Wait

Wait is a reflective, emotionally intimate novella that centers around a woman navigating an uncertain waiting period — literal and metaphorical — in her life. Told through sharp, lyrical prose, the story explores themes of **time, longing, womanhood, and the body**, set against the backdrop of quiet domestic moments and internal conflict.

The narrator moves through a phase of suspended animation — waiting for something to begin or end, searching for clarity, identity, or healing. Though compact, the novella is deeply poetic and evocative, offering a rich emotional interior life in just a few pages.

Part I: Home Chapter 1

The chapter opens with Elise and Sheba preparing for a party on the eve of graduation. Elise watches Sheba choose a dress nearly identical to her own, highlighting their intimate yet complex friendship. The atmosphere in the dorm room is calm, with night air drifting through an open window, contrasting the underlying tensions. Sheba mentions she cannot stay out late due to physical reasons, and their conversation reveals social dynamics and emotional nuances, including Elise’s curiosity about the party and Sheba’s enigmatic social obligations.

Elise’s family is en route from Nantucket to attend her graduation, a journey marked by uncertainty and delayed communication. Elise anxiously texts her mother and sister, growing increasingly concerned as messages go unanswered throughout the day. This growing unease juxtaposes the youthful revelry of the party, where Sheba

immerses herself in music and dance, drawing Elise into a shared experience that blurs their individual identities. Their mirrored dresses and intimate gestures underscore themes of connection and difference between the two young women.

As the night unfolds, Elise returns to her dorm exhausted and disconnected, her phone dead and messages missed. The morning brings a stark shift when Sophie calls, frantic and revealing that their mother never boarded the ferry to join them. This revelation introduces a sudden crisis, casting a shadow over the anticipated celebration. The chapter captures Elise’s attempt to process this alarming news, balancing disbelief with urgent concern, while Sophie’s voice conveys growing distress and confusion.

The chapter closes on a note of uncertainty and tension, as Elise and Sophie grapple with their mother’s mysterious absence just hours before the graduation ceremony. The narrative effectively contrasts moments of youthful intimacy and anticipation with the sudden intrusion of anxiety and unresolved family concerns. This opening chapter sets a tone of emotional complexity and foreshadows challenges ahead, anchoring the story in themes of family, identity, and the unpredictable nature of life’s pivotal moments.

Part I: Home Chapter 2

Elise sits alone on the deck of a ferry, surrounded by strangers enjoying a summer outing, yet she feels isolated and disconnected. The salty, gasoline-tinged air and the ferry's engine drown out the natural sounds of the sea, mirroring Elise's internal turmoil. She searches for familiar faces but finds only tourists, highlighting her sense of alienation from the place she once called home. Despite the discomfort inside the ferry's cabin, with its familiar yet unappealing smells and worn seats, she clings to the deck, caught between wanting to escape and the need to stay grounded in her surroundings.

As the ferry reaches open water, Elise shares a brief moment with an elderly man, borrowing a cigarette from him while struggling with the inability to contact her mother. Her repeated unsent texts underscore the strained and distant relationship between them. This emotional distance is deepened by a recent phone call with her mother, Gilda, who was preoccupied with the death of a family dog rather than Elise's upcoming graduation. The contrast between Elise's hopes and her mother's distractions exposes the fragile and complicated family dynamics that shape her experience.

Elise reflects on her mother's constrained life, marked by years of isolation and hardship, and the elusive dream of connecting with their Brazilian relatives. The narrative conveys the cyclical nature of waiting and longing, as Gilda's past years of confinement on Nantucket mirror Elise's current feelings of stasis. The ferry worker's reprimand for smoking jolts Elise back to reality as she prepares to disembark, symbolizing the end of one phase and the uncertain beginning of another as she returns to her hometown.

Upon arrival, Elise is greeted by Mr. Wagner, a neighbor whose familiarity contrasts with her recent solitude. Their conversation reveals the passage of time and the subtle

changes in relationships within the community. As Elise approaches her family home, the worn condition of the house reflects the passage of time and underlying struggles. The chapter closes with a tentative invitation to dinner, suggesting a potential for reconnection amidst the lingering tensions and unspoken challenges that define Elise’s journey home.



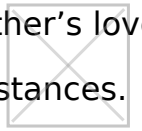
Part I: Home Chapter 3

Elise's college years were marked by financial constraints that limited her ability to travel home, leading her to find summer work at the campus library and form close bonds with international students. These friendships exposed her to diverse cultures and cuisines, offering a sense of community during breaks when most students returned home. Unlike her peers, Elise did not experience the typical summer separation from family, a dynamic she had long observed on her island, where seasonal visitors came and went. This unique upbringing shaped her understanding of identity and belonging, blending the rhythms of home life with the academic world.

Upon starting college, Elise noticed the contrasting ways parents engaged with their children. Many stayed through orientation, helping with logistics and maintaining constant contact, while Elise’s own mother, Gilda, maintained a more distant but caring presence. Gilda's infrequent calls, though sparse, carried deep significance, revealing a quiet affection despite their physical and emotional distance. This subtle connection underscored the complexities of their relationship, shaped by Gilda’s struggles as a young immigrant mother navigating new challenges far from her homeland.

Gilda’s backstory reveals a journey marked by hardship and resilience. Pregnant at twenty and separated from Elise’s father, she faced familial rejection and the demands of raising two daughters largely on her own. Her life as a cook in demanding jobs left little time for social connections, with only work colleagues who spoke a different language for companionship. Yet a rekindled friendship with an old friend from Brazil brought a rare moment of joy and escape, symbolized by a brief trip to Cape Cod, which also highlighted the family’s limited resources and the sacrifices Gilda made daily.

