

Chapter 17

"Chapter 17" opens on a night of quiet celebration and reflection, as Celia joins the narrator to mark the release of a new article. While Don is unsure if the decision to release the article was the right one, and Harry is preoccupied with a secretive new relationship, the narrator sees this moment as an opportunity to unwind and enjoy life. The evening is spent in the comfort of the narrator's home, without the usual entourage or staff, a rare occurrence that allows the protagonist to feel a bit more human, rather than the polished, public figure that she is known to be. As Celia searches the kitchen for a corkscrew, their easygoing banter reveals the stark contrast between their personal lives and their public personas. The lack of staff, with the studio still vetting applicants for a maid, highlights the vulnerability and realness of the moment, making the kitchen—a space usually distant for the wealthy—feel almost unfamiliar.

The kitchen, in all its domestic simplicity, represents a part of life the protagonist never really had a chance to experience growing up. Being wealthy has a way of detaching people from the simple pleasures and responsibilities of life, such as cooking or even choosing the right wineglass. It's a reflection of how, in the world of the rich and famous, parts of their homes—and, by extension, their lives—can feel like a performance or set, rather than something authentically theirs. As Celia finds the corkscrew and the protagonist fumbles for wineglasses, they share an understated laugh, recognizing how much of their lives are dictated by others. Their glassware choices become a metaphor for their lives: a mismatch of identities and roles, trying to find what fits, even as they stumble through the motions of their day-to-day existence.

The conversation shifts to their backgrounds, with Celia reflecting on her privileged upbringing in Georgia. Despite being surrounded by wealth and family, her life is far from perfect. Her parents, with their notions of Southern nobility, and her siblings,

some of whom don't even understand her career in movies, paint a picture of family ties that are both suffocating and supportive. In contrast, the narrator shares that her familial relationships are virtually nonexistent. Having been estranged from her father and relatives back in Hell's Kitchen, she has no longing for those connections. This conversation reveals the divide between the two women: Celia, who has money and family history but yearns for a sense of authenticity, and the narrator, who has carved her own path, driven solely by her ambition. It's a connection that transcends their differences, one rooted in mutual admiration and understanding of the sacrifices each has made to get where they are.



As the night continues, their conversation becomes more candid, with Celia showing a surprising vulnerability as she discusses her desire to stand out in a world that often defines women by their appearances. The protagonist, on the other hand, is aware of the attention her looks garner, but it's the quiet strength she has built in her rise to fame that defines her. Their friendship is tested, not by jealousy or competition, but by an understanding of what it means to truly be seen in a world obsessed with surface-level beauty. As Celia takes the protagonist's hand, toasting to her being "absolutely unstoppable," their bond deepens, showing the layers of support they provide for one another. The celebration, however small and intimate, marks a pivotal moment in their relationship: a reminder that behind the glittering façades of Hollywood, there are real, raw emotions and struggles at play.

When the conversation turns to their careers, both women express admiration for one another, albeit with subtle tensions beneath the surface. Celia reflects on how the protagonist's performance in *Father and Daughter* was so captivating that it left a lasting impact on her, while the protagonist, ever self-critical, deflects the compliment. Despite the mutual admiration, the tension between them is palpable, with both women struggling to reconcile their competitive instincts with their desire to support one another. The chapter explores the complexities of female friendships in the high-stakes, image-driven world of Hollywood, where every relationship has its roots in ambition, rivalry, and shared experiences of navigating an industry that demands

constant reinvention.

Their discussion shifts to more personal revelations as they start a fire in the fireplace, a simple, almost childish endeavor that leads to a playful moment of camaraderie. The contrast of the warm, intimate setting with the world outside—the chilly desert winds and the Hollywood facade—creates a space for honesty and vulnerability. In a world where both women are constantly performing, this moment of trying to start a fire becomes symbolic of their desire for something real and grounding. Celia, once again, shows her carefree side as she grabs the wine and drinks directly from the bottle, a rebellious act that only deepens the protagonist's sense of closeness to her. It's in these moments, unguarded and raw, that the true nature of their friendship is revealed—not in the glitz and glamour, but in the shared understanding of the pressures they face.

Their playful moment takes a turn when the protagonist, in a teasing act, spills wine on Celia's shirt. The act, though accidental, serves as a turning point in their evening—a reminder that, despite the tension in their careers and friendships, they can still laugh and enjoy each other's company. As the protagonist leads Celia to her bedroom to change, they share a quiet, poignant exchange. The protagonist's confession that she doesn't know if she loves Don anymore reveals the emotional turmoil that comes with their relationship. Celia, with her directness, pushes for an answer, but the protagonist's response shows the complexity of love in a world where public image often blurs the lines between affection and obligation. This moment encapsulates the heart of the chapter: navigating love, fame, and the intricate dynamics of female friendships in an industry built on illusions.

Celia's final question, "Do you love him?" cuts through the emotional fog of the evening, and the protagonist's answer is complex and unresolved. It's not a simple declaration of love, but rather an acknowledgment of the complicated, layered nature of their relationship. The chapter concludes with the protagonist offering Celia a shirt from her closet, a seemingly trivial act that holds deeper significance. The lilac button-down blouse, which doesn't fit the protagonist well but would suit Celia perfectly,

symbolizes the passing of both material and emotional wealth between them. In this quiet moment, as Celia dons the shirt, they share an unspoken understanding—both women have found something rare in one another, a bond forged in the fires of ambition, love, and mutual respect. It is this connection that will carry them through the challenges ahead in the ever-turbulent world of Hollywood.

