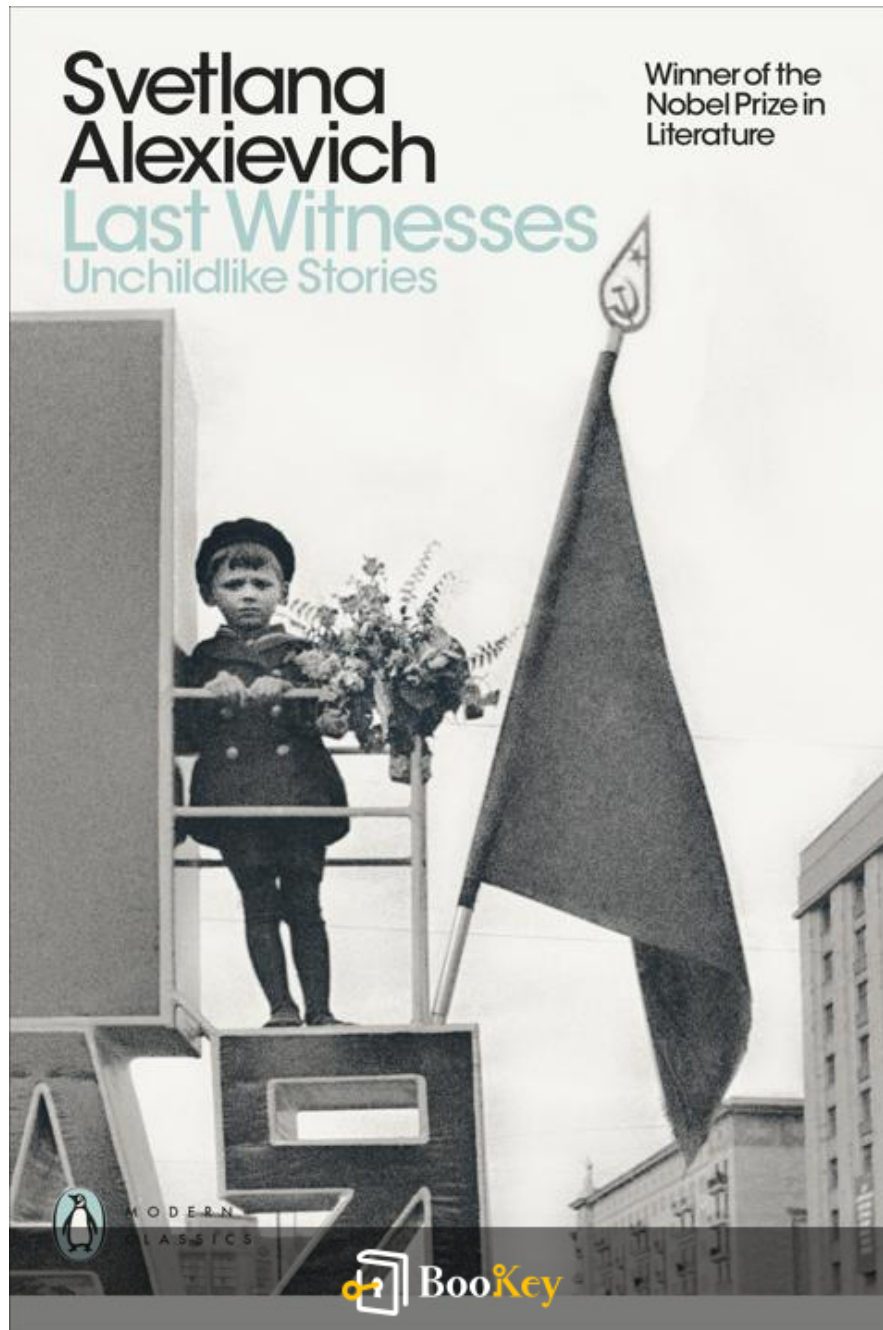


Last Witnesses PDF (Limited Copy)

Svetlana Alexievich



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Last Witnesses Summary

Voices of Childhood During the Second World War

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About the book

In "Last Witnesses," Nobel laureate Svetlana Alexievich masterfully weaves together the haunting testimonies of those who were children during World War II, illuminating the indelible scars left by conflict on the innocence of youth. Through poignant recollections and raw emotions, the book captures the stark contrast between the simple joys of childhood and the harrowing realities of war, creating a deeply affecting tapestry of personal histories that echo the collective memory of a generation. As these last witnesses share their stories of loss, resilience, and survival, readers are invited to reflect on the profound impacts of war not just on nations, but on the very essence of humanity itself. Alexievich's compelling narrative challenges us to confront the past and bear witness to the enduring cost of conflict, making it an essential read for anyone seeking to understand the human experience in times of turmoil.

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About the author

Svetlana Alexievich is a Belarusian journalist and writer, renowned for her groundbreaking works of oral history that illuminate the human experience through the voices of ordinary people. Born on May 31, 1948, in Stasiukany, Belarus, she became a prominent figure in literature, winning the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2015 for her polyphonic writings, which bring together personal testimonies of historical events and social upheaval. Her unique narrative style blends investigative journalism with a poignant exploration of human emotions, allowing readers to engage deeply with the collective memories of her subjects, particularly in her celebrated works like 'Voices from Chernobyl' and 'Last Witnesses.' In 'Last Witnesses,' Alexievich captures the voices of children who experienced the horrors of World War II, providing a haunting reflection on the impact of war and the resilience of the human spirit.

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Chapter 1 Summary: HE WAS AFRAID TO LOOK BACK...

In the haunting narratives captured by Svetlana Alexievich in "**Last Witnesses**", we are immersed in the fragmented memories of children recounting their experiences during World War II. Their vivid recollections reflect the stark innocence of youth shattered by the brutal realities of war. Below is a synthesis of the powerful stories shared, illustrating the emotional depth and lasting impact of war on their lives.

1. The psychological trauma begins early, as depicted through Zhenya Belkevich, who at six years old, struggles to comprehend the departure of his father for war. His memories are laced with innocence—a fairy tale of the Golden Fish juxtaposed with the profound fear of losing a parent. This traumatic departure marks the beginning of his internalization of war, forever linking it to abandonment and loss. The image of his mother's lifeless body amidst the chaos solidifies his perception of war as a rupture in familial bonds.

2. Gena Yushkevich, at twelve, reflects on the eerie stillness preceding the war as a turning point. The silence shrouded in disbelief quickly morphs into chaos with the onset of bombings and destruction. Gena's youthful naivety clashes with the reality of death and devastation, grappling with the sight of civilians, including women and horses, caught in the violence. His



recollection of frantically running to a cemetery for safety encapsulates the desperation of civilians helplessly confronting their fate.

3. Natasha Golik, just five, illustrates how conflict dismantles the stability of childhood. Her experience emphasizes the helplessness of children confronting war. After being presumed dead while sleeping for days, her awakening signifies a painful realization of vulnerability. The juxtaposition of childhood innocence against the backdrop of mortal fear demonstrates how war robs children of their safety and security.

4. Katya Korotaeva, thirteen, recalls the unsettling smell of war ingrained in her memory, intertwined with the fragrant lilacs of her youth. Her youthful exuberance turned sour as she witnesses the infernos consuming her city, transforming joy into horror. The poignant imagery of burning flowers symbolizing lost innocence encapsulates the loss sustained in war, engendering a haunting reminder of life before conflict.

5. Zina Kosiak's narrative illustrates the brutal transition from a carefree summer at camp to the harrowing realities of war. Stripped of her parents' protection, she navigates the chaos of evacuation and the struggle for survival. Her longing for familial connections in the orphanage aligns with the universal need for love and safety amidst tumult, exposing the profound emotional scars left by unresolved separation.



6. Taisa Nasvetnikova shares her youthful optimism and the rapid shift to despair following her father's departure to war. The symbols of childhood—colorful clothing, laughter, and the exhilaration of swimming—are overshadowed by fear during their evacuation under bombardment. Taisa's memories reflect a longing for normalcy, punctuated by her observations of adult pain and trauma that infiltrated her childhood joys.

Together, these narratives exhibit the painful innocence of childhood, irrevocably altered by war. The recollections reveal not only individual trauma but also a collective mourning for lost families and disrupted lives. They serve as a testament to how the shadows of past conflicts can shape identity, carry pain, and ultimately remind us of our shared humanity. This potent exploration of memory and loss transcends time, inviting reflection on the enduring consequences of war on the innocent.



Critical Thinking

Key Point: The lasting impact of childhood trauma shapes our identities and collective consciousness.

Critical Interpretation: As you immerse yourself in the heart-wrenching stories of children like Zhenya, Gena, and Natasha in 'Last Witnesses', you are reminded that the scars of our past, whether personal or collective, inform who we become. Their experiences serve as a profound nudge to reflect on your own childhood, acknowledging that the innocence of youth can be irrevocably altered by the harsh truths of life. This realization implores you to foster compassion and resilience, advocating for the loving bonds of family and community, while also recognizing the importance of healing from past wounds. The narratives resonate deeply within you, empowering your journey to build a more understanding world, where every voice, especially the innocent, is heard and cherished.



Chapter 2 Summary: A HANDFUL OF SALT...ALL THAT WAS LEFT OF OUR HOUSE...

The narratives in Chapter 2 of "Last Witnesses" by Svetlana Alexievich delve into the personal experiences of children during the tumultuous times of World War II, showcasing their unfiltered memories and emotional responses to the horrors surrounding them.

1. Innocent Dreams – Young Misha Maiorov recalls his childhood dreams filled with the warmth of home, highlighting tender moments with his grandmother as she crafted quilts, and his grandfather as he made shoes. Through these dreams, we see the normalcy of life before the war, contrasted sharply with the chaos that ensued. As the war intruded, Misha's perception shifted from a cozy home to a stark reality where soldiers occupied his home, leaving him feeling displaced and frightened.

2. The Onset of War – Zina Shimanskaya, at eleven, remembers the day war erupted, initially perceived as an exhilarating adventure that quickly transformed into a nightmare. The transition from innocent excitement to the grim realities of German troops marching into Minsk portrays the abrupt loss of childhood joy, replaced by fear and confusion. As the adults around her navigated the chaos, she grappled with conflicting emotions, recalling a naive sense of heroism and her reluctance to relinquish her Pioneer neckerchief despite the dangers.



3. Loss and Grief – Each child's story confronts the stark realities of loss. Zhenia Selenia recounts a traumatic encounter with death when German soldiers executed community leaders, an event that deeply imprints on his young psyche. He recalls the haunting image of his aunt gathering the brains of a fallen relative—a moment that irrevocably alters his understanding of human fragility.

4. Surviving Trauma – Vasia Kharevsky, only four years old, expresses an instinctual plea for survival amidst the bombings, revealing a child's profound understanding of fear. The yearning for food shared with his brother reflects a poignant moment of familial love amid despair. Their struggles make them acutely aware of the war's harsh realities, leading Vasia to feel an overwhelming sense of abandonment.

5. War as a Defining Experience – Inna Levkevich's narrative touches on the swift transformation of her childhood as she witnesses the destruction of her school and the chaos of evacuation. Here, the war takes away the innocence of youth, forcing children into precocious roles that strip away carefree life, while simultaneously uniting them in collective experiences of loss and hardship.