The chapter closes with a poignant scene of Gilda preparing to leave Elise and her sister Sophie alone overnight for the first time. Despite her anxiety, she reassures them with practical instructions and expressions of trust, while the girls display a mix of concern and responsibility. This moment encapsulates the evolving dynamics within the family, reflecting themes of independence, care, and the delicate balance between absence and presence that defines their lives. The narrative captures the quiet strength of a mother’s love amid hardship and the resilience of children adapting to uncertain circumstances.



Part I: Home Chapter 4

In Chapter 4, "Wait," Elise confronts the challenges of daily life amidst uncertainty and absence. An unnoticed rain drenches her as she inspects the flat tire on Gilda’s car, symbolizing the hidden troubles in their lives. Determined to maintain normalcy, Elise plans to drive her daughter Sophie to her high school graduation and purchase a celebratory cake, reflecting her desire to hold onto family milestones despite the growing void left by Gilda’s disappearance. The discovery of a hidden spare tire in the car’s trunk highlights overlooked solutions and the complexities of their strained family dynamics.

As weeks pass without any news from Gilda, Elise's attempts to gather information reveal systemic obstacles and emotional barriers. The hospital’s malfunctioning system and unhelpful receptionist frustrate her efforts, underscoring the isolation she feels. Elise’s reluctance to involve the police, due to Gilda’s strict rule against it, illustrates the deep-seated mistrust and fear within the family. Yet, desperation pushes her toward considering official channels, exposing the painful tension between seeking help and respecting Gilda’s wishes.

The chapter also delves into the sisters’ resilience and resourcefulness as they adapt to their difficult circumstances. Sophie’s unkempt appearance and their makeshift laundry routine reveal the strain on their daily lives. Elise’s reluctant descent into the cellar, confronting filth and decay, symbolizes her willingness to face unpleasant realities to support her family. Their joint effort to find the car jack and change the tire, aided by an online tutorial, demonstrates their determination to regain control and solve problems despite limited experience and resources.

Ultimately, the chapter portrays a poignant portrait of waiting and endurance amid uncertainty. Elise and Sophie’s small victories—finding the spare tire and learning to change it—serve as metaphors for hope and agency in a time of waiting and loss. The

narrative balances the mundane with the emotional, capturing the complexity of family bonds tested by absence and the quiet strength required to navigate an unstable present while holding onto the hope for a better future.



Part I: Home Chapter 5

In Chapter 5 of Part I: Home, the narrative centers around Elise and Sophie navigating the emotional and social complexities of Sophie’s high school graduation day. Amidst a crowded hallway filled with graduates in blue caps and gowns, Elise finds Sophie withdrawn and hesitant about joining the after-party. Despite encouragement from the Wagners, who have been quietly supportive throughout, Sophie’s ambivalence underscores the bittersweet nature of the occasion. A brief video call with their friend Gilda, currently far away in Atibaia, adds a layer of distance and longing, emphasizing the fractured connections that shape their present experience.

As they move to the after-party under the white tent on the football field, the atmosphere contrasts sharply with Sophie’s internal conflict. Surrounded by celebratory food and casual small talk, Elise contemplates the unusual family dynamic they share with the Wagners, feeling a subtle discomfort in the assumed roles and attachments. Sophie’s early departure from the event reflects her struggle to embrace the typical rites of passage, revealing her sense of isolation and the weight of her circumstances, including the absence of their mother and the uncertain future ahead.

The drive home introduces practical challenges that mirror the emotional tension of the day. Elise’s difficulty starting the car at a busy intersection, compounded by the impatient reactions of other drivers and onlookers, symbolizes the obstacles they face in moving forward. Sophie’s encouragement and the presence of the Wagners’ vehicle nearby offer support, yet Elise’s apprehension and determination to get home safely capture the fragile balance between hope and hardship in their lives. The journey home becomes a metaphor for navigating an uncertain path with resilience.

Once home, the sisters’ interaction reveals the lingering impact of their loss and the tentative steps toward healing. Sophie’s retreat to their mother’s bedroom and her stained sweater suggest a grasping for comfort in familiar but painful surroundings,

while Elise’s concern about the future of their house highlights the practical realities they must confront. The chapter closes on a note of quiet reflection, with Elise pondering their next steps, capturing the complex interplay of grief, responsibility, and the search for stability that defines their current existence.



Part II: The Guest Chapter 1

The chapter opens with a vivid description of a summer morning on Nantucket, setting the scene with wooden boats approaching the shore and locals enjoying the lively atmosphere. The island’s seasonal shift is palpable through the bustling ferry schedule, crowded streets, and the return of familiar summer merchandise in shops. This introduction establishes a backdrop of renewal and anticipation, underscoring the island’s cyclical rhythm and the sense of community that defines it during the warmer months.

Elise’s early morning drive to work introduces a personal narrative threaded with family dynamics and practical concerns. Her conversation with Gilda reveals the pressure to provide accurate social security numbers for immigration paperwork, hinting at underlying legal and familial complexities. The mention of a lawyer connected through Elise’s aunt adds a layer of authenticity and tension, reflecting the challenges faced by those navigating immigration processes within close-knit communities.

Upon arriving at her job, Elise reconnects with Steve, her former high school acquaintance and current employer. Their exchange highlights the passage of time and changes in their lives, while also emphasizing Elise’s precarious economic situation. Despite the modest pay and the informal nature of the job, she embraces her role as an endangered species monitor, linking her work to her academic background and a sense of purpose. This segment conveys themes of resilience, adaptation, and the quiet dignity found in seemingly small, meaningful tasks.

