

Hello all,

I hope this plot summary will be helpful for our last session if you haven't had a chance to read the book. I also recommend the film *The Hours*, which came out in 2002 and is directed by Stephen Daldry and starring Meryl Streep, Julianne Moore, and Nicole Kidman.

All best,

Barbara

### ***The Hours* by Michael Cunningham Plot Summary**

#### **Prologue**

It's 1941 in England, near the start of World War II, and a woman (Virginia Woolf) rushes out of her home in a coat that's too heavy for the temperature. She has left a note for Leonard (her husband) and one for Vanessa (her older sister). Virginia walks toward the river, looking for stones and putting them into the pockets of her jacket. Then she walks into the river. At one point, she considers turning back, but she knows that if she does, Leonard and Vanessa will never let her out again.

Leonard finds his letter from Virginia and fears it may be a suicide note. He rushes out to find her. Meanwhile, Virginia's body floats quickly down the current of the river. After a short journey, the body stops somewhere beneath the water, near a stone column from a bridge. Above, a young boy throws a stick through the slats on the side of the bridge, and the stick floats down. A truck of soldiers passes the bridge, and the boy waves to them, so one soldier waves back. Virginia's body stays pressed to the bottom of the river.

#### **Chapter 1: Mrs. Dalloway**

In New York City, in June near the end of the twentieth century, Clarissa Vaughan is on an errand to buy flowers for a party she's hosting. She is 52 and in good health. Her friend Richard, whom she's known since college, always calls her Mrs. Dalloway, after the titular character from the Virginia Woolf novel, because he feels that Clarissa deserves a great literary name and that Mrs. Dalloway makes the most sense, since that character's first name is also Clarissa.

As Clarissa crosses a plaza, she runs into Walter Hardy, who is muscular and wearing a tank top. Walter tries to kiss Clarissa on the lips, and she initially turns to give her cheek, then starts turning back, eventually meeting his lips partway. Clarissa wishes she could be more decisive about kissing a friend on the mouth and feels that this is one of the reasons why her daughter (Julia) resents her.

Clarissa asks Walter about his plans for the evening and wonders if he and his partner Evan would like to come to a party she's holding in the evening for Richard, who has recently won a literary honor called the Carrouthers Prize. Walter says he'll come. Clarissa notices Walter has a strange reaction to her mention of the party and wonders if he's jealous of Richard's award—Walter is also a writer, although his works are more romantic and sentimental than Richard's. Clarissa warns him to be on time—they have to hold the party before the ceremony since Richard doesn't do late nights.

Clarissa parts ways with Walter and thinks about Richard. Before Richard's decline in health, he and Clarissa used to have long debates on various topics. Richard has always disapproved of

Clarissa's long-term partnership with Sally, believing their relationship makes Clarissa too much like a suburban housewife. Clarissa resents this, because Sally is an intelligent woman who works as a public television producer, and Clarissa herself works in publishing, printing some pulp books to make money but also some very unprofitable literary books.

As Clarissa crosses Houston Street, she considers picking up a gift to celebrate Evan's returning health. She passes some shops in SoHo and considers buying a dress for Julia, but Julia doesn't wear dresses and prefers masculine clothes. Clarissa then passes a bookstore and is dismayed to see only one book from her publishing house in the window.

Clarissa remembers being three or four and growing up in Wisconsin. One time a branch tapped against her window and then music started to play—this memory remains important to her since it is one of her first memories and seems to represent all the possibilities of life. Clarissa still wishes she could buy a gift for Evan or a dress for Julia. She gets annoyed with Mary Krull, the queer theorist who has been influencing Julia's recent fashion sense.

Clarissa finally makes it to the florist, Barbara. Clarissa makes small talk about how she needs flowers for Richard's party. Barbara originally came to New York to sing opera. As they're looking at flower options, there's a crash outside. Barbara says it's probably just the film crew that's been there all morning. When Clarissa leaves the florist, she thinks she sees a famous person's head looking out of a trailer, possibly Meryl Streep or Vanessa Redgrave. The famous woman pulls her head back, but her presence seems to linger in the air.

