Leaving Time

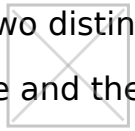
Leaving Time (2014) by **Jodi Picoult** is a **mystery-driven drama** blending **grief, memory, and the supernatural**. The story follows **13-year-old Jenna Metcalf**, who has spent a decade searching for her missing mother, **Alice**, a scientist studying elephant grief. After her mother's mysterious disappearance from an elephant sanctuary—following a tragic accident involving an elephant and Jenna's father—Jenna hires **a disgraced psychic** and **a retired detective** to uncover the truth.

The novel alternates between **Jenna's present-day investigation** and **Alice's past research notes**, revealing eerie parallels between elephant mourning rituals and human emotions. As Jenna gets closer to the truth, she must confront painful secrets about her family—and the possibility that her mother's disappearance was no accident.

Chapter 1: Jenna

The chapter introduces Jenna, a precocious thirteen-year-old with an exceptional understanding of memory. She distinguishes between different types of memory—factual, sensory, academic, and personal—and reflects on her early fascination with the subject, which led her to conduct independent studies in school. Jenna's first memory, from when she was just nine months old, involves her mother feeding her cotton candy and speaking to her in Xhosa, a language she learned in South Africa. This vivid recollection contrasts sharply with her inability to remember the traumatic night her mother disappeared, a gap she attributes to the brain's tendency to suppress or distort traumatic events.

Jenna’s mother was a scientist who studied memory in elephants, a topic Jenna has internalized. She explains how elephants never forget, linking strong emotions to memory formation, with negative experiences leaving indelible marks while traumatic ones often fade into oblivion. Jenna’s own memory of her mother’s disappearance is fragmented: she recalls being three years old, her mother found unconscious near a dead body, and her subsequent disappearance from the hospital. These events split Jenna’s life into two distinct phases, leaving her grappling with the void left by her mother’s absence and the unanswered questions surrounding it.



Jenna’s social struggles at school highlight her isolation. Despite her intellectual prowess, she fails to connect with her peers, particularly the popular girls who dismiss her as an outsider. Her focus on scientific facts and elephant herds sets her apart from typical eighth-grade interests, reinforcing her sense of alienation. Yet, Jenna remains undeterred, prioritizing her quest to understand her mother’s disappearance over fitting in. Her memories of life after the incident are patchy, marked by a new bedroom at her grandmother’s house and unsettling visits to her catatonic father, who barely responds to her presence.

The chapter concludes with Jenna’s haunting nightmares, triggered by the distant trumpeting of Maura, an elephant her mother once studied. Though logically aware that Maura is far away, Jenna feels the elephant is trying to communicate with her, a lingering connection to her mother’s world. This unresolved tension underscores Jenna’s relentless pursuit of closure, blending her scientific curiosity with an emotional longing to piece together the fragments of her past. The chapter sets the stage for her journey to uncover the truth about her mother’s disappearance and the mysteries surrounding that fateful night.

Chapter 2: Alice

The chapter explores the remarkable memory and cognitive abilities of elephants, challenging the common perception of the phrase "memory like an elephant" as mere cliché. It begins with an anecdote about an Asian elephant in Thailand that accurately returned shoes to the correct children, demonstrating their ability to recognize and remember individual items. This example sets the stage for a deeper discussion on how elephants retain complex information, suggesting their memory is not just a myth but a scientifically observable trait.

Further evidence of elephants' long-term memory is provided through their reactions to traumatic experiences. In Botswana, a female elephant charged a helicopter, associating it with past culling events. Similarly, elephants at a sanctuary exhibited stress when hearing medical helicopters, linking the sound to historical violence. These behaviors highlight how elephants retain vivid memories of past threats, often reacting aggressively or defensively when encountering similar situations decades later.

The chapter also examines elephants' ability to distinguish between friend and foe using olfactory cues. A study in Kenya revealed that elephants could differentiate between the scents of the Masai, who historically hunted them, and the Kamba, who did not. Without visual contact, the elephants displayed fear and avoidance behaviors toward the Masai's scent, showcasing their sophisticated sensory perception and memory. This contrasts with humans, who often fail to recognize potential dangers despite having advanced cognitive abilities.

The concluding reflection poses a thought-provoking question: "What won’t they forget?" This underscores the chapter's central theme—elephants' extraordinary memory is not just about recall but also about emotional and survival-based retention. Their ability to remember trauma, recognize threats, and perform complex tasks suggests their memory is deeply intertwined with their social and environmental

interactions, making it a vital aspect of their survival.



Chapter 3: Serenity

The chapter "Serenity" introduces a protagonist who, from a young age, possesses the ability to see and interact with spirits invisible to others. As a child, she encounters various apparitions, from a boy under the jungle gym to an elderly woman singing lullabies. Her family acknowledges her psychic gift, tracing it back to her ancestors, but advises her to conceal it to avoid social alienation. Moving to New Hampshire, she learns to suppress her visions, such as foreseeing a teacher's ink-stained blouse or a gerbil's escape, to fit in with her peers.

Despite her efforts to hide her abilities, Serenity's gift resurfaces when she foresees her friend Maureen's injury during a playground swing jump. Choosing not to warn Maureen to avoid being labeled a freak, she witnesses the accident and loses her friendship. This pivotal moment leads her to vow always to speak up when her visions could prevent harm, even at personal cost. The chapter highlights her internal conflict between self-preservation and moral responsibility, as well as the isolating consequences of her gift.

As Serenity matures, she becomes more adept at distinguishing between the living and spirits, though her abilities have limits. She fails to predict her father's suicide or her mother's stroke, leading her to question the selective nature of her visions. She rationalizes that some knowledge is withheld for a reason, as knowing everything would diminish life's purpose. After her father's death, she and her mother relocate to Connecticut, where she explores her identity through Wicca and tarot readings in college, embracing her gift more openly.

In college, Serenity meets Shanae, a fellow occult enthusiast, who introduces her to spirit guides like Lucinda and Desmond. These guides help her navigate the paranormal realm safely, teaching her to set boundaries and control her abilities. The chapter concludes with Serenity's growing acceptance of her gift, aided by her guides,

as she learns to balance her psychic insights with a fulfilling life. The narrative underscores themes of self-discovery, the burden of foresight, and the importance of mentorship in mastering one's unique talents.



Chapter 4: Alice

The chapter explores the profound understanding of death among elephants, highlighting their unique grieving rituals. Unlike humans, elephants do not conceptualize afterlife but experience grief purely as loss. They show no interest in the bones of other species but exhibit reverence toward deceased elephants, even long after death. When encountering elephant remains, they approach cautiously, touching and smelling the bones with their trunks and feet, sometimes carrying them or rocking gently over fragments. This behavior suggests a deep, instinctual recognition of their own kind.

Elephant death rituals are well-documented by researchers, underscoring their consistency across observations. The chapter cites George Adamson’s account of elephants relocating the bones of a shot bull elephant back to its death site. Other renowned researchers, including Cynthia Moss and Joyce Poole, have recorded similar behaviors. The narrator, likely a field researcher, aligns their own observations with these findings, emphasizing the universality of elephant mourning practices. These rituals reflect a communal response to death, transcending individual herds.

A poignant example involves the matriarch Bontle, whose death is witnessed by the narrator in Botswana. Her herd’s immediate reaction—attempting to lift her, mounting her, and the calf’s desperate attempts to revive her—reveals their distress. Once Bontle dies, the elephants cover her body with leaves and dirt, standing vigil for days. Years later, the herd still pauses at the site of her remains, particularly her skull. The calf, now grown, interacts with the skull as if recognizing his mother, suggesting long-term memory and emotional attachment.

The chapter concludes by reinforcing the idea that elephants possess a sophisticated awareness of death, marked by rituals that mirror human mourning in their solemnity and persistence. Their actions—covering the body, returning to remains, and

displaying quiet reverence—speak to an emotional depth that challenges simplistic views of animal cognition. The narrator’s firsthand account lends credibility to these observations, inviting readers to reconsider the boundaries of grief and memory in the animal kingdom.



Chapter 5: Jenna

In Chapter 5 of *Leaving Time*, Jenna confronts Serenity, a psychic, about a dream involving her missing mother. Jenna clings to the hope that her mother is alive, despite Serenity's vague and metaphorical descriptions. The dream features a woman with a blue scarf and an elephant, details Jenna latches onto as proof. Serenity cautions that psychic visions are often symbolic, recounting a past case where "China" and "rose" symbolized inherited china rather than literal locations. Jenna, however, remains undeterred, her desperation overshadowing skepticism as she imagines reuniting with her mother.

Jenna proposes using Serenity's dream as new evidence to reopen her mother's case, but Serenity dismisses the idea, explaining that law enforcement won't consider psychic visions credible. Jenna counters by questioning how Serenity's abilities work, prompting Serenity to describe her past methods of using personal items to locate missing children. Despite Serenity's admission of her imperfect track record, Jenna remains convinced of her legitimacy, especially after Serenity unknowingly referenced the blue scarf Jenna had left behind earlier.

Determined to act, Jenna impulsively leads Serenity to the Stark Nature Preserve, a former elephant sanctuary in New Hampshire founded by Jenna's father. She reveals her father's work as an animal behaviorist and the sanctuary's history, connecting it to the elephant in Serenity's dream. Jenna's urgency suggests she believes the vision points to this location, though Serenity remains skeptical. The chapter highlights Jenna's unwavering hope and her willingness to interpret ambiguous clues as direct leads.

The chapter ends with Jenna urging Serenity to guide them further into the preserve, testing the psychic's abilities in real time. Jenna's mix of determination and vulnerability underscores her emotional journey—balancing logic with longing.

Serenity's reluctance contrasts with Jenna's fervor, creating tension between skepticism and faith. The setting of the abandoned sanctuary adds a layer of mystery, leaving readers to wonder whether the dream holds truth or is merely another dead end in Jenna's search.