The chapter concludes with Elise settling into her monitoring duties on the beach, observing piping plovers with careful attention. Her experience and growing familiarity with the birds serve as a metaphor for her own journey of observation, patience, and gradual understanding. The detailed portrayal of the natural environment and the

delicate balance of the ecosystem mirrors Elise’s personal navigation of her circumstances, setting a reflective and hopeful tone for the narrative to unfold.



Part II: The Guest Chapter 2

In the quiet early hours, Elise awakens to unsettling noises downstairs, suspecting an intruder in her home. Despite her initial fear, she cautiously descends the stairs armed with a nail file, only to find Sheba, her disoriented friend, sitting on the floor eating yogurt. Sheba's confused state, likely caused by Ambien, contrasts sharply with the tension Elise feels. As Elise tends to Sheba, guiding her back to bed and calming her, the two share a moment of vulnerable intimacy, highlighting the complexities of their friendship amid an atmosphere charged with uncertainty and unease.

The chapter then shifts to recount how Elise and Sheba first met on their college's opening day, bonding over Sheba's sweatshirt emblazoned with "Nantucket," Elise's hometown. This connection provided Elise a comforting link to home in an otherwise alien environment. Their friendship blossomed despite their starkly different backgrounds: Elise's small-town roots versus Sheba's affluent New York City upbringing, marked by wealth, privilege, and family tensions. Their shared curiosity and openness allowed them to bridge these differences and form a deep, if complicated, bond.

Sheba's backstory reveals a life shaped by her unique origins as a "test tube baby" and the complex dynamics of her family, including her two mothers and a feud with her grandfather that severed ties to Nantucket. This history underscores Sheba's own identity struggles and her longing for belonging, which she finds on the island more than in her native New York. The narrative emphasizes how their friendship is rooted in these contrasting yet complementary identities, with each woman providing the other a sense of grounding and understanding.

Ultimately, the chapter explores themes of home, identity, and friendship through the lens of Elise and Sheba's relationship. Their reunion in the middle of the night, fraught with confusion and care, mirrors the broader emotional landscape of their

connection—one marked by loyalty, vulnerability, and the challenge of reconciling disparate worlds. The chapter sets a tone of intimate tension, signaling deeper conflicts and emotional revelations to unfold as their story continues.



Part II: The Guest Chapter 3

In this chapter, Elise observes Helen and Holly from the guest house, noting their tense and deliberate interactions in the driveway. Helen appears stern and preoccupied, while Holly responds with casual gestures and a laid-back demeanor. Their conversation reveals a delay or postponement until Monday, suggesting unresolved matters that require patience. Meanwhile, Sheba arrives, tired and disoriented, and quickly assesses the atmosphere, warning Elise that their mothers are overwhelmed and not interested in socializing. This sets a tone of underlying familial tension and the complications of returning from vacation to unexpected responsibilities.

As Sheba settles into the guest house, she and Elise engage in a candid exchange about recent events. Sheba shares her abrupt and unwelcome return from Europe due to her grandfather's death, which has triggered pressure to join an exclusive yacht club. This obligation disrupts her personal plans and social life, highlighting the burdens of family expectations and legacy. Elise empathizes with Sheba’s frustration, recognizing the clash between individual desires and inherited duties. Their conversation reveals Sheba’s defiant yet resigned attitude toward these imposed traditions.

The chapter also delves into Sheba’s characteristic way of coping by oversharing personal and often shocking anecdotes. She recounts a brief, bizarre romantic encounter with a photographer, using humor to deflect from the disappointment of her interrupted vacation. This storytelling serves to underscore Sheba’s complex personality—outspoken, unconventional, and guarded beneath her bravado. Elise’s reaction to these stories shows a mixture of amusement and discomfort, illustrating the evolving dynamics of their friendship and Sheba’s influence on Elise’s perspective.

Overall, the chapter juxtaposes moments of domestic observation with intimate conversations that reveal deeper emotional currents. It explores themes of family

pressure, the clash between tradition and modernity, and the ways individuals navigate social expectations. Through the interactions between Elise, Sheba, Helen, and Holly, the narrative conveys a nuanced portrayal of relationships strained by circumstance yet marked by subtle support and understanding. The chapter’s tone balances tension with humor, providing insight into the characters’ inner lives and the complexities of their connections.



Part II: The Guest Chapter 4

In this chapter, Elise is depicted in the attic on a sweltering day, observing robins outside while grappling with the oppressive heat that has settled over the island. Despite the discomfort, she resists using a noisy fan and worries about the rising electricity bill if she installs air conditioning. The narrative conveys a sense of domestic tension and responsibility as Elise receives a call from her mother, Gilda, who reminds her about submitting social security numbers necessary for an important application. Their conversation highlights the uncertainty surrounding the application's processing time and Gilda's deep longing to reunite with her daughters.

Gilda's protective nature emerges strongly during the call, as she repeatedly asks Elise if she has been locking the doors at night, reflecting her anxiety about their safety. Elise tries to reassure her mother by discussing mundane topics like the weather and precautions against heatstroke, attempting to soothe her worries. The exchange underscores the emotional distance and the strain of separation, with Gilda's concern manifesting in everyday practicalities and Elise's efforts to maintain normalcy despite the underlying tension.

The chapter also reveals a glimpse into Gilda's fragile state through an earlier scene where her sister, Beth, finds her overwhelmed and drinking beer while working on the immigration paperwork. Beth's intervention provides a moment of warmth and nostalgia as she invites Gilda out to revisit a childhood ice cream shop, hoping to lift her spirits. This outing symbolizes a brief respite from their struggles and a reconnection with happier memories, despite Gilda's difficulty recalling them, which hints at her emotional and mental fatigue.

Overall, the chapter paints a poignant picture of family dynamics strained by distance, immigration challenges, and personal hardship. It balances moments of intimate domestic detail with broader themes of hope, memory, and the search for stability.