## **Chapter 2: Mrs. Woolf**

In Richmond (a suburb of London) in 1923, Virginia Woolf lies in bed thinking of how to begin her novel, *Mrs. Dalloway*. She imagines Mrs. Dalloway saying something, then getting flowers. She considers various possibilities before deciding she finally has to get up and write. Leonard is already up. Virginia gets ready in the bathroom, then goes down to take coffee.

At the breakfast table, Leonard is reviewing proofs of a book. Leonard tries to make Virginia eat more for breakfast than just coffee, but she refuses, promising to have a big lunch. She goes back upstairs, thinking that she just needs to stay healthy so she can convince Leonard to move back to the city of London. She likes to skip eating to stay clear-headed enough to write. At last, she grabs her pen and writes "Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself."

## **Chapter 3: Mrs. Brown**

In Los Angeles in 1949, Laura Brown reads *Mrs. Dalloway*. She knows that instead of reading in bed, she should be getting up to make breakfast for her husband, Dan, and her three-year-old son, Richie. But she decides to stay in bed, figuring that she is allowed to get away with some "lapses" because she's pregnant. She plans to make Dan a birthday cake later and set a big bouquet of flowers on a table surrounded by all his presents.

Laura reads more of *Mrs. Dalloway* and finds it very beautiful. She thinks about how just five years ago, she heard Dan was dead, only to learn two days later that he was still alive (and someone else with the same name had died). Dan could have married anyone after he came back a hero, but he'd already decided on Laura.

Laura reads another page, wondering how anyone who wrote as vividly as Virginia could ever kill herself. Laura is reading through all of Virginia's books and likes to imagine sometimes that she has some of the same brilliance in her that Virginia had. At last, she gets ready and goes down to breakfast with Dan and Richie. Laura thinks of the cake she'll make later in the day and the flowers she'll buy. Dan has already poured cereal for himself and Richie.

Laura says Dan shouldn't have let her sleep in on his birthday, but Dan says she needed the rest. Laura insists, so Dan says he'll wake her up with him the next morning. She has always been embarrassed about being three years older than him.

Dan leaves for work. Alone with Richie, Laura often feels uncertain of what to do. She tells him to finish his breakfast, then she lights a cigarette while she finishes her coffee. She thinks about how she was up until 2 a.m. the previous night reading and wonders if it's bad for the new baby. Laura tells Richie about the cake they're going to make together for Dan, but Richie seems unconvinced that this will actually happen.

#### **Chapter 4: Mrs. Dalloway**

Clarissa heads with her flowers to Spring Street. She passes two young girls who recently saw a famous person and are arguing whether it was Meryl Streep, Susan Sarandon, or Vanessa Redgrave. Clarissa gets swept up in the excitement and waits a few more minutes to see if the person will come out again, but at last, she leaves and goes toward Richard's apartment.

Clarissa remembers how the part of the city she's in used to be wilder, with bars, coffeehouses, and the sound of music. She passes a corner where Richard may have kissed her, but she doesn't remember specifically. She feels undesirable next to Louis, who is big but not dumb, like someone the Renaissance artist Michelangelo might draw. Clarissa remembers arguing with Richard on that corner and believes that even though the argument didn't seem significant at the time, it was a major turning point in their relationship.

As Clarissa walks down Bleecker Street and turns onto Thompson Street, she thinks the neighborhood today is just full of tourists, with even the surviving bars and coffeehouses now changing to serve people from out of town. She makes her way to Richard's apartment, which has an entrance that always makes her think of the word "squalid." The elevator doesn't work, so she takes the stairs. Clarissa knocks on Richard's door.

Richard greets Clarissa, still calling her "Mrs. D" (for Dalloway). Richard gets some help for his illness from new medicines, but he's unlucky compared to people like Evan, who contracted HIV later and benefited more from recent advances. This means Richard's mind is not as sharp as it used to be. Clarissa shows Richard all the flowers she has for his party, and he asks if all those flowers mean he's died.

