

# People From My Neighborhood PDF (Limited Copy)

Hiromi Kawakami



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# People From My Neighborhood Summary

Exploring the lives that shape our surroundings.

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## About the book

In "People From My Neighborhood," Hiromi Kawakami invites readers into a charmingly eccentric community where the ordinary deeply intertwines with the extraordinary, and the mundane life of a Tokyo suburb unfolds with whimsy and warmth. Through a series of interlinked stories, the protagonist reflects on the peculiar and colorful personalities that inhabit her neighborhood, capturing the essence of human connection, nostalgia, and the subtle magic found in everyday encounters. Each character, from the enigmatic old woman who tends her garden to the surreal stories of a mysterious boy, reveals layers of life that resonate with our own experiences, beckoning us to consider the beauty and strangeness of the world around us. This captivating collection beckons readers to embrace the quirks of their own neighborhoods and the rich tapestry of lives that make up our communities.

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## About the author

Hiromi Kawakami is a celebrated Japanese author known for her poignant explorations of human relationships and the subtleties of everyday life. Born in Tokyo in 1958, she originally pursued a career in the academic field, teaching literature and composition, before transitioning to writing full-time. Kawakami gained international acclaim with her novel "The Briefcase," which won the Akutagawa Prize, and has since published a number of widely translated works that highlight the intricacies of modern existence, often infused with a touch of magical realism. Her distinctive narrative style, characterized by its lyrical prose and deep empathy for her characters, has endeared her to readers worldwide, making her a significant voice in contemporary literature.

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## Chapter 1 Summary: The Secret

In the first chapter of "People From My Neighborhood" by Hiromi Kawakami, we are introduced to a whimsical relationship between the narrator and a mysterious child who lives beneath a white cloth at the base of a zelkova tree. When the narrator first encounters the child, it is unclear whether they are boy or girl, but the child's fierce glare and assertive demeanor immediately stand out. After an awkward start, the child invites the narrator to follow them back home, and surprisingly, the child becomes a part of the narrator's life, transforming their space into a shared home.

As time passes, the child reveals themselves to be more than just a typical kid. They eat sparingly, listen intently to the narrator's woes about work and romance, and exhibit a playful nature, especially after baths, when they joyfully dance around the room. Yet, the child also has a mysterious quality; they often disappear for days, only to be found returning to their spot under the cloth. This peculiar relationship stretches over thirty years, where the child remains unchanged while the narrator grows older and more cynical, facing the passage of time with the weight of loss as pets come and go.

The narrator's feelings toward the child evolve from uncertainty to deep affection. Despite the doubts about the child's humanity — their eternal youth and absence of aging — the bond they share becomes central to the narrator's life. The narrator grapples with the realities of aging, loneliness,

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and mortality, wondering about the child's true nature and purpose. When asked about why he came into the narrator's life, the child cryptically responds, "It's a secret," leaving a lingering air of mystery that adds depth to their unconventional connection.

This chapter beautifully explores themes of companionship, the passage of time, and the nature of existence, all woven together with a touch of surrealism that invites readers to ponder the significance of the relationships we form and the secrets that bind us.

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## Critical Thinking

**Key Point:** The Importance of Connection in an Uncertain World

**Critical Interpretation:** Imagine walking through your own life, burdened by the weight of responsibilities and the passage of time, only to discover that connection can come from the most unexpected places. Just like the narrator's chance encounter with the mysterious child beneath the zelkova tree, you too might find that companionship, however unconventional, can illuminate your existence and fill the void of loneliness. This chapter inspires you to embrace the relationships that develop in your own life, challenging you to find beauty in the bond you share with others, regardless of how peculiar those connections may appear. Such introspection encourages you to reflect on what truly matters—those secret threads of affection and understanding that weave through our lives, reminding you that connection, in lieu of certainty, is what nourishes the soul.

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## Chapter 2 Summary: Chicken Hell

In Chapter 2 of "People From My Neighborhood," titled "Chicken Hell," we meet an intriguing old man who used to belong to a prominent farming family now dwindled to just a few chickens and goats in his small yard. The surrounding area has been devoured by urban development, transforming fields into concrete housing. The old man captivates the narrator with tales about a mythical Chicken Hell, where a giant chicken punishes those who are unkind to its kind, emphasizing the consequences of cruelty in a whimsical yet chilling manner.

The old man's chickens, a mix of vibrant roosters and weary hens, roam freely, embodying both resilience and vulnerability. He shares his experiences with the chickens, hinting at a darker side to his relationship with them—he playfully torments them by kicking them away when they rush for food or chasing them around when he's in a bad mood. Despite this cruelty, he also shows a softer side; he refuses to eat his chickens that die of natural causes and opts to bury them instead. His eyes, one missing and replaced by a glass orb, add to his colorful character.

As the narrative unfolds, we glimpse the sad reality of lost agrarian traditions as younger generations abandon farming for corporate jobs in the city. The narrator, once fascinated by this man and his life, eventually grows distant, reflecting the inevitable passage of time and the fading connections

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to rural roots. The old man's eccentricity lingers in memory, encapsulated by the contrast between the comfort of modern pastry shops and the harshness of farm life—a poignant metaphor for change and loss in a rapidly evolving society.

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## Chapter 3: Grandma

In Chapter 3 of "People From My Neighborhood" by Hiromi Kawakami, the narrator recalls fond memories of visiting a woman she affectionately calls "Grandma." Though the woman was likely in her mid-forties, the narrator, a young elementary school student, found her company much more enjoyable than that of her school friends, whom she considers unruly. Grandma's house is spacious and inviting, filled with colorful origami paper, a kotatsu, and her beloved tea set. Despite the occasional presence of a mysterious little boy who always hides away, the two share a unique bond as they engage in card games with hanafuda, often bending the rules to create exciting combinations.

However, their playful dynamic is tinged with complexity. Grandma sometimes asks for small amounts of money, which the narrator begins to bring with pride, yet she also battles her own moods, folding origami figures obsessively only to discard them in frustration. The chapter introduces the narrator's world to new concepts, like the unpleasantness of cod liver oil, which leads to a humorous exchange about its smell.

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## Chapter 4 Summary: The Office

In Chapter 4 of "People From My Neighborhood" by Hiromi Kawakami, the story focuses on a peculiar character in the community who refers to his makeshift workspace as his "office"—a gazebo in the park. He rarely attends school but wears a well-worn and faded school uniform. This uniform not only signifies his detachment from the conventional world but also carries the scent of mothballs. The man is quiet and communicates primarily with three phrases: "Shall I sign here?" "Final balance, please," and "It's raining hard today."

He often arrives at his office with a cushion not for himself but for any guests who might approach him. This intriguing detail reflects his unspoken generosity and desire to accommodate others, even though his social interaction is limited. The narrator is hesitant to engage with him alone, often bringing along a friend named Kanae, who tends to boss him around, engaging him in trivial challenges like reciting the two times table.

The narrator's attempts to connect with the man are met with awkward exchanges. Once, during a warning of an impending typhoon, the narrator went looking for him but found him absent. Another time, the narrator offered him a deep-fried bun, but he rejected it, repeating his catchphrase, which frustrated the narrator and triggered a surprising reaction from him—he clamped his hands over his ears, highlighting his discomfort with



unexpected situations.

As time progresses, the narrator learns he is four years younger than the man, who eventually stops frequenting the gazebo. They encounter each other occasionally, but their exchanges remain formulaic. However, the man gains some recognition, exhibiting his drawings at a children's center. The illustrations are vibrant and imaginative, showcasing his talent beyond the limited phrases he typically uses.

Transitioning through time, we see the man shedding his school uniform for more casual attire, yet he continues to rely on his mantras. During a street encounter, he surprises the narrator by mentioning deep-fried buns, marking his first spontaneous comment beyond his usual phrases. Tragically, he dies at a young age of thirty-three, but his art lives on, with a posthumous collection published that gains popularity. The narrator reflects on the difference between the published drawings and the raw creativity displayed in the children's center, suggesting a depth to the man's work that goes beyond mere appearance.

This chapter beautifully explores themes of communication, isolation, and the struggle for connection. It highlights how individuals can lead rich internal lives despite external constraints, leaving a lasting impression on the narrator and illuminating the often overlooked beauty in the mundane aspects of life.

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## Chapter 5 Summary: Brains

Kanae and her older sister share a complicated relationship marked by teasing and intimidation. Kanae, the younger sister, often dismisses her sister as a stranger, asserting dominance despite being two years younger. Their family home is a two-story building where the girls' playful antics often unfold, like when they sneak into their parents' bedroom to jump on the bed. As they indulge in this mischief, Kanae's sister catches them and, fearing retribution, she retreats in panic when threatened by Kanae.