Chapter 6: Alice

The chapter explores the complex emotional responses of elephants when encountering the remains of their own species, particularly focusing on whether they can distinguish between bones of familiar individuals versus strangers. Observations of elephants in the wild have shown clear signs of grief—silence, physical drooping, and gentle touching—when they come across elephant bones. However, scientific experiments conducted in Amboseli, Kenya, aimed to test this further by presenting elephants with various objects, including ivory, skulls, and wood, to measure their reactions and preferences.

Researchers conducted controlled experiments with elephant herds, introducing items like ivory fragments, elephant skulls, and non-elephant skulls to observe behavioral differences. The results showed elephants were most drawn to ivory, followed by elephant skulls, suggesting a species-specific recognition. When presented with skulls of elephants, rhinos, and buffalo, the elephants consistently prioritized elephant remains, indicating a clear preference for their own kind. This reinforced the idea that elephants have a unique connection to their species' remains.

A deeper layer of the study involved presenting skulls of deceased matriarchs to herds that had known them. Contrary to expectations, the elephants did not show a stronger reaction to their own former leaders' skulls compared to others. This raised questions about whether elephants truly grieve specific individuals or simply respond to elephant remains in general. While earlier anecdotes suggested deep, personal mourning, the experimental results seemed to challenge this, leaving room for debate about the nature of elephant emotions.

The chapter concludes by reflecting on the implications of these findings. While the study demonstrates elephants' fascination with their species' bones, it also complicates the understanding of elephant grief. The absence of preferential behavior

toward familiar remains might suggest that elephants mourn elephants as a collective rather than as individuals. Alternatively, it could imply that the loss of any matriarch—regardless of personal connection—holds universal significance, hinting at a broader, communal sense of loss among elephants.



Chapter 7: Virgil

The chapter introduces Virgil, a private investigator haunted by an unsolved case involving Alice Metcalf, who disappeared a decade ago. Virgil reflects on how every cop has a case that lingers—a failure that becomes a personal ghost. For his former colleague Donny Boylan, it was the murder of a pregnant woman he failed to protect; for Virgil, it's Alice's unexplained vanishing. Plagued by guilt and alcoholism, Virgil often hallucinates Alice in his shabby office, where he drowns his regrets in whiskey. The chapter establishes Virgil's tormented psyche and his unresolved past.

The narrative shifts to a flashback ten years earlier, when Virgil was a rookie cop assisting Donny with a case at the New England Elephant Sanctuary. A caregiver named Nevvie was found dead in the elephant enclosure, complicating Donny's impending retirement. The sanctuary had been controversial from its inception, with locals fearing the "violent" elephants. Despite initial protests, the facility had operated without incident until Nevvie's death. Virgil and Donny wait impatiently for the elephants to be secured, revealing the logistical challenges of investigating a crime scene shared with massive, agitated animals.

Thomas Metcalf, the sanctuary's founder, arrives distraught and blames himself for the tragedy, suggesting the elephants sensed tension and acted out. His erratic behavior and cryptic remarks about elephant behavior raise questions. As Virgil and the team prepare to examine the body, a thunderous elephant roar interrupts them, underscoring the raw power of the animals. Metcalf's grim warning about elephant stampedes hints at the danger lurking in the enclosure, leaving Virgil uneasy about what they might discover.

The chapter builds suspense around Nevvie's death, intertwining Virgil's personal demons with the unfolding mystery. The sanctuary's eerie atmosphere, Metcalf's guilt, and the unpredictable elephants create a sense of foreboding. Virgil's present-day

struggles with alcohol and guilt mirror the unresolved case, suggesting a deeper connection between Alice's disappearance and the sanctuary's dark history. The chapter sets the stage for a complex investigation that will force Virgil to confront his past failures.



Chapter 8: Alice

The chapter explores the mechanics of memory through an analogy comparing the brain to a central office, where the hippocampus acts as an administrative assistant filing daily experiences. Memories are organized thematically for easier retrieval, such as grouping conflicts with a spouse or festive events. However, memory lapses occur when experiences aren't properly encoded or are misfiled—like failing to notice a crying woman at a baseball game because attention was elsewhere or due to incorrect association with unrelated past events. The text also touches on how dreams can unexpectedly resurface buried memories, likening them to accidental discoveries of hidden treasures.

Memory capacity varies among individuals, with repeated activities strengthening neural connections. The chapter cites London taxi drivers, whose hippocampi enlarge from spatial navigation demands, though it's unclear whether this is innate or developed. Conversely, PTSD sufferers often have smaller hippocampi, potentially due to stress hormones impairing memory function. Elephants, in contrast, possess enlarged hippocampi, enabling remarkable recall—evidenced by studies showing female elephants recognizing over 100 individuals. One experiment revealed elephants mourning a deceased matriarch, responding to her recorded call months later, suggesting advanced memory and abstract thought.

Elephant matriarchs serve as living archives, guiding herds with knowledge of migratory routes and survival strategies, even for paths unused in their lifetimes. The chapter highlights a case in Pilanesberg, where orphaned young elephants, traumatized by culling, struggled to function until reintroduced to older females, Notch and Felicia. These matriarchs stabilized the herd, demonstrating the critical role of memory in social structure. When Felicia was injured, her herd faced renewed instability, prompting researchers to leverage elephant memory by reuniting the

matriarchs with their former trainer, Randall, after a decade-long separation.

Randall's reunion with the elephants underscores their profound recall. Despite the herd's skittishness, the matriarchs recognized his voice and commands, responding with trust while the younger elephants fled. Notch even inspected Randall affectionately before rejoining her herd, illustrating how deeply elephants retain social bonds. This poignant interaction reinforces the chapter's central theme: memory is not merely functional but deeply tied to identity, relationships, and survival—whether in humans or elephants. The narrative bridges scientific insight with emotional resonance, emphasizing memory's role in continuity and connection.

Chapter 9: Jenna

The chapter opens with Jenna recalling a vivid memory of her parents, sparked by a fragment of conversation preserved in her mother's journal. The scene unfolds with her parents playfully debating the existence of monogamy in the animal kingdom, her mother—a scientist—dismissing each example her father provides as circumstantial or chemically driven. Their banter, filled with humor and affection, culminates in a tender moment where her father compares their love to the anglerfish's extreme monogamy, kissing her mother as they laugh. Jenna observes this interaction, noting how their silent communication mirrors the unseen ways elephants communicate, a detail that hints at her mother's work and Jenna's own longing to understand her.

Jenna's narrative shifts to reflect on her mother's journals, which are filled with meticulous elephant behavior observations from Botswana. While reading them, Jenna fixates not on the scientific data but on the personal traces of her mother—her handwriting, the pressure of her pencil—hoping to reconstruct her identity from these fragments. This mirrors her mother's own scientific process of piecing together elephant behavior, though Jenna feels frustrated by the gaps in her understanding. She muses that Virgil, the detective she's enlisted to help find her missing mother, might share this tendency to focus on missing pieces rather than the bigger picture.

The chapter then transitions to Jenna's present-day interaction with Virgil, who agrees to take her case despite his hungover state. Skeptical of his reliability, she insists on driving him to a diner for coffee, only to reveal her "car" is a bicycle. Their comedic journey—with Virgil awkwardly perched on the handlebars—highlights Jenna's precociousness and determination. The scene underscores her resourcefulness and the odd-couple dynamic between them, as she navigates the challenges of being a teenager investigating her mother's disappearance without adult support.

The summary concludes with Jenna questioning Virgil about the lack of effort in searching for her mother, pointing out the absence of flyers or a command center. This moment reveals her frustration with the authorities’ indifference and her relentless drive to uncover the truth. The chapter blends nostalgia for her parents’ love story with her present-day quest, emphasizing Jenna’s emotional depth and the unresolved mystery that propels her forward.



Chapter 10: Alice

The chapter explores the profound empathy exhibited by elephants, drawing parallels to human behavior through anecdotes and scientific observations. It begins with an African proverb emphasizing collective strength, which sets the stage for discussing elephant social dynamics. Researchers in Amboseli documented elephants displaying empathy by comforting distressed herd members, protecting calves, and assisting injured individuals. These behaviors suggest a sophisticated emotional intelligence, challenging traditional views of animal cognition and highlighting their capacity for cooperative care.

The narrative shifts to personal observations, such as the story of Stumpy, a bull elephant whose trunk was damaged by a snare. His herd consistently fed him despite his inability to forage independently, demonstrating altruism beyond evolutionary necessity. Another striking example involves an elephant rescuing a trapped rhino calf, an act with no ecological benefit to her species. Similarly, a matriarch exhibited patience toward lion cubs, recognizing them as vulnerable young rather than future threats. These instances reveal elephants' ability to transcend instinctual aggression in favor of compassionate intervention.

However, the chapter also acknowledges the limits of elephant empathy. Orphaned calves often perish because herds prioritize their own survival over nurturing unrelated young. A poignant description of a "good-bye ceremony" underscores the tragic choices elephants face. Yet, an exceptional case defies this norm: a matriarch adopted an unrelated calf after initially rejecting it, moved by its desperate cries. This rare act of cross-herd adoption suggests empathy can occasionally override biological imperatives, especially toward mother-offspring relationships.

The chapter concludes by reflecting on elephants' unique sensitivity to maternal bonds across species. Their actions imply an understanding of loss and suffering, particularly

regarding children. While evolutionary logic often dictates behavior, elephants occasionally exhibit extraordinary kindness that challenges Darwinian assumptions. These observations position elephants as emotionally complex beings capable of both calculated survival decisions and unexpected acts of compassion, offering profound insights into interspecies empathy.



Chapter 11: Serenity

The chapter "Serenity" explores the narrator's complex relationship with her psychic abilities and the profound grief following her mother's death. Despite achieving fame and success as a psychic, the narrator couldn't foresee her mother's terminal illness. She describes showering her mother with luxuries—a Malibu bungalow, celebrity encounters, and extravagant gifts—yet these couldn't shield her from the pain of watching her mother wither away. The loss left her emotionally shattered, forcing her to mask her despair behind a public persona of happiness and success.

