

Chapter 15

Chapter 15 opens with the protagonist and Don in the quiet privacy of their bedroom, a rare moment of intimacy amidst the whirlwind of Hollywood life. Don, ever the confident one, casually asks how the rehearsals are going, and the protagonist admits that Celia is as talented as anticipated, perhaps even more so. Don, however, is more focused on his own career trajectory, boasting about the success of *The People of Montgomery County* and his impending contract renewal. He is at the peak of his career, and with his leverage, he claims that Ari Sullivan would give him anything he asked for to keep him happy. Don's suggestion to remove Celia from the project entirely to maintain the protagonist's status seems like an easy solution. However, the protagonist refuses, stating that it is not necessary, as Celia is only in a supporting role. Instead, the protagonist chooses to focus on their own position as the lead, expressing a calm acceptance of the situation and even finding something about Celia that is appealing.

The next day, during their lunch break, the protagonist and Celia take an impromptu trip in Celia's vintage pink 1956 Chevy, a car that reflects her bold personality. Despite her poor driving skills, which have the protagonist gripping the door handle in fear, the two women are in high spirits. As they make their way through Hollywood Boulevard, Celia suggests they stop at Schwab's, a well-known hangout where many of the city's most influential figures, including the famous columnist Sidney Skolsky, often spent their time. The protagonist immediately senses that Celia wants to be seen there, not only for a milkshake but to boost her own visibility in the industry. Initially, the protagonist is skeptical, interpreting Celia's desire to be seen with them as a strategic move. However, Celia insists that her intentions are genuine—that she simply wanted to enjoy a milkshake together, but she thought of Schwab's as an additional opportunity for exposure once they were already out. The protagonist, however, is not

easily convinced and remains wary of Celia's motives.

Their conversation and dynamic shift as they decide to drive to a quieter spot, CC Brown's, for ice cream instead. Here, the protagonist asserts their control over the situation by suggesting a change in plans, refusing to let Celia steer them into the spotlight against their will. By choosing a location that is more subdued and less likely to attract attention, the protagonist makes it clear that they won't be used for the benefit of someone else's image. At CC Brown's, as they sit and share milkshakes, the protagonist uses the moment to impart some life lessons to Celia. They explain the importance of pushing boundaries in Hollywood to get ahead and that, in the end, everyone is using someone, whether they admit it or not. The protagonist admits, without hesitation, that they have used others to get to where they are, and they are fine with that. Hollywood, the protagonist emphasizes, is a game that requires people to be ruthless, to use others without guilt, and to be unapologetically ambitious in the pursuit of success.

As Celia absorbs this hard truth, she expresses some discomfort at the idea of using others, though she has no doubt that the protagonist's approach has worked. The conversation between them continues, revealing the growing complexity of their relationship. The protagonist, initially defensive, begins to understand that Celia is not only trying to learn but also seeking a genuine partnership that could benefit both of them. Celia's ambition is just as strong as the protagonist's, but where the protagonist has become adept at using people to climb the ladder, Celia still wrestles with the ethics of such tactics. Despite this, there's a mutual recognition that, in Hollywood, survival often requires compromise, and both women are aware of the stakes at play.

The conversation takes a more personal turn as Celia admits she feels more drawn to the protagonist, not just for her fame but for the way she unapologetically takes what she wants. The protagonist, while initially skeptical of Celia's admiration, is somewhat disarmed by the sincerity behind her words. Their bond, forged in the fires of ambition, continues to grow, though it is a complicated one, built on mutual respect for each other's abilities and drive. Celia acknowledges that the protagonist is currently more

famous and powerful, but she doesn't let that discourage her. In fact, Celia expresses a desire to become even bigger, to eclipse the protagonist's success. The tension between them, however, doesn't feel hostile—it feels like the beginning of a potential partnership, where both women have something to gain from the other. Celia suggests that they help each other grow in the industry, though the protagonist is cautious, unsure of what this could mean for their future competition.

The chapter ends on a poignant note, with Celia declaring her intention to learn from the protagonist, offering to help with her scenes and teach her what she knows. This proposal seems to mark the beginning of an unspoken agreement between them—one where each woman will lift the other up in a world where success often depends on the strength of your allies. As they share a moment of mutual understanding, both women realize that they are far from the typical actresses in Hollywood. They are calculating, driven, and determined to make their mark in an industry that rewards both talent and ruthlessness. Celia's final confession that she truly likes the protagonist, not just for her success but for her unapologetic nature, reveals a layer of authenticity beneath the surface-level rivalry that has defined their relationship so far. The protagonist, in turn, begins to soften toward Celia, realizing that perhaps their futures, while inevitably competitive, might be brighter if they truly help each other rather than tear each other down.