6. Echoes of Pain – Lida Pogorzelskaya's story reflects on the profound silence that enveloped her family following her father's death. Her tranquil



memories of life before the war darken as she and her family find themselves unmoored, embodying the haunting echoes of displacement.

7. Existence Amidst Ruins – Volodia Chistokletov recalls the chaos of evacuation, as children around him engage in war games, oblivious to the true devastation. As young soldiers, they navigate their trauma by centering their play on conflict, unaware of the profound implications of their innocence.

8. Fragmented Youth – Through the voices of children like Lenya Khosenevich and Volodia Parabkovich, the chapter exposes the deep scars of war that alter the course of their lives. The haunting memories share the burden of loss, with tender remembrances tinged with personal grief and an unfulfilled childhood.

Throughout Chapter 2, Alexievich intricately weaves narratives portraying the loss of innocence, resilience, and the haunting legacy of war in the minds of children. Each story is a poignant testament to the way war reshaped their lives, forever marking the transition from childhood to a world beset with sorrow and survival.



Critical Thinking

Key Point: The Resilience of Childhood

Critical Interpretation: As you immerse yourself in the heart-wrenching stories of the children from 'Last Witnesses', particularly the sharp transition from innocent dreams to the harsh realities of war, you find a profound source of inspiration. Here, in the delicate balance of their recollections, you can grasp the resilience that lies within every child. Their ability to cling to memories of warmth, love, and playful innocence amidst chaos reminds you that, no matter how severe the trials you face in life, there exists an innate strength within you to rise, adapt, and find hope. This resilience can inspire you to nurture and protect your sense of wonder and joy, for those qualities can serve as an anchor in turbulent times, guiding you through your own life's challenges.

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Chapter 3: MY LITTLE BROTHER CRIES, BECAUSE HE WASN'T THERE WHEN PAPA WAS THERE...

In Chapter 3 of "Last Witnesses" by Svetlana Alexievich, a mosaic of voices from children reveals the profound impact of war on their childhoods, as they recount their experiences during World War II. The recollections are rich with emotional nuances, encapsulating loss, fear, resilience, and the unyielding human spirit amidst unimaginable hardships.

1. A poignant narrative unfolds through Larissa Lisovskaya, who reflects on the absence of her father, a partisan executed by fascists. The relentless presence of war transforms her childhood landscape into one marked by loss and survival, as she articulates the duality of her memories—joyful moments with her father and the pain of grieving alongside her pregnant mother amidst hiding from persecution.

2. Nina Yaroshevich recounts the abrupt change from a promising family gathering to the chaos of war. Her father is called to the front, and their village is soon overrun by German troops. The innocence of childhood dissipates as she witnesses the arrival of soldiers and hears the sounds of

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Chapter 4 Summary: ...NEITHER SUITORS NOR SOLDIERS...

The narratives in Chapter 4 of "Last Witnesses" by Svetlana Alexievich vividly encapsulate the haunting memories and experiences of children during World War II in Eastern Europe. Each account is imbued with a raw emotional weight that reveals the resilience and trauma faced by the young amidst the chaos of war.

1. Vera Novikova recalls the devastating fire that consumed her village, marking the beginning of her trauma. At just thirteen, she recounts witnessing the brutal execution of her cousin, a pregnant woman, by the Germans. The horror of this event is amplified by the chilling silence imposed on the villagers, forcing them to suppress their grief as they hide their tears to avoid violent repercussions. Even years later, the scars of such memories linger, making them more terrifying in hindsight.
2. Sasha Kavirus, now a doctor of philology, describes a day at school that was abruptly shattered by bombing raids, instilling in him an enduring awareness of the horrors of warfare. He details the traumatic destruction of his village, the fear of being captured by the Germans, and the harrowing experiences of wandering in search of safety. His desire for violence against the Germans mirrors the loss and anger that fueled many children of that period.



3. Oleg Boldyrev, reflecting on his childhood under the shadow of war, speaks of the immense toll on innocence as factories became battlegrounds where young children labored for survival. The relentless grind of work and psychological suppression leads to an environment where even brief moments of respite, like sleeping, are tinged with the sorrow of lost childhood.

4. Liuba Alexandrovich shares the chaotic conditions experienced during the early days of occupation, as her village is overwhelmed by refugees and livestock evacuations. She conveys the pain felt by families as they struggle to save their animals, symbolizing their livelihoods. The collective mourning following executions becomes a harrowing backdrop to the urgent yearning for normalcy.

5. Nina Shunto describes the profound loneliness she endured after being separated from her parents and losing a caregiver. Her narrative outlines the struggle of displaced children forsaking their search for family in favor of survival among strangers who, despite their own peril, showed kindness and compassion.

6. David Goldberg's transformation from carefree celebration to the stark call of war illustrates the abruptness of adolescence lost to the chaos of conflict. He captures the bravery of children rallying to protect themselves,



highlighting the raw courage born from desperation as they embark on dangerous journeys.

7. Genia Zavoiner presents a personal view of loss through her father's disappearance and her ensuing journey through the ghetto. Her narrative emphasizes the innocence lost amid violence and helplessness, contrasting simple childhood joy against the brutality of war.

8. Volodia Ampilogov's story showcases the harrowing reality of child abduction and subsequent survival amidst war-torn landscapes. His experiences shed light on child soldiers and the indiscriminate nature of violence that blurred the lines between innocence and survival.

Through these interwoven narratives, Alexievich paints a rich tapestry of despair, resilience, and the indelible human spirit in children subjected to the horrors of war. Each voice, unique in its suffering, collectively reveals the universal truths about loss, love, hope, and the struggle against overwhelming odds. These accounts resonate deeply, illuminating the long-lasting scars of childhood trauma during wartime.

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Chapter 5 Summary: AND WHY AM I SO SMALL?...

Chapter 5 of "Last Witnesses" by Svetlana Alexievich presents a collection of powerful, fragmented memories from children affected by the horrors of World War II. It illustrates their experiences of loss, trauma, and survival, each narrative uniquely showcasing the impact of war on innocence.

1. Sasha Streltsov's Childhood Dreams: At just four years old, Sasha reflects on the absence of his father, who died in the war. Through tender yet haunting memories of his mother, he recalls their walks in the forest and her comforting words. When his father is confirmed dead in 1945, Sasha's mother succumbs to madness, leaving the boy in the care of his devoted grandmother. Sasha's longing to become a pilot emanates from the legacy of his father, embodying a child's dream intertwined with the reality of loss.

2. Nadia Savitskaya's Endless Wait: Twelve-year-old Nadia recounts her family's harrowing wait for her brother's return from the army. The persistence of hope translates into palpable despair as letters bring news of his death. In the backdrop of a war-torn village, the family faces starvation and encounters the brutal realities of life under occupation. Nadia's laughter, an inappropriate response to trauma, reflects her psychological struggle and her attempt to cope with fear.

3. Volodia Korshuk's Heart-Wrenching Innocence Volodia recalls the

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last peaceful day before the war struck, vividly remembering the chaos that ensued. The loss of his mother to the Germans leaves an indelible mark, questioning the rationale behind her execution. The narrative encapsulates the abrupt transition from childhood to a sobering reality marked by violence and grief.

4. Vasya Baikachev's Brutal Education Twelve-year-old Vasya's youthful bravado leads him into the complexities of adult horrors. The transition from childhood games to the grim realities of interrogations and torture at the hands of the Nazis encapsulates a loss of innocence. The contrasting memories of camaraderie among partisans reveal the thin veil between childhood fantasy and the brutal warfare that engulfs him.

5. Nadia Gorbacheva's Unforgettable Childhood: Nadia's recounting of the simplicity of her earlier days turns into heartbreak as she recalls the pressures of war on her family. With beautiful imagery of laughter and innocence intermingling with terror, her narrative highlights the iron grip of fear. Despite the overwhelming sadness, she illustrates a glimpse of normalcy through her family's attempts to maintain semblances of childhood.

6. Valya Nikitenko: The Burden of Memory. At four years old, Valya experiences trauma through fragmented memories. The image of her home burning is haunting, capturing the fragility of childhood amid conflict.



Valya's recollection of her family's struggle to survive underlines the innocence lost as fear and survival instincts become paramount.

7. Zoya Mazharova's Vision of an Angel: Zoya's fervent hope radiates through her encounters with her angel during her capture and torment. The desolation of camps, her yearning for freedom, and the communal bond formed through shared suffering create layers of resilience amid despair. Zoya's memories serve as a testament to human will amidst cruelty.

8. Volodia Barsuk's Lasting Legacy of Family: Volodia's narrative of joining the partisans as a family conveys heroism laden with personal loss. His poignant experiences with his mother encapsulate both love and the unspeakable pain of death—the legacy of bravery intrinsic to familial bonds during wartime.

9. Varya Vyrko: A Child's Lament Eight-year-old Varya shares the tragic story of her grandfather's killing, a stark reminder of the grotesque reality of war. The improvised burial reflects the degradation of human dignity, as she copes with grief amidst a society that has normalized violence.

10. Leonid Shakinko's Observations of Execution: Leonid reflects on the execution of villagers, capturing the numbing effect of witnessing death. His recollection highlights the absurdity and brutality of mass execution as



innocence is stripped away from the children who observed it. This chilling account underscores the war's psychological ramifications on those left behind.

In summary, Chapter 5 narrates the poignant testimonies of children who faced the consequences of war, encapsulating themes of loss, trauma, and survival against a backdrop of loss of innocence and the deep scars that remain long after the conflict ends. Through their voices, Alexievich paints a broader picture of humanity's vulnerability in the face of destructive forces.

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Chapter 6: I'LL BUY MYSELF A DRESS WITH A LITTLE BOW...

In Chapter 6 of "Last Witnesses" by Svetlana Alexievich, a series of poignant, personal narratives illuminate the harsh realities faced by children during WWII, emphasizing their innocence, resilience, and the profound impact of war on their lives.

1. The opening story from Polia Pashkevich captures the innocence of childhood disrupted by the war. At just four years old, her understanding of conflict is rooted in fairy tales; she visualizes war as a “big black forest” filled with terror. The arrival of troops in Belynichi introduces her to military presence, leaving remnants like cartridges and decorations that she plays with, unaware of their grim significance. The trauma escalates when she witnesses her mother being shot and experiences separation from her family. After the war, she reflects on her stark longing for simple joys, like owning beautiful dresses, amidst the childhood dreams shattered by conflict.

2. Eduard Voroshilov's account, at eleven years old, begins with a stark realization of the war's reality after a youth questions how someone could

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Chapter 7 Summary: I WAS EMBARRASSED TO BE WEARING GIRLS' SHOES...

The narratives in Chapter 7 of "Last Witnesses" by Svetlana Alexievich collectively present the experiences of children during the war, interweaving themes of innocence lost, survival amid trauma, and the struggle for identity in the face of unimaginable horrors. Each child's story is a poignant reflection of their formative years shaped by conflict, loss, and the fight to maintain their humanity.

1. Childhood Perception of War: Marlen Robeichikov offers a child's perspective on the war, initially viewing it as an adventure. Their evacuation from Minsk was portrayed as a game, with excitement overshadowing fear. However, this naive excitement quickly turned to the harsh reality of loss and hardship, particularly as they found themselves in orphanages, grappling with the absence of parental care and facing dire hunger.

