

Chapter 9

Chapter 9 begins with Phoebe joining Lila's wedding party, which carries an eerie, almost cult-like sense of camaraderie. Lila introduces Phoebe to her friends, including High Bun, who despite her name now wears a long fishtail braid, and Neck Pillow, sporting an eye-catching diamond necklace. The introductions are quirky and lighthearted, with humor revealing the unique personalities of the group members, especially Marla, the groom's sister, and Juice, the groom's daughter, who prefers to be called by her unusual nickname. The interactions are a blend of humor and oddities, creating a peculiar dynamic between the characters that makes Phoebe both intrigued and slightly uncomfortable.

As the conversation progresses, Phoebe observes Lila's demeanor shift—she becomes quieter and less assertive around the wedding guests, revealing a more reserved side of herself. This transformation causes Phoebe to feel protective of Lila, reminding her of her own wedding experiences where similar shifts in mood occurred. Though Phoebe tries to lighten the atmosphere with humor, Lila remains subdued, while others engage in sarcastic banter and familiar exchanges, which only make Phoebe feel more out of place. The contrasting dynamics among the group members become clearer, as Phoebe reflects on her role in the wedding and her discomfort with the tensions simmering beneath the surface.

Lila begins to share the story of how she met Gary, the groom, at her mother's art gallery, and the group eagerly discusses this connection. They are especially intrigued by the coincidence that Gary was also her father's doctor, which adds a layer of significance to their relationship. During the storytelling, there's a humorous exchange about a nude painting, but the mood shifts quickly when tensions arise within the group, resulting in an awkward silence. The story about Lila and Gary's meeting is both charming and unsettling, as it reveals more about their relationship and the

awkwardness in the room, setting the tone for the unfolding dynamics. The group's reactions to the story suggest underlying discomfort, and it becomes evident that the group's interactions are far from seamless.

As the conversation draws to a close, the women prepare to depart for the wedding venue, but the dynamics shift again when the topic of transportation comes up. High Bun and Lila decide to drive a vintage convertible, but the car's old mechanics require Phoebe's help, as she is familiar with stick shifts. This marks the beginning of a change in the group's mood, as the journey toward Bowen's Wharf is filled with a blend of anticipation and nostalgia. The car ride reveals different sides of the women, with Phoebe observing their contrasting personalities and interactions. Their conversations drift from lighthearted banter to deeper, more personal exchanges, as they navigate through the traffic chaos, punctuating the journey with humor despite the undercurrents of discomfort.

Upon reaching Bowen's Wharf, the group's arrival is met with a mix of excitement and unease, as Phoebe notices Gary in the crowd. Their past connection from the hot tub is briefly acknowledged, but the moment is overshadowed by the awkwardness of the situation. Juice's outburst about her recently "deceased" virtual dog named Human Princess shifts the tone of the gathering, revealing deeper emotional currents within the family. The mention of loss and memories brings a more somber undertone to the event, highlighting the complexities of family relationships. The chapter ends with the group being invited to continue their gathering on a boat, maintaining a balance of fascination, tension, and unexpected emotional revelations among the characters. This scene encapsulates the emotional intricacies of the gathering and the undercurrent of unspoken feelings that will continue to shape the interactions between the characters.