The narrative’s restrained tone and focus on small, meaningful interactions effectively convey the characters’ internal conflicts and desires, setting the stage for the unfolding story of resilience and reunion.



Part II: The Guest Chapter 5

Elise enters the main house for the first time on the day of a fundraising event, uncertain of where to go or what to expect. The house’s sleek, modern décor contrasts with her unfamiliarity and discomfort as she navigates through the foyer, dining room, and a pristine kitchen where servers prepare for the event. She notices details like cream pillows in the kitchen, reflecting her sense of dissonance and apprehension about the upscale environment she is about to work in. This initial exploration sets the stage for her deeper immersion into a world she has not previously experienced.

Expecting influential environmental scientists or activists at the fundraiser, Elise is surprised to find the guest list comprises a small, eclectic group including a nonprofit CEO, a tech startup president, a geologist turned SpaceX researcher, and wealthy benefactors. This revelation highlights the complex power dynamics and social hierarchies at play, with Elise perceiving the event as a battleground of money and influence. She also discovers that Helen, who invited her, hired a catering company unbeknownst to her close friend Sheba, fueling tensions and underscoring underlying conflicts in their relationships.

Elise reflects on her mother’s warnings about the restaurant industry’s demanding and unappreciated nature, contrasting her own lack of experience with her family’s history of kitchen work. Despite her initial reluctance and feeling inexperienced, she is determined to help. When she offers to serve, the sous chef’s skeptical response and the uncertainty about payment illustrate Elise’s outsider status in this professional kitchen environment. Nevertheless, she is given a uniform and tasked with following instructions, marking the beginning of her hands-on involvement in the event.

Her encounter with Asia, a former high school friend now also working at the event, offers a moment of connection amid her uncertainty. Asia guides Elise through the practicalities of the job, including uniform changes and flower arrangements for the

dining room. Asia’s candid advice about the simplicity of Elise’s duties and the need to defer more complex requests emphasizes Elise’s novice position but also provides reassurance. This interaction grounds Elise’s experience, blending personal history with the immediate demands of her new role as a server at the fundraiser.



Part II: The Guest Chapter 6

The chapter opens with Elise sensing an unusual tension as Steve unexpectedly arrives by dinghy, signaling an emergency involving Sophie. The normally carefree atmosphere of the estuary contrasts sharply with Elise’s growing anxiety. Upon learning that Sophie has been arrested following an altercation with a construction worker during an eviction attempt, Elise’s concern deepens. The urgency of the situation unfolds as Steve contacts his brother Randy at the police station to gather details, revealing that Sophie’s actions—kicking the worker—stemmed from a heated dispute sparked by the landlord’s eviction notice.

The narrative then shifts to a detailed description of the island’s police station, highlighting its transformation from a modest outpost to a heavily fortified complex after 9/11. This setting underscores the gravity of Sophie’s predicament amid the island’s evolving law enforcement landscape. Sophie, waiting anxiously outside the station, is reunited with Elise, who immediately assesses her sister’s physical and emotional state. Sophie’s terse explanation of the eviction situation reveals confusion and frustration, as she resists the forced move and confronts the construction crew sent to "gut" the house, which she believes they must physically remove her from.

As they drive away from the station, the sisters’ conversation exposes the deeper issues at play. Sophie admits that their mother, the leaseholder, no longer resides at the house, complicating the legitimacy of the eviction. The absence of any formal eviction notice in the mail adds to the uncertainty, and tensions rise when Elise accuses Sophie of neglecting important correspondence. Their exchange reflects underlying familial strains and the stress caused by their precarious housing situation. The imagery of officers casually smoking cigars outside the station contrasts with the sisters’ fraught dialogue, emphasizing the dissonance between authority and personal crisis.

The chapter closes on a somber note, with Elise reflecting on the precariousness of Sophie’s situation and the fortunate connection to the police through Steve’s brother. Despite this, the sisters’ silence and unresolved tension hint at ongoing challenges ahead. Elise’s internal regret over her harsh words to Sophie underscores the emotional complexity of their relationship and the broader themes of uncertainty, displacement, and familial responsibility that permeate the chapter.



Part II: The Guest Chapter 7

Elise begins her day in quiet reflection, noticing the stillness around her and the presence of two mourning doves at her window. Her morning routine is simple yet deliberate as she prepares for work, moving through the guest house where signs of the previous night's activity linger. She finds Sophie and Sheba asleep, reminders of the transient and unsettled nature of their current lives. Despite the calm appearance, Elise is aware of the underlying tension and the need to maintain normalcy amid uncertainty.

Outside, Elise engages with the natural world, observing the shore and documenting bird activity with a mixture of scientific diligence and personal fatigue. The sea and its creatures offer a temporary escape from her worries, yet the reality of her disrupted life looms. She and Sophie have been living at Sheba’s for a week, avoiding contact with their mother and grappling with the loss of their family home, which has been demolished. Elise struggles with the emotional weight of this loss and the challenge of articulating what it means to lose a place that no longer exists.

The fragility of life becomes starkly apparent when Elise witnesses a gull destroy a clutch of eggs she had been monitoring. This event triggers a profound emotional response, symbolizing the uncontrollable forces that have shaped her recent experiences. Her conversation with Steve reveals her feelings of failure and grief, highlighting the personal significance of her environmental work and the broader theme of loss. Steve’s reassurance offers some comfort, yet Elise remains uncertain about the future and the possibility of renewal.

