

# Prologue

Prologue opens with the narrator, isolated and in physical discomfort, sitting with their back against a wall. The flat pillows they lean on remind them of the absence of the comfort they once found in their sister, Mae. Mae's absence brings with it a sense of loneliness, and the narrator feels a growing distance between themselves and the warmth of family. Holding a photograph of Leah, a figure who existed before the narrator even knew her, they reflect on the deep and profound impact women, especially Mae and Leah, have had on their life. Despite the long periods of absence and separation, their influence continues to shape the narrator's sense of self, even as their physical condition worsens. As the sun begins to set outside, the narrator's solitude deepens, making the space around them feel more oppressive. The pain in their legs leaves them unable to move, preventing them from reaching the fire that has always been a quiet companion in times of sorrow. These moments of stillness, in combination with their physical limitations, reinforce the heavy weight of isolation, as the narrator contemplates a life filled with connections lost over time.

Struggling with the reality of their illness, the narrator becomes increasingly aware of their profound loneliness. They realize that, despite the loving care offered by their family, no one can truly bridge the emotional gap they feel. Leah's visits offer some relief, as do the efforts of siblings Mae and Ben, but the narrator remains distant, believing that their pain and emotional struggles are beyond anyone's understanding. Their mother's attempts to comfort them through prayers and words of hope bring little solace, as the narrator feels disconnected from these gestures of love. The presence of family cannot soften the sting of solitude, and the narrator grapples with the fear that they will face the end of their life in isolation. Their mother, while offering comfort, can only pray for their peace, yet the narrator feels that no amount of love will be enough to ease the profound sadness of impending loss. This internal

conflict—wanting companionship yet feeling unreachable—creates a powerful sense of isolation, adding weight to the already heavy reality of their illness.

Just as the chapter seems to spiral deeper into despair, Mae suddenly appears at the door with a look of genuine joy, an emotion that has been rare in the narrator's recent life. Mae's brightness offers a stark contrast to the dark, oppressive mood that has dominated the narrator's existence, bringing a temporary but significant shift in atmosphere. Intrigued by her positive energy, the narrator tries to sit up, eager to share in the happiness that Mae brings, even if only for a brief moment. Mae, carrying news of a visitor, hints at a potential reconnection that could revive the narrator's sense of purpose and alleviate the emotional weight of illness. The visitor's arrival could provide a rare opportunity for conversation, offering the possibility of reconnecting with life outside the confines of illness and isolation. Though the moment is fleeting, it serves as a reminder that, even in times of deep sorrow and physical pain, human connection still holds the power to uplift and offer temporary respite from despair.

The prologue sets the tone for an emotional exploration of love, illness, and the complexities of human connection. Themes of familial bonds, the impact of loss, and the fleeting nature of joy are established as the narrator faces their own mortality. The emotional turmoil of confronting the end of life alone is intertwined with the quiet, yet powerful, presence of family, who offers what little support they can. Despite their attempts, the narrator's emotional isolation remains palpable, with brief moments of happiness offering only temporary relief. This opening sets the stage for a deep and reflective journey, filled with moments of light and darkness, where the narrator's quest for understanding, acceptance, and peace will unfold. The chapter hints at the profound struggle between holding on to fleeting moments of joy and accepting the inevitable nature of loss, allowing readers to connect deeply with the narrator's emotional landscape.