Clarissa raises the shade on a window, since Richard doesn't have much light in his apartment. He has an old chair that smells and is falling apart, but he won't replace it. Clarissa asks Richard if his AIDS is still causing him to hallucinate. Richard says it's not at the moment. Earlier, though, he was seeing creatures that reminded him of black fire, both dark and bright, that were

speaking to him in an ancient language. Clarissa suggests increasing his medication, but Richard says that just because he can't see the things doesn't mean they're gone.

Clarissa mentions seeing a movie star on the way over to Richard, and although he humors her, she knows he has no interest in famous people. She reminds him that his party starts at five o'clock. Richard gets confused and thinks that he remembers already being at the party, having fallen out of time. He doesn't look forward to having to pretend to be brave in front of everyone while he's sick. He thinks he's only getting the prize because he has AIDS, but Clarissa tries to reassure him.

Clarissa goes over the guest list for the party, and Richard continues to be stressed. He doesn't want to have to speak to his publisher, Martin Campo, but Clarissa feels that Martin is a good man who spent his family fortune on publishing difficult books. She promises to stay by Richard's side at the party. Richard wonders if the party can just go on without him, but Clarissa insists that he show up. He feels embarrassed about what a big ego he used to have about his own work.

Richard says that his one regret is that he never got to write anything about his relationship with Clarissa. Clarissa reassures him that he's done so much that he shouldn't have any regrets. She promises to come back at 3:30 to help him get dressed before the party. As she goes, she kisses him on the cheek, so as not to spread any germs to him, since his immune system is so weak.

### **Chapter 5: Mrs. Woolf**

Virginia checks her clock and sees that about two hours have passed. She feels good about what she's written, although she knows she might not feel the same way about it tomorrow. She'd like to write for the whole day, but she fears that if she writes for more than a couple hours, her headaches will return. When she reaches her goal of 250 words, she reluctantly decides that's enough for the day.

Virginia goes down to the printing room, where Ralph and Leonard are working on page proofs. Leonard is in a bad mood due to the number of errors in the pages, but Ralph is more optimistic about their progress. Ralph is an assistant, and under Leonard, many assistants come and go. Virginia reassures Ralph that the book will be done soon enough, but she is really trying to reassure Leonard more than Ralph.

### **Chapter 6: Mrs. Brown**

In LA, Laura makes a cake with Richie. As she makes the cake, she feels like an artist or an architect creating something, perhaps even like Virginia writing *Mrs. Dalloway*. She guides Richie in what to do. When Richie pours the flour in and it all forms a big mound, he's afraid he did something wrong, but Laura reassures him. Laura begins to feel that maybe everything in her life is fine—that she will continue to be devoted to Dan and Richie and that she's all prepared for their second child.

### **Chapter 7: Mrs. Woolf**

Virginia walks up Mt. Ararat Road in Richmond, planning how and why her character Clarissa Dalloway will die by suicide. She imagines it will be due to a woman, one Clarissa knew and loved when she was young, before she decided to marry a man. She thinks about how women

have to be more sensitive to small details, right down to the choice of a hat, and so she figures Clarissa will probably kill herself over something that seems very small on the outside. Virginia reaches Hogarth House (her home, named after her publishing company Hogarth Press) and goes inside, where she finds Nelly downstairs in the kitchen, rolling out a pie crust. Nelly describes what she plans on serving for lunch, including yellow pears for the pudding, adding that she could do something different if Virginia wants something fancier. Virginia is disappointed by the pears but doesn't want people to think that she needs fancy things, so she goes along with it.

Virginia reminds Nelly that Vanessa and her children are arriving in the afternoon for tea. She wants to give them China tea and sugared ginger, but Nelly says it would take a trip into London to get those things. Virginia replies that there's plenty of time for Nelly to get to London and back. Virginia feels maybe she is punishing Nelly for the pears and wishes she could be more skilled with servants, getting Nelly to not serve pears while still having Nelly love her. Virginia decides to make Clarissa Dalloway more skillful with servants.

