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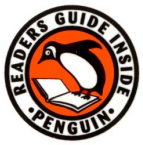
Slavenka Drakuli

A NOVEL ABOUT THE BALKANS



author of *THE TASTE OF A MAN* and *CAFÉ EUROPA*

SLAVENKA DRAKULIĆ

"*S.* may very well be one of the strongest books about war you will ever read. . . .
The writing is taut, precise, and masterful." —*THE PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER*

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S. Summary

Exploring Identity Amidst the Shadows of War

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About the book

In "S.," Slavenka Drakuli delves into the haunting r
Yugoslav Wars through the lens of personal loss and cultural identity, offering a poignant exploration of how conflict reshapes the human spirit. This evocative narrative uncovers the inner turmoil of individuals grappling with the fragments of their past while navigating the complexities of survival in a fractured society. Drakuli 's powerful p
personal stories with vivid historical context, inviting readers to reflect on the wounds inflicted by war and the resilience demanded in its aftermath. As the protagonist confronts her own memories amidst a backdrop of political upheaval, "S." serves as a stark reminder of the lasting scars left by history and the enduring quest for hope and redemption.

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About the author

Slavenka Drakuli is a renowned Croatian author and
for her incisive exploration of gender, identity, and the complexities of life
in post-Yugoslav societies. Born in 1949 in Osijek,
literary career in the 1980s and gained international acclaim for her poignant and often provocative narratives that intertwine personal experiences with broader social and political themes. Her works, including novels like "The Taste of a Man" and essays such as "How We Survived Communism and Even Laughed," reflect her deep commitment to addressing the lingering effects of war and the struggles of women in patriarchal cultures. Through
her sharp commentary and empathetic storytelling, D
a vital voice in contemporary literature, engaging readers with the complexities of human experience.

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Chapter 1 Summary: Karolinska Hospital, Stockholm 27 MARCH 1993

In the backdrop of Karolinska Hospital in Stockholm, S. experiences the complexities of motherhood and trauma after giving birth to a child she feels disconnected from. On March 27, 1993, S. is shocked to discover her body is producing milk, bringing forth a wave of confusion and concern for a child she feels no bond with. The infant lies in a cot, still and vulnerable, yet S. cannot see him as her son; instead, he feels like an emblem of her past suffering and loss.

Her thoughts reveal deep-seated animosity towards the child. S. associates motherhood with tragedy and pain—reflecting a tumultuous history marked by violence and war. She recalls the horrible circumstances surrounding her pregnancy, rooted in trauma; the little life before her is a reminder of the violation she endured. While another new mother, Maj, confidently nurtures her child, S. feels alienated, recognizing the stark contrast between their situations. Maj's infant embodies security and a bright future, whereas S.'s child represents destruction and despair.

S. reflects on her experience during labor, where pain acts as a transient but necessary release from a prolonged emotional numbness. The moment S. delivers the baby brings momentary relief amidst her struggles, leading her to reminisce about F., a woman she saw give birth in desperate conditions

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who ultimately chose to end the life of her child. The stark memory leaves S. pondering decisions of life and death, yet she cannot bring herself to act in such a violent manner.

Her mind is a battleground of conflicting emotions; she oscillates between wanting the child to disappear and acknowledging that it has survived against her will. As she analyzes her actions and thoughts, the narrative reveals her internal conflict—her hatred for the child juxtaposed with a reluctant acknowledgment of the life she has birthed. S. struggles with feelings of filth and a constant sense of being unclean, reflecting her trauma and the heavy burden of memories that won't wash away.

As she contemplates her reflection in the shower, what she sees does not align with her internal anguish. Her pale face seems untouched by the horrors she has faced, leaving her with the desire to protect her new identity. However, in her darkest moments, S. gains a glimmer of acceptance, reconciling with her circumstances and allowing some hope for a future. Despite the child's bleak beginnings, she finds a trace of comfort in knowing she chose life over death.

Ultimately, S. matures in her understanding of motherhood, appreciating that her child, despite the suffering tied to his conception, holds a future that is distinct and separate from her past. She grapples with the weight of her experiences, reflecting on how both life and death leave scars, and her

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journey is one of reclaiming herself amidst the fallout of war and trauma.

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Chapter 2 Summary: Village of _____., Bosnia END OF MAY 1992

In Chapter 2 of *S.* by Slavenka Drakuli , tension b caught in the chaos of war in her village in Bosnia in May 1992. The chapter opens with her cooking, but an accidental touch against the hot rim of the pot serves as a metaphor for the larger pain and destruction surrounding her life. The air filled with violent smells of charred milk and sweat mirrors her turmoil as she prepares to leave her home when soldiers invade, marking the beginning of her harrowing journey.

As S. boards a bus with other women and children, she is overwhelmed by a sense of unease and physical discomfort. With each passing moment and each turn of the bus, memories flood in, including the quiet village now shrouded in smoke. She reflects on the haunting realities of war—the gradual stripping away of normal existence and personal safety—doubting the very existence of her past life.

The morning of chaos becomes clearer when S. hears loud male voices outside her home, reminiscent of distant rumblings of troubling times. Despite initial denial, it becomes apparent that soldiers are searching for weapons but are likely driven by deeper, more sinister motives. She witnesses soldiers robbing neighbors, feeling shameful yet aware of her own vulnerability. A sense of foreboding tightens around her as soldiers begin to

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invade her space.

The turning point arrives when S. confronts a young soldier who interrupts her life directly. His intrusion symbolizes the violent entry of war into the domestic sphere, forcing S. to grapple with her fate. The soldier, seemingly naive and boyish, may still hold power over her. Despite the fear gripping her heart, she attempts to diffuse the situation by offering him coffee—an act of normalcy in the midst of chaos.