After her mother's passing, the narrator's understanding of grief deepened, making her more empathetic to others seeking closure through her readings. Despite connecting countless spirits to their loved ones, she received no communication from her own mother for years. This absence fueled her desperation until one day, her mother appeared vividly in her car—healthy and smiling, as she remembered her from childhood. The vision was fleeting but transformative, leading the narrator to believe spirits choose how they wish to be remembered, not just how they’re recognized.

The encounter also sparked introspection about her own skepticism and the nature of the paranormal. Though she initially doubted her sanity, the realism of the vision convinced her of its authenticity. Yet, over time, doubt resurfaced, mirroring the skepticism she once dismissed. The chapter juxtaposes her earlier certainty with her current uncertainty, highlighting the fragility of belief—even for a professional psychic.

The narrative shifts to a mundane yet symbolic moment at a tech store, where the narrator’s frustration with a dismissive Gen Y employee mirrors her broader disillusionment. She muses that rudeness might stem from past-life trauma, like reincarnated Vietnam soldiers. This scene underscores her struggle to reconcile her psychic identity with her fading connection to the spirit world, leaving her questioning her purpose and credibility.

Chapter 12: Alice

The chapter opens with the death of Mmaabo, a matriarch elephant, observed by the researcher Alice. Mmaabo's herd, particularly her daughter Onalenna, attempts to revive her, displaying behaviors that suggest grief, such as prodding her body and vocalizing distress. Another unrelated elephant, Sethunya, arrives and performs a solemn, swaying ritual over Mmaabo’s body, further hinting at cross-herd mourning. Alice meticulously documents these interactions, noting the elephants' unique identifiers and behaviors, as she shifts her research focus to elephant cognition and emotion, a controversial approach in her field.

Alice reflects on the challenges of studying elephant grief, a topic often dismissed by traditional animal researchers. She argues that understanding complex behaviors requires intricate science, contrasting it with more straightforward disciplines like math or chemistry. Despite her boss Grant's skepticism, Alice remains committed to her work, believing that elephants exhibit profound emotional responses to death. Her dedication is evident as she sacrifices sleep to record every detail, from the elephants' return visits to the arrival of other animals near Mmaabo’s corpse.

The narrative intensifies as Onalenna returns to her mother’s body at twilight, standing vigil until interrupted by a Land Rover. Anya, another researcher, informs Alice that Grant needs her, but Alice hesitates, wanting to give the elephants more time to grieve. The scene highlights the tension between scientific obligations and ethical considerations. Onalenna’s protective behavior—warding off a hyena with her trunk—further underscores the depth of her connection to Mmaabo, leaving Alice to ponder the emotional weight of the moment.

The chapter concludes with Alice waking at dawn to find Onalenna gone and scavengers beginning to claim Mmaabo’s body. The imagery of lionesses and vultures contrasts sharply with the earlier scenes of mourning, emphasizing the inevitability of

nature’s cycle. Alice’s reluctance to leave reflects her emotional investment in her research, blurring the line between observer and participant. The chapter leaves readers questioning the boundaries of animal emotion and the ethical responsibilities of those who study it.



Chapter 13: Jenna

Jenna visits her father, Thomas Metcalf, at a mental health institution with purple walls, accompanied by Serenity and Virgil. Upon arrival, they encounter an unfamiliar nurse and hear Thomas shouting in distress. Jenna rushes to his room, where he is being restrained by orderlies for aggressively protecting an empty cereal box he believes contains vital research. Jenna calms him by validating his delusion, and the orderlies release him once he complies. The chaotic scene reveals Thomas's unstable mental state, yet Jenna's compassion shines through as she navigates his erratic behavior.

Thomas, mistaking Jenna for her mother, Alice, excitedly shares his discovery about an elephant named Koshik that can imitate human speech. He passionately explains the implications for understanding elephant cognition, particularly theory of mind—the ability to recognize one's own and others' mental states. His articulate reasoning contrasts sharply with his disheveled appearance, hinting at his former intellect. Jenna reflects on how his brilliance likely captivated her mother, even as she grapples with the discomfort of being mistaken for Alice.

The chapter delves into Thomas's theories about mirror neurons and empathy in elephants, drawing parallels to human cognition. His enthusiasm for the topic momentarily overshadows his instability, revealing glimpses of the scholar he once was. Meanwhile, Virgil and Serenity observe the interaction with a mix of curiosity and concern. Jenna improvises their roles to align with Thomas's academic interests, further illustrating her efforts to connect with him despite his delusions.

The emotional core of the chapter lies in Jenna's conflicted feelings—her longing for her father's affection, even when it's directed at a memory of her mother. The hug he gives her, though rooted in confusion, offers her a fleeting sense of comfort. The scene poignantly captures the complexity of their relationship, blending sadness, love, and

resilience as Jenna continues her search for answers about her family’s past.



Chapter 14: Alice

The chapter begins with Alice recounting a story told to her by Owen the bush vet about researchers attempting to collar a female elephant. After darting the elephant, the herd formed two concentric circles around her, with the outer circle facing outward protectively. The inner circle, hidden from view, was heard rustling and snapping branches. When the herd eventually stepped away, the darted elephant was found covered in soil and branches, a behavior typically seen in elephants masking the scent of birth or death, though this instance defied conventional explanations.

Alice reflects on the enigmatic behavior of elephants covering their dead or injured companions. She questions whether this act is meant to mask the scent of death, noting that elephants' keen sense of smell would likely distinguish between a darted and deceased elephant. She shares another anecdote about an Asian bull elephant in musth who killed his mahout, only for the female elephants to cover the body with dirt and branches. This suggests the behavior may be a response to unexpected or violent deaths, not limited to elephants themselves.

The narrative shifts to Alice's personal experience in Botswana, where she fell asleep under a baobab tree after long hours of observation. Upon waking, she found herself partially buried under branches and dirt, as if the elephants had mistaken her for dead. This surreal encounter left her bewildered, as she had no memory of closing her eyes or any explanation for her deep sleep, except that she felt "more than herself" at the time.

The chapter concludes with Alice revealing the irony of the elephants' actions: they assumed she was dead when, in fact, she was pregnant. This poignant twist underscores the elephants' instinctual yet misunderstood behavior, while also highlighting Alice's personal transformation. The chapter blends scientific observation with personal narrative, exploring the mysteries of elephant behavior and the profound

connections between life and death.



Chapter 15: Serenity

The chapter "Serenity" explores themes of protective instinct and hidden violence through a tense confrontation. The narrator reflects on hysterical strength—extraordinary acts of power triggered by adrenaline in life-threatening situations—citing examples like a mother lifting a car to save her child. This concept becomes reality when Thomas Metcalf strikes his daughter Jenna, prompting the narrator to instinctively shield her. The moment reveals a maternal protectiveness the narrator didn't know they possessed, while Virgil, another character, reacts with equal fury, physically restraining Thomas. The scene underscores the unpredictable nature of human behavior under stress.

The aftermath of the attack leaves Jenna and the narrator shaken, with Jenna visibly distressed and the narrator experiencing somatic intuition—a physical reaction to the room's oppressive energy. The narrator, once skilled at sensing emotional undercurrents, perceives a disturbing aura around Thomas. Virgil's agitation grows, and he storms out, unable to contain his anger. Jenna, meanwhile, stares at her father as if seeing him anew, hinting at a fractured relationship. The nurse suggests sedation for Thomas, allowing Jenna and the narrator to leave, though the emotional weight of the encounter lingers.

Outside, Virgil reveals a darker truth: Thomas has a history of domestic violence, suggesting Jenna's mother, Alice, might have fled to protect herself. This revelation clashes with Jenna's belief in her parents' happy marriage. A phone call confirms that Alice's DNA was found near Nevvie Ruehl's body, complicating the narrative. Jenna oscillates between frustration and disbelief, questioning Virgil's shifting theories—whether her mother was a killer or a victim. Virgil speculates Thomas might have attacked Alice, leading to Nevvie's accidental death, but Jenna dismisses the idea as implausible.

The chapter ends with unresolved tension, leaving Jenna’s mother’s fate ambiguous. The narrator privately wonders if Alice is a trapped spirit, haunted by guilt. Jenna’s sarcasm and Virgil’s dogged pursuit of answers highlight the emotional toll of uncovering painful truths. The confrontation with Thomas exposes buried family trauma, forcing Jenna to reconsider her past. The chapter masterfully blends physical drama with psychological depth, leaving readers questioning who is truly responsible for the violence—and whether the answers lie in the living or the dead.



Chapter 16: Alice

The chapter "Alice" from *Leaving Time* explores the profound maternal instincts and communal care systems of elephants, drawing parallels to human parenting. The narrator reflects that elephants might be the best mothers in nature, attributing their patience and devotion to the extended two-year pregnancy period. Elephant calves are cherished and indulged, allowed to behave mischievously without reprimand, highlighting the unconditional love and protection they receive. The bond between mother and calf is portrayed as unbreakable, with the mother’s role central to the baby’s survival and well-being.

Elephant herds exhibit a collective approach to raising calves, known as *allomothering*, where the entire group shares responsibility for protecting the young. Calves are strategically positioned within the herd, shielded by their mothers and older siblings from potential threats. This communal care ensures safety while allowing the mother to focus on nourishment, as she requires massive amounts of food to produce milk. The chapter emphasizes how this system not only safeguards the calf but also prepares young females for future motherhood by teaching them caregiving skills.

The concept of *allomothering* underscores the importance of communal support in elephant societies, likened to the human adage "It takes a village." Younger female elephants learn vital parenting skills by assisting in calf-rearing, ensuring the continuation of maternal knowledge across generations. This collaborative effort balances the mother’s need to forage with the calf’s need for exploration and protection. The chapter highlights the biological and social necessity of this system, which strengthens herd cohesion and ensures the survival of the species.

