

# Chapter 16

Chapter 16 opens with a light-hearted moment the morning after a wild night, as Lila teases Phoebe for cleaning the room, her hangover from the previous night's celebration evident. Though Lila seems disoriented, she casually mentions their plans for the day, including the surfing lesson awaiting them, yet her tone reflects little enthusiasm. Juice, her companion, pushes for them to hurry, as they are already behind schedule, but Phoebe, sensing the need for space, decides to stay behind and give Lila some alone time amidst the chaotic wedding preparations. Phoebe's decision to hold back hints at a growing understanding of the emotional undercurrents in the group, as she navigates her own feelings and obligations within this turbulent atmosphere.

As Lila prepares for the day, she shares her doubts about her ability to surf, admitting she never wanted to take part in the activity in the first place. Despite initially promising Juice a morning of surfing, Lila now feels a reluctance, revealing her underlying disinterest. This moment of vulnerability contrasts sharply with Phoebe's quiet introspection, as she contemplates her own place in the wedding festivities and the role she is expected to play. Beneath the surface, tensions regarding her feelings for Gary begin to surface, adding complexity to Phoebe's interactions as she processes her emotional state. Lila's casual approach to the day's events juxtaposes with Phoebe's more serious internal dialogue, highlighting the differences in their perspectives and their evolving relationships with the people around them.

At the beach, Phoebe and Gary fumble as they struggle to fit into their wetsuits, providing a lighthearted moment that breaks the tension between them. Their awkwardness, while comedic, also draws them closer, with Gary's laughter making Phoebe smile and adding warmth to the moment. The ease of Gary's humor contrasts with the difficulty of their shared challenge, and Phoebe begins to appreciate the

authenticity of his laughter, which brings a sense of ease amid the discomfort. The interaction deepens their connection, allowing Phoebe to let go of some of her previous reservations, even as the complexities of her feelings continue to linger beneath the surface. Their shared laughter signals the growing comfort between them, while also setting the tone for the day ahead.

When they meet Aspen, their surf instructor, Phoebe recalls her yoga lessons from the pandemic, which help her feel more grounded and present as she prepares to catch her first wave. As she manages to stand on the board for the first time, the exhilaration of success quickly turns into a thrilling tumble into the ocean, where the saltwater and the rush of the waves overwhelm her senses. This experience, though brief, allows Phoebe to feel a sense of freedom and vitality that she had been missing. The dynamic between the trio—Phoebe, Gary, and Juice—grows more familial as they cheer for Juice, who quickly masters the waves, further bonding them through shared moments of joy and success. The playful camaraderie strengthens their connection, making the day feel more like an adventure among close friends than an obligation.

As the session progresses, the waves grow larger, and the trio's laughter grows louder, signaling their deepening bond and increasing enjoyment of the activity. The experience becomes one of exhilaration, not just from the waves but from the sense of unity they feel as they conquer the surf together. Afterward, they head to Flo's for lunch, celebrating their accomplishments from the day while Phoebe reflects on the growing emotions she feels for Gary. The camaraderie of the day and the simple joy of being together highlight the complexity of her feelings, blending happiness with a sense of bittersweetness. Phoebe's desire to connect with Gary intensifies, but she remains apprehensive about fully opening up to him, fearing that the moment might be fleeting and not last.

Despite the underlying tension, Phoebe finds herself immersed in the warmth of the day, trying to savor the joy and simplicity of the moments spent with Gary and Juice. As they go through mundane errands, Phoebe is able to find humor in life's simplicity, drawing closer to Gary in ways she hadn't anticipated. The ease with which they

navigate these small tasks together creates a sense of normalcy, one that Phoebe hasn't experienced in a long time. Yet, as the day draws to a close, she feels the subtle pang of realization that moments like these are fragile, and the warmth she's found might not last forever. Still, she's grateful for the connections she's made, and she finds herself wishing for more of these small, joyful moments with Gary. These fleeting instances remind Phoebe of the deeper emotional complexities she's facing, pushing her to confront the uncertainty of her feelings while appreciating the rare moments of happiness she's able to share with those around her.