Returning to Sheba’s, Elise confronts her vulnerability amidst the supportive presence of Sophie and Sheba. Her tears break the veneer of composure, exposing the rawness of her emotions. The chapter closes with a moment of connection and empathy, as Elise allows herself to be comforted despite her embarrassment. This scene

underscores the importance of human connection in times of distress and the ongoing process of coping with change and loss.



Part III: The Main House Chapter 1

The chapter opens with Elise caught in a seemingly endless line of cars waiting for full-service gas at a small station near the island's main supermarket. Despite an empty self-service station nearby, drivers cling to the traditional service, highlighting a subtle tension between convenience and habit. Elise's reflections on the traffic evoke the philosophical Ship of Theseus paradox, as she contemplates whether the line remains the same when all original cars are replaced. This moment of quiet introspection is punctuated by a brief, tender interaction with a family on bicycles, stirring unexpected emotions within her.

Elise and Sophie have been residing in the guest house for nearly a month, feeling the weight of distance from Gilda, who is absorbed in her life in Brazil. The physical and emotional separation is palpable, compounded by the arrival of a mysterious package redirected to the guest house, likely containing important documents from their mother. This tangible connection to home brings a shift in Elise’s emotional state, symbolizing the complex ties that bind them despite their dispersal and distractions.

Inside the guest house, Elise reconnects with Sheba, who reveals her disappointment and social rejection from a prestigious yacht club. Their conversation uncovers Sheba’s insecurities and the broader theme of belonging and exclusion, while Elise offers support and solidarity. The two share a moment of camaraderie and freedom, acknowledging their status as "parentless" and unburdened by supervision, which deepens their bond amid uncertainty and change.

The chapter concludes with a phone call from Gilda, bridging the physical divide with a warm, if cautious, conversation. The dialogue reveals Elise’s fatigue and emotional strain, while Gilda’s gentle concern underscores the lingering connections and care within the family. This exchange encapsulates the chapter’s exploration of distance, waiting, and the enduring ties that sustain them through moments of isolation and

transition.



Part III: The Main House Chapter 2

In this chapter, Sheba invites Elise and Sophie to the main house for dinner, citing the superior sound system, cozier couches, and better pantry selection as reasons to gather there instead of the guest house. Sophie, relieved from her dinner shift, agrees to join, while Elise, delayed by lack of service, arrives later to find the two already cooking cacio e pepe together. The atmosphere is warm and intimate, marked by matching aprons, jazz music, and thoughtful table settings, which elicit a sense of grown-up sophistication and comfort among the friends.

The conversation shifts to plans for a night out at a bar, despite Sophie being underage. Sheba offers to provide a fake ID and a wig for Sophie, who is eager to break free from the monotony of home life and experience something different. Elise expresses skepticism about the plan, highlighting the risks and the difficulty of Sophie passing as someone else, but Sophie is determined, bolstered by Sheba's support and connections at the local bar. This interaction reveals the characters’ longing for freedom and the tensions between responsibility and rebellion.

Sheba leads them to her expansive walk-in closet, a converted office filled with luxurious clothing and hidden compartments, where she helps Sophie select an outfit that suits her tastes and personality. Their detailed discussion about preferences and styles underscores the care and camaraderie shared among the trio. Elise, meanwhile, is left to reflect quietly on the surroundings and the subtle intimacies of Sheba’s personal space, discovering a poetry book and observing the playful dynamics between Sheba and Sophie through the closet door.

The chapter closes on a tender note as Sophie tries on various dresses for a fashion show judged by Elise, capturing a moment of youthful excitement and sisterly bonding. The scene is punctuated by laughter and lightheartedness, highlighting themes of friendship, identity exploration, and the bittersweet transition from adolescence to

adulthood. This snapshot of their evening encapsulates both the joy and complexity of their relationships within the main house’s inviting yet charged environment.



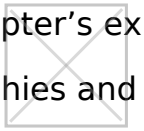
Part III: The Main House Chapter 3

The chapter begins by illustrating the gradual and natural transition of the characters Sophie, Elise, and Sheba from the guest house into the main house. This shift unfolds effortlessly, like water spreading across a surface, highlighted by a shared morning after a night out, where they gather over simple food and sparkling Perrier. Their day inside, wrapped in comfort and watching a poignant film, symbolizes a new phase of connection and domestic intimacy. The narrative emphasizes the significance of space and belonging, particularly as Sophie experiences a rare moment of privacy and personal space in the main house, contrasting with her previous shared and transient living arrangements.

As the summer progresses, the main house becomes a sanctuary marked by careful attention to detail and comfort. Elise and Sheba take pride in the elegant and personal touches of Helen and Holly’s room, with its luxurious linens and scenic views, creating a nurturing environment. The domestic order maintained in the main house, from the pristine fridge to the folded laundry, contrasts with the unnoticed presence of the housekeepers, hinting at unspoken boundaries and social dynamics within the household. This setting underscores a sense of stability and care, even as some aspects remain quietly invisible or unacknowledged.

The arrival of the wealthy summer visitors introduces a stark contrast to the domestic calm. Sophie’s demanding job catering to billionaires at the Lunch Counter exposes her to relentless physical exhaustion and emotional strain. Despite the glamour of the island’s affluent visitors, Sophie’s experience is one of weariness and overwork, which deeply concerns Sheba. The chapter conveys the toll of service labor amid luxury and the social disparities that underpin their daily lives. Meanwhile, the exhaustion and strained schedules contribute to a fading communication routine with Gilda, highlighting the emotional distance and pressures faced by the characters.

Gilda’s storyline offers a poignant counterpoint, focusing on her personal journey and family reconnection in Brazil. Busy with her new job and a recent family reunion, Gilda’s thoughts drift to her daughters and the emotional weight of saudade. She prepares to meet her estranged father, Manuel, in a quiet and private setting, reflecting on how to present herself and the complex feelings surrounding their reunion. This narrative thread weaves themes of memory, identity, and reconciliation, enriching the chapter’s exploration of family ties and emotional landscapes across different geographies and generations.