2. Family and Grief: Liuda Andreeva's recollections reveal how childhood innocence coexisted with the anguish of familial loss. She recounts traumatic events, such as soldiers invading her home and her mother's desperate attempts to shield her, ultimately leading to a harrowing discovery of her grandmother tied and abused. This evokes a sense of helplessness and the perception that being a child was dangerous, hinting at



a profound understanding of mortality and grief formed at an alarmingly young age.

3. Survival Instinct and Resilience: Andrei Tolstik presents a story of resilience amidst chaos. After losing his mother, he navigates life with various guardians, each encounter highlighting the deep sense of loss and adaptation in his young life. Aunt Marfa's nurturing is juxtaposed with the fear of abandonment, emphasizing the desperate need for connection in a broken world.

4. Coping with Death: Mikhail Shinkarev recounts his shift from childhood joy to a new reality where death was a common occurrence. Along with friends, he buries the dead, illustrating a grim acceptance of mortality woven into their childhood experiences. Their actions reflect a surprising maturity, as they instinctively take on responsibilities that adults shouldered in peacetime.

5. Trauma and Memory: Leonid Sivakov's story showcases the indelible scars left by violence and loss. The childhood innocence of playing and hiding deteriorates as he faces the brutality of conflict. His survival is marked by confusion and trauma, with visceral memories of the violence that engulfed his family and neighbors.

6. Innocence of War: Tonia Rudakova's account reflects the stark



contrast between childhood innocence and the brutality of war. While children naturally seek safety and play, they are thrust into the horrific adult world of violence and loss. Her experiences underscore how war obliterates not just lives, but also the simple joys of childhood.

7. Desire for Normalcy and Safety: Sasha Solianin illustrates the longing for a peaceful existence amid chaos. His narratives of imminent death and desperate escapes resonate with the universal desire for survival and the preservation of life, showcasing how even in dire circumstances, there remains an innate urge to protect oneself and others.

8. Transformation through Trauma Lena Aronova's transformation from a carefree girl to a young volunteer amid the war illustrates a loss of innocence but also a newfound purpose. Through her experiences in a military hospital, she learns about suffering and compassion, desiring to mend wounds and save lives – a reflection of how war, while devastating, also catalyzes profound emotional growth and resilience.

The stories of these children encapsulate a collective trauma yet showcase incredible strength and adaptability. They navigate their childhoods amid the wreckage of war, bearing witness to humanity's resilience and the enduring spirit of survival against overwhelming odds. Their experiences are a devastating reminder of the cost of conflict on the youngest, yet they also highlight the camaraderie and unyielding spirit that arose from shared



suffering in a tumultuous time.

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Chapter 8 Summary: I RAN AWAY TO THE FRONT FOLLOWING MY SISTER, FIRST SERGEANT VERA REDKINA...

Svetlana Alexievich's "Last Witnesses" poignantly captures the harrowing experiences of children during the Second World War, detailing their unforgettable memories and the scars left by the conflict. In various narratives, young voices reflect on their lost childhoods amidst the backdrop of war.

1. **Childhood Disrupted:** The onset of the war heralds the end of innocence for many children, uprooting their lives in an instant. Nikolai Redkin, for instance, recalls how the departure of his older siblings and the evacuation of his family left him and his younger sister to navigate the harsh realities of survival alone.
2. **Forced Maturity:** Young individuals were thrust into adult responsibilities, as exemplified by Valya Kozhanovskaya who witnessed her mother's tragic fate when their home burned down. Separated from her sibling and uprooted to an orphanage, her innocent joys swiftly turned to despair, highlighting the emotional cost of the war on youth.
3. **Struggles for Survival:** Other accounts portray the brutal realities of survival. Efim Friedland describes his rigorous journey as he accompanied a breeding herd during the evacuation, even when faced with extreme hardships. His white shirt becomes a symbol of hope amid chaos, while the loss of beloved animals emphasizes the pathos of war.



- 4. Loss and Grieving:** The sorrow of losing family members is a persistent theme. Masha Ivanova mourns both her father, captured and killed, and her grandmother, whose passing deepens her sense of abandonment and grief. The emotional weight of such losses shapes the identities of these children as they struggle to comprehend the war's toll.
- 5. Witnessing Atrocities:** For some, witnessing the cruelty of war leaves indelible impressions that distort their perceptions of humanity. Yura Karpovich's memories recount horrific images of violence against both soldiers and civilians, planting seeds of mistrust that lead to lifelong emotional battles.
- 6. Resilience and Hope:** Despite the overwhelming darkness, moments of resilience shine through, where children find ways to support each other, seeking solace in shared experiences. One such example is when Ludmila Nikanorova recalls her family's previous happiness before the war, contrasting sharply with the dismal existence they had to endure, but hinting at the strength they muster to endure.
- 7. Fleeting Childhood Moments:** Innocent memories of simpler times occasionally surface amid the chaos. Leonida Belaya recalls distant, comforting images of playing and laughter before the horror overtook her life, emphasizing the stark contrast between pre-war childhood and the realities of war.
- 8. Heartbreaking Separations:** The narrative of Maria Puzan reveals the painful separations from kin and the dire struggles for basic survival, culminating in a poignant plea for the loving care that is now lost. Her



heartbreaking experiences showcase the critical lack of nurturing that comes from the loss of parental figures during conflict.

9. The Burden of Memory: The accumulative trauma shapes their identities long after the war ends, as seen through Valya Yurkevich's reflections on her experiences during bombings and losing family members, depicting how such moments haunt them, causing enduring emotional trauma.

In conclusion, "Last Witnesses" serves as a profound testament to the resilience and suffering of children during the Second World War, capturing their struggles for survival, emotional scars from loss, and enduring memories of love and innocence once lost. Each narrative weaves a rich tapestry of youthful experiences set against the harsh realities of war, depicting a generation profoundly altered and defined by their trials under extreme conditions. Through their voices, Alexievich invites us to confront the haunting legacy of conflict and the enduring impact it has on the innocence of childhood.

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Critical Thinking

Key Point: Resilience Amid Adversity

Critical Interpretation: As you reflect on the harrowing tales of children like Ludmila Nikanorova, you are reminded that even in the darkest times, the human spirit is capable of remarkable resilience. Their ability to support one another in the face of overwhelming despair inspires you to seek connection and hope in your own life. While you may not face the same horrors, you are encouraged to face your challenges with courage, understanding that vulnerability can give rise to strength. The stories of these young witnesses serve as a powerful reminder that amidst sorrow and loss, there is always a flicker of hope waiting to be nurtured. When life becomes overwhelming, remember the lessons of resilience shared by generations before you, and let them guide you to find light in the shadows.

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Chapter 9: I REMEMBER THE BLUE, BLUE SKY...AND OUR PLANES IN THAT SKY...

The accounts within Chapter 9 of "Last Witnesses" by Svetlana Alexievich capture the innocence and harsh realities faced by children during the war, transforming their dreams and aspirations into survival narratives in the wake of destruction and loss. Several poignant stories emerge, each highlighting individual experiences entwined with the collective trauma of conflict.

1. **Childhood Dreams Shattered**: Pyotr Kalinovsky starts recounting his childhood filled with dreams of becoming a pilot, reflective of a time when children fantasized about heroism and adventure, often inspired by revolutionary ideals. However, the arrival of Germans in his town shatters this idyllic existence, revealing a harsh reality where the sky, once a symbol of hope, now becomes an ominous reminder of death. His memories intertwine music—recalling songs that once united and uplifted spirits—with the terror of witnessing brutal violence, leading him to an unsettling transformation of fear for the sky that once inspired him.

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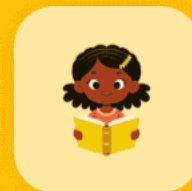
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Chapter 10 Summary: A BIG FAMILY PHOTOGRAPH...

In Chapter 10 of "Last Witnesses," Svetlana Alexievich weaves together poignant narratives from children whose lives were irrevocably altered by the horrors of war. The chapter encapsulates the innocence lost amidst the ravages of conflict, revealing the emotional depth of memories tied to their families and the trauma they endured during World War II.

1. The chapter opens with **Tolya Chervyakov**, who at five years old recalls a family photograph emblazoned in his memory. His father, a soldier, is depicted with a rifle, while his mother, a nurse in a partisan brigade, translates her love through acts of care amidst the chaos. The narrative highlights the fragility of childhood as Tolya's experiences include the dire health struggles of his sickly younger brother, capturing the agonizing fear that permeated their lives. The imagery of their mother bathing the frail child in milk illustrates the desperate efforts of a parent to provide solace even in a time of war.

2. **Katya Zayats**, a twelve-year-old, recounts the terror that engulfed her village upon German occupation. The harrowing story of their neighbor Todor, who is buried alive, serves as a stark portrayal of the brutality faced by the local populace. Katya describes how her family relied on the kindness of others for survival, collecting scraps of food from neighboring villages.



Their harsh reality underscores a community's struggle to overcome despair in the face of relentless destruction.

3. **Fedya Trutko** brings forth his experience during the traumatic onset of the war. He recalls the day his mother fell gravely ill, only to be taken away from a hospital as German forces invaded. Fedya's tale shifts to flight and the resulting disarray within his family. His path intertwines with partisan fighters, and the makeshift school they establish amidst the conflict becomes a beacon of hope and resilience. Fedya's youthful aspirations of joining the fight contrast sharply with the somber reality of their existence, emphasizing the innocence stolen from children by the war.

4. In the narrative of **Zoya Vasilyeva**, a talented dancer before the war, her life transforms drastically as conflict displaces her family. Zoya remembers the joy of performances and the promise of a bright future that is abruptly interrupted by turmoil. Her journey illustrates the loss of personal dreams alongside the destruction of cultural identity, yet her spirit remains unbroken, echoing the longing for normalcy amidst chaos.

5. **Anya Pavlova's** tale reveals the brutal realities faced by civilians, particularly women and children. As German soldiers target her family, her mother's fierce love becomes a lifeline, and Anya's story embodies the profound sacrifices made in the name of survival. The horrifying sequence of events she witnesses showcases the savage inhumanity wrought by war,



leaving an indelible scar on her psyche.

6. **Inna Starovoitova**, at just seven, grapples with separation and loss.

Left to care for younger siblings while her mother undertakes dangerous missions, Inna's innocence is shattered as she confronts the horrors of German occupation. Her account emphasizes a child's struggle to maintain hope and bravery in a world turned upside down, leading to moments of profound courage amid despair.

7. The emotional weight of **Galina Firsova's** narrative reflects the soul-crushing experience of starvation and deprivation during the Siege of Leningrad. Describing the struggle to survive on meager rations, her reflections convey a deep sense of human suffering while hinting at the lengths to which families would go to endure. The bonds formed during these hardships, particularly her relationship with a pivotal dog, symbolize the small flickers of salvation in a dark period.

8. Lastly, **Faina Lyutsko's** gripping memory connects the cruelty of war with a child's desperate cries for her mother, highlighting the indiscriminate violence that targeted families. Each child's tale combines to form a mosaic of loss filled with longing, survival, and ultimately, resilience. The reflections gathered in this chapter encapsulate not just the historical trauma faced by these children, but also the universal themes of family, sacrifice, and the enduring scars left by war.