The chapter concludes by underscoring the irreplaceable bond between an elephant mother and her calf, particularly in the wild, where separation before age two is fatal. Mothers impart essential survival skills to their daughters, fostering a lifelong

connection that lasts until death. This enduring relationship exemplifies the depth of elephant social structures and the critical role of maternal care in their survival. The narrator’s admiration for elephant motherhood invites readers to reflect on the parallels and lessons for human parenting and community support.



Chapter 17: Jenna

Jenna is walking along a state highway when Serenity pulls up in her car, offering her a ride home. Jenna hesitates, reluctant to engage in a conversation about Virgil, whose presence or opinions she clearly resents. Their interaction is interrupted by a police officer, leading to a tense but brief exchange. Jenna eventually gets into Serenity's cluttered car, where she folds a dollar bill into an elephant—a skill her mother taught her. This act sparks a reflection on her complicated feelings about her mother, who she feels has disappointed her yet still influences her life.

As they drive, Jenna observes Serenity's eclectic belongings and contrasting symbols—a fuzzy steering wheel cover and a religious cross—prompting her to ponder whether opposing beliefs can coexist. She questions whether both her parents could share blame for past events and if her mother's love for her could persist despite her absence. Serenity's unapologetic personality, marked by her bold appearance and carefree attitude, contrasts with Jenna's introspection. Jenna admires Serenity's self-acceptance, even as she struggles with her own unresolved emotions and search for meaning.

Their conversation turns philosophical when Jenna asks Serenity about the meaning of life. Serenity deflects with humor but eventually shares wisdom from her spirit guides: avoid intentional harm and seek happiness. Jenna wonders if her own purpose is tied to uncovering the truth about her mother's disappearance, questioning whether this pursuit will truly bring her fulfillment. The exchange highlights Jenna's deep yearning for answers and her uncertainty about whether those answers will heal her.

After Serenity drops her off, Jenna bikes to a sanctuary, where she falls asleep and dreams of her childhood. The dream recalls a nursery school field trip to see an elephant named Maura, where Jenna's detailed drawings of the animal set her apart from her peers. This memory underscores her unique upbringing and the lasting

impact of her mother’s influence, even in her absence. The chapter closes with Jenna’s quiet determination to uncover the past, despite the emotional toll it takes on her.



Chapter 18: Alice

The chapter follows Alice, an elephant researcher, as she observes Kagiso, a pregnant elephant whose impending birth becomes a focal point in her life. Alice reflects on her own unnoticed pregnancy, drawing parallels between her emotional state and the elephants she studies. Her work, once energizing, now feels routine, and she finds herself constantly thinking of Thomas, a colleague who left for another continent. Their connection, though distant, persists through scholarly exchanges, with unspoken emotions hidden beneath academic discourse. Alice's growing attachment to Thomas contrasts with her professional detachment from the elephants, hinting at an internal conflict between personal and scientific priorities.

Alice witnesses Kagiso's tragic stillbirth, a moment that shatters her usual objectivity. Unlike typical elephant births, Kagiso is alone, her herd absent, and her attempts to revive the calf are heartbreakingly futile. The scene triggers Alice's memories of other grieving elephants, leading her to question the nature of motherhood and loss. Overcome by emotion, she cries—a rare breach of her researcher's detachment. This moment forces her to confront the harshness of nature and her own helplessness, mirroring her unresolved feelings about her pregnancy and Thomas. The incident becomes a turning point, blurring the line between observer and participant in life's cycles.

After recording Kagiso's grief, Alice finally acknowledges her own pregnancy and travels to meet Thomas in New England. She deliberately withholds her pregnancy news, rationalizing that their brief connection doesn't obligate him to involvement. Her decision reflects both her independence and fear, shaped by her work with matriarchal elephant societies. The chapter highlights Alice's internal struggle: she plans to potentially raise the child alone in Africa, yet seeks Thomas out, suggesting unresolved feelings. Her actions reveal a contradiction between her intellectual understanding of

relationships and her emotional needs.

The chapter closes with Alice's arrival in Boston, where Thomas greets her with an unconventional gesture—an uprooted plant. Their reunion is charged with unspoken tension and humor, contrasting with the gravity of Alice's secret. This moment encapsulates the chapter's themes of connection, concealment, and the interplay between personal and professional lives. Alice's journey—from observing elephant grief to confronting her own vulnerabilities—culminates in this ambiguous reunion, leaving her future decisions about motherhood and Thomas deliberately unresolved.

Chapter 19: Virgil

The chapter opens with Virgil reflecting on a pivotal moment when Thomas Metcalf's violent reaction to a pebble necklace revealed a rare clarity in his otherwise unstable demeanor. Virgil, now in his office, grapples with physical discomfort—initially dismissed as heartburn but possibly linked to a growing intuition about the case. His workspace is cluttered with meticulously arranged evidence from old police files, suggesting his renewed dedication to uncovering the truth behind Nevvie Ruehl's death, which was previously ruled an accident but now seems suspicious.

Virgil acknowledges his past inefficiencies, including failing to clear out evidence boxes, which serendipitously preserved crucial materials. He speculates about the motives of Alice Metcalf, who disappeared after Nevvie's death, leaving behind her daughter Jenna. Virgil questions whether Alice fled to escape guilt or pursue something else, and why she abandoned her child. The discovery of Alice's hair on Nevvie's body adds complexity, leaving open whether it was incidental or indicative of foul play.

The narrative shifts to Virgil's interaction with his landlady, Abigail, who interrupts his musings with her skepticism about his chaotic workspace. Their banter reveals Virgil's unexpected sobriety, attributing his newfound focus to Jenna's influence. Abigail's belief in communication with the dead contrasts with Virgil's pragmatic approach, though her mention of "dead men talking" subtly echoes his own unresolved questions about the case.

Virgil's internal conflict is palpable as he weighs the possibilities of Thomas, Alice, or Gideon being responsible for Nevvie's death. His determination to prove it was murder drives him, even as he navigates personal and professional setbacks. The chapter underscores Virgil's dogged pursuit of justice, fueled by Jenna's persistence and his own unresolved doubts, while hinting at deeper mysteries surrounding Alice's disappearance and the true nature of Nevvie's demise.

Chapter 20: Alice

The chapter focuses on Maura, a pregnant African elephant with a violent past, now residing in a sanctuary. Elephant pregnancies last 22 months, requiring immense physical investment, and maternal instincts are fiercely protective—interfering with a calf can be deadly. Maura was previously a circus elephant who attacked a male companion and a zookeeper, earning her a "killer" reputation. Her pregnancy went unnoticed until late stages due to lack of routine testing, prompting quarantine to manage risks, especially with another elephant, Hester, in the enclosure. Research revealed Maura had previously given birth in captivity, where she was restrained during delivery, causing extreme distress until reunited with her calf, who was later sold to a zoo.

The sanctuary staff had mixed motivations for anticipating Maura’s calf. Thomas, the sanctuary founder, saw fundraising potential, while others like Grace were eager to witness their first elephant birth. The narrator, Alice, felt a deep connection with Maura, having arrived at the sanctuary around the same time and given birth to her daughter shortly after. Alice observed Maura’s behavior closely, believing they shared a mutual appreciation for their sanctuary life. Despite personal fulfillment—raising her daughter, researching elephant cognition, and contributing to the sanctuary—Alice grappled with challenges, including financial strain, ethical dilemmas in her research, and tensions with a senior staff member, Nevvie.

Nevvie frequently undermined Alice’s decisions, from adjusting elephant diets to dismissing her research methods, citing her own experience as superior. Their conflicts escalated over disagreements on Maura’s delivery timeline—Alice predicted an imminent birth based on physical signs, while Nevvie insisted it would occur during the next full moon. Alice recalled witnessing a wild elephant birth, describing the herd’s protective behavior and celebratory reactions, contrasting it with Maura’s traumatic

past delivery in chains. This memory reinforced her determination to ensure Maura’s calf would not be taken away.

The chapter underscores the complexities of elephant behavior, maternal bonds, and the ethical responsibilities of sanctuary care. Alice’s personal and professional struggles mirror Maura’s journey—both seeking safety and autonomy in a world that has not always been kind. The impending birth symbolizes hope but also tension, as differing perspectives among the staff highlight broader debates about animal welfare, research ethics, and human intervention in natural processes.



Chapter 21: Jenna

Jenna, the teenage protagonist, recounts how she exploits the invisibility of children to stow away on a Greyhound bus without a ticket. She blends in with a distracted family to board undetected, then hides in the bathroom until departure. Her destination is Tennessee, where she hopes to find Gideon, a former employee connected to her missing mother. Jenna reflects on her grandmother's likely anger and her own realization that this journey—sparked by her father's unusual reaction to a pebble necklace—might finally provide answers about her mother's disappearance a decade earlier.

The chapter reveals Jenna's complex emotions as she pursues Gideon, who accompanied elephants from her father's bankrupt sanctuary to Tennessee. She wonders if Gideon reunited with her mother or knows her whereabouts, recalling childhood observations of their possible romantic connection. Jenna's internal monologue oscillates between hope and resentment, struggling with the possibility that her mother might have chosen happiness without her. She outlines four imagined scenarios for her reunion, ranging from joyful reconciliation to devastating rejection, with the latter being too painful to fully contemplate.

Jenna's journey is fueled by fragmented memories and internet research, contrasting with her grandmother's disapproval of such investigations. She acknowledges that Virgil (likely a detective or investigator) will probably deduce her destination but feels compelled to proceed alone. The narrative highlights Jenna's vulnerability beneath her resourcefulness—her need for answers outweighs the risks of traveling unsupervised. She briefly considers Serenity's psychic abilities but ultimately trusts her own instincts in this quest.