Part III: The Main House Chapter 4

In Chapter 4 of Part III: The Main House, Gilda informs Elise about the ambiguous response from the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services regarding their request tied to Sophie’s immigration status. The agency requires more evidence to prove Sophie’s dependency on Gilda, despite Sophie’s strong-willed independence. This bureaucratic demand forces Gilda and Elise to confront the difficult question of how a mother can formally demonstrate the necessity of her presence in her child's life. Elise offers to write a supporting letter, highlighting the complexity of defining familial bonds through legal criteria.

Elise then reveals to Gilda that she and Sophie are no longer living in the family house due to eviction by their landlord, who plans to renovate and sell the property. This disclosure unsettles Gilda, who expresses concern over not being informed sooner, emphasizing her maternal responsibility to know where her children reside. The phone conversation is abruptly ended by Steve, who needs to leave for work, leaving the situation unresolved and tensions simmering between Elise and Gilda over communication and trust.

Later, Elise reflects on her difficult circumstances while enduring harsh weather on the beach, where she works for Steve. Her physical discomfort parallels her emotional turmoil about having shared the news with her mother and fearing Gilda’s disappointment. Returning to the house, Elise encounters Sophie, who is wearing a wig lent by their friend Sheba. This moment subtly underscores Sophie’s ongoing struggle with identity and vulnerability, hinting at deeper emotional and personal challenges beneath the surface of their family’s legal and social struggles.

The chapter poignantly illustrates the intersecting challenges of family loyalty, legal bureaucracy, and personal resilience. Through the interactions between Gilda, Elise, and Sophie, the narrative explores the complexities of dependency, independence,

and the emotional weight carried by each character. The tension between institutional demands and familial love underscores the broader theme of proving one’s worth and connection in a world governed by rigid systems and uncertain relationships.



Part III: The Main House Chapter 5

In the summer following Sophie’s eleventh birthday, an early appearance of phosphorescence in the island’s waters sparked curiosity. Elise overheard teenagers describing their experience of seeing glowing green lights while swimming at night, attributing it to phosphorescent jellyfish. Intrigued by this phenomenon, Elise shared the story with Sophie, and together they researched the sea creatures responsible for the bioluminescent display. Their search revealed a variety of luminous marine organisms, including comb jellies, and a captivating video showcased the enchanting glow of these underwater lifeforms, deepening their fascination and desire to witness it firsthand.

Motivated by their discovery, the girls devised a plan to observe the phosphorescence themselves. Setting an alarm for the early hours when their mother Gilda would be asleep, they quietly slipped out of the house in their nightgowns. Their stealthy escape was filled with anticipation and cautiousness as they navigated the dark island roads, encountering only a family of deer along the way. Upon reaching the beach, they adjusted their eyes to the dim light and ventured cautiously into the ocean, determined to find the glowing spectacle described by the teenagers.

Despite Sophie’s initial fear of the dark, murky water—heightened by a previous painful crab encounter—Elise reassured her, and they waded deeper into the tide. Once submerged, they were mesmerized by the glowing comb jellies illuminating the water around them, creating a magical and otherworldly experience. Their playful immersion, marked by neon patterns and shared wonder, symbolized a moment of childhood freedom and awe, as they imagined never leaving this luminous underwater world and dreamed of breathing beneath the waves.

Their reverie was abruptly ended by their mother’s urgent call from shore, warning them of the danger and ordering them out of the water. Gilda’s unexpected vigilance

revealed that their secret excursion had been discovered, highlighting the tension between childhood curiosity and parental concern. The chapter closes with Sophie and Elise reluctantly leaving the glowing sea behind, their brief encounter with the mysterious phosphorescence leaving a lasting impression on their young lives.



Part III: The Main House Chapter 6

In this chapter, Elise visits a local farm market after a month-long absence from the grocery store, seeking a simple connection to normal life amid her personal struggles. The familiar sights and sounds evoke a sense of nostalgia, yet she wanders the aisles aimlessly, trying to delay returning home and confronting unresolved tensions with Sophie. Her distraction is interrupted when Mrs. Wagner calls out to her, leading to a delicate and emotional exchange about Mrs. Wagner's dog, Suzie, who has recently been diagnosed with cancer. The encounter reveals layers of shared grief and concern, setting a somber tone.

Their conversation shifts from the dog's illness to more personal matters, including Elise's mother's recent death and its aftermath. Mrs. Wagner expresses sympathy and reflects on the injustice of their situation, hinting at broader societal issues regarding immigration and belonging. Elise responds with quiet frustration, underscoring the painful reality of their loss and the challenges they face. This dialogue highlights the complex emotions of mourning and the struggle to find support within their community.

A significant revelation emerges when Elise questions how their landlord learned of their mother's absence, which led to them being evicted from the family home. Mrs. Wagner explains the landlord, Mark, is a longtime friend of her husband and has been checking in on the house from afar. This connection introduces a nuanced dynamic, revealing how personal relationships and decisions intersect with legal and social constraints. Elise asserts her independence and maturity, emphasizing her right to make decisions about her living situation despite the landlord's authority.

The chapter closes with a tense exchange about the difficult choices Mrs. Wagner faces regarding Suzie's treatment, with Elise critiquing the potential emotional motivations behind prolonging the dog's suffering. Mrs. Wagner acknowledges the

complexity of the situation, offering Elise and Sophie continued support despite recent conflicts. This interaction encapsulates the chapter’s themes of grief, responsibility, and the intricate balance between compassion and practicality in difficult times.