The playful atmosphere turns darker when Kanae and her friend begin to tickle her sister, initially laughing but escalating to an unsettling level as her sister's laughter transitions to distress. They stop when their sister falls face down, revealing the gravity of their actions as they realize she is incoherent and crying, highlighting a troubling dynamic where bullying masquerades as innocent fun.

Later, the story takes an eerie turn when Kanae's sister invites the narrator into their home while Kanae is away. She reveals a mysterious box containing what she calls "doll brains," a chilling keepsake of their shared childhood. The unsettling discovery intensifies the sense of discomfort surrounding Kanae's sister and the strangeness of their world. The moment leaves the narrator feeling uneasy, provoking thoughts about innocence lost and the shadows lurking beneath childhood games.



Throughout this chapter, themes of sibling rivalry, the innocence of youth versus the potential for cruelty, and the dark fascination with death and the macabre emerge. The interactions between the sisters encapsulate a world where playfulness can border on violence, reflecting the complexities of familial bonds and the darker sides of growing up.

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## Chapter 6: The Crooner

In Chapter 6 of "People From My Neighborhood," titled "The Crooner," we're introduced to Blackie, a fierce black mutt owned by Kiyoshi Akai. The neighborhood kids dread Blackie, as he's not just a barker but also a serious biter, leaving injuries that cause complaints from those unfortunate enough to cross paths with him. Kiyoshi and his mother seem unfazed by the chaos he creates, allowing Blackie to roam freely until sunset, asserting his territorial dominance in their neighborhood.

The children, particularly Shimizu and his older brother, hatch a plan to get rid of Blackie by poisoning him with detergent-laced meat. However, despite their efforts, Blackie remains unharmed, leading to their initial frustration. The plot twists dramatically when Blackie manages to catch a thief during a burglary attempt, gripping the thief's leg until he cries out in pain. This unexpected heroism earns Blackie grudging respect from the kids, who abandon their attempts to harm him after seeing his bravery.

Blackie's story ends tragically three years later when he is struck by a dump

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## Chapter 7 Summary: The School Principal

In Chapter 7 of "People From My Neighborhood," we meet a rather unique character, the school principal—a dog school principal, to be precise. He frequents a local dog run in the park, keeping a watchful eye on the dogs and their owners. With his t-shirt emblazoned with "DOG SCHOOL" and "PRINCIPAL" across his belly, this bald man in his fifties takes his role seriously as he scolds dogs for misbehaving, be it for pooping on the ground or barking too much.

The narrator has multiple encounters with the principal, who is always the one to initiate conversation, often expressing a fondness for mixed-breed dogs over pedigrees. Although the principal seems friendly, the narrator finds his attention overwhelming and tries to avoid him by walking alone, only to be pulled back into conversation when the principal notices that the narrator's dog is absent.

Through their talks, we learn that both the principal and the narrator attended the same elementary school, sharing memories of a notorious dog named Blackie. The principal reveals a humorous yet slightly troubled side when he recounts a childhood incident involving a girl's satchel stuffed with chicken bones, an act he believed was born out of affection.

The principal's layered personality shines through as he discusses his

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family—his lawyer wife and two bank-working daughters, whom he describes as living “boring lives,” though his eyes betray a deeper sadness. The chapter reflects themes of childhood reminiscence, the complexity of adult lives, and the peculiar connection between humans and their pets. It skillfully combines humor and a touch of melancholy, all while offering a glimpse into the eyes of a man who finds purpose—and perhaps solace—in the company of dogs.

Character	Role	Personality Traits	Key Themes
School Principal	Dog school principal	Serious, friendly, humorous, troubled	Childhood reminiscence, complexity of adult lives, connection between humans and pets
Narrator	Observer	Overwhelmed, nostalgic	
Principal's Family	Wife and daughters	Boring lives, deeper sadness in principal	

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## Chapter 8 Summary: The Love

In Chapter 8 of "People From My Neighborhood" by Hiromi Kawakami, we meet the intriguing owner of a modest bar called the Love. Despite her demon-like appearance, with a face reminiscent of paintings of old, she surprisingly has a warm and pleasant demeanor. The Love opens early, serving breakfast rolls and iced coffee at a bargain price, with lunch offering a choice between two identical ready meals: the Hamburger Special and the Meat Bun Special. Karaoke nights are a staple, though the bar rarely sees customers, leaving the woman to sing alone, her voice drifting into the streets.

Her life is deeply intertwined with her work, as the Love doubles as her home. After closing each night, she simply transforms the bar into her living space, washing up in the sink and laying out her mattress on the tatami platform. The woman's personal belongings, stored neatly in a plastic box, highlight the simplicity of her lifestyle. There's a tender relationship she shares with her daughter, who occasionally stays over, and the mother insists on making her comfortable despite the cramped conditions.

Recently, the menu at the Love has expanded to include baby-friendly foods like stewed kabocha and rice porridge, a reflection of her daughter's new role as a mother. However, even the "new" dishes are essentially repackaged leftovers, further emphasizing the modesty of the place. Strangely, the

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neighborhood folks rarely frequent the Love, and when outsiders do visit, they seem to leave hurriedly. The community's puzzlement about how the lady sustains her bar adds a layer of mystery to her life, suggesting deeper themes of resilience and the complexity of personal connection amidst a backdrop of loneliness. This chapter paints a vivid portrait of a woman who, despite her challenges, persists in her charming little world.

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## Critical Thinking

**Key Point:** Resilience in simplicity

**Critical Interpretation:** In this chapter, the woman running the Love bar exemplifies how great resilience can flourish in the most unassuming settings. Imagine waking up each day in a space that serves as both your livelihood and your home, where every simple meal and solitary karaoke night becomes a testament to your enduring spirit. Her ability to create warmth and comfort within her modest circumstances reminds you that life's true richness often lies in small, meaningful moments and connections. This perspective encourages you to embrace simplicity, not as a limitation, but as a pathway to cultivate joy and resilience, inspiring you to find beauty in your own challenges and relationships.

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## Chapter 9: The Juvenile Delinquent

In Chapter 9 of "People From My Neighborhood" by Hiromi Kawakami, we follow the transformation of Kanae, a girl who undergoes a drastic change as she enters junior high school. Initially, Kanae still acknowledges her childhood friend, but she quickly becomes enveloped by a new identity: a juvenile delinquent. With her long skirts, bleached hair, and newfound popularity, she attracts a gang of followers, including a tough biker gang's boss, which draws both admiration and intrigue from the narrator.

As the story unfolds, Kanae's life is marked by drama. Rumors of a violent duel between boys for her affection circulate, culminating in the arrest of the gang's leader after a tragic street battle. This incident sets the stage for Kanae's downward spiral, as her circle of admirers dwindles and she resorts to more scandalous behavior, with whispers about her secret rendezvous on the school rooftop.

Despite the sordid details of her teenage life that spread like wildfire among the neighborhood women, Kanae defies expectations. After graduation, she

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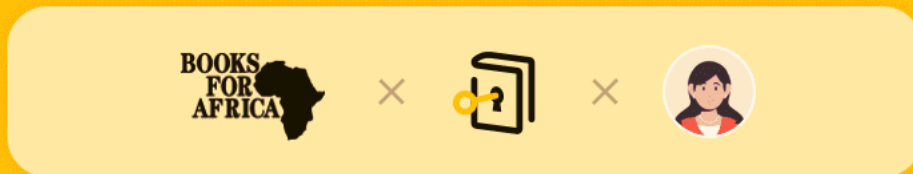
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## Chapter 10 Summary: The Tenement

In Chapter 10 of "People From My Neighborhood," we delve into the life of an old taxi driver living in a decrepit tenement that he claims dates back to before the Meiji Restoration. The building, dilapidated and empty aside from him and his taxi, sets the stage for a whimsical yet poignant exploration of solitude and ghostly companionship.

Our main character, an eccentric old man, only works as a taxi driver two days a week, during which he leisurely drives through the small neighborhood, taking his time at parks and shrines. On his annual three-day escape in mid-January, he prepares a satchel filled with an odd assortment of food—rice balls, hard-boiled eggs, and mandarin oranges—but curiously claims not to eat any of it. Instead, he enjoys a hearty meal at a local noodle shop, Ramen Five. The mystery surrounding where he goes on his Expressway sparks curiosity in the townsfolk, with whispers of him vanishing into the mountains.