As the bus makes stops through major cities, Jenna anticipates being intercepted by authorities but remains undetected. The chapter ends mid-thought, emphasizing the

precariousness of her mission. Jenna's determination to return "not alone" underscores her deep longing for familial connection, while her strategic evasion of adult attention demonstrates the cunning of a child forced to grow up too soon. The passage masterfully blends logistical details of her journey with poignant emotional introspection.



Chapter 22: Alice

The chapter explores the intricate mating rituals of elephants, emphasizing how communication combines vocalizations and physical gestures. For instance, a matriarch’s “let’s go” rumble is paired with body positioning to guide the herd. During mating, males produce deep, guttural musth rumbles, which vary between individuals and are accompanied by ear movements and urine dribbling. These sounds serve multiple purposes, from asserting dominance to attracting mates, showcasing the complexity of elephant social interactions.

Female elephants play an active role in mate selection, responding to male musth rumbles with choruses that attract multiple suitors. This allows females in estrus to choose the healthiest and most viable mates, often rejecting unsuitable males even after mounting. Days before estrus, females emit powerful roars to draw more males, increasing their options. The actual mating is marked by lyrical estrus songs—repetitive, purring vocalizations—followed by celebratory sounds from the herd, akin to those heard during births or reunions.

Unlike whales, where males with complex songs attract females, elephant mating dynamics are female-driven. Females sing out of biological necessity, as their brief six-day estrus window demands effective long-distance communication. Pheromones are ineffective over miles, so vocalizations become critical for attracting potential mates. This highlights the evolutionary adaptation of elephants to ensure reproductive success in vast habitats.

The chapter concludes with a speculative question about whether elephant calves learn estrus songs from older females, similar to whale song transmission across generations. This curiosity underscores the potential for cultural learning in elephants, where daughters might refine their mating strategies based on maternal experiences. The parallels between elephant and whale communication suggest deeper layers of

social learning and adaptation in the animal kingdom.



Chapter 23: Serenity

The chapter "Serenity" delves into the narrator's struggles as a psychic who has lost the ability to communicate with spirits. She recounts a past session where she failed to connect with a deceased basketball coach, only to later learn from his wife that he had committed suicide after a scandal involving an affair and blackmail. The wife's bitter rejection at his funeral seemingly prevented him from communicating during the reading, a revelation that underscores the idea that spirit communication requires willingness from both parties. This experience mirrors the narrator's current inability to connect with the dead, a fact she hides from her companions, Virgil and Jenna.

The narrative shifts to the present, where Virgil pressures the narrator to use her psychic abilities to uncover the truth about Grace Cartwright's suicide. Despite her reluctance, she attempts to contact Grace but fails, attributing it to the possibility that Grace, like the basketball coach, is too ashamed or unwilling to communicate. The narrator internally debates whether her inability stems from the spirits' reluctance or her own lost abilities, a tension that highlights her self-doubt and the complexities of her gift. Virgil's skepticism and her own frustration create a charged dynamic as they grapple with unanswered questions.

Virgil's theory that Grace's suicide might conceal a darker truth—such as murder—adds another layer to the mystery. The narrator suggests that Grace's apparent happiness could have been a facade, and her death might have been a cover-up. This speculation leads to a broader discussion about the reliability of official rulings and the hidden motives behind seemingly straightforward tragedies. The chapter raises questions about the nature of truth and the ways grief, shame, and secrets can obscure it.

The chapter concludes with the narrator's internal conflict, torn between her desire to help Virgil and her fear of admitting her diminished abilities. Her failed attempt to

contact Grace reinforces the theme that communication with the dead is not a one-sided endeavor but a dialogue that depends on mutual willingness. The unresolved tension between the narrator and Virgil, coupled with the lingering mystery of Grace's death, leaves the reader questioning what really happened and whether the truth will ever come to light. The chapter masterfully blends supernatural elements with human emotions, creating a poignant exploration of loss, guilt, and the search for closure.



Chapter 24: Alice

The chapter explores the profound grief of Maura, an elephant mourning the death of her calf, and the emotional ripple effects on those around her. Alice, the narrator, observes Maura's withdrawal from her surroundings, noting how she stops eating and avoids interactions, even with enrichment tools she once enjoyed. The absence of her herd exacerbates her isolation, making her grief more acute. Alice and others attempt to comfort Maura, but her sorrow remains overwhelming, highlighting the deep emotional bonds elephants form and the devastating impact of loss.

Meanwhile, Thomas, Alice's husband and the sanctuary's manager, reacts to the tragedy with a starkly different approach. While the others remain mired in sadness, Thomas shifts into hyper-efficient mode, focusing on new fundraising ideas to sustain the sanctuary. His abrupt transition from catatonic grief to relentless productivity puzzles Alice, who prefers this version of him over the broken man she briefly witnessed. She becomes his unwavering supporter, hoping her presence can prevent his depression from resurfacing, even as she takes on additional responsibilities to keep the sanctuary running.

The chapter takes a dramatic turn when Alice discovers Thomas has drained their shared bank account and taken out a second mortgage without consulting her. This financial recklessness leaves the sanctuary in dire straits, unable to pay for essential supplies or employee wages. Alice's frustration peaks when she learns Thomas has impulsively purchased a truckload of orchids, inspired by a dream, despite their impracticality and cost. His grandiose plans for an observation deck to attract donors further underscore his detachment from their immediate financial crisis.

The chapter concludes with Alice confronting Thomas about his irresponsible decisions, revealing the growing tension between them. While his vision for the sanctuary's future is ambitious, his lack of communication and financial prudence threatens its

stability. Alice's determination to salvage the situation contrasts with Thomas's manic optimism, setting the stage for a deeper conflict. The chapter underscores themes of grief, resilience, and the challenges of balancing emotional needs with practical realities in both personal and professional spheres.



Chapter 25: Virgil

Virgil and Serenity rush to catch a flight to Tennessee in a desperate attempt to find Jenna and Gideon Cartwright, fearing the consequences if Jenna confronts Gideon first. The urgency stems from their suspicion that Gideon may be responsible for Jenna's mother's disappearance. Despite financial constraints, Serenity books expensive last-minute tickets using her credit card. At the airport, Virgil encounters a ticket machine error, forcing him to plead with an elderly airline employee who eventually assists him after hearing his heartfelt confession about the emergency.

After a frantic sprint through security, Virgil barely makes the flight, reuniting with Serenity onboard. Their journey is fraught with delays due to thunderstorms, leaving them exhausted upon arrival in Nashville. Serenity rents a car, and while waiting, Virgil discovers a potential lead in an old phone book: a listing for G. Cartwright in Brentwood. This serendipitous find redirects their search, as they decide to investigate the address instead of proceeding to Hohenwald.

The pair drives to Brentwood, arriving at a dilapidated house that appears abandoned. The neglected state of the property raises questions about Gideon's whereabouts and whether Jenna has already been there. The eerie atmosphere of the dead-end street adds to the tension, leaving Virgil and Serenity to ponder their next steps as they prepare to confront the possibility of uncovering dark truths.

Throughout the chapter, Virgil's determination and emotional vulnerability shine through, contrasting with Serenity's pragmatic yet supportive role. The narrative builds suspense around Gideon's potential guilt and Jenna's safety, while also highlighting the themes of fate and intuition. The chapter ends on a cliffhanger, setting the stage for a confrontation or revelation at the derelict house.

Chapter 26: Alice

The chapter "Alice" explores themes of resilience and new beginnings as the protagonist adjusts to life after her partner Thomas's unexplained absence. Over two months, Alice discovers unexpected strengths, balancing her scientific work with managing the elephant sanctuary. Her daughter Jenna blossoms during this time, developing language skills and curiosity about the world. The passage highlights how Alice and Gideon, her dedicated colleague, form a partnership to keep the sanctuary running, often working late into the evenings while Jenna plays nearby.

Alice observes the elephants' emotional complexity, particularly Maura's gradual recovery from grief over her lost calf. She continues her research despite Thomas's disapproval, bringing Jenna along as the toddler displays a natural affinity for observation and sorting objects. Gideon frequently joins them, sharing stories about the elephants' traumatic pasts in circuses. Their conversations reveal both the animals' capacity for forgiveness and the humans' guilt over their role in elephant suffering, creating poignant moments of reflection.

A tense incident occurs when Jenna wanders dangerously close to Maura, enchanted by the elephant. Gideon swiftly intervenes, preventing potential disaster but triggering Jenna's terrified tantrum. The scene underscores the unpredictable nature of both children and elephants, as well as the protective dynamic between Alice, Gideon, and Jenna. As Gideon calms the exhausted child, Alice reflects on her parenting compared to elephant mothers' infinite patience, revealing her insecurities.

The chapter concludes with tender moments between Alice and Gideon as they watch over the sleeping Jenna. Their mutual appreciation surfaces—Gideon praises Alice's motherhood, while she acknowledges his potential as a father. This unspoken connection lingers as they sit together, surrounded by dandelions Jenna had gathered, suggesting the possibility of deeper bonds forming in Thomas's absence. The

sanctuary becomes a space for healing and new relationships, both human and animal.



Chapter 27: Jenna

Jenna visits The Elephant Sanctuary in Tennessee, where she observes the facility's storefront adorned with images of elephants, including Maura, her mother's favorite. The sanctuary promotes a philosophy of "protected contact," emphasizing positive reinforcement over traditional bull hooks. As Jenna explores, she contrasts this approach with the "free contact" method used at her mother's former sanctuary, hinting at past tragedies. Her curiosity leads her to sneak into the sanctuary grounds by hiding in an employee's pickup truck, determined to uncover clues about her mother's disappearance.

Upon arriving at the sanctuary's expansive grounds, Jenna is struck by the pristine environment and the vast, green landscape. She stealthily observes an African elephant, marveling at its size and the metal tips on its tusks. Her presence is soon discovered by Gideon, a sanctuary worker who recognizes her resemblance to her mother, Alice. Their encounter is charged with tension and hope, as Gideon reveals he had expected Alice to flee with Jenna years ago, but she never contacted him.