Through these interwoven narratives, Alexievich creates a haunting yet beautiful exploration of childhood resilience against the backdrop of war, demonstrating how these experiences shape lives long after the dust has settled.

Character	Key Events	Themes
Tolya Chervyakov	Recalls a family photo of his soldier father and nurse mother; experiences his brother's illness.	Fragility of childhood; parental love amidst chaos.
Katya Zayats	Describes village terror during German occupation; survival through community support.	Despair, community resilience; brutality of war.
Fedya Trutko	Mother's illness during German invasion; joins partisan fighters and establishes a makeshift school.	Loss of innocence; hope and resilience in conflict.
Zoya Vasilyeva	Remembers her life as a dancer; loss of dreams and cultural identity due to dislocation.	Transformation of identity; longing for normalcy.
Anya Pavlova	Mother's sacrifices as German soldiers target her family; experiences horrific violence.	Survival, maternal love; emotional and physical scars of war.
Inna Starovoitova	Cares for siblings during mother's missions; faces the horrors of occupation.	Struggle for hope and bravery in despair.
Galina Firsova	Describes starvation during the Siege of Leningrad; forms bonds amid hardship.	Human suffering; small acts of salvation.
Faina Lyutsko	Connects experiences of war with cries for her mother; highlights family violence.	The universality of loss; impact of war on families.



Critical Thinking

Key Point: The Resilience of Childhood Amidst Chaos

Critical Interpretation: As you read the stories of these children, each one radiating a profound resilience despite the horror they faced, you may find inspiration in the capacity of the human spirit to endure unimaginable adversity. Tolya's tender memories of family love, Katya's reliance on community support, and Fedya's makeshift school become reminders that even in the darkest times, hope can be cultivated through love, unity, and the indomitable will to persevere. In your own life, when faced with challenges, let their stories encourage you to look for strength in your connections with others and the possibility of reclaiming joy and purpose, no matter how difficult the journey may seem.

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Chapter 11 Summary: HE WON'T LET ME FLY AWAY...

The narrative presented in Chapter 11 of "Last Witnesses" by Svetlana Alexievich captures the harrowing memories and dreams of several individuals as they reflect on their past experiences during and after World War II. Through their accounts, we gain insight into the psychological scars left by the war, the innocence of childhood shattered by violence, and the struggle to communicate and process these memories.

1. The experiences shared begin with Vasya Saulchenko, who, even as a sociologist eight years after the conflict, is haunted by dreams of the first German soldier he killed. Despite witnessing horrifying acts of violence, he recalls that killing felt like a necessity at the time rather than an act of fear. The memories resurface decades later when now older, he reflects on the impact of war on his ability to discuss it with his own son. Fearful of tainting his child's innocence, Vasya grapples with the weight of the past and the preservation of a peaceful life devoid of such trauma.

2. Anya Korzun's recollections of the war's end on May 9, 1945, depict a moment of chaotic joy as adults embrace children, celebrating victory. For her, the day is marked by laughter and tears, yet at just two years old, she lacks understanding of the significance of these events. The arrival of her father brings confusion; having grown up without him, she struggles to



recognize him, embodying the disconnect that war creates within families.

3. Nikolai Berezka's narrative details the turmoil of being born during the war and the impact of his father's unseen agony. His father's screams echo through their home as he battles the lingering pain of his war wounds. Even as a child, Nikolai's awareness of loss and trauma is profound, with the brutal reality of his neighbors' children lost to mines magnifying the effect of war on young lives.

4. Mariam Yuzefovskaya reflects on her own experience growing up in wartime. She remembers the weight of expectations and burdens placed on her by her mother, who desperately tried to protect her from the ravages of war. Their reunion after the war, marked by a desperate desire for acceptance and validation, reveals the struggle to reconnect after prolonged separation and the lingering effects of past suffering.

5. Both Arseny Gutin and Valya Brinskaya share memories steeped in a longing for paternal presence and suffocating fear amid the chaos of approaching bombs. Their childhoods are defined by a yearning for connection with their fathers, who are overshadowed by loss and sacrifice. They recall vivid moments of joy mixed with profound sorrow, where simple acts become laden with meaning in the context of warfare.

6. Valya's account of fleeing air raids exposes the stark terror children faced,

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contrasting against innocent childhood desires and hopes. Her observations reveal the deep emotional toll—she witnesses death up close, coming face to face with horror, resulting in a numbness that alters her perception of life and death.

7. The overarching theme of these narratives highlights the fractured continuity of life caused by war. The children, now grown, navigate their adult lives carrying the weight of their childhood experiences. The collective memories reveal not only the loss of familial bonds and innocence but also the enduring spirit of resilience and the attempts to reclaim normalcy in a world irrevocably changed.

In conclusion, through an array of personal accounts, Alexievich illustrates the indelible scars left by the tragedy of war, revealing how the ghosts of the past linger in the subconscious of the survivors. Their voices serve as a poignant reminder of resilience yet also reflect the profound and often uncommunicable impact of trauma on future generations.



Best Quotes from Last Witnesses by Svetlana Alexievich with Page Numbers

Chapter 1 | Quotes from pages 10-30

1. I remember it. I was very little, but I remember everything.
2. Then I also shouted: 'Papa! Papa!'
3. He was afraid to look back.
4. I can't believe that my father left that morning for the war.
5. It became connected like that in my memory, that war is when there's no papa.
6. I sat by mama's little mound till night, till we were picked up and put on a cart.
7. In those moments I realized: she looks like my mama...
8. It's funny, but nobody laughs.
9. I find it unbearable that they're here. Do you understand me?
10. But I still want my mama.

Chapter 2 | Quotes from pages 31-60

1. I want to go home! Everybody wants to go home, to the warmth! But there is no more home, only a heap of smoking embers.
2. Ah, my cottage! Ah, my cottage! I was a young girl in i-i-i- it...Here the matchmakers ca-a-a-ame...Here the children were bo-o-orn.
3. They said he was one of our pilots. At night I dreamed about him.
4. I pictured war as people in budenovki on horseback. Now we'll show ourselves, we'll help our fighters. Become heroes.



5. I don't want to go to that school anymore. I came home and kissed all the portraits my schoolbook...

Chapter 3 | Quotes from pages 61-91

1. "Papa was tall..."
2. "He begins to cry, because he wasn't there when papa was there..."
3. "Mama made it out of foot-cloths. They were white, and she dyed them with ink."
4. "We were saved by cow dung. You get up early in the morning and wait till the cows come out..."
5. "Even now I...All my life I've cried in the happiest moments of my life."
6. "We took turns licking it. And after us our cat also licked it, she was hungry, too."
7. "That tinkling...When we were liberated, father went to the front."
8. "They taught us to act so that it's good for everybody, not for some one person."
9. "There were three of us, the neighbors led us away from the road, but they were afraid to take us..."
10. "We didn't believe that there could be a life like that."





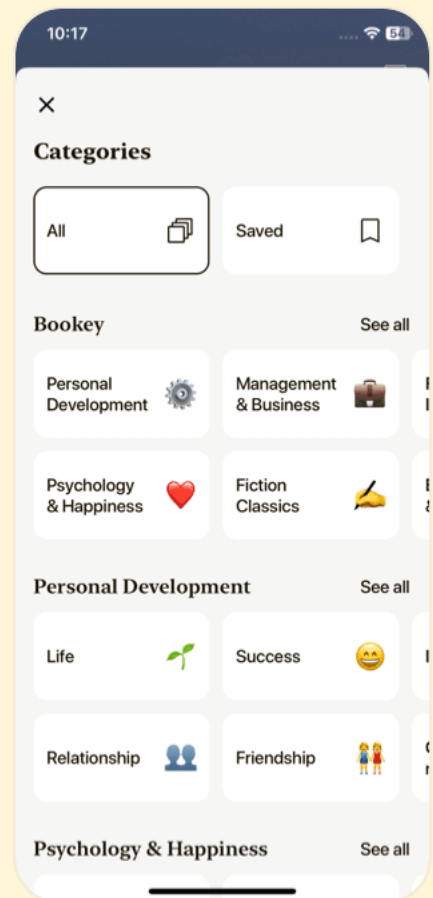
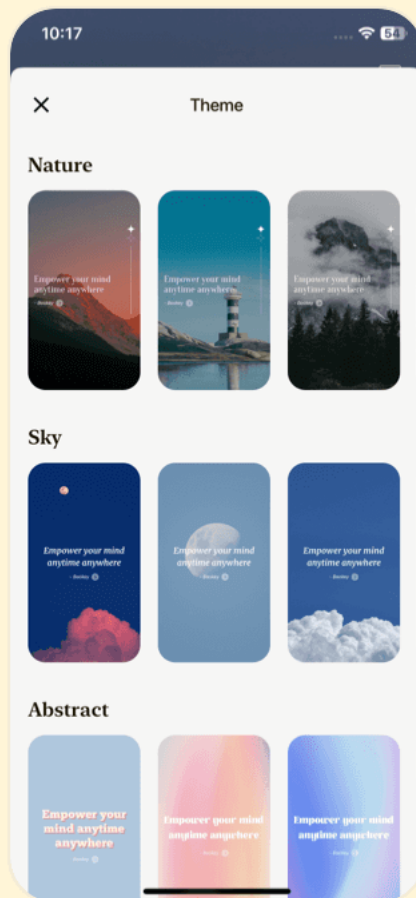
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Chapter 4 | Quotes from pages 92-120

1. Our village is burning, our house is burning... Mama took the frying pan out with her hands: "Eat, children." It was impossible to eat those pancakes, they smelled so much of smoke, but we ate them, because we had nothing else but grass.
2. So young... As yet neither suitors nor soldiers... Why have I told you this? It's more frightening for me now than then.
3. They didn't betray him... So... they didn't betray him.
4. I heard her say to father, "If only one son could be left..." Then father said, "Let them run for it. They're young, maybe they'll save themselves." But I felt so sorry for mama that I didn't go.
5. In a children's center, also surrounded by barbed wire. We were guarded by German soldiers and German shepherds.
6. Not a single human being. Hungry cats... I remember after the war we had one primer in the village, and the first book I found and read was a collection of arithmetic problems. I read it like poetry.
7. You'll be my children now... As soon as she said it, my brother and I fell asleep right there at the table. We felt so good. We had a home now.
8. We kissed their hands... And a woman at the station saw him and took off her kerchief to use as a diaper.
9. I remember my grandfather's words: "And these innocent ones, why must they perish? They can't even say anything."
10. I want everybody to know the name of the woman who saved me: Olympia Pozharitskaya, from the village of Genevichi... Whenever the Germans appeared, they



would send me off somewhere at once.

Chapter 5 | Quotes from pages 121-150

1. "Don't hurry. Listen to how the leaves fall. How the forest sounds..."
2. "You're like him. Very much like him," mama reassured me.
3. "We'll dig potatoes, and you'll go to the Suvorov School in Minsk."
4. "It was the first time in my life that I rode in a truck."
5. "They poured our grains out and indicated to us that we should line up to be shot."
6. "I laughed and laughed, ten minutes went by and I still laughed."
7. "You, too, are my only one, so we should address each other informally. We're the closest to each other in the world."
8. "During the war we recalled all the time how we lived before the war."
9. "What is it? During the winter we took rides several times on frozen German corpses."
10. "How did I survive, after dying a hundred times?"