When questioned about his mysterious trips, he playfully claims to be driving with the "girls"—the ghosts of three women who once lived in the tenement. His playful banter with the woman who runs a nearby bar, Love, introduces a humorous element, as he describes these ghostly companions who are, despite being deceased, still enjoyable to have around. However, a visit to the town hall reveals the tenement was actually built after World War

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II, contradicting his fanciful stories and raising questions about his own existence.

The narrative blends humor with a touch of melancholy, highlighting themes of loneliness, the passage of time, and the connection to the past. The old man, whether real or a ghost himself, finds a unique way to cope with his isolation through memories and imagined companionship. As he indulges in a feast of ramen and dumplings, we are left with a vivid sense of his character—a mix of nostalgia, humor, and perhaps a hint of sorrow, reminding us that sometimes, the company we keep, even if imaginary, can be as meaningful as those who are physically present.

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## Chapter 11 Summary: The HachirM Lottery

In Chapter 11 of "People From My Neighborhood" by Hiromi Kawakami, the narrative revolves around the peculiar HachirM, a boy from a family which families must take care of HachirM, a boy from a family overwhelmed with children. The storyteller shares that their own family has lost the lottery twice: once when they were four and again in third grade. Losing the lottery means HachirM, the troublesome child of the Shikishima family, must temporarily live in the home, requiring the family to feed him and ensure he attends school, all while handling his mischievous behavior and unfiltered complaints.

HachirM's stay significantly impacts the household with escalating food costs. While a headache for the families because of his troublemaking attitude and habit of talking back, he also brings some unique talents. He has a knack for gardening, particularly with exotic herbs, which flourish under his care but are often neglected in terms of culinary use. Additionally, HachirM displays a special ability in the art of the human heart, a tradition within his family, though these creations are considered too grotesque for public display.

When HachirM stays with the narrator's family for the summer in junior high and continues to be a nuisance yet occasionally enjoys moments of camaraderie, like treating the narrator to ice cream. Eventually,

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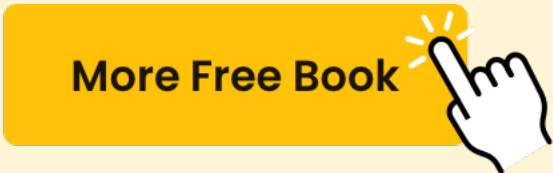


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HachirM matures and transitions from being a kid sh  
homes to a licensed architect. He offers to renovate houses at a discounted  
rate, which often results in a signature heart sculpture adorning the homes of  
those who accepted his help. However, some families find this unwanted,  
leading HachirM to retaliate playfully by planting p  
chrysanthemums in their gardens.

This chapter beautifully captures themes of community, childhood mischief,  
the impact of growing up, and the way relationships within a neighborhood  
can evolve over time, reflecting both the burdens and joy of sharing lives  
with one another. HachirM, with his quirks and even  
memorable figure that ties the community together in unexpected ways.

Chapter	Summary
11	<p>The chapter discusses the HachirM lottery, which deci  temporarily host HachirM, a mischievous yet talented  The narrator's family has lost the lottery twice, leadin  with them, impacting their dynamics, and increasing fo  shows unique talents in gardening and creating heart sculptures, though  they are often seen as grotesque. As he matures and becomes an architect,  he offers home renovations and sometimes adds his signature heart  sculptures, which are not always welcomed. The chapter explores  community, childhood mischief, and evolving relationships in a  neighborhood, emphasizing HachirM's memorable pres  lives of the people.</p>



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## Chapter 12: The Magic Spell

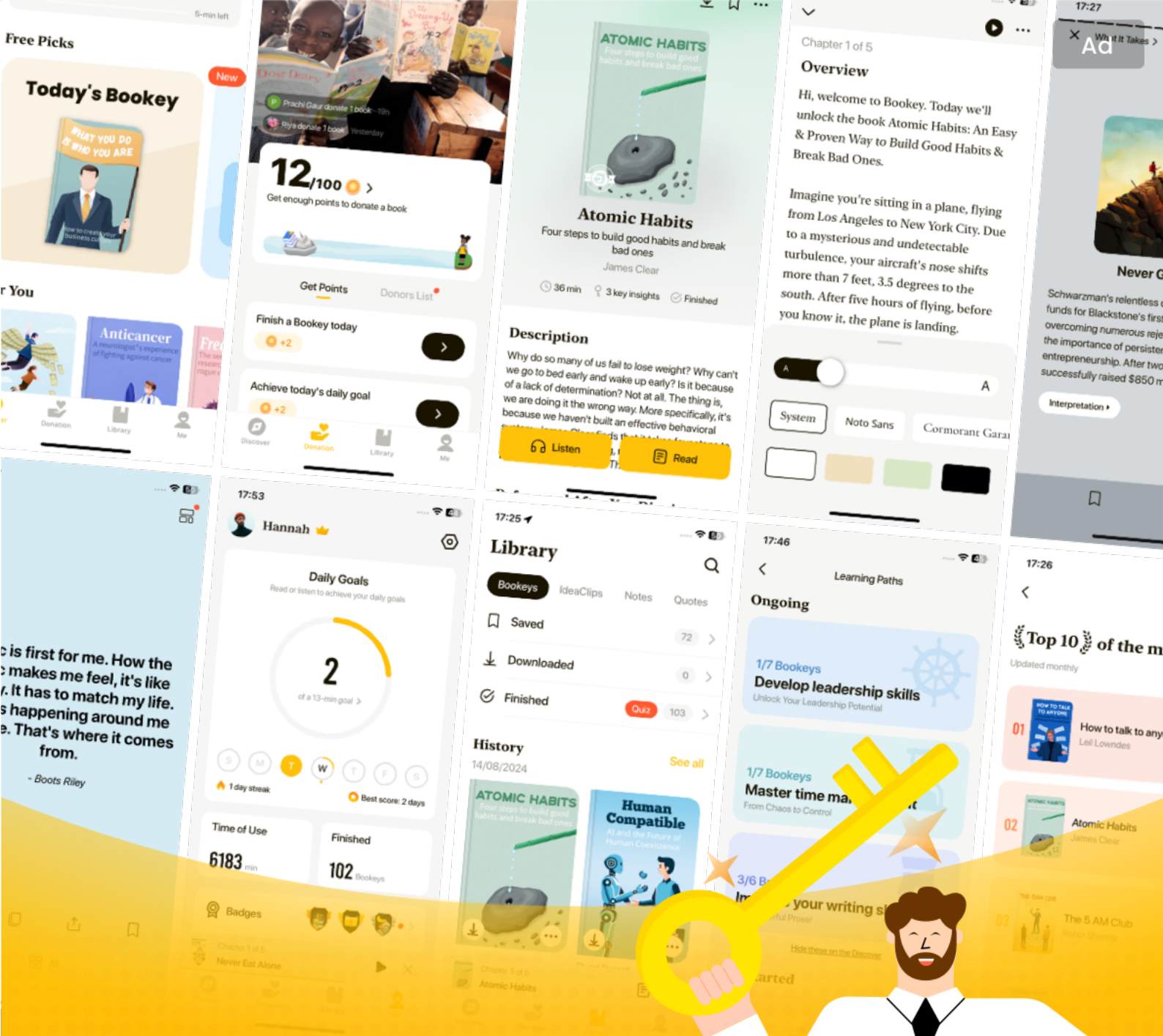
In Chapter 12 of "People From My Neighborhood" by Hiromi Kawakami, the return of the Kawamata family from America brings a fascinating twist to the neighborhood. The parents, having spent a decade running a business in California, return with not only wealth but also stories of Hollywood glamour, igniting envy and curiosity among the locals. Their daughters, Dolly and Romi, are quintessentially American, with Dolly, the older sister at five, immersing herself in imaginative play at the local park.

Kanae and the narrator, intrigued by Dolly's American ways, initially plot to tease her but quickly abandon their plan when they witness Dolly's remarkable sandcastle construction skills. As they watch her meticulously shape her creation, they become mesmerized, especially by her repeated use of the word "oops" whenever a part of her tunnel collapses. This seemingly innocent expression sparks their imagination, leading them to jokingly believe it to be a magic spell.

The girls develop a playful obsession with the word "oops," chanting it

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## Chapter 13 Summary: Grandpa Shadows

In Chapter 13 of "People From My Neighborhood," we meet Grandpa Shadows, a mysterious figure living in a dilapidated mansion on the outskirts of town, surrounded by banana trees and sago palms. Local lore and whispers from an old chicken farmer tell us that his once-lush garden is a shadow of its former self, mirroring the enigmatic nature of its occupant. Grandpa Shadows earned his nickname thanks to his peculiar two shadows: one is meek and compliant, while the other is wild and unruly, often causing chaos and even attaching itself to unsuspecting townsfolk for days on end.

