

Chapter 12

Chapter 12 opens with the protagonist recalling the troubling cycle of violence and reconciliation in her marriage. Don hits her once, apologizes, and she convinces herself it won't happen again, but when she expresses doubt about having a family, it happens again. She tries to justify his actions, believing that maybe it was her fault for not communicating clearly. The next day, Don brings flowers, gets down on his knees, and apologizes, but the cycle continues. The protagonist, caught between conflicting emotions, starts to accept these apologies as part of their routine, even though deep down, she knows this isn't how love should feel.

Later, after an argument at the Oscars, Don, drunk and upset over his loss, takes his frustration out on her once more. He shoves her out of the car, calling her background into question, and despite her anger, she lets it slide once again. The next morning, he comes crawling back with another apology, and though the protagonist doesn't believe him anymore, she accepts it because it's easier than addressing the truth. She compares this behavior to fixing a broken dress with a safety pin—something that feels like part of her routine. This resignation becomes more apparent when Harry Cameron visits her dressing room with good news: *Little Women* is getting the green light, and she's been cast as Jo March.

Harry's announcement about the cast stirs both excitement and trepidation in the protagonist. Celia St. James, the young actress who has been gaining attention for her role in a period piece, will play Beth. Ruby and the protagonist are both wary of Celia's talent and the potential threat she poses to their careers, especially considering the favorable attention Celia has been receiving. Celia's beauty and innocence seem to stand in stark contrast to the protagonist's more established star power, but she recognizes that Celia's growing influence could overshadow them if they don't deliver top performances. The protagonist, despite her reservations, resolves to give the best

performance of her life, determined that when audiences see *Little Women*, they won't remember Beth but rather the middle sister who dies. Harry, always the supportive friend, reassures her that her talent will shine through and that the world already knows how great she is.

In the midst of the conversation, Harry notices a bruise on the protagonist's face, a remnant from her latest altercation with Don. His concern is evident, and he promises to take action, offering to talk to Ari Sullivan. However, the protagonist is firm in her resolve, unable to leave Don despite the abuse. Her complex feelings of love for him are interwoven with a sense of dependency—she acknowledges that her desire for him and his approval often overrides her sense of self-worth. She loves him, and she wants him, but she also craves the spotlight, a desire that ties her even more tightly to the very man who hurts her. This internal conflict, the battle between her love for Don and her yearning for independence, reveals the painful reality of living under the public's gaze, where personal relationships are often overshadowed by ambition and image.

This chapter lays bare the psychological complexity of the protagonist's relationship with Don. Her emotional turmoil is compounded by the way Hollywood's expectations shape her identity. The tension between her love for Don and her need to remain relevant in the industry creates an ongoing struggle, one that is only intensified by the cycle of violence and reconciliation. The theme of self-sacrifice, both personally and professionally, is at the forefront of this chapter, as the protagonist navigates the fine line between surviving in Hollywood and preserving her dignity. Despite the hardships, she remains determined to prove herself, not just as an actress, but as a woman who can overcome the obstacles that life—and the men in her life—continue to throw at her. It's a poignant exploration of how love, power, and ambition can entangle to shape one's identity in a world where appearances are everything.