### **Chapter 8: Mrs. Dalloway**

Clarissa gets home with her flowers and sees Sally in the hallway as she's on her way out to lunch with Oliver St. Ives, a movie star they both know. Sally asks if Clarissa needs help with anything, but Clarissa reassures her that she has the party under control. Clarissa thinks she feels something deathly in her hallway. Then she realizes it's worse than death—it's the idea that Richard is losing his whole identity to AIDS and won't be able to grow old with her. Clarissa knows that she and Sally are wealthy by some standards, having two floors and a garden in the West Village, but she also feels that they aren't wealthy by New York standards. She tries to appreciate what she has and make peace with the idea that she's lucky regardless of whether the party goes well.

Clarissa thinks about Oliver St. Ives, who used to pretend to be a heterosexual hero in thrillers but who recently came out in a *Vanity Fair* article. Clarissa thinks about how, when Oliver St. Ives invited Sally to lunch, he probably didn't exclude Clarissa but just didn't think of her. Clarissa tries to reassure herself that her life is in no way a failure. Clarissa thinks back to how Richard was in a relationship with her and Louis at the same time. Clarissa tried to have sex with Louis once, but it was clear they weren't meant for each other—instead, their main bond was that they both loved Richard. As much as Clarissa tells herself her current life is good, she can't help thinking of missed opportunities with Richard. While sex with Richard was not as satisfying as she hoped, but she still thinks back to the day when they kissed and went on a walk—when it seemed like her whole future would be full of happiness. She realizes now that the real happiness was in that moment of anticipation.

### **Chapter 9: Mrs. Brown**

Laura is disappointed in how the cake she makes with Richie turns out, but she tries to love it even though she thinks it's a failure. She doesn't want it to distract her from taking care of the other items on her birthday to-do list. Just then, Kitty (Laura's friend and neighbor two doors down) shows up at the back door. Laura is excited but also nervous at Kitty's sudden appearance.

Kitty asks if she's interrupting anything, and Laura says of course not. Kitty is younger and seems more self-assured to Laura. Kitty notices the cake and says it's "cute," which Laura takes as evidence of her failure. Laura is slightly terrified of how much she values Kitty's friendship. Kitty seems more put-together than Laura, although Kitty's one flaw, in Laura's view, is her husband, Ray—Ray was prisoner of war in the Philippines, and now he looks prematurely middle aged and spits a lot when he talks.

Kitty takes some coffee and says she really likes it. She says she's considering switching from Maxwell House to Folgers for coffee, like Laura. The women chat for a bit, and then Kitty admits that she has to go to the hospital soon to have a growth on her uterus looked at—it might be why she hasn't been able to conceive a child with Ray. Laura is surprised to learn that Kitty is the reason they can't have a child, not Ray.

Laura hugs Kitty and tells her everything will be OK. Their lips touch, but they don't quite kiss. Kitty backs away first, but Laura worries that even though Kitty initiated the kiss, Laura is somehow the one who caused things to go "too far." Laura worries when she notices Richie watching them. She promises to feed Kitty's dog while Kitty is at the hospital. Kitty promises to call tomorrow with an update from the hospital. When Kitty leaves, Laura feels exhausted. Laura takes Richie into the living room, goes back to dump their cake into the garbage, then decides to make a new, better cake.

### **Chapter 10: Mrs. Woolf**

Virginia is reading book proofs with Leonard and Ralph when suddenly, they notice that Vanessa has arrived early with her kids. Leonard doesn't want to interrupt his work, but Virginia promises to keep her occupied. Virginia goes up to greet Vanessa and jokes that she's happy to see her but would have been even happier to see her later, at the time she originally promised. Vanessa just laughs and says they finished their business in London early.

Vanessa's three children (Julian, Quentin, and Angelica) are out in the yard, looking at a bird they found that seems to be sick. They want to bring it inside, but Vanessa warns that it's wild and would probably prefer to die outside. They suggest instead having an outdoor funeral for it. Virginia joins them, marveling at their enthusiasm, particularly Angelica's.

After the bird funeral, Virginia tells Vanessa that she can't make tea until Nelly returns from London. Everyone goes inside, but Virginia lingers by the dead bird in a circle of roses. She thinks of how she wouldn't mind being in the bird's place. She decides that her character Clarissa won't be "the bride of death" after all, but rather "the bed in which the bride is laid."