One particularly troubling instance involved Kiyoshi Akai, a neighborhood troublemaker. When the rebellious shadow clung to him, it brought misfortune, claiming through its theatrical antics that Kiyoshi would bring about its demise. Kiyoshi, however, didn't succumb to this fate but instead remained a source of annoyance, even after a near-fatal accident where he was hit by a car and fell into a week-long unconsciousness. When he awoke, he claimed to have been dancing with elegant ladies at Grandpa Shadows's mansion during his unconsciousness, a fanciful story that captivated his listeners and suggested a whimsical connection to Grandpa Shadows's past as a baron, known for hosting lavish balls.

As the chapter unfolds, we learn about the eventual dismantling of Grandpa Shadows's mansion and his subsequent relocation to a nursing home by the

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sea at the age of 103. His rebellious shadow, it seems, continued its haunting pattern, leaping to other elderly residents, often leading to their demise shortly after. This passage creatively explores themes of legacy, life and death, and the impact of community stories, weaving a tapestry of whimsical and eerie elements that captures the imagination while hinting at deeper truths about aging and companionship. The chapter leaves readers pondering the line between reality and myth, anchored by the rich, eclectic characters that populate the neighborhood.

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## Chapter 14 Summary: The Six-Person Apartments

In Chapter 14 of "People From My Neighborhood," we delve into a quirky and intriguing public housing development on the outskirts of town, where families of six seem to be the norm. This oddity quickly draws the attention and gossip of locals, especially spurred by Mrs. Kawamata, who has just returned from America. She spreads the notion that the number six is unlucky, known as "the devil's number," which leads to a growing fear and avoidance of the housing project.

Strange occurrences further fuel the rumors surrounding the apartments. For instance, Mr. Sawaki finds his beard growing uncontrollably by the day, while Ms. Arashimura strangely develops puddles at her feet, complete with swimming tadpoles. The most captivating tale involves Kanae's sister, who gains the unexpected ability to speak in the voices of historical figures after visiting the apartments. When she channels the voices, her impressions are so vivid that she speaks as if she is those very individuals, much to the delight of her friends, including the narrator.

However, a friend named Kiyoshi attempts to set the record straight about the nature of her powers, pointing out that mediums typically communicate with the dead. This playful banter dissolves as Kanae's sister slyly claims that King of M Y an a g i y a , a famous comedian, has just channel him as well.

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As the neighborhood drifts further from the cursed building, the housing project finds its own path. It builds a self-sustaining community, including its school and currency, complete with a peculiar emblem of six heads. Over time, while the main town declines, the housing development flourishes, eventually becoming so independent that it secedes from Japan and even establishes its armed forces.

As the bizarre myths surrounding the apartments start to fade, Mr. Sawaki's beard returns to normal, and Ms. Arashimura's puddles transform into frogs. Yet, Kanae's sister remains special, maintaining her gift and finding a new purpose as a sought-after medium on sacred Mount Osore, solidifying her reputation as someone who can connect with the deceased.

This chapter engages with themes of superstition, community, and the mystery of human connections, presenting a whimsical view of how rumors and beliefs can shape social dynamics and individual identities. The passage blends the unusual and the ordinary, illustrating how the fantastical can emerge from the fabric of daily life.

Element	Summary
Setting	Quirky public housing development on outskirts of town.
Norm	Families of six are the norm in the housing project.



Element	Summary
Local Reaction	Rumors and gossip, particularly from Mrs. Kawamata, who claims six is "the devil's number" leading to fear and avoidance.
Strange Occurrences	Mr. Sawaki's beard grows uncontrollably; Ms. Arashimura develops puddles with tadpoles; Kanae's sister channels voices of historical figures.
Character Interaction	Kiyoshi tries to clarify Kanae's sister's powers as he jokes about mediumship, which she amusingly twists.
Community Development	The housing project creates a self-sustaining community, complete with its own school and currency.
Independence	The housing development eventually becomes so independent that it secedes from Japan.
Resolution	Strange myths start to fade; Mr. Sawaki's beard normalizes, Ms. Arashimura's puddles turn to frogs, while Kanae's sister remains sought-after as a medium.
Themes	Engagement with superstition, community dynamics, and human connections; blending the unusual with the ordinary.

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## Chapter 15: The Rivals

In Chapter 15 of "People From My Neighborhood" by Hiromi Kawakami,

we meet two girls named YMko who grew up as rivals on the street from each other. YMko One is characterized as the “sheep,” while YMko Two, whose name means “enchantress,” is the “witch” for their competitive dynamic. Both girls attend private schools, which is uncommon in their town. The rivalry between them is fierce and playful, rooted in their similar backgrounds and appearances; they even have the same birthday and blood type.

Their competition manifests in playful jabs about their respective school principals—one a nun and the other a monk—and escalates as they flaunt their fashion choices, each trying to outdo the other. This rivalry follows

them into adulthood, leading to a showdown over YMko Two, who becomes infatuated with YMko One. Instead of seeking revenge, YMko Two adopts a surprising calmness, choosing to dress simply and engage in peaceful pastimes, leaving YMko One scrambling for attention. Unable to contain her jealousy, she embarks on increasingly desperate measures

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## Chapter 16 Summary: The Elf

In Chapter 16 of "People From My Neighborhood" by Hiromi Kawakami, we are introduced to the enigmatic Music House, nestled beside a park with its quaint, chocolate-brown walls and striking crimson roof. Despite its inviting appearance, the house is shrouded in mystery; no one knows the owner, and the only time one can enter is on their birthday, precisely at three o'clock. This exclusivity adds to the allure of the Music House, leaving its visitors with vague, cryptic memories of the music they heard within, which seem to resonate differently with each person.

Kanae, having just turned nine, hints at her own experience, but her reluctance to share details implies there's something magical—or perhaps secretive—about the house's music. Other townsfolk give ambiguous descriptions of their visits, each echoing a sense of wonder while leaving much unsaid. The old chicken farmer's whimsical theory—that an elf may reside within the building—adds a layer of folklore to the unfolding mystery, suggesting that the music might be more than just mere sound; it could be tied to the listener's fate.

Driven by curiosity, the narrator seizes the opportunity to visit the Music House as a babysitter for a child on their birthday. Once inside, they encounter the unexpected strains of “Flamenco by Starlight,” a tune both charming and mundane. This raises questions about destiny and personal



connections to music, leaving the narrator pondering whether this song holds significance for them or the child. The chapter captures themes of mystery, the intersection of music and fate, and the collective experience of the community, all wrapped in a sense of magical realism that invites readers to reflect on their own connections to music and life's fleeting moments.

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## Chapter 17 Summary: The Buriers

In Chapter 17 of "People From My Neighborhood" by Hiromi Kawakami, an unexpected discovery leads to a nostalgic stroll down memory lane. The local chicken farmer discovers six cardboard boxes brimming with discarded love letters left on his doorstep overnight. While he dismisses the letters as "god-awful," the sight sparks a conversation about a long-gone childhood organization called the buriers—kids who would bury unwanted items.

The farmer reminisces about how the buriers would dig holes for anything from diaries to clothing, but they drew the line at burying anything "raw," like dead animals. His recounting paints a vivid picture of innocence and childhood curiosity, bringing a sense of warmth to the narrative. The farmer even recalls a moment of heartbreak from his youth, when he had covertly stolen a girl's socks to have the buriers bury them, illustrating the rare and humorous mischief of boyhood.

However, the buriers' decline started when they unearthed a mummified corpse while digging—initially mistaken for old treasure—leading to a visit from authorities. The story reveals a blend of childhood folly and a hint of dark humor, as the children's discovery of the ancient mummy becomes a community curiosity.

By the chapter's end, the love letters are necessarily buried, this time by a

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policeman who once knew the joys of being a burier. While it's rumored that the letters were penned by the dog school principal to his wife, their final resting place leaves their mysteries unsolved. This whimsical yet bittersweet tale captures themes of nostalgia, the innocence of youth, and the ephemeral nature of love, inviting readers to reflect on their own memories and the things we choose to let go.

Key Element	Summary
Chapter Number	17
Author	Hiromi Kawakami
Discovery	A local chicken farmer finds six cardboard boxes filled with discarded love letters on his doorstep.
Nostalgia	The farmer reminisces about childhood days spent with a group called the buriers, who buried unwanted items.
Childhood Activities	The buriers would bury items like diaries and clothing, but not anything raw, showcasing childhood innocence.
Heartbreak	The farmer recalls stealing a girl's socks for burial, reflecting on boyhood mischief.
Turning Point	The buriers' activities decline after discovering a mummified corpse, causing a community stir.
Final Act	The love letters are buried by a policeman, rumored to be written by the dog school principal to his wife.
Themes	Nostalgia, childhood innocence, and the ephemeral nature of love.

