

Chapter 68

Chapter 68 begins with the protagonist reflecting on her decision to visit Evelyn's apartment, unsure exactly when she made up her mind to go. It was almost as if the decision was made for her, as she suddenly found herself on the way there, walking through the familiar streets from the subway. The closer she gets to Evelyn's apartment, the more she realizes that there was no other choice but to come; it was as inevitable as anything could be. She understands that her position at Vivant, the magazine she works for, is something she fought for and cannot afford to jeopardize. Her arrival, while feeling somewhat rushed, also feels like the natural step in her journey, even though she's the last to arrive.

As Grace opens the door, it's clear that the morning has been chaotic for her. Grace's usual calm demeanor is replaced with a stressed appearance, hair falling from her ponytail, a tiredness in her eyes. She explains how Evelyn had a team of people arriving earlier than expected, starting with a makeup artist at dawn and a lighting consultant who found the most flattering spot for the shoot. Grace had been scrambling to get everything ready, including scrubbing the terrace for two hours, a task made more difficult by the cold weather. Grace jokes that she's looking forward to her vacation, something she clearly needs after the exhausting morning. Despite the stress, Grace's humor helps lighten the mood, and her laughter echoes in the air, offering a brief reprieve from the tension.

The photo shoot begins, and the protagonist steps out onto the terrace, where Evelyn is being surrounded by a bustling crew. It's clear that Evelyn is in her element, surrounded by lights, cameras, and equipment, with a wind machine blowing her hair dramatically as she dons a silk green gown. Even in her later years, Evelyn commands the room in a way that is almost magnetic. As the photographer captures her, it's evident that she hasn't lost any of the star power that made her famous. The

protagonist, once intimidated by her, now sees Evelyn not just as an icon but as a woman in full control of her environment. However, watching her in this setting, the protagonist realizes that Evelyn's true essence, the one that resonates with people, is not just in her looks or her fame but in the confidence and self-assuredness she exudes naturally.

Evelyn then notices the protagonist behind the lighting crew and calls for a few photos together. Despite her reluctance, the protagonist steps forward, uncomfortable with the sudden request but unable to refuse. The moment feels loaded, as Evelyn's desire for a photo isn't just about vanity but about marking this part of her life. As the camera clicks, the protagonist feels exposed, caught between the conflicting emotions of her personal discomfort and her professional obligation. Evelyn's warmth, however, shines through, and there's a sincerity in her smile that the protagonist hadn't expected. For a brief moment, Evelyn's true concern for her well-being becomes evident, adding a layer of depth to their complicated relationship. The protagonist, caught in a whirlwind of conflicting emotions, finds herself playing a role she never quite signed up for: pretending to be captivated, pretending to be okay, even as everything within her feels unsettled.

After the photo shoot concludes, and the team starts packing up, the protagonist prepares to leave, feeling the weight of the day. Evelyn is upstairs changing, and the protagonist takes a moment to speak with Grace, who is cleaning up the kitchen. Grace reveals that she's headed on a much-needed vacation to Costa Rica, courtesy of Evelyn, who gave her two tickets for a week-long trip. It's a thoughtful and generous gesture, further showcasing Evelyn's ability to surprise and care for those around her in meaningful ways. As Grace excitedly prepares for her trip, she shares her gratitude, and Evelyn's gesture becomes a symbol of the different ways she nurtures those close to her, even as she deals with the whirlwind of her own fame.

When Evelyn joins them downstairs, she is dressed casually but still radiates the same beauty and presence that makes her seem both plain and extraordinary at the same time. She insists that Grace leave for her vacation, expressing how much she

appreciates Grace's help and how important it is for her to take a break. Evelyn's concern for Grace is genuine, and her appreciation comes through in her insistence that Grace relax and enjoy herself. The protagonist observes the scene, starting to realize that Evelyn's capacity for caring is often masked by her public persona. There's a quiet understanding between the two women, an unspoken bond that goes beyond the surface of their relationship.

The protagonist begins to see Evelyn in a new light. She's no longer just the iconic figure she once thought she knew but a woman who has built relationships over the years with care, dedication, and generosity. Evelyn's kindness and thoughtfulness, even in the midst of her demanding life, show a deeper side of her that's not immediately visible to the public. As Grace leaves for her vacation, the protagonist is left to reflect on the layers of Evelyn's character that are just beginning to unfold. There's still much she doesn't understand about Evelyn, but she's starting to realize that, like anyone, Evelyn is a complex figure with many sides—some known only to those closest to her.

This moment offers the protagonist a chance to reflect on her own place in Evelyn's life, and the role she plays in telling Evelyn's story. The complexities of their relationship are only just beginning to surface, and as the protagonist steps away from the apartment, she finds herself pondering what she's learned. Evelyn's life, full of fame, mystery, and power, is slowly becoming a little more human, a little more accessible, as the protagonist navigates the intricacies of their connection. It's clear that there's much more to Evelyn than meets the eye, and the protagonist's journey to uncover the truth behind her public persona has only just begun.