Part III: The Main House Chapter 7

The chapter opens with a vivid description of the main house’s backyard, centered around a pristine infinity pool adorned by a floating inflatable swan. Helen, the absent homeowner, typically removes the swan, but in her absence, Sheba allows it to remain, enjoying the carefully maintained pool environment. A pool technician regularly attends to the water’s condition, ensuring it is perfect by morning when Sheba swims laps, dressed in athletic gear and following a routine that includes an iced cashew-milk latte and an apple Danish on a teak chaise lounge. This luxurious setting explains why the characters rarely visit the beach anymore.

Sheba and Elise relax poolside when Sophie bursts in, expressing her desire to go to the beach, highlighting their long absence from the shore. The dialogue reveals contrasting feelings: Sheba prefers the convenience and comfort of the pool, disliking the sticky saltwater and seaweed discomforts of the ocean, while Sophie yearns for the authentic beach experience—sand, seagulls, crabs, and the presence of others. Despite Sheba’s initial reluctance, all three women prepare for a beach trip to a secluded spot known only to them, accessible through a hidden path marked by a poison ivy-covered mailbox.

The journey to the secret beach is described with sensory richness, from the hot sand to the natural flora surrounding the dunes. The characters embrace the isolation and beauty of the uninhabited shore, where Elise reflects on the endless horizon extending across the Atlantic. Sophie immediately plunges into the cold water, invigorating the group’s dynamic, while Sheba remains more reserved, hiding behind a magazine. Their differing attitudes underscore the tension between comfort and adventure, with Sheba longing for the pool’s ease but ultimately joining the beach outing.

The chapter closes with an intimate moment of observation and subtle tension. Elise watches Sophie interact warmly with local islanders, including a woman carrying an

infant, suggesting a connection to the community beyond their private retreat. Sheba’s curiosity about Sophie’s conversation and Elise’s quiet contemplation hint at undercurrents of social and personal relationships. The narrative balances the idyllic setting with nuanced character interactions, emphasizing themes of belonging, preference, and the complexities of friendship within this coastal environment.



Part III: The Main House Chapter 8

At dawn, newly hatched birds break free from their shells, signaling a moment of renewal and hope. Elise discovers the hatchlings nestled in seaweed, their fragile forms exploring their environment with tentative curiosity. Observing them through binoculars, she is captivated by their delicate movements and spirited chirping. When Steve arrives, their shared excitement over the birds' successful breeding reflects a deep connection to the natural world. Their playful banter and Steve's offer of meditation to embrace joyful moments underscore the significance of presence and appreciation in their lives.

Elise reminisces about childhood memories spent at the beach with her sister Sophie, where waves became imagined stampedes of animals. This nostalgic exchange highlights the bond between past and present, blending youthful imagination with adult observation. Steve's teasing and Elise's laughter reveal a comfortable intimacy, further enriched by their shared attention to the chicks. As they watch the birds feed and nestle, Steve proposes that Elise extend her work into the fall, an offer she gratefully accepts, providing her with stability and time to plan ahead.

Returning to the main house, Elise's arrival is marked by a text from Rahul, initiating a lighthearted and flirtatious exchange. Inside, the presence of Sophie and Sheba, each absorbed in their own digital worlds, illustrates the contrast between connection and distraction in modern life. Elise's announcement of the hatchlings' arrival sparks casual enthusiasm, while the teasing from her family about her interactions with Rahul introduces an undercurrent of youthful romance and social dynamics. The playful accusations and banter reveal the complexities of family relationships and personal boundaries.

The chapter closes with Elise engaging directly with Rahul about an upcoming bonfire party, signaling a potential new chapter in her social life. Sophie and Sheba's

excitement and advice on party attire highlight their close-knit relationship and shared experiences. Elise’s decision to attend the event and her confirmation with Rahul suggest anticipation and openness to new connections. Overall, the chapter weaves themes of growth, memory, and interpersonal relationships, balancing moments of quiet observation with lively dialogue and emotional nuance.



Part III: The Main House Chapter 9

In this chapter, Elise and her friends Sheba and Sophie drive into the woods to attend a rustic party held around a bonfire. The drive is bumpy and the location isolated, marked only by parked cars and the distant murmur of voices. The atmosphere is casual and nostalgic, with Sheba drinking prosecco and Sophie carrying a six-pack of cider. As they walk through the dark woods, the sensory details of the setting—the scent of mushrooms and the crackling fire—set a vivid backdrop for the reunion with old acquaintances, including Rahul, a key figure in Elise's past.

Upon arrival, Elise reconnects with Rahul, who greets her warmly despite some awkwardness over missed communication. Their interaction reveals a blend of past familiarity and present tension, as Elise navigates the social dynamics of the party. Sheba's boldness contrasts with Elise's more reserved demeanor, while Sophie mingles independently. The scene captures the complexities of reconnecting with former friends and lovers, highlighting subtle shifts in relationships over time.

Elise also encounters Asia and Blake, old friends who prompt reflections on shared histories and personal growth. The conversations evoke memories of middle school band performances and youthful bonds, underscoring the passage of time and changing identities. Meanwhile, Rahul's younger brother's drunken confession about Rahul's longtime affection for Elise adds an unexpected layer of insight into their past, complicating Elise's feelings and perceptions.

As the party winds down, Elise, who remains sober, grows weary of the gathering's dwindling energy. She decides it is time to leave with Sophie, signaling a return to reality after an evening steeped in nostalgia and social navigation. The chapter ends on a contemplative note, emphasizing themes of memory, connection, and the bittersweet nature of revisiting one's past within the familiar yet altered landscape of the main house and its surroundings.