Yet, the reality of war hits harder when she is instructed to gather her belongings under the guise of taking a trip. S. struggles to comprehend that this is not a temporary disruption but rather a forced removal from her life as she knows it. The act of packing becomes a somber reflection of her disconnection from what was once familiar, desperately clinging to essential artifacts of her identity.

As S. arrives at the gym where people are congregating, the atmosphere is heavy with a mixture of fear and disbelief. She's surrounded by familiar faces—her neighbors, children, and friends—all thrust into a violent maelstrom. The tension climaxes when soldiers herded men away, resulting in gunfire that claims innocent lives, leaving S. in shock as the reality of violence physically and psychologically envelops her.

Through these experiences, S. comes to terms with the unsettling truth that

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vulnerability lies not in physical possession but in existence itself. Soon, she is forced onto a bus destined for an uncertain future, clutching her backpack filled with items that now seem inadequate for the journey ahead. The vivid contrast between routine domesticity and the horror of forced displacement highlights the trauma of war.

In this chapter, themes of vulnerability, loss, and the impact of war on everyday life resonate powerfully. S. embodies the experience of countless individuals whose lives are irrevocably altered by conflict, showcasing a painful transition from peaceful existence to a harsh new reality that hangs heavy in the air. The chapter closes with the haunting image of S. as a child watching milk boil over, mirroring her world spilling out of control. This poignant moment frames the emotional weight of loss—of home, identity, and innocence—echoing throughout her perilous journey.

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Chapter 3: The camp, Bosnia END OF MAY 1992

Chapter 3 of "S." by Slavenka Drakuli immerses us life in a camp in Bosnia, where S. and other women are being held as they await an uncertain fate. The chapter opens with S. reflecting on the disorienting isolation of the camp. She describes her arrival in the dark, surrounded by barbed wire and the oppressive shadows of trees, where she experiences a mix of fear, disbelief, and a strange reliance on the hope of being exchanged—an idea that she tries, albeit unsuccessfully, to convince herself is comforting.

As S. adjusts to life in the camp, she observes the emotional responses of the other women around her. While they seem to find a way to settle even on concrete floors, she feels a profound disconnect, battling her own recognition of fear and the fragmentation of her identity, highlighted by her mixed heritage. The chaos of her previous life—to her, full of laughter and normalcy—feels remote, and her thoughts frequently drift back to memories of daily life with her family, which are now overshadowed by grief and horror.

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Chapter 4 Summary: The camp, Bosnia JUNE 1992

In Chapter 4 of "S." by Slavenka Drakuli , the prota
in a grim camp in Bosnia, grappling with her identity amidst the chaos and brutality of war. We begin with S.'s disorienting experience as she recalls a violent encounter with soldiers that left her unconscious. Once in the camp, she tries to hold on to her identity by organizing her meager belongings from her former life, which includes clothing, a photo album she cannot bear to open, and a notebook.

Her possessions act as anchors to her past, yet she feels a growing fragility in her sense of self. While she finds solace in the small items, the loss of her gold jewelry becomes a blow to her spirit, symbolizing a further diminishment of her humanity. The theft triggers feelings of betrayal among the other women, reducing their bonds of solidarity. This atmosphere of suspicion and desperation grows as S. retreats into a solitude marked by an awareness of the potential betrayals around her.

Dream sequences provide an escape, revealing her longing for normalcy and comfort—moments of eating and routine in a world that seems distant. A sudden storm brings a fleeting moment of joy, which contrasts sharply with the oppressive environment of the camp. Amidst the ongoing turmoil, S. witnesses a young girl, Z., drawing portraits which serve as a respite from their grim reality— trivializing the horror through art.

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Food becomes a focal point of their existence, and the deprivation is palpable. As S. and the other women navigate their cramped space, they cling to small acts of generosity, while the atmosphere becomes increasingly charged with tension, indicated by conflict over scarce resources.

As news of atrocities in another camp surfaces, the dread surrounding their fate deepens. S. learns of the so-called "women’s room," a harrowing place where soldiers exploit girls. Her survival instincts rise, but they come with haunting fears. One night, S. is violently taken from her sleeping space, embodying the terror of being singled out—a fear that resonates through all the women.

Through harrowing dialogue, the women begin to share their traumas, revealing layers of violation they have endured. They speak of rape, loss, and how they cope with unspeakable experiences. The discussions signify a reluctant admission of their collective suffering, placing their survival instinct against personal trauma.

The chapter culminates in S.'s own horrifying encounter with soldiers, ominous shadows in a dimly lit office. Her identity crumbles as she faces unspeakable violence, reducing her to a body devoid of agency. This traumatic experience emphasizes the loss of her sense of self and foreshadows a stark reality— survival takes precedence over individuality in

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such dire circumstances.

Drakuli 's portrayal is raw, blending memories, drea illustrating the profound impact of war on identity, trust, and humanity. S. transforms from a vibrant individual to a mere survivor, struggling to reconcile her past with the present, all while hope flickers amidst the dark encroachment of despair.