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## Critical Thinking

**Key Point:** Embrace the innocence and curiosity of youth

**Critical Interpretation:** As you read about the chicken farmer's nostalgic journey into childhood memories, let it inspire you to reconnect with your own sense of wonder. Life often pushes us toward practicality, but this chapter gently reminds you to cherish the playfulness and curiosity that once defined your youth. Embrace those moments of joy and innocence, for they can illuminate your path, allowing you to see the beauty in the mundane and the magic in letting go of what no longer serves you.

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## Chapter 18: Banana

In Chapter 18 of "People From My Neighborhood" by Hiromi Kawakami, we are introduced to Uncle Red Shoes, a colorful and eccentric character easily recognizable by his bright red trousers and shoes. His signature look includes a shaven head topped with gelled spikes, and he switches between various styles of footwear, adding to his quirky charm. Rumors swirl about his past—he once managed a factory in western Honshu that produced popular stuffed toys like Mr. Bunny and Mr. Banana. However, after the factory went bankrupt, Uncle Red Shoes moved to the neighborhood, with hints that his current worries may stem from financial troubles related to the dance studio he opened five years prior.

His visits often involve him singing “Hardly Worth Confessing,” a song that exasperates the local woman who runs the Love, emphasizing Uncle Red Shoes’s unique and sometimes annoying presence in the neighborhood. The narrator notes a peculiar pattern: every time they encounter Uncle Red Shoes on the street, something good happens the following day, ranging from finding money to winning raffles.

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## Chapter 19 Summary: Lord of the Flies

In Chapter 19 of "People From My Neighborhood," we meet Sakai, a newcomer to the neighborhood who quickly gets swept up in a gambling scene run by the notorious Uncle Round. With his distinctive round belly and eyeglasses, Uncle Round has a unique gambling setup known as the hog-and-fly game, where locals guess the number of flies buzzing around lined-up pigs. Excited by this concept, Sakai dives headfirst into gambling, which dramatically alters his lifestyle—he becomes flashy, dates multiple women, and flaunts newfound wealth, especially after winning alongside Uncle Round's operations.

However, things take a turn when rumors of Sakai cheating circulate, and Uncle Round mysteriously disappears. With a quick transition, Sakai takes over the gambling enterprise, transforming it with extravagant additions like a cabaret club and even outfitting the pigs in glitzy attire. His changes shock the local community, sparking protests led by figures like the dog school principal, Hachirō, as the moral fabric of the neighborhood unravels.

The story unfolds to a climax when whispers circulate about Uncle Round's return, just as Sakai vanishes. The gambling scene collapses back to its old, modest structure, reflecting the chaos brought by Sakai's reign. Later, the narrator learns from Uncle Round that he sought revenge on Sakai, leading

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to a violent confrontation in which he stabs Sakai, who then surprisingly transforms into a swarm of flies, earning him the title of the "Lord of the Flies." Uncle Round's revelation implies a dark mystique, as he claims that this surreal metamorphosis absolves him from murder charges, highlighting themes of power, transformation, and the moral complexities of desire and greed in a seemingly simple neighborhood. Thus, Uncle Round keeps the bronze pig's head as a haunting reminder of his encounter with the enigmatic Sakai.

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## Chapter 20 Summary: The Baseball Game

In Chapter 20 of "People From My Neighborhood" by Hiromi Kawakami, the story revolves around two boys, Kiyoshi Akai and Michio, who start sneaking off to a community center after school, claiming they're playing ping-pong. Their friend Kanae, suspicious of their unexplained absences, decides to investigate with the narrator. They arrive at the community center only to discover that Kiyoshi and Michio are not there for ping-pong at all but are engrossed in a bizarre game called "The Baseball Game."

This peculiar game, despite its name, has nothing to do with baseball; it involves flipping small balls into a hole, resembling a game like Smart Ball. It's the newest craze in their neighborhood, and while it's harmless for kids, it has dangerously addictive qualities for adults, ruining some of their lives due to the money spent on it. As Kanae and the narrator observe, they realize that Kiyoshi and Michio seemingly lack the money to sustain this obsession. They notice a small figure behind the boys, who turns out to be a peculiar bird with five fingers and a human-like face, handing over money to them.

In a moment of panic, Kanae scares away the bird, revealing the bizarre circumstances: every time the boys take money from it, they must endure a peck on their bottoms. The situation adds a humorous yet unsettling twist to their innocent game. After this incident, Kiyoshi and Michio are absent from school, with rumors circulating that they have chickenpox. However, years

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later, Kiyoshi confides that they were actually dealing with strange boils shaped like birds as a result of their peculiar predicament. This chapter blends elements of surrealism with a commentary on childhood innocence, obsession, and the bizarre nature of their neighborhood's social dynamics, ultimately leaving the reader amused yet contemplative about the strange turn of events.

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## Chapter 21: Torture

In Chapter 21 of "People From My Neighborhood," we delve into the eccentricity of Michio, a boy with a peculiar ambition to have a bronze statue of himself erected. This dream isn't taken seriously by his classmates, who mock him in his absence, except for Kanae's big sister, who surprisingly acknowledges his unique aspirations. As the story unfolds, we discover that Kanae's sister and Michio are conspiring together to revolt against the government, stirring rumors among their peers about secret plots and even possible bomb stashings. Kanae attempts to intimidate her older sister about the revolution, but her sister stands her ground, which infuriates Kanae.

The political landscape shifts dramatically when the rumored revolution becomes a reality, leading to the overthrow of the government and the declaration of martial law. While the chaos ensues, Kanae remains mostly concerned over the loss of mundane television programs, revealing her disconnect from the gravity of the situation. After the government is restored, Michio and Kanae's sister disappear for a while, only to return to

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## Chapter 22 Summary: Bass Fishing

In Chapter 22 of "People From My Neighborhood," we meet a diplomat who arrives in a small town, and the news quickly spreads. Kanae, intrigued yet skeptical, questions what a diplomat truly is, dismissing Hachirō's vague explanation. To her, anyone who risks their life is a real diplomat. Yet, as the story unfolds, the arrival of the diplomat is marked by the construction of an embassy next to the tenement, a sleek car with a chauffeur, and a flag that piques curiosity and speculation.

Despite the diplomat's apparent prominence, no one in town can actually confirm his identity. Even a cab driver who claims to have driven him can't recall any details about the man, which only adds to the air of mystery. Rumors circulate, particularly about the diplomat's hobby of fishing for black bass at a supposedly non-existent lake on the outskirts of the town, leading to heated debates among the residents.

As the townsfolk grapple with these rumors, the atmosphere begins to shift dramatically. With the introduction of the diplomat, their lives spiral into chaos. Crime rates spike, young men begin to resist military service, and families resort to living underground for safety. Schools close, children avoid education, and turf wars erupt among gangs of youths, leaving the town in disarray. The only business still operating is the Love, now a haven for drug dealers, while the familiar singing of its proprietress becomes a

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haunting reminder of the past.

Time passes—ten years, then twenty—leaving the town a ghost of its former self, reduced to ruins while the embassy thrives untouched. Strangely, one day, everything shifts back to normal. Streets are cleaned, schools reopen, and citizens regain their youth and vigor, freeing themselves from the burdens of military service and economic despair.

In the wake of this restoration, whispers about the diplomat's true nature emerge, suggesting he might be an alien conducting an experiment in hypnosis. Even so, the townspeople remain oblivious to the truth. Legends persist that the diplomat can still be spotted each Sunday at the mysterious lake, diligently fishing for bass, leaving his identity shrouded in the enigma he created. The chapter closes on a note of surreal mystery, blending themes of perception, the power of influence, and the malleability of reality itself.

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## Chapter 23 Summary: Pigeonitis

In Chapter 23 of "People From My Neighborhood" by Hiromi Kawakami, the peculiar phenomenon known as pigeonitis takes center stage. This quirky illness first surfaces right after the May holidays through a middle-aged farmer who, by the time he is diagnosed, is already in dire straits, clucking and cooing like a pigeon in his sickbed. The chapters explore the absurd yet compelling consequences of this disease, which is so contagious that those caring for the afflicted often contract it themselves.

A loudspeaker van from the town hall drives through the streets, urging people to seek testing and advising children to steer clear of school.