The conversation between Jenna and Gideon uncovers painful truths. Gideon admits he covered for Alice when the police investigated Nevvie's death, assuming Alice had taken Jenna and disappeared. Jenna's hope surges at the revelation that her mother had planned to escape with her, but it quickly deflates when Gideon confirms he knows nothing of Alice's current whereabouts. The emotional weight of the moment leaves Jenna feeling both validated and devastated, as her search hits another dead end.

The chapter culminates in a mix of revelation and unresolved mystery. Jenna's journey to find her mother takes a poignant turn as she grapples with the reality that even those closest to Alice are just as clueless about her fate. The sanctuary, once a potential lead, becomes another reminder of the unanswered questions surrounding her mother's disappearance. Jenna's determination persists, but the chapter closes on

a note of bittersweet realization, underscoring the complexity of her quest.



Chapter 28: Alice

Alice, the narrator, reflects on her fractured marriage and precarious family dynamics while sitting in the attic of the African barn. Her husband, Thomas, has returned after months away for mental health treatment, but their relationship remains strained. Though he appears stable and has resumed managing their elephant sanctuary, Alice harbors deep distrust, especially after past violent episodes. Their interactions are tense, limited to polite exchanges in front of their young daughter, Jenna, and heated arguments in private. Alice fears Thomas's unpredictability and worries about Jenna's safety, both around the elephants and her father.

The chapter reveals Alice's secret affair with Gideon, another sanctuary worker, as an escape from her suffocating marriage. Their trysts are brief and risky, given the lack of privacy at the sanctuary. Alice grapples with guilt over the affair but feels powerless to end it, finding solace in Gideon's affection. Meanwhile, Thomas's controlling behavior escalates; he physically harms Alice and threatens her fitness as a mother, hinting at a looming custody battle. Alice contemplates fleeing with Jenna but fears legal repercussions, unsure whether her infidelity or Thomas's mental illness would weigh more heavily in court.

Grace, another sanctuary employee, suggests enrolling Jenna in preschool, which Alice embraces as a way to protect her daughter from Thomas. The chapter highlights Alice's fractured identity—torn between being a devoted mother, a researcher, a dutiful wife, and a woman in love. She feels like an actor in her own life, only truly herself with Gideon. The sanctuary's busy environment forces their affair into hidden corners, including the African barn, where they are eventually discovered by Grace during a rainstorm.

The chapter ends with a cliffhanger: Grace, drenched and holding an umbrella, witnesses Alice and Gideon's intimacy. The tension peaks as Grace arrives to deliver

urgent news—Jenna is sick at school and needs to be picked up. The discovery of the affair and the emergency involving Jenna set the stage for escalating conflict, leaving Alice’s fragile world on the brink of collapse.



Chapter 29: Serenity

The chapter "Serenity" delves into the supernatural as the protagonists encounter a poltergeist linked to Grace, a woman who drowned herself after her husband's infidelity. Serenity explains that poltergeists, often misunderstood as mere "noisy ghosts," are manifestations of unresolved anger from those wronged in life. Grace's connection to water manifests in the haunting, with Virgil struggling to reconcile his reliance on hard evidence with the inexplicable events they witness. The tension escalates as they theorize about Nevvie Ruehl's supposed death and her daughter's possible survival, hinting at a deeper mystery involving deception and hidden motives.

Jenna's distress takes center stage as she reveals her encounter with Gideon at the elephant sanctuary, where she uncovers shocking news about her mother's pregnancy. The revelation adds complexity to the investigation, suggesting Gideon may have manipulated events surrounding Nevvie's disappearance. Virgil pieces together a timeline, suspecting Gideon's involvement, while Jenna grapples with the emotional weight of her mother's possible fate. The dialogue underscores Jenna's vulnerability and Virgil's protective instincts, creating a poignant moment amid the unfolding mystery.

The narrative shifts to a quieter interaction between Jenna and Serenity, where Jenna seeks solace in the possibility of her mother's spiritual presence. Serenity offers a comforting yet realistic perspective on the afterlife, comparing it to coexisting layers of reality. Her metaphor of oil and vinegar illustrates how spirits may intermittently intersect with the living, providing Jenna with a glimmer of hope. This exchange highlights the chapter's emotional depth, balancing the supernatural elements with human grief and longing.

The chapter concludes with lingering questions about Gideon's motives and Nevvie's true fate, leaving the characters—and readers—on edge. The interplay of psychic

phenomena, personal trauma, and unresolved relationships drives the plot forward, setting the stage for further revelations. Serenity's pragmatic yet empathetic approach grounds the story, while Virgil's skepticism and Jenna's desperation add layers of tension. The chapter masterfully blends mystery, emotion, and the supernatural, keeping the narrative compelling and cohesive.



Chapter 30: Alice

The chapter opens with Alice reflecting on her absence from Grace's funeral, as she remained at the animal sanctuary to manage the workload. With the staff depleted, Alice and Thomas work tirelessly to care for the animals. Gideon returns after the funeral, and Alice grapples with their strained relationship, haunted by the guilt and secrets of their past year together. She throws herself into physical tasks to avoid confronting her emotions, while Gideon avoids her, their interactions marked by unspoken tension and sorrow.

Alice's internal conflict deepens when she encounters Gideon unloading hay. Their brief exchange is awkward and painful, with Gideon avoiding her gaze and physically distancing himself. The emotional weight of Grace's death hangs heavily between them, and Alice's attempt to offer comfort is rebuffed. The situation grows more complex when Nevvie unexpectedly returns to work shortly after burying her daughter, her presence adding another layer of grief and unresolved tension to the sanctuary.

The narrative shifts to Alice's daughter, Jenna, who struggles with a fear of abandonment she calls the "Leaving Time." Alice comforts her until she falls asleep, only to be interrupted by Gideon, who needs help installing a hot-wire fence. Despite her reluctance to leave Jenna, Alice assists Gideon, and their efficient teamwork highlights their deep connection. However, their emotional rift remains unresolved as Gideon confesses he cannot continue their relationship, breaking down in her arms as he admits he doesn't miss Grace.

The chapter reaches a climax when Alice returns to find Jenna missing, the open door a stark reminder of her momentary lapse in judgment. Panicked, she searches for Thomas, praying he has Jenna, while guilt and fear overwhelm her. The chapter ends on a note of desperation, leaving the reader uncertain of Jenna's fate and Alice's emotional state as she confronts the consequences of her choices.

Chapter 31: Jenna

The chapter opens with Jenna returning home after an unexplained absence, greeted by her grandmother's mix of relief and anger. Her grandmother's frantic worry is evident as she recounts calling neighbors, the school, and even Jenna's nonexistent friends, amplifying Jenna's humiliation. The tension escalates when Jenna sarcastically asks if her grandmother called the police, triggering a near-physical confrontation. Ordered to her room, Jenna retreats to the bathroom, where she submerges herself in the tub, pushing her body to the brink of drowning in a desperate attempt to connect with her deceased mother's final moments.

In the bathtub, Jenna's thoughts spiral as she imagines her own death and funeral, drawing parallels to her mother's tragic end. She fixates on the autopsy report, wondering if her mother felt the same suffocating pressure before her death. This macabre experiment becomes a twisted way for Jenna to share an experience with the mother she never knew. Just as she reaches her limit, she surfaces violently, coughing up blood and vomiting, physically shattered by the ordeal. The intensity of the scene underscores Jenna's unresolved grief and her dangerous coping mechanisms.

The narrative shifts as Jenna recalls childhood memories of bathing with her mother, a stark contrast to her current despair. These fleeting moments of warmth and safety remind her that she has, in fact, shared something profound with her mother: love. This realization softens her anguish slightly, though it doesn't fully alleviate her pain. The chapter then transitions into Jenna's reflections on literary figures like Captain Ahab and Javert, drawing parallels to her own obsessive quest to find her mother—a quest that now seems futile.

Jenna grapples with the finality of her mother's death, acknowledging that her search has reached a dead end. While she feels a sliver of relief knowing her mother didn't abandon her willingly, she must also confront the horrifying likelihood that her father

was the killer. This revelation feels less shocking to Jenna, as her father had already been lost to mental illness long before. The chapter closes with Jenna suspended between grief, acceptance, and the daunting reality of her fractured family history.



Chapter 32: Alice

Alice finds solace in Gideon's arms, escaping the turmoil of her marriage to Thomas, whose unpredictable moods and emotional distance have left her feeling isolated. With Gideon, she imagines an alternative life where they form a loving family. However, their affair takes a dramatic turn when Alice discovers she is pregnant, forcing both to confront the reality of their situation. Gideon bravely informs his mother-in-law, Nevvie, who reacts with cold detachment, signaling the end of his marriage. This moment of truth compels Alice to face Thomas, though she struggles with guilt and hesitation.

As Alice prepares to reveal her affair and pregnancy, she makes a deliberate effort to engage with Thomas, sharing mundane tasks and conversation in an attempt to soften the blow. When she finally confesses her love for Gideon and her pregnancy, Thomas is devastated, weeping and questioning what he did wrong. Alice, torn between pity and self-loathing, reassures him that the failure of their marriage is her fault. However, his grief quickly turns to violence when he strikes her across the face, calling her a "whore" and forcing her to flee.

The confrontation escalates as Alice attempts to take her daughter, Jenna, with her, but Thomas intercepts her, physically restraining her and claiming Jenna as his own. He threatens Alice, implying that she will never take their daughter away, even if it costs Alice her life. Heartbroken and terrified, Alice is forced to leave Jenna behind, knowing her departure will confirm the child's worst fear of abandonment. The chapter ends with Alice running for help, consumed by guilt and sorrow.

