

Chapter 13

Chapter 13 starts with an intimate and rather unexpected gesture from Don. On the morning of the first day of rehearsals for *Little Women*, he wakes the protagonist with breakfast in bed—half a grapefruit and a lit cigarette. The simplicity and the thoughtfulness of this gesture make the protagonist feel special, and as Don leaves for the day, he offers words of encouragement, mentioning that today she would show Celia St. James what it truly means to be an actress. The protagonist, feeling both cared for and supported, eats the grapefruit with a smile before moving on with her morning routine. She leaves the tray in bed and heads for the shower, already mentally preparing for the work ahead.

When she exits the shower, the protagonist finds her maid, Paula, already cleaning up the room. Paula is quietly picking up the remains of the cigarette, a reminder of the protagonist's chaotic, untidy lifestyle. The protagonist is not particularly neat, as evidenced by the scattered clothes, slippers, and towel in the room. Paula, who clearly disapproves of the disorder, has her work cut out for her. The protagonist, in a hurry to get dressed for the set, asks Paula to leave her alone for a moment. Although not truly in a rush, she doesn't want Paula to witness her dressing, especially because of the bruise on her ribs. The bruise is a painful reminder of an incident nine days earlier when Don pushed her down the stairs. Though the protagonist feels a need to defend Don, the reality of the situation remains difficult to deny.

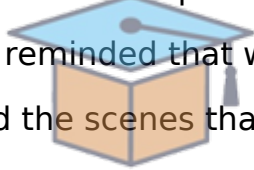
The protagonist, still processing the incident, reflects on the circumstances leading up to her injury. The push was not as severe as it may sound, she tries to convince herself, but the truth is, it caused a painful fall. When she landed, the handle of a drawer had hit her rib cage, leaving a bruise that was slow to heal. Even though Don seemed concerned after the incident, his words felt hollow—his nonchalance in asking if she was alright was jarring. The protagonist, feeling emotionally conflicted, had

convinced herself that she was fine, though the bruising told a different story. When Paula reenters the room moments later, the protagonist's frustration peaks. She had asked Paula to leave, but the intrusion felt even more unbearable because of the personal nature of the pain she was enduring. She felt betrayed by the maid for not reporting Don's actions, especially since Paula seemed intent on focusing on her own story rather than the troubling situation that had taken place.

Two hours later, the protagonist arrives on the set of *Little Women*, where the set has been transformed into a New England cabin complete with snow-covered windows. As she walks in, she is reminded that work must go on despite personal difficulties. Ruby, her co-star, is there, and the two of them quickly bond over their shared resentment of Celia St. James. The newcomer, despite her charm and apparent innocence, is an unwelcome presence for Ruby and the protagonist. Both women see Celia as a threat to their roles in the film, especially considering how the audience tends to favor the actress playing Beth, given the emotional weight of the character. The industry, as they know it, is cutthroat, and no one truly believes that a rising tide lifts all boats—it's a matter of competition, and there's no room for anyone else to overshadow their performances.

When Celia approaches Ruby and the protagonist, she exudes a childlike vulnerability that feels out of place among the competitive nature of their environment. Her soft, girl-next-door appearance—complete with big, innocent blue eyes and long, flowing strawberry-red hair—strikes the protagonist as almost too perfect, too simple. While Celia is the epitome of a fresh, unblemished beauty, the protagonist feels like the type of beauty that is unattainable for most women—a beauty that is difficult to replicate and sets her apart. Men may admire Celia's looks, but for women like the protagonist, there's a sense of isolation in being perceived as something unattainable. The contrast between their looks and personalities reveals the tensions that already exist beneath the surface of their professional relationship. For the protagonist, Celia's entry into their tight-knit world only complicates things further, making the desire to prove herself even stronger.

This chapter encapsulates the tension that can arise on set when personal lives are mixed with professional ambitions. The protagonist's feelings of isolation are underscored by the way Celia's innocence contrasts with her own hardened persona, honed by years in the industry. The bruises she carries, both physically and emotionally, are part of her internal struggle to reconcile the demands of fame with the reality of her personal life. The women around her, particularly Ruby and Celia, represent different facets of her Hollywood experience: competition, camaraderie, and the potential for both friendship and rivalry. As the protagonist navigates this complex environment, she's reminded that while beauty and talent are vital, it's often the relationships behind the scenes that define success in Hollywood. Through her interactions with others, she learns more about herself—how much she's willing to sacrifice, what she's willing to endure, and how she can use her experiences to further her career. The challenge, however, is in maintaining her sense of self while climbing the ladder of success.



Summary