However, many who experience mild symptoms evade detection by simply not talking. Kiyoshi Akai, the self-appointed expert on pigeonitis, describes the physical changes the disease brings: an expanded chest, round eyes, and a peculiar gait resembling that of a pigeon, all while his enthusiasm causes spit to fly. One character, Kanae's sister, oddly admires these changes, hinting at a strange acceptance of the bizarre transformation.

The real trouble with pigeonitis is the shift in mindset that accompanies it; the infected lose all ability to think ahead. The town descends into chaos as time-keeping and responsibilities dissolve, replaced by a carefree existence focused solely on the present. This leads to a surprising spike in pregnancy rates, as townsfolk embrace a carefree lifestyle of eating bugs and

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procreating.

After about six months, the outbreak subsides, and the community emerges immune, albeit with a shared secret that enhances their bond. Yet, Kiyoshi is left behind, untouched by the illness, and his grief and sensitivity to his status lead to teasing from others about his small eyes compared to the round ones of the recovered. The farmer relishes his newfound disposition, contrasting sharply with Kiyoshi's misery at being the outlier.

Overall, the chapter explores themes of transformation, community dynamics, and the poignant isolation of one who remains outside a shared experience, wrapped in the whimsicality of an unusual epidemic.

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## Chapter 24: Sports Day

In Chapter 24 of "People From My Neighborhood" by Hiromi Kawakami, we dive into the excitement of Sports Day, an event that had been absent from the school for three years. Kanae shares the news with a sense of thrill, reminiscent of the last Sports Day, which was organized by the police and featured martial arts and marksmanship competitions. Notably, Kanae's sister excelled in the air-rifle event, catching the police's attention, yet she chose a path as a medium instead of pursuing a shooting career. This backdrop sets a nostalgic tone as Kanae, reflecting her competitive spirit, discusses her sister's past and her own envy during that time.

This year, however, the event is sponsored by the local Marunaka Bank, shifting the focus to quirky financial competitions rather than traditional sports. Events like best loan evaluation and marketing strategies replace judo and karate. The highlight, a money-counting competition, generates a frenzy among the students, particularly Kiyoshi and Michio, who show their disappointment when they lose their chance to compete.

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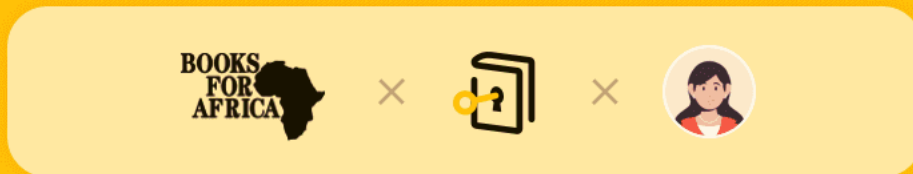
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## Chapter 25 Summary: Fruit

In Chapter 25 of "People From My Neighborhood" by Hiromi Kawakami, the arrival of a mysterious woman, dubbed the "princess," captivates a group of local girls. Though two boys mock her by calling her just an old lady, the girls are convinced there's more to her story and decide to investigate her daily routine. Living in a charming green bungalow adorned with roses, the princess spends her days tending to her garden, visiting the market, and enjoying the sunshine at the park, where she often chats with a café owner over pilaf. The girls note her structured lifestyle, believing only a princess could adhere so faithfully to a schedule, and they weave fantastical tales about her past, portraying her as a magical figure who escaped an unworthy frog and lived a life of luxury and excitement.

Each girl harbors secret aspirations inspired by the princess's story—dreams of meeting a prince or living a thrilling life—and they long to connect with her. When they catch sight of the princess conversing with a local girl, Dolly, their excitement leads to an embarrassing moment as the princess dismissively critiques their sophistication. Dolly later reveals that she once lived next door to the princess in America, where glamorous visitors and opulent parties were the norm. Their conversation hints at the darker rumors surrounding the princess, including tales of buried bodies in her garden.

The chapter blends enchantment with intrigue as it explores themes of

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fascination, desire, and the shadows of past lives. With a touch of humor and myth, the girls' adventure reveals their naivety and curiosity, mirroring the complexities of adulthood and the sinister aspects of the princess's history. Despite the fantastical elements, this chapter connects the innocence of childhood dreams with the darker realities of human nature, leaving readers with an eerie sense of continuity in the face of legend and truth. The closing lines hint at an unyielding cycle of life, both sweet and sinister, embodied in the fruit-laden branches of Dolly's garden.

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## Chapter 26 Summary: The White Dove

In "The White Dove," Kanae's big sister embarks on a seemingly mundane school trip to Mount Golden, a small mountain that only requires a short walk from school. However, she feels an overwhelming sense of isolation, trudging along without friends while others in her class bond through games and laughter. Her melancholy is intensified by a prophetic dream she had the night before, in which a small old woman and a giant man engage in a humorous yet dark battle, reflecting the complexities of marriage and human relationships. This dream propels her determination to find a mysterious object during the hike, which she believes is tied to her future.

Much to her annoyance, she discovers that her lunch has been sabotaged by her sister, Kanae, further isolating her from her classmates who are enjoying their meals. Fueled by the desire to find the object in her dream rather than partake in lunch, she ventures into the forest, where she encounters a strange, foul-smelling plant that peels away to reveal a white dove-like creature. Defying her expectations, it isn't a magical being but a bizarre, stinky organism. She decides to keep it, replacing the unpleasant contents of her lunch box with her unexpected find.

As time passes, this odd creature evolves, transforming from a dove to a humanoid figure. Despite its initial repulsiveness, Kanae's sister becomes attached to the creature, naming it Grandpa. Their relationship grows playful



and oddly intimate, characterized by a lighthearted pursuit in which she pretends to attack him with a tiny needle, reminiscent of the dream's dynamics. Eventually, their bond develops into an affair, culminating in a house built at the foot of Mount Osore, where Kanae's sister gains fame as an itako medium, calling upon the voices of the deceased.

Years roll on, and as Kanae's sister matures into adulthood, she proposes marriage to the now middle-aged Grandpa. Their life continues in an unconventional, yet comfortable rhythm, though his infidelities with women seeking to connect with the dead don't disturb her—she recognizes him as more of a bizarre presence than a conventional partner.

A pivotal moment strikes when a meteor threatens Earth, drawing a connection back to the mountain of her childhood. In a prophetic dream, her middle-aged husband vows to save her by repelling the meteor. In a poignant conclusion, he transforms back into a white dove and rises to confront the celestial threat, disappearing in a burst of snow-like particles, leaving Kanae's sister both celebrated and sorrowful. Though hailed as a hero with statues erected in her honor, she finds no joy in the accolades, instead haunted by the memory of the peculiar being that brought her comfort and companionship. Her longing for the stench of the dove symbolizes a deeper yearning for connection, loss, and the complex nature of love.