Key Themes	Description
Setting	Grim camp in Bosnia during war
Protagonist	S., grappling with her identity
Identity Struggle	Desire to hold on to her past through meager belongings
Loss and Fragility	Theft of gold jewelry symbolizes loss of humanity
Atmosphere	Growing suspicion and desperation among women
Dreams	Longing for normalcy, escape from grim reality
Art as Respite	Young girl Z. drawing portraits provides comfort
Food and Survival	Scarcity fuels tension and desperation among women
Trauma and Sharing	Women discuss their experiences of violation and survival
Climax	S. faces violent encounter, leading to loss of identity
Themes of Hope and	S. struggles between past identity and present survival

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Key Themes	Description
Despair	

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Critical Thinking

Key Point: The fragility of identity in the face of trauma

Critical Interpretation: Imagine yourself amid chaos, stripped of your belongings and your sense of self, feeling the weight of loss and betrayal around you. In these desperate circumstances, you cling to the remnants of your identity, understanding just how fragile it can be. This realization can be a powerful inspiration in our lives, prompting us to cherish our identities and the connections we forge with others. It serves as a reminder to cultivate resilience, acknowledging that while external circumstances can challenge our self-worth, it is our spirit and shared humanity that endure. Embracing kindness in moments of scarcity can forge bonds and reassert our humanity, even in dire situations, reminding us to treasure every small act of connection and generosity.

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Chapter 5 Summary: The 'women's room', BosniaJUNE-JULY 1992

In Chapter 5 of Slavenka Drakuli 's "S.", the protago makeshift ‘women’s room’ in Bosnia, a space once used as an office, now filled with mattresses and blankets. The chapter opens with S. disoriented, recollecting being cared for by fellow captives while she was feverish and near unconsciousness. As she regains her senses, she realizes the utter devastation surrounding her, having suffered physical and emotional trauma inflicted by men. The descriptions of her pain and disorientation evoke a feeling of total dispossession—not just of her body, but of her identity and autonomy.

S.'s reflections on her state reveal the profound psychological impact of her captivity. The room, though small and humid, is organized, providing a fragile sense of community among the nine women. They form routines, sharing minimal resources such as cold water and soap, while they all endure uncertainty and fear from soldiers who come and go as they please. S. observes their interactions and begins to understand the grim reality of their existence—a storehouse of women for male soldiers. The camaraderie among the women is punctuated by their attempts to maintain a semblance of normalcy and dignity, a struggle intertwined with their shared suffering.

Life in the 'women's room' is marked by a heavy atmosphere. Instead of

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hope, fear dominates their days, particularly as the soldiers arrive at night. The girls are locked in a cycle of anxiety, fearing who might be taken next and when. During one of these harrowing nights, S. experiences a brief moment of vulnerability with a soldier, but it quickly turns violent when another soldier arrives, highlighting the ever-present threat of brutality.

Among the other women is A., a very young girl who becomes emblematic of the innocence lost in war. Her struggles reflect the innocence forced upon her and the trauma inflicted by the soldiers. The bonds formed between the women reveal both compassion and self-preservation as they navigate their bleak reality together. A.’s relationship with S. illustrates the emotional toll of fear, loss, and the haunting memories of loved ones left behind.

As the chapter unfolds, A. is taken by a soldier who claims to be her brother's friend, and her absence leaves a void that signals a deep, disturbing transformation. When she returns, irrevocably changed, it becomes evident that she has been grievously harmed. The painful reality of their situation is starkly underscored by A.'s tragic fate, serving as a devastating reminder of the impact of war on the most vulnerable.

Overall, this chapter poignantly captures the themes of trauma, resilience, and the loss of identity in a brutal world where women are reduced to mere objects of violence. The harrowing experiences of S. and her companions emphasize not only the physical dangers they face but also the psychological

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scars that become embedded within them, irrevocably altering their sense of self and community.

Key Themes	Details
Setting	Women's room in Bosnia, previously an office, now filled with mattresses and blankets.
Protagonist's Condition	S. wakes up disoriented, recalling care from fellow captives during fever.
Trauma	Physical and emotional trauma from captivity; feelings of dispossession of body and identity.
Community	Nine women form a fragile sense of community sharing limited resources and routines.
Fear and Anxiety	Uncertainty and fear dominate their lives, especially with soldiers coming at night.
Connection Among Women	Women form bonds of compassion and self-preservation amidst shared suffering.
A.'s Journey	A. symbolizes lost innocence; her traumatic experience highlights the darker effects of war.
Violence	A. is taken by a soldier and returns grievously harmed, emphasizing the brutality of their situation.
Central Themes	Captures trauma, resilience, loss of identity, and the psychological impact of violence on women.

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Critical Thinking

Key Point: The profound resilience that emerges from shared suffering

Critical Interpretation: In the depths of despair, amidst trauma and loss, S. and her companions discover a remarkable strength derived from their shared experiences. The way they form a tight-knit community, cultivate compassion, and strive to maintain dignity even in the face of overwhelming brutality serves as a powerful reminder that, even in our darkest moments, the bonds we forge with others can inspire resilience and hope. This teaches us that no matter the circumstances we face, the support we provide one another can illuminate even the bleakest paths, encouraging us to find strength in unity and the human capacity to endure despite suffering.

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Chapter 6: The 'women's room', Bosnia JULY 1992

In Chapter 6 of Slavenka Drakuli 's "S.", S. wakes u room meant to house women prisoners, adorned with makeshift mattresses and blankets. She's just emerged from a feverish haze, haunted by memories of violence and deep physical pain. As she regains consciousness, she is overwhelmed by pain not only in her body but in her spirit, feeling stripped of her identity and self-worth. Surrounded by other women who share her grim fate, S. grapples with the psychological trauma of their circumstances, realizing they are all reduced to mere objects within a war-torn nightmare.

The room serves as a microcosm of their suffering, where the girls cling to small comforts like neatly folded laundry and the faint smell of soap. They live under the oppressive shadow of soldiers who come in at night, taking advantage of them as if they were disposable goods. M., one of the girls, tells S. the grim reality: some never return after being taken away, marking each absence with a note in a little book to maintain her sanity.