### **Chapter 11: Mrs. Dalloway**

Clarissa fills a flower vase with yellow roses. She is surprised when Louis buzzes the intercom at her apartment. She feels he's the only New Yorker she knows who would show up without calling first. It's been about five years since Clarissa last saw Louis, and she's a little nervous. He looks the same as he has ever since he lost his bulk and strength about two decades ago. They greet each other happily, and Louis tears up.

Louis hasn't heard about Richard's prize, but Clarissa said he should come and that Richard will be happy to see him. Even though Richard lived with Louis for much of his life, he spent his last



years of health writing about a woman in a townhouse in Manhattan, with only a brief appearance from a character who resembles Louis.

Louis walks into the apartment and sees that most of the decorating seems to be influenced by Sally's taste. He thinks that even though Clarissa definitely looks older, she still has some glamor to her. Clarissa says she can't believe that Louis hasn't been back to New York in five years. In reality, Louis has been back—he just never looked her up.

Clarissa warns Louis that Richard isn't the same as he used to be due to his AIDS. They talk about Richard's one novel. Louis feels Richard barely even tried to hide that he was writing about Clarissa, but Clarissa feels that the character is just Richard's fantasy of a woman who resembles her. The novel is over 900 pages of almost nothing happening, until suddenly the character kills herself.

Clarissa tells Louis that as much as Richard has changed, he still holds on to some part of his old self. They each regret how they treated each other in the past. For a moment, Clarissa almost thinks it seems like she and Louis are about to have sex, but then Louis mentions that he has fallen in love with a former student named Hunter Craydon (who is at least the fourth of his students that he's fallen in love with). But in fact, secretly Louis knows that his relationship with Hunter is just an affair.

Thinking about love and the past, Louis gets emotional and starts to cry. Just then, Clarissa's daughter Julia arrives at the apartment. Louis hasn't seen Julia in five years and almost gets emotional again over how grown up she looks. At last, Louis says he has to go—he's only in the city for a couple more days, but eventually, he's moving back permanently. He promises to make it to Richard's party.

As Louis leaves, he thinks back on his past and how, when he was 28 and on a trip with Richard to Rome, he got upset with Richard after a letter from Clarissa to Richard made Louis feel like Richard was more interested in her than in him. He remembers how freeing it felt to take a train to Madrid and leave Richard behind, at least temporarily.

### **Chapter 12: Mrs. Brown**

Laura drops Richie off with her neighbor Mrs. Latch, claiming she has to run an errand. In reality, she is making a new cake. After she finishes the cake and completes some other tasks for the day, she leaves the house, bringing along her copy of *Mrs. Dalloway*. The new cake she made looks much more elegant. She thinks about when her lips touched Kitty's and realizes that she desires Kitty, although she also still desires Dan.

Even though the second cake is better, Laura still regrets its imperfections. She wants to go somewhere to read but can't find a place, since in most places she'll either have to pay money, be bothered, or be unsafe. The problem with public places like a library or a park is they feel too public for her. At last, she decides to pay for a hotel room.

Laura goes first to a cheap motel, then decides that it might be too sleazy, and she wouldn't know how to act. She goes instead to a nicer hotel for tourists and businessmen. She gets a

double room, lying and saying her husband will be coming in an hour or so. She pays up front, then heads to her room.

When Laura gets to the room, it's clean, but she can tell it's been used a lot. She begins reading *Mrs. Dalloway*, feeling she has finally left her life behind and is closer to Virginia Woolf than she's ever felt before. She reads part of the book that makes her realize that a person can choose to die and that it's possible—and maybe even probable—that someone ended their life in her hotel room. Laura says “I would never” out loud to herself, patting her pregnant belly. Nevertheless, Laura imagines Virginia stepping into the river with pockets full of rocks and thinks of how easy that would be to do.

### **Chapter 13: Mrs. Woolf**

Virginia apologizes for not having gifts for Vanessa's children. All the while, she is thinking about her novel and decides that Clarissa won't kill herself—that someone else has to kill themselves, someone intelligent and tragic. Just then, Nelly gets back from London with the China tea and candied ginger, looking both triumphant and angry. Virginia is nevertheless happy. When Nelly isn't looking, Virginia kisses Vanessa, feeling like she's getting away with something secret.

