes reflect the broader existential anxieties surrounding their roles, particularly as Tommy faces his fourth donation—a milestone fraught with uncertainty and fear.

The chapter culminates in a discussion about the ominous rumors surrounding the fourth donation, including speculation about what happens afterward. Tommy voices his fears about the possibility of never truly “completing,” a concern Kathy dismisses as baseless. Despite their attempts to navigate these fears together, the underlying tension remains unresolved. The chapter closes with Kathy and Tommy walking through the neglected field at Kingsfield, a metaphor for their uncertain future and the emotional wilderness they must traverse as their relationship continues to evolve.