As the days stretch on, S. finds solace in small acts of defiance, such as

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Chapter 7 Summary: The 'women's room', Bosnia AUGUST 1992

In Chapter 7 of "S." by Slavenka Drakuli , the protag
a complex and surreal encounter with the Captain, the commander of a women’s camp in Bosnia during August 1992. The chapter opens with a striking moment of intimacy as S. reflects on the Captain's touch, contrasting the war setting with an unexpected air of civility emanating from him. His well-groomed appearance and polite manner—addressing her in the formal 'Vi'—tempt S. to see him as more than just a military officer. This tension between their worlds evokes both attraction and unease, as she grapples with her identity as an inmate.

As they converse, S. is drawn to the Captain's enigmatic character; he asks about her life, leading her to dig into memories of being a school teacher before the war disrupted everything. He seems genuinely interested, yet S. realizes the absurdity of their situation, where a man in authority displays curiosity for her experiences while they occupy such grim roles within the camp. The blurred lines of power and vulnerability create an atmosphere of confusion and seduction as S. discerns that the Captain is perhaps as lonely and disconnected from normality as she is.

S.’s initial fear gives way to a strategic relationship with the Captain. Understanding her position, she plays along with a flirtation that serves as a

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self-preservation tactic. Realizing he needs her as much as she needs him, she begins to wield her femininity as a form of agency in an otherwise oppressive environment. There's a keen awareness in her that manipulating the dynamics of their interaction could shift power from him to her, at least momentarily.

Later, emboldened by the camaraderie of the women in her room, S. dresses up for a visit to the Captain's apartment, where she hopes to gain favor and perhaps useful information that could help her compatriots. The other women are excited by the possibility of insights or assistance from the Captain, showing an inherent balance between desperation and hope among them. This interplay of self-interest and collective survival underlines the overarching theme of resilience amidst horror.

When S. enters the Captain's apartment, she is struck by its normalcy—an ordinary living space that starkly contrasts the camp. This triggers a wave of emotions as she grapples with her past, yet the warmth and comfort she finds within the apartment brings temporary solace. Through dinner and shared laughter, wrapped in the illusion of normalcy, a strange partnership forms. S. clings to the idea that engaging with the Captain offers her a chance at survival, relishing the feeling of safety and nourishment that she has been deprived of.

The chapter closes on a poignant note as they settle in front of an old movie,

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the darkened room creating a temporary bubble where the realities of the camp fade away. Instead of hatred for the Captain, S. feels gratitude; he allows her glimpses into a semblance of civilian life, representing both a momentary escape and a deeply complex relationship borne out of survival instinct rather than love. Through their interactions, themes of power, agency, and the fragile boundaries of human connection during times of war, painting a haunting portrait of resilience amidst despair.

Aspect	Summary
Setting	Women’s camp in Bosnia, August 1992
Character Focus	Protagonist S. and the Captain, the camp's commander
Initial Interaction	S. reflects on the Captain's touch; feels a mix of attraction and unease
Character Dynamics	Blurring of power and vulnerability; S. uses femininity as agency
S.'s Strategy	Flirts to gain favor and possibly help for herself and other women
Women’s Support	Camaraderie among women and joint hope for useful information from the Captain
Captain's Apartment	Normalcy of the apartment contrasts with the camp; evokes nostalgia and temporary solace
Shared Moments	Dinner and laughter foster a strange partnership and momentary escape from reality
Conclusion	S. feels gratitude toward the Captain for allowing glimpses of normal life

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Aspect	Summary
	despite the complexity of their relationship
Themes Explored	Power, agency, resilience, and the fragile nature of human connection during war

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Critical Thinking

Key Point: Empowerment through agency

Critical Interpretation: This chapter illustrates the powerful realization that in even the most oppressive situations, one can reclaim agency and influence. When confronted with the Captain, S. discovers her ability to navigate the complexities of their interaction, utilizing her femininity not merely for survival, but as a means to shift the balance of power. This insight can inspire us to recognize our own strength in adversity, empowering us to take control of our circumstances, creatively maneuver through challenges, and turn vulnerability into a form of agency, reminding us that resilience often lies in our ability to adapt and assert ourselves, even in the harshest of environments.

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Chapter 8 Summary: The 'women's room', Bosnia SEPTEMBER 1992

In Chapter 8 of "S." by Slavenka Drakuli , we delve reality of S., a woman trapped in a concentration camp in Bosnia during the war. The oppressive environment of the camp has turned death and violence into a dull routine for S., who narrates her experiences with a haunting detachment. She copes with the daily horrors by distancing herself emotionally, acknowledging that while she wants to help others, her own survival instinct forces her to prioritize self-preservation. The camp's brutal reality, where every woman must fend for herself, weighs heavily upon her.

Amidst the bleakness, a complex relationship develops between S. and a Captain who visits her weekly. He shares stories of his family, creating a temporary illusion of normalcy in the otherwise grim setting. S. perceives these meetings as a means to secure her safety and comfort, but they come at the cost of her dignity. She grapples with feelings of guilt and complicity, aware that by engaging with the Captain, a figure of authority and violence, she is not only potentially betraying her fellow inmates but also feeding into the cycle of power and subjugation.

S.’s emotions are tangled; she feels a mix of survival instinct and revulsion as she navigates her interactions with the Captain. At one point, he recalls a woman who attempted to escape and was shot—an incident that solidifies

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S.’s understanding of the precariousness of her position. Although she acknowledges that she could retaliate against him, her fear of the consequences and her desire to live prevent her from acting. Instead, she sinks deeper into a self-imposed oblivion, where forgetting becomes her method of coping.