### **Chapter 14: Mrs. Dalloway**

Julia remarks how strange Louis is. Clarissa agrees and hopes he won't ruin Richard's party. Clarissa thinks Julia is very beautiful even though she wears six rings on her left hand and even has a nose ring but never wears the ring Clarissa got her for the 18th birthday.

Julia is about to go shopping with her friend Mary Krull and has come by to pick up her backpack. In fact, Mary is outside smoking a cigarette. Clarissa suggests that maybe Mary can come in and say hello when she's done. Julia looks embarrassed or perhaps defiant and says she could go get Mary, but Clarissa changes her mind and says there's no need. Julia assures her mother that Mary is friendly and goes to get her.

Mary is stern, with a shaved head. She's wearing a tank top and looks like she's probably older than 40. She and Clarissa greet each other politely. Julia says they're shopping because Mary needs new boots. Clarissa thinks that with Mary, Julia seems like a 1950s housewife. Clarissa tells Julia to take good care of Mary, while Mary secretly thinks about how Clarissa is deluded and if anyone ever decides to “round up the deviants,” Clarissa will be right there next to Mary. Clarissa also secretly thinks Mary is a fraud for being just as aggressive and egotistical as most men.

Julia and Mary get ready to go, and Clarissa reminds Mary to be at Richard's party at five o'clock. As Mary leaves, she thinks about how much she desires Julia but how Julia seems to be straight and probably won't ever love her romantically.

### **Chapter 15: Mrs. Woolf**

Vanessa has left Virginia's house. As Nelly prepares dinner, she's in a surprisingly good mood. Leonard is writing in the study while Virginia looks out the parlor window and watches it



get dark. She's afraid that she feels a headache coming on but realizes it's just the memory of a headache. She thinks of the dead bird in the yard and then goes out to look at it.

Virginia goes out the gate and starts heading toward the center of Richmond, not knowing what she'll do when she gets there. She gets there and overhears conversations of people talking, but they just make her feel more alone. She heads toward the rail station and considers taking a spontaneous trip to London.

When Virginia steps inside the Richmond train station, she sees that it will be almost 25 minutes until the next train to London. She wonders what to do, fearing what will happen if she gets ill again while away. She's over 40 and feels her life is slipping away from her. She buys a ticket and waits at the station for a while, but eventually she decides to walk out toward Kew Road, which will give her just enough time to get back.

As Virginia is walking, she happens to see Leonard. She wonders if she can get away, but he sees her. He asks what she's doing, since it seems like she just disappeared. Virginia accuses Leonard of acting strange himself. Leonard says they must get back in time for dinner so that Nelly doesn't get angry.

Virginia says it's about time for them to move back to London. Leonard isn't sure but says they can discuss it over dinner. They both agree that they wish they could be happy with a quiet life, but they can't. Virginia keeps her train ticket in her bag but plans to never tell Leonard about it.

### **Chapter 16: Mrs. Dalloway**

Oliver St. Ives offers Sally more coffee. His eager assistant pours her some. They're talking about a potential future film that Oliver is excited about, though Sally isn't sure it could ever get made. Oliver assures her that Walter Hardy, a novelist who is also at the lunch with them, can help get it made.

Oliver describes how the film will be a conventional thriller with a gay man for the hero, but he can't be tortured about his sexuality or have HIV. Oliver notices that Sally still doesn't seem convinced by the pitch. She protests that she doesn't even have any connections to Hollywood, but he says she probably knows the industry better than many people who do have connections. Oliver makes plans to discuss the film in more detail with Walter later. Sally realizes that the two of them never really needed her.

After lunch, Sally and Walter stand on a street corner. Walter comments that he'll see Sally later that evening at five o'clock, and Sally wonders who invited him to the party. Walter goes into a store that sells formal shirts to buy a present for his boyfriend, Evan, and Sally ends up following him. Sally thinks about how Evan has been sick for a while. At one point he seemed likely to die, but now he looks more likely to live. She wonders if Walter has mixed feelings.

