

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 begins with Phoebe grappling with the weight of her mortality, haunted by the regrets and disappointments of her life. Surrounded by the remnants of a past filled with restrictions and concerns, she embraces a moment of rebellion, pouring herself a glass of German chocolate wine as she reflects on what she's missed—particularly her long-held dream of seeing the ocean. Despite acknowledging this unfulfilled wish, she is burdened by the recent separation from her husband, Matt, who chose to end their marriage over Zoom during the pandemic. His departure has left her feeling abandoned, hurt, and betrayed, amplifying her sense of loss and isolation.

As she gazes out at the ocean from her hotel room, Phoebe attempts to indulge in a small comfort by ordering a luxurious final meal, hoping for lobster and oysters. However, her plans are thwarted by the hotel staff, who inform her that room service has been suspended due to an opening reception. The idea of interacting with cheerful guests at the reception causes her anxiety, compelling her to abandon the idea of the meal and retreat further into herself. The tension she feels in this moment reveals the depth of her despair, amplifying her sense of disconnection from the world around her.

Reflecting on her life, Phoebe is reminded of the emotional and professional challenges she's faced, particularly the struggles tied to her career as an educator. A conversation with one of her students, Adam, who contemplates dropping out of college to pursue a passion for making pants, mirrors Phoebe's own confusion about her purpose. Her inner turmoil about her career path and identity begins to surface, as she contemplates her struggles with finding meaning in both her work and her personal life. This interaction highlights her growing feelings of inadequacy and uncertainty, signaling a shift in her self-perception and her ability to navigate the complexities of her own existence.

The narrative takes a more intense turn when Phoebe encounters Mia, the woman Matt left her for. They meet in a photocopier room, and a tense conversation unfolds between them. As Phoebe confronts Mia, expressing her feelings of betrayal and hurt, she uncovers painful truths about her marriage. Mia admits to loving Matt, and Phoebe realizes that their relationship had already been on shaky ground long before Mia entered the picture. This revelation marks a turning point for Phoebe, as she comes to terms with the fact that her marriage had been broken before the affair, deepening her sense of loss.



Summary

As the chapter progresses, Phoebe becomes overwhelmed by grief, her world becoming increasingly suffocating. After struggling to cope with her emotions, she is struck by the sudden death of her beloved cat, Harry, compounding her sense of despair. Seeking solace in alcohol, Phoebe tries to numb the pain, but the following morning, the harsh reality of her situation crashes down on her. She begins to reflect on the inevitability of death and the concept of rebirth, drawing from the philosophies of Whitman. However, despite these philosophical musings, she can't help but feel that the future holds little promise, intensifying her inner conflict.

In a final act of defiance against the overwhelming despair she's feeling, Phoebe decides to take a step toward escape. She books a stay at the Cornwall, symbolizing her attempt to find refuge from the anguish that has consumed her life. This gesture suggests that while Phoebe is still deep in her grief, she is trying to take control of her destiny, seeking solace in a place that might offer her some form of reprieve. The chapter concludes on a note of tentative hope, indicating that Phoebe is beginning to search for a way out of her emotional torment, even if it's just a temporary escape.