The chapter also highlights the theme of violence, both sexual and emotional, framing S.'s experiences with the larger atrocities occurring in the camp. She touches on the idea that even in their darkest moments, the women in the camp find ways to form bonds and share stories, albeit with an unspoken agreement to avoid discussing their pain openly. This unspoken pact illustrates the need for a semblance of normality, even as they are enveloped in chaos.

The narrative conveys S.’s internal struggles, where she oscillates between moments of clarity and desperation. Her interactions with both the Captain and her fellow inmates reflect the complex dynamics of victimhood, complicity, and survival under dire circumstances. As she continues to navigate this world, S. embodies the resilience of the human spirit while grappling with her moral compass in an environment that continually tests it. The chapter closes with a poignant reminder of the brutality of war and the cost of survival, leaving readers to reflect on the nature of complicity, humanity, and the profound impact of trauma.

Key Themes	Description
Setting	Concentration camp in Bosnia during the war, characterized by death and violence.
Survival Instinct	S. prioritizes self-preservation over helping others, coping through emotional detachment.
Complex Relationship	Interaction with a Captain who shares family stories, creating an illusion of normalcy and raising feelings of guilt.
Power Dynamics	S.`s engagement with the Captain exposes the cycle of violence and subjugation, complicating her feelings of victimhood.
Consequences of Resisting	Fear of retaliation prevents S. from acting against the Captain, leading to deeper emotional anguish.
Bonds among Inmates	Women form connections while avoiding discussions about their shared pain, seeking a semblance of normality.
Internal Struggles	S. experiences oscillation between clarity and desperation, reflecting on her moral compass amidst trauma.
Conclusion	The chapter emphasizes the brutality of war and the moral complexities of survival, inviting reflections on complicity and humanity.

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Critical Thinking

Key Point: The complexity of survival instincts in dire situations

Critical Interpretation: As you reflect on S.'s harrowing experiences, consider how her struggle for self-preservation amidst chaos teaches us the importance of acknowledging our own survival instincts when faced with adversity. Life can often feel like a battle for dignity and safety, and it's essential to remember that sometimes prioritizing our well-being is not just an act of selfishness but a fundamental human response to trauma. This insight can inspire you to navigate your challenges with a blend of resilience and self-compassion, understanding that in recognizing your need to survive, you can also find pathways to help others, creating a balance between personal preservation and collective strength.

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Chapter 9: The 'women's room', Bosnia OCTOBER 1992

In Chapter 9 of Slavenka Drakuli 's "S.", the story u in Bosnia during autumn of 1992, where the protagonist, S., grapples with the desire for freedom amid uncertainty and dread. As the chilling weather settles in, S. and the other women in the 'women's room' become engulfed in mixed emotions about a rumored exchange that could lead to their liberation. Initially hopeful, they are haunted by the fear of disappointment and the grim realities of war.

When news of a possible exchange first surfaces, S. feels a flicker of hope, only to be quickly followed by anxiety regarding the potential chaos of being relocated. Conversations about loved ones spark memories, making the atmosphere in the room tense and fraught with longing. The girls' daily lives are disrupted; minor squabbles emerge as they cling to their routine for comfort. Even as the prospect of escape looms, the threat of violence outside remains palpable, with news of killings in other camps and the burden of uncertainty weighing heavy in S.'s heart.

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Chapter 10 Summary: Bosnia NOVEMBER 1992

In Chapter 10 of "S." by Slavenka Drakuli , the narr
poignant moment of transition for the women in a refugee camp in Zagreb during November 1992. The chapter opens with S., a central character, grappling with the dread of the uncertain future that lies ahead as the women prepare to leave the camp. The atmosphere is tense and frantic as they board buses, desperate for escape but fearful of being left behind. The guards' commands go unheeded, and S. is overwhelmed by the chaos of their departure, contrasting the silent resignation they exhibited months prior.

As the buses journey down a winding mountain road, S. reflects on what peace means for these women, most of whom have lost everything. They hear the driver speak casually about the war, a term that still feels foreign and unreal to S., even after her time in the camp. The coldness of the bus symbolizes the harsh reality of their situation, with the women pressed closely together, unsure if this freedom will truly be theirs.

Upon reaching a dilapidated bridge over the Sava River, the women confront their next hurdle—waiting for soldiers who are supposed to facilitate their crossing. Tension escalates as uncertainty looms; they fear being deceived and sent back to the hellish conditions they have just fled. In this moment of potential hope and despair, S. observes a group of women clinging together, bonded by their shared trauma.

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While they wait, they are fed for the first time in what feels like an eternity, sharing dry bread and liverwurst—comfort food that suddenly evokes memories of better days. Just as the flicker of normalcy seems to take hold, an unexpected incident unfolds: S. is called to assist with a young woman in labor. This moment brings the stark realities of war into sharp focus as the woman delivers a stillborn baby, a tragic product of violence and rape. The baby's brief life is extinguished before it even begins, symbolizing the horror that war inflicts not only on the body but on hope itself.

After this heart-wrenching event, S. reflects on the complexities of womanhood and motherhood in a war-torn landscape. The young mother’s action—sacrificing her child—echoes the desperate choices imposed by their circumstances. As S. confronts her own fears about possible pregnancy, she contemplates the implications of birth in such dire conditions; the line between life and death seems irrevocably blurred.

Throughout the chapter, themes of trauma, displacement, and the struggle for identity emerge starkly. Drakuli masterfully por toll that war exerts on women, transforming them from survivors of violence into beings shaped by it, grappling with the loss of humanity amidst the chaos. As night falls in the crumbling house they are sheltering in, S.'s internal conflict is palpable. She feels the weight of foreboding, wrestling with her sense of self in a world ravaged by brutality.