Sally watches Walter spend \$400 on a shirt. Sally thinks about how many of her own gifts seem to fall short, although Clarissa never admits it. Sally and Walter leave the store and part ways. Sally wishes she could bring back a gift for Clarissa and truly tell her how much she means to

her—although Sally and Clarissa freely say, “I love you,” she wants to say something less ordinary.

Sally takes the subway downtown. She still wants a gift for Clarissa, so she decides to stop at a Korean market and buy some flowers—roses. When Sally gets back to the apartment, she can tell from Clarissa’s voice that something is wrong. Sally asks what’s wrong, and Clarissa mentions Louis’s recent visit and Julia’s visit with Mary. Clarissa notices that Sally bought roses, and they both laugh when they realize that it’s like an O. Henry story since Clarissa just bought roses too.

### **Chapter 17: Mrs. Brown**

Laura gets back from her hotel room near six o’clock, a little later than she planned, thinking about the characters in *Mrs. Dalloway* on the drive home. Even as she pulls into Mrs. Latch’s driveway, Laura continues to feel disconnected from her life. She is also still thinking about death. Laura feels like she’s hiding a secret, like an affair, even though she didn’t do anything particularly harmful.

Laura apologizes to Mrs. Latch for being late, but Mrs. Latch says it’s no problem. Richie starts to cry when Laura comes over, but Mrs. Latch says he’s just glad to see her. Laura is a little embarrassed of how often Richie cries because she figures it makes other people assume that she is overprotective.

Laura takes Richie home, saying they should have just enough time to get everything ready before Dan comes back. All of a sudden, Laura hears Richie say “I love you” in a tone of voice that concerns her because it seems desperate. She wonders if he’s thinking about her with Kitty or if he knows she did something unusual while she was away. She reassures Richie that she loves him and that they’ll have a nice party for Dan with a nice cake that evening.

### **Chapter 18: Mrs. Dalloway**

Clarissa goes to help Richard get ready for his party, but when she knocks and no one answers, she gets nervous. She unlocks the door and goes in. When she calls, Richard answers. He’s in a bathrobe sitting on the sill of an open fifth-story window, with one leg in the apartment and one outside. He sounds calm and acts casual, but Clarissa rushes over, terrified.

Richard says that after taking Xanax and Ritalin together, he felt like he needed more air and light, so he opened all the windows and put his leg outside. He worries that he can’t make it to the party. Clarissa begs him to bring his leg in, but Richard doesn’t move. Clarissa tells him he doesn’t have to worry about the party or the ceremony, but Richard says that even if he skips those, he’ll still have to deal with “the hours,” which keep coming one after the other.

Clarissa tells Richard he still has good days to look forward to, but Richard says that isn’t really true anymore. He tells Clarissa to call his mother, since his mother lives alone. Richard then asks Clarissa to tell him a story about the most ordinary thing she can think of. Clarissa starts telling a very short story about buying flowers that morning.

Richard recalls being 19 and in love with both Clarissa and Louis. He starts talking about how he failed at life. Clarissa tells him again not to worry about the party. Calling her “Mrs. Dalloway,” Richard says Clarissa has been good to her and that he loves her. He thinks the two of them were as happy as any two people could be. Then he slides out the window.

Clarissa screams and goes to the window. She sees Richard still falling, with his robe flapping in the wind and imagines maybe somehow it will be OK. But when he hits the ground, he doesn't get up. She rushes down the stairs to find where Richard fell and knows immediately that he's dead. She pulls back part of his robe to see his head, then screams at what she sees.

Clarissa stays by the body, resting her head against Richard's back. She thinks of all the things she would say to him if she could. She wants to tell him she loves him to and to ask forgiveness for not kissing him on the lips, since she was only trying to do it for his own health.

### **Chapter 19: Mrs. Brown**

Dan blows out his birthday cake, and although Laura applauds and says, "Happy birthday," she is secretly angry at him for accidentally spitting on the cake. But when Dan puts his arm around her, she remembers how good he can be. Laura asks Richie if he made a wish too. Richie nods, even though he didn't think of the idea—his wish, similar to Dan's, is for things to stay the way they are.