Part III: The Main House Chapter 10

The chapter opens on a scorching morning, with the main house restored to its usual state by the housekeepers. Helen, reclined beneath a fringed umbrella, applies sunscreen while summoning Elise and Sheba for a conversation. Helen confronts them about the shock of finding a stranger in her bed, implying Elise's presence was unexpected and unwelcome. Though Elise pleads her case, Helen insists the guest house arrangement is temporary, emphasizing that Sheba, her daughter, takes precedence. The tension underscores a complicated dynamic where Elise and Sophie are marginalized despite their connection to Sheba, highlighting themes of loyalty and displacement within the household.

Elise and Sophie respond to the ultimatum by retreating to the guest house, unpacking with a sense of impermanence. Elise notices Sheba's social media post, revealing a casual detachment from the unfolding drama. Over the next two weeks, they avoid the main house, seeking solace elsewhere and attempting to remain unnoticed. This avoidance reflects their precarious situation and emotional distance from Helen and Sheba. The narrative captures their quiet struggle, underscoring the uncertainty of their future and the emotional toll of being sidelined in a space they once inhabited more fully.

A week before their planned move, with no alternative housing secured, Elise visits the high school football field to clear her mind. The quiet, open space provides a momentary escape from her troubles. There, she encounters Asia, a former high school soccer player who reminisces about the lack of support for girls' sports and current rec league participation. Their conversation shifts to recent social developments, including a surprising romantic entanglement involving Rahul, a mutual acquaintance, which reveals underlying tensions and unspoken feelings within their social circle. This interaction adds depth to Elise's personal challenges and social

environment.

The chapter closes with Elise reflecting on her complicated relationships and the shifting alliances around her. Asia’s casual yet pointed remarks about Rahul’s choices highlight Elise’s conflicted emotions and the social undercurrents influencing her life. The locked scoreboard and worn surroundings symbolize stagnation and unresolved issues. Overall, the chapter explores themes of belonging, loyalty, and the struggle to find stability amid social and familial upheaval. It sets the stage for forthcoming changes while deepening the reader’s understanding of the characters’ inner worlds and interpersonal dynamics.

Part III: The Main House Chapter 11

In this reflective chapter, Elise and Sophie embark on a spontaneous drive through familiar yet unexplored parts of their island, a journey that ultimately leads them back to their old family home. The late-August atmosphere, with its fragile air and expansive sky, mirrors their nostalgic mood. Using binoculars, they observe the renovated house from a distance, noting changes like the green trim and marigolds in the window boxes, while also glimpsing the current residents and their children playing outside. Despite the alterations, the house remains deeply symbolic for both, embodying their shared past and memories.

Their observations evoke a mix of emotions as they witness the new life unfolding in the space they once called home. Sophie notices details like a dinosaur sticker in the attic window, signaling subtle traces of childhood that resonate with their own experiences. The playful children remind them of their youthful skepticism toward authority, highlighting the continuity of life despite change. This moment underscores the bittersweet reality of growth and transformation, as the house serves as a tangible link between their past and present.

The conversation shifts as Sophie reveals a significant personal milestone: her acceptance to Berkeley University through the waitlist, accompanied by financial aid. This news surprises Elise, who had been unaware of Sophie's college applications. Their exchange conveys a mixture of excitement and apprehension about Sophie's impending move to California for orientation, emphasizing the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. Elise offers support, encouraging Sophie to embrace this new chapter despite the distance it will create between them.

As they prepare to leave, the sisters reflect on the emotional complexities of Sophie's departure, particularly concerning their mother’s reaction. Sophie expresses worry about upsetting their mother by moving farther away, while Elise reassures her of their

family's pride and support. The chapter closes with the image of the children being called inside for dinner, symbolizing the passage of time and the evolving nature of home and family. Elise drives away, carrying the weight of memories and the promise of change, encapsulating the themes of transition and enduring connection.



Part III: The Main House Chapter 12

In Chapter 12 of Part III: The Main House, the narrative opens with Elise observing the natural world around her, as birds prepare for migration and she contemplates the passage of time through the sand slipping from her hands. She reflects on her daughter Sophie’s journey to San Francisco, imagining her airborne and capturing moments through photographs. Elise’s deep maternal concern is palpable as she recalls preparing Sophie’s sandwich and watching her disappear beyond the airport’s security, her heart burdened with a mix of longing and hope. This scene establishes a poignant atmosphere of distance and anticipation.

Elise’s desire to connect extends beyond Sophie; she attempts to reach her mother, Gilda, by phone, but the connection fails repeatedly. Her text message, “Mãe, estou indo” (“Mom, I’m coming for you”), symbolizes a yearning for reunion and reconciliation, underscoring themes of familial bonds and the challenges of communication over physical and emotional distances. The failed attempts to contact Gilda reflect the barriers that exist within their relationships, amplifying Elise’s solitude and determination.

Meanwhile, the chapter shifts to Gilda’s setting in Atibaia, where she shares a warm, intimate meal with her sister Beth and Manuel, who brings a sense of tradition and closeness through his gift of a well-loved book and a toast to togetherness. This domestic scene contrasts with Elise’s isolation, revealing Gilda’s own quiet world and hinting at her character’s gentle nature and vulnerabilities. The juxtaposition highlights the parallel lives of mother and daughter, separated yet connected by love and unspoken emotions.

The chapter closes with a metaphorical moment as Elise watches birds take flight and gazes at her reflection in the ocean’s shifting surface, seeing an image that is both familiar and elusive. This imagery evokes themes of change, identity, and the fleeting

nature of time and connection. The final wave erasing her reflection signifies uncertainty and the ephemeral quality of human experience, leaving the reader with a contemplative mood about the characters’ intertwined journeys and the waiting that defines their lives.