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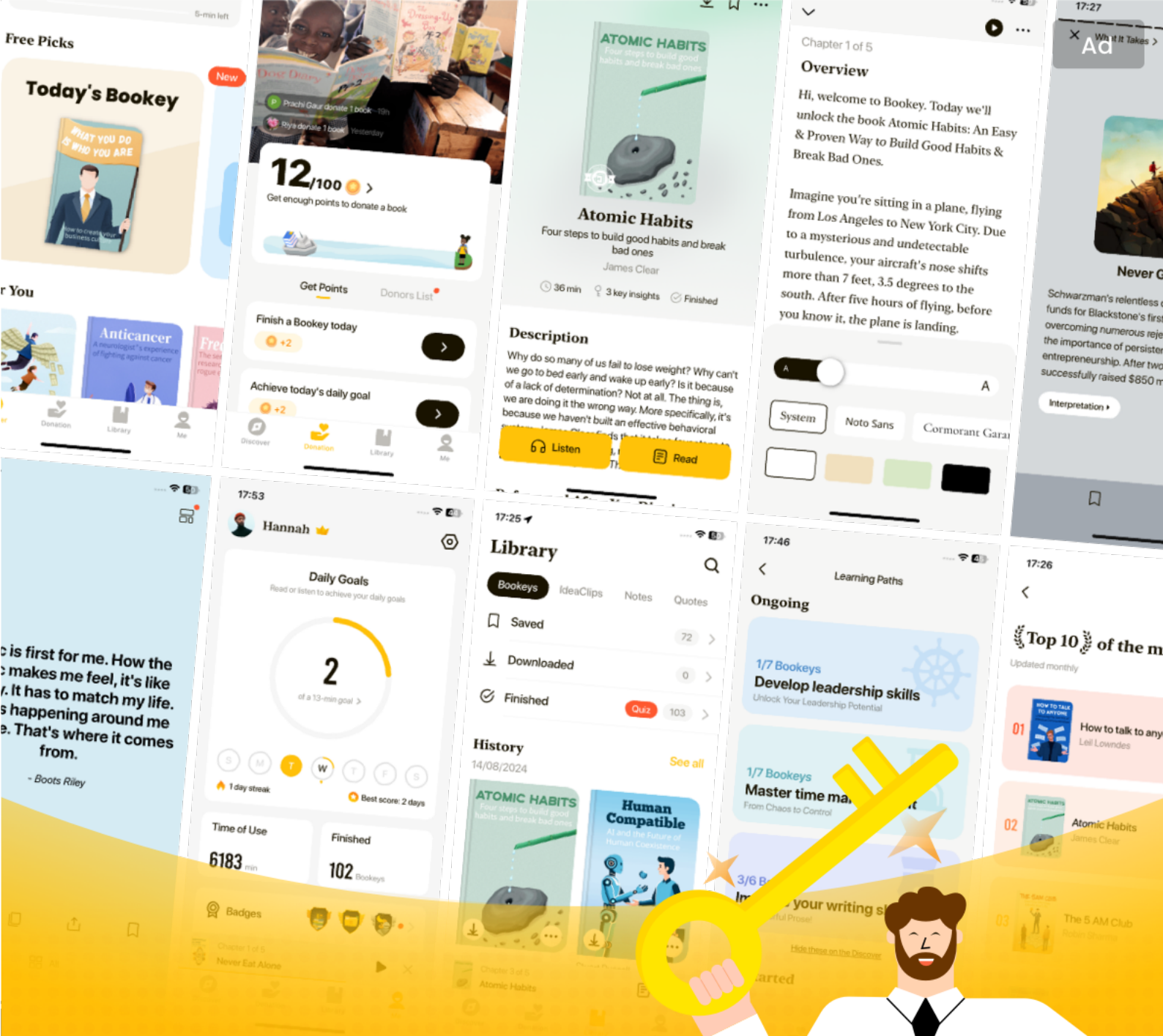
## Chapter 27: Eye Medicine

In Chapter 27 of "People From My Neighborhood," titled "Eye Medicine," the story revolves around Dr. Miranda, a unique and somewhat eccentric physician who runs the Miranda Clinic in a quaint Japanese town. Dr. Miranda has a fascinating background: after working in a university hospital, he traveled the world before returning to Japan to establish his clinic in an old building. His unconventional blend of medical practices and whimsical personality leads to mixed opinions about his abilities—some regard him as a capable doctor, while others consider him a quack.

The narrator frequents the clinic, partly drawn by its calm atmosphere and the quirky doctor who has a penchant for discussing unusual topics. On one occasion, he shares a bizarre belief that certain people in the neighborhood were hatched from eggs, sparking the narrator's curiosity. Dr. Miranda's reasoning relies on his "doctorly intuition," but the narrator struggles to accept this concept fully. He playfully debates the nature of humans and mammals and ultimately starts observing the peculiar traits of the people around him, concluding that nearly everyone he knows has indeed “hatched”

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## Chapter 28 Summary: Weightlessness

In Chapter 28 of "People From My Neighborhood" by Hiromi Kawakami, a thrilling no-gravity alert shakes up a regular school day. The Disaster Preparedness Office warns students to stay indoors from two to five o'clock, as there's an eighty percent chance of experiencing weightlessness. The announcement reverberates through the neighborhood, leading to an unexpected halt of lessons and a hurried evacuation, with students grouped for safety.

The story follows the protagonist and her adventurous friend, Kanae. Seizing the moment amidst the chaos, Kanae pulls the narrator away from the rest of their class, eager to explore rather than go home. They first search the sandpit and a nearby vacant lot, but no one is around. As the urgency of the approaching no-gravity event heightens, they find themselves heading toward a dense forest.

Despite protests from the narrator to return home, Kanae's determination leads them into the woods. As the no-gravity alert becomes reality, the children's bodies begin to lift off the ground, creating a combination of exhilaration and anxiety. Kanae, unfazed, tugs the narrator along, encouraging her to discard her backpack to ensure they remain grounded. The air is filled with floating objects—backpacks, leaves, and even sneeze particles—creating a whimsical spectacle.



Amid their adventure, they encounter other children, including Kiyoshi, who impressively navigate the trees. The weightlessness transforms their play into a joyful experience as they swing from tree to tree, filled with laughter and astonishment. However, as the sun sets, the gravity returns abruptly, causing chaos as children tumble down, and their belongings fall back to earth.

Though they narrowly escape serious injury, the day's playful adventure leaves a lasting impression on the narrator. It's a celebration of childhood daring and camaraderie, but it's also punctuated by a reminder from Kanae's older sister about the perils of weightlessness, highlighting themes of innocence and the fragility of youth. The chapter beautifully encapsulates a moment of joy amid a surreal event, blending the thrill of adventure with a touch of caution.

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## Chapter 29 Summary: Hair

In Chapter 29 of "People From My Neighborhood" by Hiromi Kawakami, the community comes together to celebrate a Sand Festival after a windstorm creates a massive sand pile outside their neighborhood. This pile, towering ten meters high and a kilometer wide, initially proves too soft to climb, but after two weeks of hardening efforts, it transforms into a sturdy sand mountain, complete with tents and utilities for the festival. Although grounded in traditional religious beliefs, the festival becomes more of a communal gathering than a strictly spiritual affair, with locals, relying on their own predictions and superstitions, attending with excitement.

As the festival unfolds, the narrative centers around a trio of friends, including the narrator, Kanae, and her sister. They navigate the bustling scene, using the busy tent of an old taxi driver—known for his accurate forecasts—as their meeting point. The presence of a mysterious, knobbly hand becomes a focal point in the narrative when it unexpectedly grabs the narrator's ankle during a moment of solitude. Despite initial fear, an inner voice prompts the narrator to endure this peculiar situation, suggesting that it would lead to great good fortune.

As the night passes and the sun rises, the hand abruptly disappears, coinciding with the arrival of a majestic bird—believed to be the sand god—who bestows blessings upon the festival-goers. However, the

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narrator's anticipation for fortune remains unfulfilled post-festival, aside from the occasional reappearance of the gentle hand that cradles their ankle. Though it offers no harm and even brings a sense of comfort, this experience blurs the line between fear and delight, prompting a deeper reflection on what true good fortune really entails.

The chapter weaves themes of community bonding, the interplay of fear and superstition, and the search for meaning in magical experiences. It captures the essence of human connections and the simple joys found in fleeting moments, leaving a resonant impression of curiosity and wonder in everyday life.

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## Chapter 30: Baby

In Chapter 30 of "People From My Neighborhood" by Hiromi Kawakami, a whimsical celebration unfolds with the arrival of a new baby, marking a significant event in the neighborhood. This baby, described as a mystical being that has undergone a transformative journey over three years, hails from the east. Initially, it was a fuyo, a soft, book-like entity that could speak, drawing attention for its unusual form. As it transitioned through various stages—a seto, known for its nighttime tidiness, a mottsa, which is a mean-spirited figure that thrives on cruelty, and then a hei, resembling a dinner plate—the narrative builds a rich tapestry of imaginative lore.

The hei, vulnerable and reliant on others for rescue, eventually transforms into manemone, dog-like creatures that speak the language of dogs and often find themselves socially ostracized. Their journey culminates in the creation of a haro, a unique entity resembling human twins, which symbolizes the final form before the baby arrives. The complex metamorphosis of these beings introduces readers to a fantastical universe where each stage carries its own characteristics and societal implications.

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## Chapter 31 Summary: The Family Trade

In Chapter 31 of "People From My Neighborhood," we follow the life

journey of SMkichi Nashida, a man who deliberately leaves his family's artistic legacy to seek a different path. After high school, SMkichi departs from home and finds work in a distant city. He not only begins his career as a stockbroker but also attends night school. Despite lacking connections, his remarkable talent as a trader quickly earns him a promotion to assistant bureau chief by his thirties. However, the complexities of corporate life leave him unsatisfied and yearning for a simpler existence.

Making a bold choice, SMkichi quits his job and embarks on a culinary adventure, sampling exquisite and exotic dishes that lead to bouts of gastrointestinal distress. This extravagant lifestyle eventually loses its charm, prompting him to pursue a more grounded dream: agricultural life with a loving partner. He immerses himself in agriculture and, through determination and innovation, becomes a key player in revolutionizing Japan's farming practices, emphasizing sustainability and local production.