Chapter 6 | Quotes from pages 151-186

1. "I never thought about war...But this is how I pictured war: a big black forest, and there's some sort of war in it. Something scary."
2. "I didn't understand what these toys were...And here is something my aunt told me..." }, {





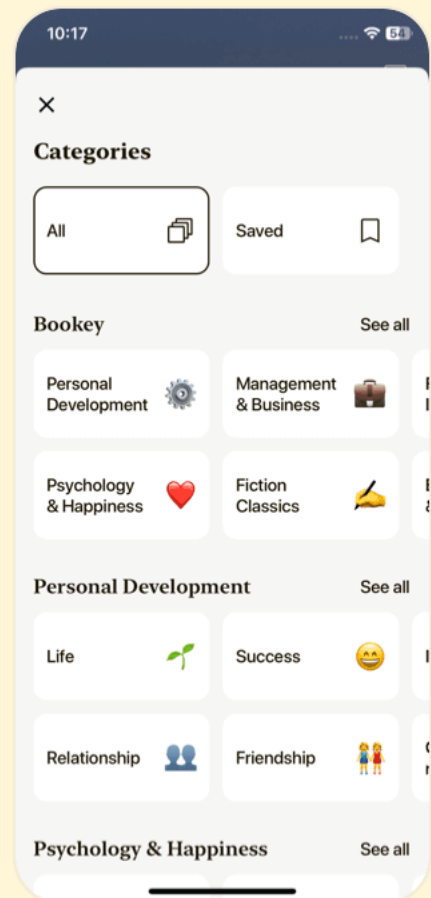
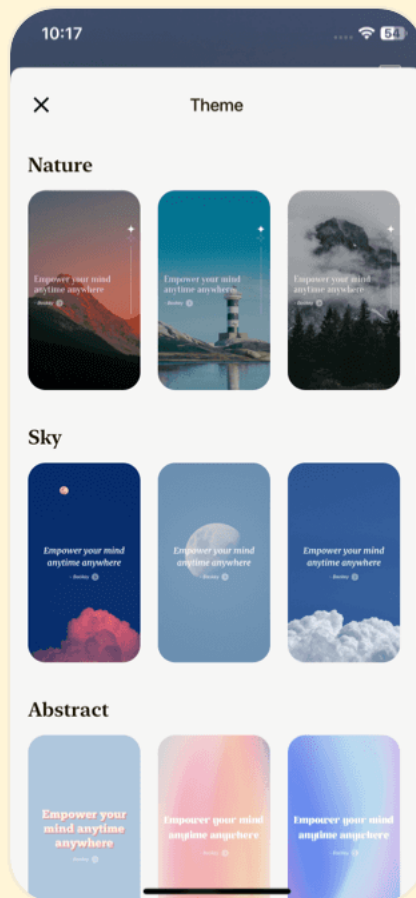
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Chapter 7 | Quotes from pages 187-211

1. Our childish imagination pictured meeting the Germans, who would open our suitcases and there would be our Pioneer neckerchief.
2. We were still children of peace.
3. With a heroic air, Misha went past the orphans who were left with nothing and came running back to his orphanage.
4. To steal something at a market wasn't regarded as shameful, on the contrary — it was heroism!
5. We didn't care what we pilfered, so long as it was something to eat.
6. Each one had a norm—three cubic feet. We had to fell the trees, trim them, then cut them into three-foot lengths and stack them up.
7. Somebody's little son cried out... He fired five times... He looked at me... I couldn't hide behind the broom, I couldn't do it.
8. I crawled toward it as if following a thread... the scream hung in the air.
9. We didn't even know how to bury... but now we somehow recalled it.
10. I really didn't want to die... I especially didn't want to die at dawn.

Chapter 8 | Quotes from pages 212-241

1. "I'm with First Sergeant Vera Redkina."
2. "Only fear or something good stays in a child's memory..."
3. "The little trunk was just his size..."
4. "I always waited for him..."
5. "You'll never save your mama, children."



6. "Next to the bull, I felt warm and safe."
7. "The wooden sandals and striped pajamas were brought back to the estate."
8. "We ran in the direction of the sunrise, to the east."
9. "One day, the soldiers burst in shouting, 'Dear children!'"
10. "Did God watch this? And what did He think?"

Chapter 9 | Quotes from pages 242-263

1. We wanted either the sky or the sea. The whole globe!
2. For two years I had lived in a town occupied by Germans. I had forgotten how people sang.
3. I remember the blue, blue sky. And our planes in that sky. We had been waiting for them, waiting all through the war.
4. I saw how they died...How they were scared...
5. Mama saved her children. Before the war, she had been a 'firebrand.' My little brother Slavik was born in 1941.
6. People even ate dirt...At the market, we could buy dirt from the destroyed and burned-down warehouses.
7. But to this day, I still can't look at a hungry man.
8. I bend down, he comes up to me and looks me in the face: am I smiling or crying?
9. I don't want to remember. But I need to tell people about my misfortune.
10. The only memory I have of my mother is how afraid I was to lose her.





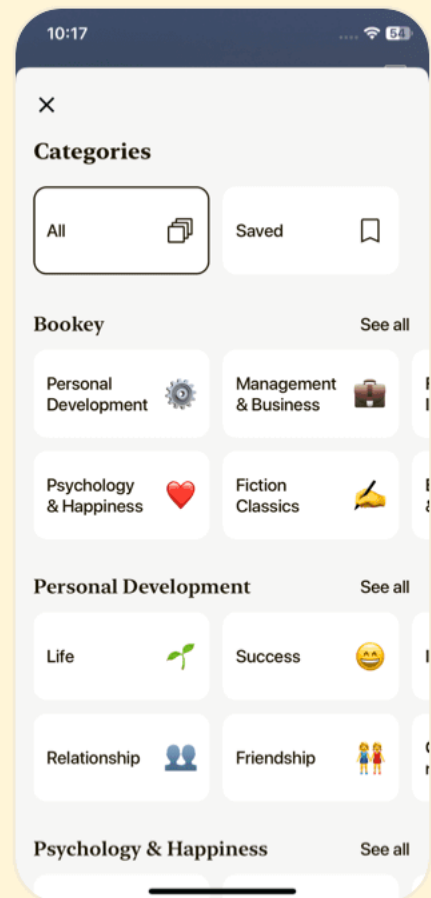
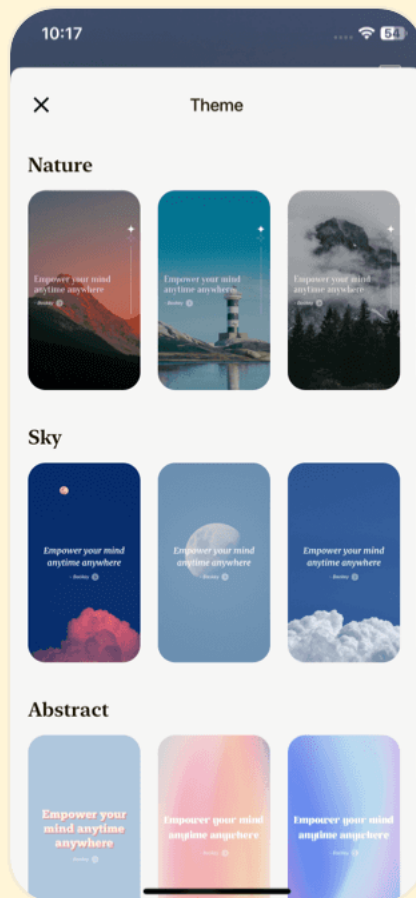
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Chapter 10 | Quotes from pages 264-289

1. "If something has stayed in my memory, it's like a big family photograph..."
2. "A big photograph... One big photograph..."
3. "How will I repay the people?"
4. "They took away his shovel, yelled something at him in their own language..."
5. "We lived by charity..."
6. "We would come to a cottage... 'Give us something...'"
7. "Mama spun it herself, she wove it..."
8. "The war didn't end soon... They count it as four years. There was shooting for four years..."
9. "Our school was called 'the green school'..."
10. "But I wanted to study... When my daughter was in the first grade, her mama was in the tenth. At night school."

Chapter 11 | Quotes from pages 290-310

1. I killed him myself, I didn't just see him dead.
2. I wasn't frightened that I had killed him... And I didn't think about him during the war.
3. People who haven't seen a man kill another man are completely different people...
4. Everybody wanted to kiss the word Victory...
5. Little daughter, remember this all your life...
6. I waited a long time for my father... All my life...
7. I have always believed in your destiny, children.



8. If they kill us, we'll die together. Or else just me...

9. We are the last witnesses. Our time is ending. We must speak...

10. Our words will be the last...

Last Witnesses Discussion Questions

Chapter 1 | HE WAS AFRAID TO LOOK BACK... | Q&A

1.Question:

What is the significance of the children's memories about their parents at the beginning of the war?

The children's recollections of their parents serve to underscore the abrupt and traumatic disruption caused by the onset of World War II. Each child emphasizes the moment they lost their parent—often a father—highlighting the pain and confusion that accompanied these separations. For instance, in Zhenya's story, the last memory of her father is filled with warmth but also foreshadows tragedy; she feels that this was the last time she would see him and immediately connects the war to the absence of a father. The poignant details reflecting their innocent perceptions create an emotional depth, illustrating the overwhelming sense of loss and abandonment that children experienced during this tumultuous time.

2.Question:

How do the children perceive the concept of war and its immediate effects on their daily lives?

Initially, the children struggle to grasp the full meaning of war and what it entails. As exemplified by Gena's description of the calm before the attack, the notion of war clashes with their realities of childhood innocence. They are both terrified and confused, as they encounter unexpected violence, destruction, and the chaos of evacuation. As the air raids commence, for example, Gena reacts with disbelief and



fear, indicating that they are caught between childhood naivety and the harsh reality of adult concerns. The experiences illustrate how the war shatters their understanding of safety and normalcy, foreshadowing a painful coming-of-age.

3.Question:

What does the portrayal of food and scarcity reveal about the children's experiences during the war?

Food scarcity during the war serves as a powerful symbol of suffering and survival throughout the children's narratives. The stories depict a desperate struggle for food, representing broader themes of deprivation and resourcefulness. For instance, Zina recalls using every available resource—like eating grass and young tree bark—indicating the extreme measures the children were forced to take for survival. The description of children raiding their environment for sustenance highlights their vulnerability and innocence challenged by harsh circumstances. Furthermore, it evokes a sense of communal hardship, as they share their experiences of starvation, revealing the devastating impact of war on everyday life.

4.Question:

How do the children's stories illustrate the theme of memory and trauma related to war?

The children's narratives are imbued with vivid memories that reflect the trauma inflicted by war, highlighting how these experiences are indelibly etched in their minds. Each child's recollection showcases significant



moments—like Zhenya’s last sight of her mother or Katya’s memories of ruined cities—which linger long after the events themselves have passed. The repetition of specific images and feelings, such as the smell of lilacs associated with destruction, evokes a haunting sense of loss and longing that defines their childhoods. These stories convey that war leaves deep psychological scars, shaping their identities as they grapple with the remnants of their traumatic past while trying to reconcile their scant but cherished memories of pre-war life.