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In this compelling chapter, the reader witnesses the resilience and fragility of women bound by their shared experiences in a time of unimaginable suffering. The horrors of war threaten to erode their humanity, leaving them to question not only their survival but what kind of existence awaits them beyond the confines of the camp. The imagery and emotional depth resonate, illustrating the complexity of human emotion in the face of devastating circumstances.

Key Aspect	Summary
Setting	Refugee camp in Zagreb, November 1992.
Main Character	S., a woman dealing with uncertainty as she prepares to leave the camp.
Atmosphere	Tense and chaotic as women board buses to escape, contrasting earlier resignation.
Journey	While traveling, S. contemplates the meaning of peace amidst loss.
Key Incident	Women wait at a bridge for soldiers to cross the Sava River, filled with fear and uncertainty.
Food Symbolism	Sharing dry bread and liverwurst evokes nostalgia for better days.
Climactic Moment	S. assists a young woman in labor who delivers a stillborn baby, highlighting war's brutality.
Themes	Trauma, displacement, identity struggle, and the psychological toll of war on women.

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Key Aspect	Summary
Reflections of S.	Her internal conflicts about possible pregnancy and the implications of motherhood in war.
Conclusion	Women face a grim future and wrestle with their humanity in the face of suffering.

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Chapter 11 Summary: Refugee camp, Zagreb NOVEMBER 1992

In Chapter 11 of "S." by Slavenka Drakuli , we follo grappling with her past as she navigates life in a transitional camp near Zagreb. The chapter opens with her friend J. preparing to leave for Slovenia, where she has an uncle to take her in. Pregnant and hopeful for a fresh start, J. clings to a small bottle of nail polish, a symbol of her desire for normalcy and beauty amidst chaos.

As S. arrives at the camp, she is overwhelmed by a sense of disorientation. The camp lacks guards and barbed wire, yet it remains a space of despair and waiting for its inhabitants—people stripped of their homes and identities. S. meets a diverse group of refugees, each haunted by the memories of their lost lives and homes, all grappling with the stark reality of their present. Each individual shares stories of loss, recounting with painful detail the homes they fled and the violence that shattered their lives. This collective trauma reinforces a theme of shared grief but highlights the loneliness of individual experiences.

S. struggles with her own identity in this space, feeling out of place among others who seem to have a clearer connection to their roots. She reflects on how belongings serve as anchors to one’s selfhood, a stark contrast to the transitory life in the camp where people exist in limbo, waiting for decisions

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about their futures. The atmosphere of stagnation hangs heavy, and S. contemplates her uncertain status as a refugee—someone without a true home, trapped between two worlds.

In a poignant moment, S. and J. venture into the city, encountering the vibrancy of life continuing around them despite the chaos of war. While S. feels disconnected and alien, J. finds momentary joy in the beauty of the city, reflecting a struggle between holding on to the past and the desire to adapt to a new life. They indulge in small pleasures like pastries, yet even this can't erase the weight of their experiences. S. is jarred by the normalcy around her; it feels as if two realities exist side by side—one of bustling life and the other of mourning and waiting.

As the chapter progresses, S. learns she is pregnant, a revelation that crushes her with a sense of despair. Five months along, she grapples with the complexity of carrying a child conceived in violence, and she feels resentful, viewing the pregnancy as an unwanted burden rather than a hopeful new beginning. The discussion with the doctor is both revealing and triggering; S. confronts the harsh truth of her situation, her thoughts spiraling from fear of the unknown to the contemplation of adopting the child out.

S. is consumed by ambivalence. She reflects on her emotions surrounding motherhood, torn between the instinct to protect a life and the knowledge that this child is a product of trauma. Seeking solitude in the camp proves

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difficult, as the constant presence of other refugees serves as a reminder of their shared suffering. She feels isolated despite being surrounded by so many others, her thoughts heavy with the weight of her predicament.

The chapter concludes with S. experiencing a shift in perspective. While she wrestles with feelings of loss and desperation, she starts to reconcile herself to the idea of giving up the child. She wishes to distance herself from the child’s existence, seeing it as a temporary cargo rather than a part of her identity. This emotional detachment signifies her struggle to regain control over her shattered life, even as the camp and its haunting memories continue to consume her.

Through vivid characterizations and rich emotional l
eloquently captures the rawness of displacement, the fragility of identity, and the complexities of motherhood in the face of unimaginable trauma. S.'s journey reflects broader themes of resilience, the search for belonging, and the profound effects of war on the human psyche, ultimately leaving readers questioning the nature of survival and hope in a world fraught with pain.

Section	Summary
Introduction	S., a young refugee, navigates life in a transitional camp near Zagreb, feeling disoriented and disconnected.
Friend's Departure	J., S.'s friend, is preparing to leave for Slovenia, symbolizing hope and normalcy with a bottle of nail polish.

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Section	Summary
Camp Atmosphere	The camp, devoid of guards and barbed wire, embodies despair; refugees share their stories of loss and trauma.
S.'s Identity Struggles	S. feels out of place among others with clearer ties to their roots, reflecting on the nature of belongings and identity.
City Encounter	S. and J. venture into the city, contrasting vibrancy with their own mourning; J. finds joy while S. feels alienated.
Pregnancy Revelation	S. learns she is pregnant, grappling with conflicting emotions about carrying a child conceived in violence.
Emotional Turmoil	Consumed by ambivalence, S. contemplates adopting the child out, feeling isolated despite the presence of other refugees.
Shift in Perspective	The chapter ends with S. beginning to reconcile with the idea of detaching from the child, seeing it as a burden.
Thematic Exploration	Drakuli explores displacement, identity fragility, ar trauma, leaving readers questioning survival and hope.