Dan asks Richie to help him cut the cake. Laura goes to get dessert plates and thinks about her life compared to Kitty in the hospital. When she puts plates and forks on the table, she feels as if she has somehow miraculously succeeded at the last minute in her plans for the day. Laura watches Dan help Richie cut the cake. Laura imagines good will prevail in the world and even Kitty will get better soon. She savors the moment even as she feels like it's a page in a book about to turn. She watches a smiling Richie lick icing off a candle and make another wish.

### **Chapter 20: Mrs. Woolf**

Virginia is having difficulty concentrating on the books she's reading, so she tries to reassure herself by thinking of how at dinner, she managed to convince Leonard to move back to London. She makes promises to finish writing her current book and write many more.

Suddenly, Virginia thinks of kissing Vanessa. She thinks the kiss was innocent in some ways but also mysterious and not innocent in other ways, which is why they hid it from Nelly. Leonard gets up from his own chair and asks if Virginia is going to bed. She says she's not tired yet, but Leonard says he'd like to see her in bed within a half hour. Virginia agrees. She thinks about how in her book, she will make it so that Clarissa Dalloway has loved a woman and even kissed a woman, but just once. Clarissa will get to go on living her life and enjoying London while some "deranged poet" will die in the novel instead.

### **Chapter 21: Mrs. Brown**

Laura finishes brushing her teeth, thinking of Richie already in bed and Dan waiting for her. She won't be able to read because Dan will want to have sex. She looks at a nearly full bottle of sleeping pills in the bathroom, which she can't use because she's pregnant. She thinks about how taking all the pills would be as simple as checking into a hotel room.

Laura closes the cabinet and heads into her bedroom. Dan says he had a great birthday and invites her to bed. Laura says she's coming, but she doesn't move, feeling like a ghost observing things. Dan invites her to bed again. In the distance, she hears a dog bark.

## **Chapter 22: Mrs. Dalloway**

Clarissa and Sally carefully lead Laura (who is now elderly) down the hallway to their apartment. Julia has put away the food for Richard's party, but the flowers are still in the vase. Clarissa introduces Julia to Laura. Julia offers her condolences. Julia tells them she managed to reach almost everyone on the guest list to tell them not to come, but a few showed up, including Louis, and she had to break the news of Richard's death.

It's now 10 minutes past midnight. Clarissa tells Laura there's a bed ready for her when she wants it. Clarissa says Richard was wonderful, and Laura agrees, saying he was also a good writer. Clarissa senses that Laura knows that Richard's novel was inspired by Clarissa. Laura asks if Clarissa ever edited Richard's writing, but she says an editor needs some objectivity and that she was too close to Richard.

Clarissa says she tried to take care of Richard the best she could. Laura says she did too, but she wishes she could have done better. Laura attempted suicide at one point and fled her family, but has somehow outlasted both Dan, who died of cancer, and her daughter, who was killed by a drunk driver.

Clarissa wonders how Richard felt as he jumped out the window. She wonders what it felt like to hit the ground and assumes there couldn't have been much pain—and might have even been some pleasure. Sally and Julia have decided to eat some of the party food so it won't go to waste. Clarissa thinks the food looks pristine and permanent, even though she knows how perishable it really is. Sally says that everyone should eat and go to bed.

Clarissa thinks about how after she and everyone else goes to bed, it will truly feel like Richard has left the world. She wonders if any of Richard's writing will survive, imagining that it's possible people in the future might want to read him but that most books, even good ones, are more likely to vanish. She thinks about how most people lead lives full of difficulty with only "an hour here or there" when everything seems to be perfect.

Julia asks if she should make a plate for Laura, but Clarissa says she'll see to Laura. Laura gives a weak smile, and Clarissa has no idea what Laura could be thinking. Clarissa is no longer Mrs. Dalloway because Richard isn't around anymore to call her that. She has yet another hour in front of her to face. She invites Laura into the kitchen, saying everything's ready.