5.Question:

What role do adult figures play in the children's journeys through war in the chapter?

The adult figures, primarily the children’s parents, serve as critical references for comfort and security amid the chaos of war. For many children, their parents symbolize safety, love, and the essence of home. For example, Taisa’s memories of her father’s insistence on evacuation illustrate his protective instinct, even as it contradicts the children’s desire to stay together. Meanwhile, the absence of parents often leaves children in states of longing and despair, as seen in Zina’s story where she seeks her mother after being separated. Furthermore, in their interactions, adult figures reflect the complex emotional reactions to war—fear, shame, and pride—as they confront their own vulnerabilities while trying to support the children through their turmoil. Thus, the adults shape the children’s understanding of the war and its meaning, illustrating the intergenerational effects of conflict.



Chapter 2 | A HANDFUL OF SALT...ALL THAT WAS LEFT OF OUR HOUSE... | Q&A

1.Question:

What themes are prevalent in the dreams of Misha Maiorov from Chapter 2?

The dreams of Misha Maiorov display themes of innocence, nostalgia for pre-war life, and the juxtaposition of peace and war. In Misha's dreams, he recalls serene moments spent with his grandmother, where they engage in domestic activities like quilting and shoemaking—symbolizing a comforting, familial love and the simple joys of life before the war disrupted their existence. These memories encapsulate a sense of normalcy and childhood innocence. However, the transition into his waking reality is starkly characterized by the intrusion of war, represented by soldiers in their home, the destruction of their house, and the haunting memories of violence he experiences. This duality between his cherished memories of peace and the harsh reality of war highlights the loss of innocence and the devastating impact of conflict on personal lives.

2.Question:

How does the experience of Zina Shimanskaya reflect the initial perceptions of children towards war?

Zina Shimanskaya's experience illustrates a child's naive and romanticized perception of war. Initially, she views war as an exciting adventure, akin to the heroic tales she adored from literature. Her enthusiasm about the war, shared with her classmates at the circus, shows the disconnect between adult realities and children's imaginations, as children often envision war as a battlefield for heroism rather than a source of trauma. However, as the war becomes a tangible reality with German soldiers taking control of



their lives, Zina's perspective shifts dramatically. She experiences confusion and fear of the very institutions she trusted—like her school and the symbols of her childhood (portraits of leaders in her schoolbooks)—become corrupted by the oppressive regime, reflecting her painful awakening to the grim truths of warfare.

3.Question:

What impact does the war have on the family dynamics, as depicted through the character of Lida Pogorzhelskaya?

Through Lida Pogorzhelskaya's narrative, the impact of war on family dynamics is stark and profound. The sudden loss of her father during the initial chaos of evacuation profoundly alters her family structure. Lida's parents had a traditional familial hierarchy, with her father as the head. His death leaves an emotional void, challenging the fabric of their family life. The responsibility shifts on her mother, who must adapt to a new reality of survival amidst the crisis. Lida's recollections reveal her struggle to process her father's absence and the transformation of her mother, who unexpectedly emerges as a strong and resilient figure. This dynamic showcases how war disrupts not only the physical presence of family members but also the roles and relationships within families, forcing them to adapt and redefine their identities in times of crisis.

4.Question:

What does Misha's dream of his home turning to ashes symbolize in the context of wartime experiences?

Misha's dream of returning home to find it reduced to ashes symbolizes the



devastating loss of safety, security, and identity brought about by war. The image of a once vibrant home—now a pile of smoldering embers—illustrates the complete destruction of his childhood and the world he once knew. The retention of the salt lump from the ashes serves as a stark metaphor for the remnants of his life; it signifies both the tangible loss of physical possessions and the abstract loss of memories and familial love that used to define his existence. This powerful imagery reflects a broader narrative of displacement and trauma experienced by individuals during wartime, emphasizing how war shatters not only lives but also the physical spaces tied to one's identity and history.

5.Question:

How does the narrative employ the innocence of children to convey the horrors of war, particularly through the character of Vasia Kharevsky?

Vasia Kharevsky's narrative effectively employs a child's innocence to highlight the horrific realities of war. His recounting of being with his older brother during bombings encapsulates a child's perspective, filled with a simple yet profound desire to live amidst chaos. Vasia's plea, "I want to live! I want to live!" reflects an instinctual human yearning for survival that transcends an understanding of death or the implications of their situation. The stark contrast between his innocent desires and the violent backdrop he is surrounded by serves to illustrate the brutal impact of war on vulnerable lives. His guilt over wanting to save food—understanding the scarcity that war brings—also sheds light on how war forces even the youngest among



them to grapple with complex emotions such as shame and survival instinct, urging readers to confront the stark innocence lost amid the backdrop of human conflict.

Chapter 3 | MY LITTLE BROTHER CRIES, BECAUSE HE WASN'T THERE WHEN PAPA WAS THERE... | Q&A

1.Question:

What memories does Larissa Lisovskaya have of her father, and how does she share these with her younger brother?

Larissa recalls her father vividly, describing him as tall and strong and remembering how he used to toss her in his arms. She shares these memories with her younger brother, who is upset because he was not yet born when their father died. During conversations, Larissa and her sister recount their father's strength and presence, which creates a sense of longing and sadness for the brother who feels excluded from these cherished memories.

2.Question:

How do children in the chapter cope with the changes and horrors brought on by war?

Throughout the chapter, children cope with the chaos of war in various ways. Larissa finds comfort in her memories, while others like Nina Yaroshevich and Tamara Parkhimovich grapple with fear and the loss of parental figures. They adapt their play to mimic war, and their conversations reveal a mix of confusion, fear, and an innate desire to understand the adults' tears and actions. For example, Vera Tashkina remembers



playing 'war' and observing adult desperation, and Dima Sufrankov describes fearful moments during air raids, emphasizing how children try to make sense of the world around them amidst the chaos.

3.Question:

What are some themes present in the experiences of the children recounted in this chapter?

The chapter explores several profound themes including loss, longing, the impact of trauma on children, and the innocence of childhood juxtaposed with the horrors of war. Another significant theme is survival; the children display remarkable resilience, trying to nurture their younger siblings and endure circumstances beyond their control. There is also a strong sense of community, as they share food and support each other through their struggles, attempting to maintain a semblance of normalcy amidst devastation.

4.Question:

What does Tamara Parkhimovich's story reveal about the trauma inflicted by war at a young age?

Tamara's account highlights the immediate and visceral trauma that children experience during war. Losing her mother in a bombing raid leaves her in constant fear and longing, expressing how she had to rely on a teacher who impersonated a maternal figure in her anguish. Even when she is reunited with her mother, she struggles with disbelief and fear that this happiness might vanish. The psychological scars are clear, as Tamara expresses a



lifelong fear of happiness, indicating that the trauma of losing her mother continues to affect her adult relationships and capacity for joy.

5.Question:

How do the children's perspectives on war alter their outlook on life and relationships as recounted in the chapter?

The children's perspectives are deeply shaped by their wartime experiences, leading them to appreciate life differently. Many express a longing for parental love and the comforts of childhood, such as candies and hugs, which are significantly missing due to the war. For example, Marina Karyanova's desire to be held speaks to a fundamental yearning for warmth and safety, overshadowed by the harsh realities they face. Others exhibit fear of abandonment and loss, which permeates their relationships, prompting them to form bonds with one another as they navigate through trauma together. Their innocence starkly contrasts with their adult-like worries, indicating a loss of carefree childhood due to war.





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Chapter 4 | ...NEITHER SUITORS NOR SOLDIERS... | Q&A

1.Question:

What are some of the main traumatic events described in Chapter 4 that the narrators experienced during the war?

In Chapter 4 of "Last Witnesses," several traumatic events are recounted by the narrators. Vera Novikova recalls a vivid memory of her home burning down, along with the painful experience of her cousin being hanged by the Germans while pregnant—a horrifying act witnessed by her and other villagers. Sasha Kavrus describes the fear and chaos as fascist planes bombed their village and the execution of men whom the Germans suspected to be part of the resistance. Oleg Boldyrev shares the grief of losing his older brother at Stalingrad, as well as the harsh realities of child labor in factories, where he and other boys worked long hours under grueling conditions. Additionally, Liuba Alexandrovich recounts the horrifying execution of villagers and the death of innocent animals during livestock evacuations, depicting a landscape of suffering and loss in her village. Through these narrations, the psychological impact of witnessing violence, loss, and destruction is evident, illustrating the deep scars left by the war.

2.Question:

How do the experiences of childhood narrators in Chapter 4 reflect the broader impact of war on families and communities?

The experiences shared by the childhood narrators in Chapter 4 vividly encapsulate the broader impact of war on families and communities. Vera Novikova's account reveals how the war intrudes upon her childhood, turning innocent curiosity into horror as she witnesses her home burn—a symbol of familial safety and stability. Sasha Kavrus's



narrative shows the breakdown of community ties as his village is bombed, and men executed for refusing to betray others, reflecting a loss of trust and the fracturing of social bonds. Oleg Boldyrev speaks to the forced maturation of children as they are thrust into the harsh realities of industrial labor, emphasizing how war strips away the innocence of youth, replacing it with harsh survival instincts. Liuba Alexandrovich highlights the collective trauma experienced by the community, marked by the screams of women and the cries of those who witnessed their loved ones being shot. Each narrative intertwines personal loss with the shared suffering of their communities, illustrating how war creates a ripple effect that devastates not just individuals, but entire families and social structures.

3.Question:

What contrasting emotions and themes are present in the narrators' stories, particularly regarding innocence and the brutality of war?

The stories of the narrators in Chapter 4 are marked by a stark contrast between innocence and the brutality of war. For instance, Vera Novikova recalls the sunlight and beauty of her village before it was marred by destruction, illustrating a naive joy turned to horror. This juxtaposition underscores the loss of childhood innocence—the children initially find excitement in the fire, not fully grasping the gravity of the situation until it becomes tragically clear. This theme is echoed in Sasha Kavrus's experiences, who initially remembers playing freely before the arrival of warplanes, a stark contrast to the later memories of fleeing and destruction. Oleg Boldyrev's recollection of the factory signifies the harsh imposition of



adult responsibilities on children due to wartime demands, forcing them to confront cruelty and suffering prematurely. The juxtaposition of innocence—exemplified through childhood games or the simple joys of family life—with the grim realities of death, loss, and trauma prevalent in wartime narrates a poignant theme of lost adolescence that runs throughout their experiences.

4.Question:

What specific actions did the parents and family members take in response to the war, as illustrated by the narrators' accounts?

In Chapter 4, the responses of parents and family members to the war reveal their desperate attempts at survival and protection of their children. For example, Sasha Kavrus's father, despite the fear surrounding him, remains hidden and fights to protect his family's identity, choosing not to betray anyone to the Germans. This demonstrates a powerful theme of loyalty and resistance even in the face of imminent danger. Vera Novikova's mother embodies resilience when she insists that her children eat food from a charred frying pan despite its smoky flavor, showcasing survival instinct in desperate times. Oleg Boldyrev's father passes down the harsh reality of labor in factories to his son, preparing him to shoulder responsibilities from a young age, reflecting a pragmatic yet deeply sorrowful acceptance of their circumstances. The narratives suggest a spectrum of responses, from resilience to despair, as parents navigate the dangers imposed by war, all while struggling to maintain some semblance of normalcy and familial care.