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Chapter 12: Refugee camp, Zagreb DECEMBER 1992

In Chapter 12 of "S." by Slavenka Drakuli , we follo Zagreb, grappling with her tumultuous feelings amidst the backdrop of war and displacement. The chapter opens on a plane where S. observes a couple wrapped up in their own world, contrasting sharply with her experiences of trauma and loss. She learns that her cousin, B., has been found, stirring a mix of nostalgia and discomfort as S. reflects on their past encounters. B., now worn and worn down, invites S. to her home, revealing the stark reality of their lives post-war.

Their meeting is laden with unspoken grief and the weight of their shared history as S.'s own family's fate remains uncertain. B. offers her support, urging S. to move in with her family, but S. feels a sense of hesitancy—she grapples with the secret of her pregnancy and the fear of burdening them with her pain. Their interactions illustrate the theme of familial bonds strained by conflict, as unarticulated fears and the reality of impending conscription hover in the air.

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Chapter 13 Summary: Stockholm DECEMBER 1992

In Chapter 13 of "S." by Slavenka Drakuli , we find Stockholm, navigating a world that feels both foreign and familiar. She experiences a blend of anxiety and relief as she grapples with the chaos of being a refugee. The chapter opens with S. sitting in a bus filled with others like her, clutching the bags provided by Caritas, the only tangible tie to her previous life. The new environment is stark, with the darkening sky and cold air contrasting dramatically with her earlier experiences.

S.'s life takes a surprising turn when she encounters G., a familiar face from her past. They reconnect warmly, with G. working to help refugees like S. She offers S. comfort and safety by inviting her to stay at her home instead of the designated reception center. This compassionate act illustrates the theme of solidarity among displaced individuals and the potential for personal connections to bloom even amidst chaos. G.'s determination to assist S. reflects resilience and the human spirit's capacity to care for one another in difficult times.

As the bus speeds towards G.’s home, S. reflects on the drastic changes in her life. She’s filled with a mix of nostalgia and uncertainty, reminded of fleeting moments from her past, such as times spent preparing stuffed cabbage with loved ones. There’s a poignant clash between her memories of home and the starkness of her current reality, highlighting the theme of

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displacement and the struggle to reconcile these two worlds.

Once at G.'s home, S. is enveloped in familiar smells and objects that remind her of her childhood and life in Sarajevo. Yet, this comfort is laced with the fear of longing for a past life she wishes to escape. The chapter concludes with the sisters in spirit sharing memories, bridging the years and the divisions created by war, as they confront their identities shaped by ethnic ties and their shared experiences as refugees.

This chapter is a moving exploration of hope, memory, and connection, illustrating how friendships can offer solace and a sense of belonging even against the backdrop of loss and displacement. S. grapples with her complex feelings about home and identity, illustrating the emotional chasm that refugees often navigate while trying to rebuild their lives.

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Chapter 14 Summary: Stockholm JANUARY 1993

In Chapter 14 of "S." by Slavenka Drakuli , the story in Stockholm, filled with a mixture of anxiety and hope as the cold weather hits her. She’s part of a group of refugees, bound together by their shared experiences and the uncertain future ahead of them. As they head towards the airport bus, an emotional reunion occurs when S. unexpectedly encounters G., an old schoolmate. G., who has become a support worker for refugees, quickly recognizes S. and offers her the chance to leave the reception center and stay with her instead. This act signifies G.'s deep empathy and willingness to break the rules to help a friend.

The journey to G.'s home gives S. a glimpse into a new life, one marked by an elegance and beauty she feels almost alienated from. They dine in a fancy restaurant, where S. finds a fleeting warmth and a sense of normalcy despite her looming past. Yet, the moment becomes complicated as she struggles internally with her pregnancy, a painful reminder of the trauma she’s endured.

Once at G.'s home, a stark reality dawns on S. as she must confront her pregnancy. G. inadvertently highlights S.'s thinness, failing to notice the obvious sign of life growing within her. When S. finally gathers the courage to share the news of her pregnancy, G.'s reaction shifts from joy to something darker as she realizes the circumstances of S.'s conception. This

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revelation strains their connection, revealing the gulf between understanding and judgment.

As days pass, the tension lingers. S. contemplates giving the child up for adoption, a decision G. supports but approaches with skepticism, underscoring a complex web of emotions surrounding motherhood and innocence. S. feels isolated in her suffering, grappling with the idea that her pregnancy is not a blessing but a burden—a parasite consuming her.

In her new apartment in Rinkeby, S. begins to reflect on G.'s kindness and the unheralded efforts made to help her secure residency and housing. Daily, she finds herself overwhelmed by hunger, both physically and emotionally, as she tries to nourish herself and, by extension, the baby she feels disconnected from. This compulsion to eat becomes a coping mechanism, a way to fill the void left by the trauma of her past.

As her pregnancy progresses, S. finds her body changing in ways she never anticipated. People around her begin to treat her with kindness, offering her seats on public transport as if she were a typical expectant mother. Yet S. harbors a bitter acknowledgment of her situation, feeling the weight of being seen as an ordinary pregnant woman while grappling with the extraordinary circumstances that brought her here. Her bitterness slowly subsides as she begins to confront her identity as both a refugee and a pregnant woman, bringing forth themes of survival, loss, and the complexities of motherhood

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within a fractured existence.

This chapter captures S.'s emotional turmoil, the resilience found in unexpected friendships, and the intersections of personal tragedy within the broader narrative of displacement and hope.

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Chapter 15: Stockholm FEBRUARY 1993

In Chapter 15 of "S." by Slavenka Drakuli , we find world—Stockholm. The scene opens in the bright, clean corridors of the Immigration Office, where she is accompanied by G. He reassures her that everything has gone well, but S. is filled with a sense of uncertainty and dislocation. She is visibly pregnant, which evokes a mix of sympathy and concern from the officials around her.