This chapter highlights the emotional and physical consequences of Alice's choices, as well as the destructive power of betrayal and unresolved pain. Thomas's violent reaction underscores his deep-seated instability, while Alice's inability to protect Jenna reveals the tragic cost of her actions. The narrative captures the raw emotions of

heartbreak, rage, and desperation, leaving the reader with a sense of impending tragedy as Alice's world collapses around her.



Chapter 33: Virgil

Virgil, a former law enforcement officer, is determined to uncover the truth about a decade-old case involving a buried body presumed to be Nevvie Ruehl. He realizes that obtaining a DNA sample from the state lab's autopsy records is his best chance, but as a civilian, he lacks the authority to access the evidence. Instead, he attempts to persuade Ralph, an evidence room custodian at the Boone PD, to help him by flattering his ego and appealing to his sense of importance. Despite Virgil's efforts, Ralph reveals that the state lab lost years of evidence due to a pipe burst, crushing Virgil's hopes of retrieving the DNA sample.

Returning to his chaotic office, Virgil is confronted by Jenna and Serenity, who are eager for updates on the case. Jenna bombards him with questions, but Virgil deflects her intensity by demanding coffee. He explains the challenges of obtaining DNA evidence, given the lab's loss of records. Meanwhile, Serenity remarks on the disarray of his office, prompting Virgil to notice a forgotten clue—a fingernail found in the victim's bloodstained uniform shirt, which Jenna had previously reacted to with distress.

Virgil takes the fingernail and the shirt to a lab technician named Tallulah, hoping to compare the DNA with Jenna's. Tallulah, who has a flirtatious rapport with Virgil, agrees to help despite his unpaid favors. As she tests the shirt's bloodstains and the fingernail, Jenna becomes overwhelmed and rushes out, feeling nauseous. Serenity follows to comfort her, leaving Virgil to await the results that could confirm or disprove his theory about the victim's identity.

The chapter highlights Virgil's persistence and resourcefulness as he navigates dead ends and leverages personal connections to advance the investigation. His interactions with Ralph and Tallulah reveal his ability to charm and manipulate, while Jenna's emotional reactions underscore the personal stakes of the case. The discovery of the

fingernail introduces a potential breakthrough, leaving the reader anticipating the DNA results and their implications for Jenna’s search for her mother.



Chapter 34: Alice

The chapter explores the neurological and developmental reasons behind infants' inability to remember early experiences, attributing it to their lack of language capacity. It explains that infants' vocal cords are not fully developed, limiting their communication to distress cries triggered by a direct neural pathway from the amygdala to the larynx. This primal alarm system is so effective that even individuals with no childcare experience, like college students, instinctively respond to a baby's cry. The section highlights how this biological wiring serves as a survival mechanism before language acquisition.

As children grow and develop speech capabilities, the nature of their crying changes, leading to different social responses. The chapter notes that by age two or three, a child's cry becomes less likely to elicit sympathy and more likely to provoke annoyance in others. This shift forces children to adapt by using verbal communication to seek attention, marking a critical transition in their social development. The text underscores how societal expectations shape communication methods as children mature.

The chapter then examines the persistence of the amygdala-larynx connection into adulthood, despite its diminished everyday utility. This primal neural pathway remains dormant until triggered by extreme fear or surprise, such as encountering a threat in the dark. When activated, it produces an involuntary, distinctive scream that differs from voluntary vocalizations. The author emphasizes that this response is deeply ingrained in human biology, serving as an evolutionary relic of our infant defense mechanisms.

Finally, the passage reflects on the remarkable continuity of this physiological response from infancy through adulthood. It suggests that while humans develop sophisticated communication skills, we retain this primitive alarm system as a last-

resort survival tool. The chapter concludes by highlighting how such biological mechanisms, though rarely used, remain an intrinsic part of our neurological makeup, ready to activate in moments of true terror. This insight bridges developmental psychology with evolutionary biology, showing how early survival mechanisms persist throughout life.



Chapter 35: Serenity

The chapter "Serenity" follows a medium attempting to help Jenna connect with her deceased mother, Alice. The narrator reflects on her past experiences with spirit communication, comparing open channeling to a chaotic news conference. She prefers targeted connections through spirit guides, likening them to telephone operators. The group visits a sacred spot at an elephant sanctuary, where Jenna recalls memories with her mother. The setting, marked by purple mushrooms and a giant oak, holds significance as the burial site of an elephant calf, suggesting a mystical connection between nature and memory.

Jenna, Virgil, and the medium form a circle to summon Alice's spirit. The narrator emphasizes the importance of positive energy, chastising Virgil for his skepticism. Jenna shares heartfelt stories she invented to explain her mother's absence, revealing her deep longing. Despite her emotional outpouring, no spiritual contact occurs initially. The medium, desperate to help, fabricates a vision of Alice to provoke Jenna's rawest emotions. This manipulation triggers Jenna's anguished cry for her mother, a moment the medium believes might finally bridge the gap between the living and the dead.

The chapter explores themes of grief, belief, and the lengths people go to for closure. The medium's deception raises ethical questions, as she justifies her lie by claiming it was necessary to make Jenna's plea genuine. Virgil's skepticism contrasts with Jenna's vulnerability, highlighting the tension between faith and doubt. The discovery of a buried tooth under the mushrooms adds a mysterious twist, hinting at unresolved secrets tied to the sanctuary and Alice's past. This artifact suggests there may be more tangible connections to uncover beyond the spiritual realm.

In the end, the chapter leaves Jenna emotionally drained, grappling with the possibility that her mother is truly gone. The medium's actions, though questionable, stem from a

desire to provide solace. The elephant sanctuary's role as a symbolic bridge between life and death underscores the chapter's exploration of loss and memory. The tooth's discovery hints at deeper mysteries, setting the stage for further revelations about Alice's disappearance and the sanctuary's history.



Chapter 36: Alice

The chapter explores the profound impact of trauma on elephant behavior, contrasting their typical ability to compartmentalize death with exceptional cases where grief manifests destructively. One striking example involves an orphaned female calf raised by young bulls, who later treated her own offspring with the same neglect she had experienced. Without the guidance of a matriarchal herd, she failed to develop proper maternal instincts, unlike young females in breeding herds who practice caregiving as "allomothers" long before motherhood. This highlights how the absence of traditional family structures disrupts natural behavioral development in elephants.

A parallel case emerges with young male elephants in Pilanesberg, who exhibited abnormally aggressive behavior—charging vehicles and killing rhinos—after witnessing their families slaughtered during culling operations. The chapter identifies a common thread: both the neglectful mother and violent bulls lacked parental guidance and endured the trauma of seeing their families killed. Unlike natural deaths, which herds process collectively, human-inflicted mass killings leave survivors without social support systems, exacerbating long-term psychological damage.

The author critiques the scientific community's reluctance to acknowledge trauma's role in elephant behavior, suggesting political shame plays a part since humans perpetrate these violent acts. They argue that grief following violent human actions differs fundamentally from responses to natural death, as the former destroys the very social networks elephants rely on for emotional recovery. This distinction underscores how anthropogenic trauma creates irreversible behavioral ruptures in elephant societies.

Concluding with a poignant observation, the chapter emphasizes that while death is natural, murder is an unnatural disruption with cascading consequences. The author calls for greater recognition of how human violence against elephants creates complex

trauma, challenging researchers to confront uncomfortable truths about our species' role in destabilizing elephant social ecosystems. This perspective reframes elephant grief studies by centering the ethical implications of human actions.



Chapter 37: Jenna

Jenna, Virgil, and Serenity examine a small tooth found at the scene, initially assuming it belongs to an animal like Maura’s calf. Jenna clings to this belief to avoid confronting darker possibilities, while Virgil remains skeptical due to its size. Serenity suggests involving the police, but Jenna feels uneasy, especially after learning Serenity’s earlier vision of her mother was a deception. The tension rises when Tallulah, a forensic expert, enters and identifies the tooth as human—a deciduous molar from a child under five. This revelation shatters Jenna, triggering a visceral physical and emotional reaction.

The narrative shifts to Jenna’s fragmented childhood memories, revealing a traumatic event. As a young child, she was lured away by an unfamiliar woman under the pretense of a game, only to be violently attacked. The woman’s soothing words contrast horrifically with her actions, as she smothers Jenna and strikes her with a rock. Jenna’s disoriented recollections blend fear with surreal imagery, including Maura the elephant rescuing her. The elephant’s gentle care—covering her with branches and comforting her—stands in stark contrast to the human cruelty she endured.

Jenna’s consciousness wavers between past and present, struggling to reconcile the truth. In the lab, she dissociates, her surroundings fading as Serenity’s voice becomes indistinct. The chapter underscores Jenna’s lifelong fear of abandonment, rooted in her mother’s disappearance and the betrayal by the woman who harmed her. The elephant’s protective role symbolizes an unexpected sanctuary, while the human world remains fraught with danger and deception.

The chapter culminates in Jenna’s emotional collapse, as the weight of the tooth’s origin and her suppressed memories overwhelm her. Her physical pain mirrors the psychological torment of realizing the tooth likely belongs to her younger self. The narrative leaves her suspended between reality and memory, grappling with the

unresolved trauma of her past and the unanswered questions about her mother’s fate. The interplay of trust, betrayal, and survival underscores the chapter’s haunting tone.



Chapter 38: Alice

The chapter opens with Alice reflecting on the disappearance of her daughter Jenna, whose body was never found despite Alice having witnessed her lying in an enclosure. Unable to contact the police without revealing her own whereabouts, Alice obsessively monitors news from afar while grappling with overwhelming grief. She describes seeking therapy under a false identity, questioning whether her persistent hallucinations of Jenna’s cries are normal. The therapist’s ambiguous response—"It is normal for you"—prompts Alice to end the sessions, underscoring her realization that life will never return to normalcy after such a loss.