5.Question:

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How do the children's narratives reflect their perceptions of adults and the adult world during the war?

The children's narratives in Chapter 4 convey a complex perception of adults and the adult world shaped by their wartime experiences. For instance, Vera Novikova sees her mother weeping and praying, which instills a sense of fear and helplessness in her; she perceives her mother's traditional roles as both a source of comfort and a reminder of vulnerability. Sasha Kavrus describes his father's strong demeanor during the war, which he admires, yet he is also aware of the underlying fear that permeates his father's bravery. Oleg Boldyrev, while initially inspired by the idea of working in the factory, soon perceives the toll it takes on both his body and spirit, as he witnesses the fatigue and despair around him. This evolution in perception highlights a transition from the idealization of adults to recognizing their struggles and limitations, leading to a deeper understanding of the complexities of life under duress. Overall, the narratives reflect children's initial childlike admiration for adults, which is starkly contrasted with their eventual realization of the harsh realities and challenges that these adults face in times of war.

Chapter 5 | AND WHY AM I SO SMALL?... | Q&A

1.Question:

What events in Sasha Streltsov's childhood shaped his desire to become a pilot?

Sasha Streltsov's childhood was significantly affected by the absence of his father, who was a soldier in both the Finnish War and World War II, leading to his eventual death in

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1945. Sasha's memories of his mother, who instilled in him a love for nature through walks in the forest and activities like drawing birds in the sand, were foundational to his early years. These experiences, combined with the absence of his father's physical presence but an emotional connection to him ('You're like him. Very much like him,' his mother reassured), fueled Sasha's longing to both grow up and emulate his father. His determination to become a pilot crystallized further when he entered the second grade and firmly decided on a future in aviation, reflecting his aspirations in a time of hardship.

2.Question:

How did Sasha's grandmother influence his upbringing after his father's death?

After his father's death, Sasha's grandmother, referred to as Grandma Sasha, became his primary caregiver. She took on the physical demands of sustaining their household, including chores like laundry, plowing, cooking, and tending to livestock. Despite her heavy workload, she provided emotional support to Sasha by sharing stories about his birth and his father's bravery. The action of taking Sasha to the recruiting office to apply for a military school was a significant step, demonstrating her commitment to his future. She advocated for him using his father's death notice, emphasizing the honor of being his son. This relationship established a strong sense of family and legacy, driving Sasha forward into his pursuit of becoming a pilot.

3.Question:

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What traumatic experiences did Nadia Savitskaya recount regarding waiting for her brother during the war?

Nadia recounted the intense emotional turmoil her family faced during the war, particularly the prolonged wait for her brother to return from military service. This waiting caused their family to hold onto hope despite the surrounding despair. As a means of support, Nadia and her mother ventured out to seek food for the soldiers, even resorting to stealing grain from fields. Their encounter with German patrols, who threatened them with execution yet spared them after their mother pleaded with them, left a lasting scar on Nadia's psyche. This incident illustrated the constant danger they faced and shaped a coping mechanism in Nadia, where fear manifested in uncontrollable laughter—a reaction she still has when frightened.

4.Question:

What was Volodia Korshuk's experience during the early days of the war, particularly surrounding the loss of his mother?

Volodia Korshuk's early experiences during the war were marked by chaos and trauma. After fleeing his home in Brest due to the invasion, he witnessed horrific sights, such as the destruction of buildings and the deaths of civilians, including a little girl lying under a blanket. His most harrowing experience came when German soldiers took his mother away from their relative's home. Volodia was unable to follow her, hiding in fear instead. When his mother was found killed later, shot in the face, Volodia struggled to comprehend the brutality of her murder and fixated on her beauty as he



mourned her loss. This traumatic event would linger with him, affecting his perception of life and death, and eliciting feelings of helplessness and confusion.

5.Question:

How do the childhood memories presented in the chapter contribute to the overall themes of memory and trauma in 'Last Witnesses'?

The childhood memories recounted in Chapter 5 serve to illustrate the profound impact of war on young lives, encapsulating themes of memory and trauma that permeate 'Last Witnesses.' Narrators like Sasha, Nadia, Volodia, and others reflect on their lost innocence and the emotional scars left by experiences such as loss, fear, and survival. Their recollections are tinged with nostalgia and sorrow, demonstrating how childhood moments are intertwined with the harsh realities of war. The memories highlight both the children's resilience amidst horror and their attempts to understand and articulate their trauma as adults. Overall, these narratives weave together a collective remembrance of suffering, resilience, and the longing for peace woven through the fabric of their lives during wartime.

Chapter 6 | I'LL BUY MYSELF A DRESS WITH A LITTLE BOW... |

Q&A

1.Question:

What were some of the traumatic experiences that Polia Pashkevich recalled from her childhood during the war?

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Polia Pashkevich, at just four years old, recalled witnessing her mother's assassination in the street, a traumatic event that would leave a lasting scar on her psyche. She vividly described how her mother was shot down, with her overcoat turning red and the surrounding snow becoming stained, creating a haunting memory of violence in her early childhood. Additionally, Polia experienced fears of separation from her siblings during the chaos of evacuation, where they were forced to be taken in by strangers, leading to feelings of abandonment and terror.

2.Question:

How did Polia and her siblings cope with the fears and dangers they encountered during the war?

Polia and her siblings displayed remarkable resilience despite their fears. They learned to identify the sounds of artillery versus friendly planes, recognizing that artillery fire was a clear indication of danger. They engaged in play with war remnants like cartridges and badges, which symbolized their childhood innocence amid chaos. The children also relied on each other for emotional support, navigating fears of separation through solidarity, such as when they worried about their little brother being left behind.

3.Question:

What were the living conditions like for children in the orphanage after their parents were taken?

The orphanage where Polia and her siblings were sent presented a grim reality; the children in the orphanage lived in dire conditions, waiting in vain for their parents to come for them. They experienced hunger and



deprivation, as food was scarce, and they longed for the most basic comforts, such as a slice of bread or sweets, which were a rare treat. The emotional strain of not knowing their parents' fate and the constant fear of being forgotten or left alone compounded their hardships.

4.Question:

What did Polia dream of doing when she grew up, and how did her childhood experiences shape that dream?

Polia dreamt of becoming a dressmaker and envisioned buying herself beautiful dresses with vibrant colors and designs, including ones with little bows. This dream was likely fueled by her yearning for beauty and normalcy in a world defined by war and loss. As a child surrounded by trauma and deprivation, the dream of creating dresses represented an escape from her harsh reality and a longing for a stable, joyful future.

5.Question:

What were Eduard Voroshilov's experiences and perceptions of war as described in Chapter 6?

Eduard Voroshilov's experiences highlighted his gradual understanding of the war's brutal nature. Initially, he expressed innocence about death, learning only in a harsh moment that people could die even in the absence of gunfire. His narrative conveyed feelings of confusion, fear, and a sense of detachment from the violent realities of war. He became keenly aware of the suffering of others, struggling with mixed emotions of pity and the harshness of survival amid the backdrop of destruction. Eduardo's friendship with Kim,



a Jewish boy at risk, solidified his understanding of racial persecution and personal loyalty, evoking sentiments of protectiveness and resilience among children during wartime.

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Chapter 7 | I WAS EMBARRASSED TO BE WEARING GIRLS' SHOES... | Q&A

1.Question:

What happens to the children at the Pioneer camp in the beginning of the chapter?

The chapter begins with Marlen Robeichikov, an eleven-year-old boy, recounting the chaos at the Pioneer camp as war breaks out. Their camp is evacuated due to bombings in Minsk, and the children are told to pack only the necessities. They prepare for a long journey away from war, not fully understanding the severity of their situation or the loss of their parents.

2.Question:

How does Marlen Robeichikov describe the food and living conditions in the orphanage after evacuation?

Marlen describes the food as extremely scarce, noting that they receive only a spoonful of scalded milk and a piece of bread each day, along with boiled beets and watermelon rind soup. The children are always hungry, especially during the winter, and they have to work for their food. They struggle to fend for themselves, with limited resources, and are often involved in schemes to obtain food, highlighting their will to survive despite terrible conditions.

3.Question:

What emotional struggles do the children face after being separated from their parents and placed in orphanages?

The children experience deep emotional turmoil as they grapple with the reality of



losing their parents. Marlen notes that while initially the loss seemed like an adventure, it soon became frightening and overwhelming. They long for parental care and affection, which they had taken for granted before, and they struggle to adapt to life without their families.

4.Question:

What act of bravery does Marlen's friend Mishka Cherkasov display in the face of hunger?

Mishka Cherkasov shows remarkable bravery by running over to an army unit to get food for the group, despite the bitter cold and having to navigate a competitive environment where other orphans are also seeking food. He decides to use his hat to collect soup when it is offered, illustrating his selflessness as he prioritizes bringing back food for his friends over his own hunger.

5.Question:

How does the perspective of war differ between the children and the adults, according to the chapter?

The chapter illustrates a stark contrast between the children's perception and the reality of war. The children, like Marlen and Liuda, initially see war as a distant, almost cinematic experience, detached from fear and danger. They engage in childlike play, expressing anticipation for battles like watching a film. In contrast, the adults in their lives are deeply traumatized and afraid. The children are not yet aware of the full impact of war, such as the deaths of their parents, exposing their naivety.



Chapter 8 | I RAN AWAY TO THE FRONT FOLLOWING MY SISTER, FIRST SERGEANT VERA REDKINA... | Q&A

1.Question:

What was the emotional impact of the war on children as illustrated in the chapter?

The emotional impact of the war on children was profound and devastating. Each child's story highlights the loss of innocence as they were forced to confront violence, death, and separation from their families. For example, Nikolai Redkin recounts the quiet that enveloped his home as family members were conscripted into the army, symbolizing the loss of security. Valya Kozhanovskaya's memories are filled with fear and the traumatic vision of her mother rushing into flames to save clothing, ultimately leading to her loss. The narratives reveal childhood experiences heavily marked by grief, fear, and involuntary maturity, with characters constantly struggling to cope with the harsh realities that disrupted their once innocent worlds.

2.Question:

How did the war change the daily responsibilities of the children depicted in the chapter?

The war considerably altered the daily responsibilities of the children. For instance, Nikolai Redkin describes how he and other adolescent boys had to take on adult roles, plowing fields in the absence of men who were called to war. This shift forced young boys, some merely nine years old, to assume labor that was physically demanding and far beyond their years. Similarly, Valya Kozhanovskaya details how she was separated from her family and forced to endure hard labor in a German estate, where she had to



gather stones in fields to prepare them for plowing while facing the constant threat of violence. The children's transition from carefree youth to heavy laborers illustrates the abrupt loss of childhood as they were thrust into survival mode.

3.Question:

What role did family play in the children's experiences of war, according to the chapter?