As S. meets with a psychologist in a small, decorated room, the stark contrast between this experience and her past in Bosnia strikes her. She recalls her memories of crowded, chaotic offices filled with waiting bodies and uncertainty—places where getting any paperwork done was a struggle. This orderly environment with potted plants and the offer of coffee feels surreal, highlighting the difference between her old life and her new one.

During the session with the psychologist, S. grapples with her decision regarding her pregnancy, unsure of the path ahead. The psychologist, while kind, seems unable to grasp the weight of S.'s choices and the trauma of

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Chapter 16 Summary: Rinkeby, Stockholm MARCH 1993

In Chapter 16 of "S" by Slavenka Drakuli , we follow her new life in a suburb of Stockholm after fleeing her past. Awakening in a hospital room, she notices a baby in a Plexiglas cot beside her, though she doesn't recognize it as her own. Soon after, she moves into a freshly painted, empty apartment that symbolizes her fresh start. The large room filled with light brings her hope, and she falls asleep on a mattress on the floor, comforted by the smell of fresh renovations.

As she settles into her new surroundings, S. grapples with the weight of her memories and the loss of her past life. She visits antique shops, longing to furnish her space with objects that remind her of her grandmother and her childhood home, but ultimately fills her apartment with brand new items that feel distinctly Swedish. This newness creates a dichotomy in her experience; while her apartment is bright and calming, it also lacks any remnants of her history, mirroring her struggle to reconcile her past with her present.

As spring approaches, S. finds herself increasingly isolated, grappling with the physical and emotional burdens of her pregnancy. The weight of her body feels alien to her, and she finds comfort in the supportive presence of a Bosnian neighbor who offers food and encouragement. Despite the impending birth, S. battles impatience and anxiety, reflecting on her

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transformation and feeling detached from her own body.

On a bright morning, contractions start and, once in the hospital, she calmly prepares for the arrival of her child. However, the moment is jarring. When the nurse places the newborn on her chest, S. is overtaken by a mix of emotions—fear, confusion, and an unexpected bond. Paralyzed by the moment, she feels a powerful connection to the tiny, vulnerable being, realizing that despite her fear and uncertainty, this child is a part of her.

As her child nestles against her, a profound internal conflict arises; she struggles between feelings of disgust and a burgeoning sense of nurturing and love. The moment is both intimate and heartbreaking, as S. grapples with the implications of motherhood amid her personal turmoil. Just as quickly as the moment of connection begins, the nurse takes the baby away, leaving S. overwhelmed and convinced she will never see him again. Through this chapter, the themes of displacement, the longing for home, and the complexities of motherhood are vividly explored, painting a portrait of a woman caught between her past and an uncertain future.

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Chapter 17 Summary: Karolinska Hospital, Stockholm NIGHT OF 27-28 MARCH 1993

In the tranquil setting of Karolinska Hospital in Stockholm on the night of March 27-28, 1993, S. finds herself grappling with a complex web of emotions post-childbirth. As she gazes out at the birch trees and the sea, she perceives her new surroundings as almost foreign, evoking a desire to embrace this fresh chapter in her life. However, the reality of her situation is jarring; she has just given birth to a baby that she feels no connection to, viewing it instead with a mix of curiosity and detachment. This child, a healthy baby boy, is not the object of her affection but rather a byproduct of a traumatic past that she cannot escape.

Maj, her hospital roommate, holds the baby and expresses concern over S.'s reluctance to accept him, unaware of the inner turmoil S. faces. There is a stark misunderstanding between them, as Maj cannot fathom S.'s pain or her decision to give up the child for adoption. S. reflects on her inability to articulate her feelings and fears – words fail her just as she struggles physically in her weakened state.

As Maj breastfeeds the baby, S. contemplates the unfairness of his circumstances, born into a world that will forever shape his identity based on the dark legacy of war and conflict. S.'s thoughts drift to the idea of crafting a better past for him, a wish that someone might give him a life devoid of

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the burdens she faces. Her reflections plunge deeper into painful memories, particularly the loss of her own family, and she grapples with the notion that this child, now in a different mother's arms, may escape the horrors she endured.

A pivotal moment occurs as S. inadvertently covers the baby with a blanket, a simple act that hints at the yearning for connection she tries to resist. Yet, as she watches Maj bond with her children, she feels an unexpected pang of envy for the ordinary life Maj represents – a stark contrast to her own chaotic and painful existence.

As night deepens and the hospital quiets, S. takes out an old photograph, recalling buried memories of her own childhood. These memories pierce through her emotional haze, allowing her to recognize a resemblance between the baby and her long-lost sister, further complicating her sense of grief and belonging. S.'s mind races with thoughts about the fate of children born in conflict, pondering whether the lies told to them about their origins might shape their lives for better or worse.

The narrative shifts as S. is jolted by a recurring dream of revenge against a man who has forgotten her pain. The confrontation feels hollow, for the man does not recognize her, highlighting her struggle with identity and the haunting shadows of her past that she cannot escape. This reflection deepens her understanding of victimhood; those who suffer must remember so that

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the perpetrators do not continue to evade accountability.

As dawn approaches, the baby begins to cry, and S. instinctively comforts him, nursing him despite her initial reluctance. Tears flow, reflecting a profound release as she feels a surge of love and connection. In this moment, S. begins to reconcile with her identity as both a survivor and a mother, a crucial step toward healing in the face of overwhelming sorrow. Ultimately, the chapter encapsulates profound themes of trauma, motherhood, and the complexities of identity shaped by war and loss, leading S. toward a fragile yet hopeful new beginning.

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