Yet, in his quest for love, SMkichi struggles to find a woman who shares his aspirations for a simple life in the fields. After several unsuccessful introductions through matrimonial agencies, he embarks on a walking tour of farms across the country, hoping to connect with someone who embraces

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his rural vision. When that fails, he seeks solace and enlightenment as a Buddhist ascetic on Mount KMya, becoming a disciplinarian and sparking a religious revival that positively impacts Japan's relations worldwide.

Feeling virtuous and refined, SMkichi again attempts to marry, but realizes his newfound discipline has dulled his attraction to potential partners. Dismayed, he decides to abandon the idea of marriage altogether and returns to his hometown. There, he reconnects with quirky local characters, including the old chicken farmer and Kanae, who looks upon him with disdain. Desperate to redefine himself, he tries his hand at music in the Music House, but his lack of musical talent leads nowhere.

Eventually, SMkichi confronts his reality: there's no room for him as an abstract artist. In a surprising turn, he disciplines himself to develop this talent, ultimately becoming an acclaimed artist whose work can be seen in public spaces. Additionally, he opens a unique restaurant next to his studio, serving unusual dishes. Through the trials and tribulations of his life, SMkichi finds a sense of fulfillment, though he remains somewhat isolated, having carved out a distinct existence away from the expectations of his family. This chapter explores themes of identity, the search for purpose, and the struggle to balance personal desires with familial expectations, all painted against the backdrop of SMkichi's rich, exploratory life.

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## Chapter 32 Summary: The Bottomless Swamp

In Chapter 32 of "People From My Neighborhood" by Hiromi Kawakami, the narrative revolves around the curious and whimsical construction of the School of Sweets, a building that transcends the notion of a conventional school. Designed entirely from delectable treats—chocolate walls, ginger snap fences, and candy windows—the school is a fantasy world where home economics flourishes but is plagued with whimsical challenges.

Kanae, a local girl known for her love of drinking sake since childhood, receives an unexpected acceptance letter from the School of Sweets. Her reaction is defiant; she scoffs at the idea of combining her drinking habits with sweet treats and promptly tears the letter to shreds, much to the ire of her friend RokurM, who secretly gathers the pieces of the acceptance letter for himself. RokurM's enthusiasm for the spot at the school, where he relishes the delight and privilege of eating sweets daily, proclaiming his luck during the opening ceremony.

Despite the initial excitement, the school's unique concept faces significant hurdles. Students must replicate any part of the building they consume, leading to a surge of counterfeit food items as they struggle to meet the school's stringent ingredient requirements. As authenticity gives way to subpar imitations, attendance starts to dwindle, much to Kanae's dismay, while Kanae mockingly attributes the decline to him and his classmates.

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Eventually, the beloved School of Sweets must shut down, succumbing to neglect as it melts away into what is described as a bottomless swamp. Local lore persists about the fate of its students, including chilling tales of those who supposedly drowned in the goo, with whispers that transformed into a counterfeit version of his former self, resurrected by his classmates' desire to mimic culinary creations.

This chapter beautifully blends whimsy with darker undertones, showcasing themes of indulgence, the consequences of unpreparedness, and the shifting nature of identity. The enchanting yet fleeting joys of childhood dissolve into a cautionary tale about authenticity and the transient nature of fanciful dreams.

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## Chapter 33: Falsification

In Chapter 33 of "People From My Neighborhood," titled "Falsification," the story unfolds through the curious lens of Romi Kawamata, who reveals an intriguing and covert battle raging in the neighborhood. It all begins with an innocent observation about the tax office's changed appearance, but Romi quickly delves deeper, bringing to light a fantastical ability possessed by her sister, Dolly. She can manipulate memories, subtly altering how the residents perceive their surroundings.

Romi rattles off a series of bizarre examples: the bakery door has flipped sides, and various locations, like the bank and the principal's house, have been scrambled or transformed in the memories of everyone around them. For these changes to stick, Dolly relies on the manipulation of collective memory. She explains that a single individual, the owner of the Love, is resistant to these alterations; she remembers the original state of things. This unique trait allows her to combat Dolly's memory tricks, restoring reality for everyone else as well.

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## Chapter 34 Summary: Refrigerator

In Chapter 34 of "People From My Neighborhood" by Hiromi Kawakami, the quirky "greeting squad" makes its eccentric debut in the neighborhood during autumn. Composed of five distinct members, the squad is led by a handsome, sharply-dressed man in his mid-forties, with a younger female second-in-command who sports a striking bob and an apron. The trio of remaining members, though varied in gender, share a peculiar resemblance—often swapping identities with whimsical introductions like "I'm a bird catcher" and "I'm a blue-ringed octopus." This playful chaos creates an amusing yet bewildering atmosphere for anyone caught in their path, as the greetings drag conversations and moments out into an absurd standstill, leaving innocent passersby in a time-warp-like limbo.

The narrative vividly portrays the disruptions caused by the greeting squad, illustrated by a comically frustrating encounter the dog school principal faced, only to be caught in a spiraling quarrel among the squad members that ended with the squad leader needing to be carried off after fainting from the altercation. Yet, surprisingly, he bounced back the very next day, continuing their peculiar greetings with renewed vigor.

As the chapter unfolds, readers learn that the squad operates a surprisingly successful French restaurant named "Konnichiwa," which belies their chaotic public persona. This eatery not only excels in food but has become a

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hotspot, requiring reservations months in advance. However, the ambiance remains unpredictable as squabbles often erupt among the squad members, prompting diners to momentarily leave and watch from a safe distance, returning only when the dust settles. The chapter humorously hints at the absurdity of it all, with one incident leading to a greeter being locked in a refrigerator overnight, only to emerge "as good as new" the next day.

Themes of identity, community, and the absurdities of human interaction resonate throughout the chapter. The greeting squad embodies an inevitable blend of camaraderie and chaos, showcasing the bizarre yet endearing threads that weave a neighborhood together, leaving readers both amused and contemplative about the roles we play in our own communities.

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## Chapter 35 Summary: The Shacks

In "The Shacks," we follow RokurM and a group of b upon a cluster of four shacks on the outskirts of their town, igniting their imaginations with possibilities of ghosts lurking inside. Their initial plan to test their courage by spending the night there fizzles out when no ghosts appear, and instead, a couple of them fall sick, lead blame ghosts for their misfortune.

The narrative deepens when Kanae's older sister reveals that these shacks represent various emotions—sadness, anger, hate, and joy. The shacks are said to absorb the emotions of anyone who enters, and they expand as they grow. Intrigued, Kanae and the narrator decide to investigate, but they find the shacks underwhelmingly small. When Kanae confronts her sister's teacher, he elaborates on the concept that true emotional purity is needed for the shacks to grow. Mixed emotions would hinder expansion, which frustrates Kanae.

Fueled by pure anger—triggered by the teacher's demeanor—Kanae seizes the opportunity to channel her emotion into the shack of anger. She pushes the narrator outside and enters the shack, and to their astonishment, it begins to grow dramatically, reaching impressive heights like a towering monument. Excitement builds as news spreads, and the neighborhood rushes to experience these shacks. However, their mixed emotions fail to elicit any

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growth, and instead, the shacks begin to crack and weaken.

As the day progresses, even Kanae's impressive structure ultimately collapses, leaving scattered debris. The atmosphere shifts as the shacks become largely abandoned, except for a dog school principal who trains his dogs in the shack of joy. The dogs' untainted joy leads to their playful antics without causing the shack to expand, yet it remains intact, highlighting the purity of canine emotions.

Through this tale, themes of emotional complexity and the nature of joy and purity emerge. Kanae's journey from anger to creation reveals both the power and limitations of emotions, while the dogs serve as a reminder that sometimes, the simplest emotions can hold the most strength. The shacks stand as a testament to human feelings and the struggle for pure emotional expression in a world filled with mixture and nuance.

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## Chapter 36: The Empress

In Chapter 36 of "People From My Neighborhood," the scene is set during the annual lottery at the local shopping arcade, where excitement buzzes as residents try their luck at winning a variety of quirky prizes. The community has a history with the lottery's first prize—three wishes—and the chapter reflects on previous winners whose wishes caused stirrings in the neighborhood.

One memorable winner was a bewildered bachelor who, upon wishing for the most beautiful woman in the world, found himself overwhelmed by the chaos she brought into his life. Initially enchanted, he soon regretted his request when her beauty led to chaos, financial strain, and public impropriety. In a desperate attempt to regain control, he wished for her to become submissive, only to create further pandemonium as she became overly compliant to all. Ultimately, he wished her away, leaving the neighborhood to reflect on the drastic shifts in power dynamics brought about by his ill-conceived wishes.

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