Family played a crucial role in the children's experiences of war, often serving as their source of strength and identity, but also as the main source of trauma and loss. For instance, Nikolai recalls the absence of his brothers and the distressing separation from his sister, Vera, highlighting the emotional burden of losing familial ties. Valya's devastating loss of her mother in a fire not only robbed her of parental support but also left a deep psychological scar that complicated her understanding of safety and love. The stories illustrate that while family bonds provided comfort, they were also a source of grief, as the chaos of war frequently led to violent separations.

4.Question:

In what ways did the children's memories of war reflect both innocence and brutality?

The children's memories of war poignantly reflect a mix of innocence and brutality. For example, Nikolai's initial enthusiasm to follow his sister to the front lines showcases a naïveté about the realities of war, contrasting sharply with the brutal experiences he eventually faces. Valya's recollection of



seeing wounded soldiers and losing her mother merges the innocent curiosities of childhood with the raw horror of war. These memories demonstrate how children often process trauma through a lens of innocence, struggling to comprehend and articulate their experiences amid violence. The juxtaposition of their youthful perspectives with horrific events reveals a painful loss of innocence often present in war narratives.

5.Question:

What does the chapter reveal about the resilience of children during wartime?

The chapter reveals a remarkable resilience among children during wartime, as they adapt to unimaginable circumstances while maintaining a flicker of hope. Nikolai, for example, takes on adult responsibilities despite his young age, demonstrating his determination to support his family and survive. Valya's story, marked by her eventual escape from the brutal conditions of forced labor, also illustrates her tenacity in seeking freedom and a return to normalcy. While faced with overwhelming trauma, the children's ability to find moments of courage, perseverance, and solidarity with others reinforces the theme of resilience, showcasing how they manage to endure and hold onto their identities in the midst of chaos.

Chapter 9 | I REMEMBER THE BLUE, BLUE SKY...AND OUR PLANES IN THAT SKY... | Q&A

1.Question:

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What experiences did Pyotr Kalinovsky have during his childhood related to the war, and how did they shape his perception of life?

Pyotr Kalinovsky, who was twelve years old when the war began, reflects on his childhood experiences with both fear and a sense of heroism. Initially, he recalls that children were trained for war, learning to shoot and throw grenades, which shows the normalization of militaristic preparation in children of that era. His dream of becoming a pilot was representative of the aspirations many boys had, as they longed for adventure and the beauty of the sky. However, upon witnessing the Germans occupy his town, his perception shifts dramatically; he becomes fearful of the once beautiful sky after seeing the brutal realities of war, including public hangings of resistance fighters. The trauma of witnessing death and destruction deeply affects him, transforming his early dreams into a haunted memory of fear and loss.

2.Question:

How did Yakov Kolodinsky respond to the events he witnessed as a child during the war?

Yakov Kolodinsky, at just seven years old, experienced the trauma of witnessing the violence inflicted by the Germans on his village. He recalls the terrifying morning when the Germans came and began taking villagers away, wherein he and his mother could only watch in horror as men were captured and later executed. The vivid memories of the gunshots and the subsequent sight of dead villagers left him traumatized. His feelings of fear



were compounded by being abandoned in a barn after fleeing from the chaos, marking a pivotal moment of loneliness and helplessness. This trauma was so deep that he became mute for two days following the events, showcasing the psychological impact of witnessing violence at such a young age.

3.Question:

What were the effects of the siege on Leningrad on Anya Grubina and her family?

Anya Grubina's account of her childhood in Leningrad reveals the desperation and horrors of survival during the siege. Losing her father to the war, Anya and her mother struggled to feed themselves and her baby brother, Slavik, who was just six months old at the time. The extreme starvation made them resort to eating inedible items like paper and vegetation, showcasing the lengths to which they had to go to survive. She also describes the miraculous moment of encountering a live cat in an orphanage, which was a symbol of hope and normalcy amidst the despair. The lasting impressions of hunger and fear continued to affect her long after the siege had ended, illustrating how the experiences of war and deprivation can haunt survivors throughout their lives.

4.Question:

What trauma does Vera Zhdan recount from her childhood during the war?

Vera Zhdan shares a harrowing story of witnessing the execution of her



father and brother by German soldiers. She recalls how they were forced to dig their own graves under threat of gunfire. The most traumatic aspect of this experience was the sheer helplessness she felt as a child, being forced to watch the murder of her family members and not being allowed to mourn openly. The Germans demanded that she and her mother smile, an act of cruelty that perpetuated their trauma. This event left her deeply afraid of men for the rest of her life, leading to an enduring fear of relationships and intimacy, illustrating the long-term impact of violent experiences on children.

5.Question:

How did the experiences of Valya Zmitrovich during the war illustrate the loss of innocence?

Valya Zmitrovich narrates her childhood experience of losing her family amidst the chaos of war. She remembers the happy moments prior to the war, only to be thrust into a nightmare where her mother was taken by German soldiers and later executed. Valya and her siblings were left to fend for themselves and had to escape from their village to keep safe. The trauma of the events is palpable as she recounts gruesome details of her mother's death, highlighting the brutal realities that shattered her childhood innocence. Valya's narrative reflects the deep scars left by the war on children, as she struggles to cope with her feelings of loss and the responsibility of caring for her surviving sibling.





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Chapter 10 | A BIG FAMILY PHOTOGRAPH... | Q&A

1.Question:

What childhood memories does Tolya Chervyakov recall about his family in the chapter?

Tolya Chervyakov recalls a big family photograph fixed in his memory. He describes his father in the foreground, wearing an officer's cap and holding a rifle, while his mother, a nurse in a partisan brigade, is beside him. Though he can't remember his mother from those years, he vividly recalls her constant laundry work and the medicinal smell around her. Tolya notes how his little brother was often sick and often cried at night, prompting their mother to weep in fear. A stark memory involves his brother being bathed in milk by their mother, giving him relief after a painful night.

2.Question:

What examples of the impact of war on children's lives are presented through Katya Zayats' story?

Katya Zayats shares how her village was devastated by war, detailing the plight of her family and their struggles to survive after being burned out. She recounts witnessing the execution of their neighbor, Old Todor, by German soldiers, which infused fear and confusion in the children. Katya and her little sister had to beg for food from other villages due to their mother's illness. They were often given minimal provisions, like barley and pieces of bread, highlighting the extreme poverty and desperation that families faced due to the war.

3.Question:

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How does Fedya Trutko's account illustrate the confusion and chaos brought by the war to families?

Fedya Trutko's account begins with the chaos surrounding his mother's illness during the onset of the war. Just days after being admitted to the hospital, the Germans invaded, and he was separated from her forever. He describes how his family, including his siblings, had to flee their home and ultimately regroup with relatives. His narrative demonstrates the disarray, loss, and despair as he recounts how he and his sister were left to fend for themselves during air raids and the ongoing violence, as well as the thinly veiled longing for their mother.

4.Question:

What hardships did Zoya Vasilyeva experience, and how did they affect her aspirations?

Zoya Vasilyeva's story reflects her transition from a joyful dancer with aspirations to a survivor amid war. Initially filled with happiness as she enrolled in a prestigious dance school, her life was uprooted by the war, leading to a separation from her family during a bombardment. As she navigated through the chaos, Zoya found herself doing mundane tasks in a partisan unit instead of pursuing her dream of dancing. She experienced a profound loss of innocence and ambition, culminating in her longing to return to ballet even after earning a medal for her role as a partisan.

5.Question:

What does Anya Pavlova's story reveal about the psychological trauma

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and survival instincts developed during wartime?

Anya Pavlova shares a harrowing experience of being taken by Germans while her mother desperately tried to protect her, showcasing the trauma of a child thrust into violence and fear. She narrates how she survived by pretending to be pregnant to avoid being taken away. This survival instinct came at a heavy psychological cost, leaving her haunted by memories of violence and the horror she witnessed, such as the execution of children and the trauma of separation from her family. Her recounting emphasizes the severe emotional toll that war inflicts on innocent lives.

Chapter 11 | HE WON'T LET ME FLY AWAY... | Q&A

1.Question:

What recurring theme does the dream of Vasya Saulchenko reveal about his war experiences?

Vasya Saulchenko's dream about the German soldier he killed symbolizes the deep psychological scars left by his experiences during the war. The dream signifies a sense of guilt and haunting memories that persist into adulthood, illustrating how violence and death impact a child's psyche. Despite having killed a man as a child, it is the dream of the deceased soldier that prevents him from 'flying away' or escaping his traumatic memories. This recurring dream reflects the inability to reconcile his actions with his childhood innocence, highlighting the lasting effects of war on mental health.

2.Question:

How does Anya Korzun's childhood perception of the end of the war differ from



the realities experienced by adults around her?

Anya Korzun recalls the end of the war with a sense of childhood innocence, characterized by excitement and joy devoid of an understanding of the gravitas of war. For the children, the announcement of Victory on May 9, 1945, is a jubilant moment filled with laughter and celebration manifesting in gestures like kissing the word 'Victory' from the loudspeaker. In contrast, adults around her, like her mother, exhibit deep emotional responses, merging joy with tears, indicating a complex mix of relief, sorrow, and residual trauma from their wartime experiences. This contrast highlights the dissonance between the blissful ignorance of children and the heavy burden of adult experiences.

3.Question:

What does Nikolai Berezka's account reveal about the psychological impact of war on children, especially concerning parental relationships?

Nikolai Berezka's account reveals profound psychological effects of war on children, particularly through the relationship with his father. Despite being born in 1945, he recalls vivid memories of his father's suffering due to war injuries, emphasizing how the war extends its influence beyond the battlefield to familial bonds. The fear and pain he witnesses drive him to think about the war incessantly, indicating a loss of childhood normalcy. His longing for his father's presence, coupled with the horrors involving the tragic death of his friends due to mines, underscores the deep-seated trauma that affects children's perception of safety and family. As a result, Berezka is



left with an enduring sense of loss and confusion regarding the consequences of war.

4.Question:

What does Mariam Yuzefovskaya's experience reveal about the challenges faced by children growing up during wartime?

Mariam Yuzefovskaya's experience illustrates the profound struggles faced by children during wartime, including identity crises and emotional neglect. Born in 1941, she recounts her feelings of shame and self-loathing due to her appearance and health issues as a result of the harsh conditions during the war. The effort her mother makes to present her as beautiful for her father's return compounds her anxiety about acceptance. Furthermore, her intense need for parental validation is disrupted by the trauma of war when her father returns; the moment he hesitates creates an emotional rift, highlighting how familial relationships are altered by the consequences of conflict. Mariam's subsequent feelings of bitterness and the loss of a carefree childhood signify the broader emotional and psychological burdens placed on children living through war.

5.Question:

In what ways does Valya Brinskaya's narrative reflect critical insights on the psychological shifts children undergo during wartime experiences?

Valya Brinskaya's narrative reflects the critical psychological shifts experienced by children in wartime, moving from innocence to an acute



awareness of mortality and loss. Valya recounts the atmospheric shifts of the war's onset, indicating a loss of stability and safety. Her observations of her parents' fear, along with her efforts to appear brave in front of her brother, highlight the emotional weight placed on children to adapt during crises. Valya's transformation from a frightened child to one who stops fearing the bombings after witnessing death signifies a loss of childhood innocence, culminating in a numb acceptance of violence and tragedy. This trajectory illustrates how war alters the fundamental aspects of child development, imposing adult-like burdens and responsibilities on young shoulders.