Alice then shifts to recounting her earlier trauma: the death of her mother to cancer and her subsequent discovery of a dying elephant calf in the bush. These events marked the beginning of her immersion in elephant behavior, particularly their grieving processes. She contrasts elephants’ pragmatic acceptance of death with her own spiraling guilt over unresolved conflicts with her mother. This personal anguish leads her to study elephant grief academically, though her true motivation is to learn how to cope with loss from these animals, who navigate it with apparent ease.

The narrative transitions to Alice’s work in South Africa during a surge in poaching, where she establishes an elephant orphanage modeled after Dame Daphne Sheldrick’s facility. She details the meticulous care required for orphaned calves, including round-the-clock human companionship, specialized nutrition, and gradual integration into wild herds. Alice emphasizes the emotional intelligence of elephants, noting their need for consistent affection and their capacity to remember both kindness and discipline. The facility’s success is evident when formerly rescued elephants return for help, demonstrating selective trust in humans despite past trauma.

Concluding the chapter, Alice reflects on the parallels between raising orphaned elephants and parenting her own child. The locals dub her “Ms. Ali,” a name that

eventually labels the orphanage itself. Her mission—to prepare elephants for independence—mirrors the universal parental goal of raising children to thrive without them. Yet, the chapter ends on a poignant note: when separation happens prematurely, as with Jenna, the natural order fractures, leaving Alice adrift in unresolved sorrow.



Chapter 39: Virgil

The chapter "Virgil" from *Leaving Time* explores a surreal moment of realization as the protagonist, Virgil, discovers his own ethereal existence. The narrative begins with a childhood metaphor about clouds, symbolizing the disillusionment of discovering reality differs from perception. Virgil drops a tooth, but it slips through his hand as if he has no physical form. When he reaches for Tallulah and Jenna, his hands pass through their smoke-like bodies, and Jenna flickers in and out of visibility. Virgil recalls earlier encounters—airport staff ignoring him, a waitress who barely noticed him—hinting that he and others like him exist in a liminal state between worlds.

Virgil’s memories deepen as he reflects on Abby, his landlady dressed in vintage clothing, and Ralph, an impossibly old evidence room clerk. He realizes these individuals, like him, are ghosts—present in the world but not truly part of it. A vivid flashback reveals Virgil’s death in a car crash: the deliberate unbuckling of his seatbelt, the impact, and the fleeting sensation of flying. This moment underscores his transition from life to death, framing his current existence as a spirit. The chapter blurs the line between reality and the afterlife, emphasizing Virgil’s gradual acceptance of his ghostly nature.

A conversation with Serenity, a psychic, resurfaces in Virgil’s mind. She compares death to falling asleep—a gradual detachment from the physical world. Virgil now understands this analogy, recognizing that his current state mirrors the suspended awareness of sleep. As he tries to reach Serenity, he finds her solid and tangible, unlike the fading forms of Tallulah and Jenna. Her ability to perceive and interact with him confirms her genuine psychic gifts, contrasting with Virgil’s earlier skepticism. This moment highlights the theme of unseen connections between the living and the dead.

The chapter concludes with Virgil’s fleeting presence as he begins to vanish entirely. His final thought is a realization of Serenity’s true skill, acknowledging her as an

exceptional psychic rather than the fraud he once suspected. The narrative leaves Virgil on the brink of dissolution, his story a poignant exploration of death, acceptance, and the thin veil between worlds. The prose blends haunting imagery with emotional depth, leaving readers to ponder the nature of existence beyond life.



Chapter 40: Alice

The chapter delves into Alice's profound grief and transformation following personal tragedies, including the loss of two babies and her former identity. Now a dedicated caretaker at the Msali Elephant Orphanage in South Africa, she immerses herself in work to avoid confronting her pain. Alice reflects on her past as a researcher in the Tuli Block and her brief life in the States, but she has distanced herself from her former self, Alice Metcalf, whom she considers "dead." Her nights are haunted by screams, and she avoids sleep, preferring exhaustion to numb her emotions.

Alice's thoughts often linger on her daughter Jenna, though she rarely dwells on Thomas, who remains institutionalized, or Gideon, who died in Iraq. A drunken Google search revealed Gideon's posthumous Medal of Honor, sparking a fleeting thought of visiting his grave. Alice's only tangible connection to her past is a piece of bark-stripped wood from an elephant named Maura, a relic from her time at the Tennessee sanctuary. The artifact, hanging on her wall, symbolizes her unresolved grief and the life she left behind.

The chapter takes a dramatic turn when the wooden artifact suddenly falls and breaks, coinciding with a phone call from Detective Mills. The detective's revelation that they've found Jenna's body shatters Alice's fragile equilibrium. The call forces her to confront the past she has tried to escape, signaling that her years of hiding are over. The moment is charged with tension, as Alice braces for the blame and guilt she has long anticipated.

The chapter masterfully intertwines Alice's internal struggles with the external events that disrupt her carefully constructed life. Her grief, guilt, and attempts at redemption are palpable, culminating in the shocking revelation about Jenna. The broken artifact serves as a metaphor for Alice's fractured psyche, while the detective's call propels the narrative toward an inevitable reckoning. The chapter leaves readers on the edge,

anticipating the emotional fallout of this long-buried truth.



Chapter 41: Serenity

The chapter "Serenity" follows the protagonist's unsettling realization that the people she has been interacting with—Virgil and Jenna—may actually be spirits. The narrative begins with her searching for a fallen tooth in a laboratory, where she learns that Tallulah, an employee she inquired about, had died months earlier. This discovery triggers her growing suspicion about the nature of her companions, especially when she recalls moments where others seemed unaware of Virgil and Jenna's presence. Her confusion deepens as she attempts to verify their existence through phone records and a return visit to a diner, only to be met with disbelief from the waitress.

The protagonist's investigation leads her to the Boone Town Office, where she reviews death certificates that confirm Virgil's suicide and Nevvie Ruehl's accidental death at an elephant sanctuary. Notably, Jenna's death certificate is absent, but the discovery of the tooth suggests her fate. The documents also reveal that Alice Metcalf, Jenna's mother, was likely alive after the incident, explaining her absence from communication. The protagonist grapples with the implications of these findings, realizing that her interactions with Virgil and Jenna were perceived by others as delusional or one-sided conversations.

As she reflects on past encounters, the protagonist pieces together clues that others could not see or hear Virgil and Jenna. From the airline passenger who ignored her to the nurses at Hartwick House who only addressed her, the evidence mounts that her companions were not physically present. Even her first meeting with Jenna, which caused a client to flee, now makes sense in light of this revelation. The chapter captures her dawning awareness of the supernatural nature of her experiences, leaving her emotionally shaken and directionless.

The chapter concludes with the protagonist driving aimlessly, overwhelmed by the truth. She recalls moments that now seem like clear signs of Virgil and Jenna's ghostly

presence, such as their ability to manipulate energy or remain unseen by others. The realization that she has been communicating with spirits forces her to question her sanity, as evidenced by the waitress's mental health services card. The chapter ends on a note of unresolved tension, as the protagonist arrives at Virgil's office building, symbolizing her continued search for answers amidst the chaos of her newfound reality.



Chapter 42: Alice

Alice returns to bury her daughter Jenna’s remains, which are shockingly incomplete due to decomposition and scavenging. Despite her scientific understanding of decay, the reality of seeing only fragments of her child’s bones leaves her emotionally shattered. She had hesitated to return, fearing arrest, but her need for closure outweighed her fears. Yet, even as Jenna’s coffin is lowered, Alice feels disconnected, unable to fully accept this as her daughter’s final resting place.

After the burial, Alice visits her estranged husband, Thomas, at Hartwick House, where he has lived for a decade. She is stunned by his aged appearance, but his smile briefly revives the man she once knew. Their reunion is strained, as Thomas seems trapped in a delusional state, mistaking a Dr. Seuss book for a scientific article and referencing their daughter as if she were still alive. Alice realizes he is mentally unwell, unable to confront their shared past or Jenna’s death.

Thomas reminisces about Jenna as a toddler, recalling her clever antics, oblivious to the tragedy that befell her. Alice is heartbroken by his fragmented memories, which reflect a happier time before their lives unraveled. She mourns not only Jenna but also the loss of the man Thomas once was. Their conversation underscores the enduring pain of their shared history, leaving Alice with no solace or resolution.

Back at her motel, Alice grapples with unresolved guilt and fear, convinced the police will arrest her for an undisclosed crime. Instead, she is confronted by a mysterious woman with pink hair, whose name she struggles to recall. The encounter hints at another layer of Alice’s troubled past, leaving her—and the reader—with unanswered questions about her actions and the truth behind Jenna’s death.

Chapter 43: Jenna

The chapter "Jenna" from *Leaving Time* explores themes of memory, loss, and the deep connections between humans and elephants. The narrator, Jenna, describes visiting her mother during the twilight hours between night and morning, where her mother shares stories about her work with orphaned elephants. These tales serve as a substitute for the bedtime stories Jenna missed during their separation, highlighting the emotional void left by her mother's absence and the comfort found in their reunions.

One of the stories Jenna’s mother recounts is about Lawrence Anthony, known as the Elephant Whisperer, who rescued and rehabilitated wild elephants in South Africa. When Anthony passed away, the elephants he saved traveled a great distance to mourn at his home, despite not having visited in over a year. This anecdote underscores the profound bond between humans and elephants, as well as the animals' seemingly inexplicable awareness of human emotions and events.

Jenna reflects on the mystery of how the elephants knew of Anthony’s death, offering her own interpretation: love transcends physical presence. She suggests that merely thinking about a loved one who has passed away creates a connection, making the physical details of their absence irrelevant. This idea ties back to her visits with her mother, implying that their bond persists despite separation or loss.

The chapter concludes with Jenna’s poignant realization that emotional connections defy explanation and endure beyond physical boundaries. Her mother’s stories about elephants mirror her own experiences of love and loss, illustrating how memories and thoughts keep loved ones close. The narrative blends personal reflection with broader themes of interspecies empathy, leaving readers with a sense of wonder about the unseen ties that bind us all.