

Chapter XXXIII

Chapter XXXIII begins with Mibs feeling completely overwhelmed by the emotions swirling within her as she sits alone on the floor, separated from her family, with her father in the hospital. The absence of her father's comforting presence has left her feeling unsettled and unsure, and the weight of the moment causes her anxiety to rise. Her brother, Will, notices her distress and, along with a caseworker named Bill, steps forward to offer her comfort. Bill, recognizing how deeply affected Mibs is, speaks to her with a gentle understanding, acknowledging the pain she's experiencing. In an attempt to help ease her turmoil, Bill suggests they go to the hospital to find their father, a proposition that catches everyone off guard, as they had not expected this offer. The suggestion is unexpected but also carries with it the promise of a sense of direction, which leaves everyone in the room both surprised and cautiously hopeful.

The story takes a reflective turn as Mibs and her siblings begin to recount the chaotic events that have brought them to this point, sharing their perspective on everything that's happened. Bill listens closely, offering empathy as he absorbs their story, not interrupting but instead showing them the care they need in this moment of crisis. After they finish, Bill somberly informs them of their father's condition, emphasizing that the family's presence is crucial during such a difficult time. This news further heightens the sense of urgency, and Fish, who has always been aware of the weight of responsibility, acknowledges the gravity of the situation. He suggests that everyone, no matter how challenging it may be, must remain strong in order to help their family through this trial. His words resonate deeply within the group, as they realize that the support of one another is essential to getting through this hardship.

Bill then addresses the actions they've taken that led to the current situation, acknowledging that their behaviors have caused concern among their families and the people around them. He reassures the group that there are no legal ramifications for

Lester and Lill, who have been the ones looking after the children during the chaos. Bill's words help calm their fears, reminding them that the immediate concern is to safely transport the children to Salina, where their father is being treated. The news that there would be no legal consequences brings a measure of relief, allowing the group to focus on what's important next—getting to their father. Mibs, feeling a deep sense of gratitude toward Bill, silently thanks him for the reassurance and kindness he has shown throughout this difficult time. She wishes, however, that she could express her thanks more openly and with more depth than mere words could convey, yet in her heart, she knows the comfort his presence offers is invaluable.

After a brief discussion, the decision is made that an armed officer will accompany the children for safety on the journey to the hospital. Though the decision is made to ensure the children's security, it also makes the situation feel even more serious, heightening the tension in the room. Mibs can't help but notice the change in atmosphere, feeling the weight of their circumstances more acutely. Meanwhile, Lill comforts Lester, offering him words of encouragement and support, reminding him that they are all in this together. She reassures him, providing the emotional strength he needs to face the journey ahead. As the family prepares to depart, Lill's continued support offers a sense of solidarity, helping to steady everyone's nerves.

As they get ready to leave, Bill offers Will a chance to ride along in the patrol car, an offer that is tempting but also creates internal conflict for Will. The idea of leaving his siblings behind, even in the safety of the patrol car, feels wrong to him. Will, after a moment of hesitation, chooses to stay with his siblings, further solidifying his commitment to his family. His decision highlights the strong familial loyalty that runs through the siblings, emphasizing that, despite the uncertainty and fear they all face, they are committed to sticking together. This decision is not just about proximity but about the emotional ties that bind them, and Will's choice underscores the depth of the connection between them.

As the chapter draws to a close, Mibs reflects on the unpredictable nature of life and how both positive and negative experiences are often intertwined. She considers how

the lessons she has learned from this chaotic journey are shaped by the contrasts between hardship and love, uncertainty and hope. The events that have unfolded so far have taught her valuable lessons about the unpredictability of life and the power of family support. Mibs realizes that despite the challenges they face, the presence of her family offers strength in the face of adversity. She also recognizes how each experience, whether good or bad, plays a crucial role in shaping the person she is becoming. As the journey to Salina continues, Mibs holds onto the hope that, despite the uncertainty ahead, the love and support of her family will guide them through this difficult time.