

# Chapter 14

Chapter 14 begins with Evelyn suggesting to the protagonist that they pick up their conversation tomorrow, a casual statement that underscores the complexity of their interactions. The sun has already set, and as the protagonist scans the room, they notice the remnants of several meals scattered around, a sign of the time spent working through the day. The protagonist's mind is clouded with the weight of the situation—questions about their next steps linger, and as they begin packing up their things, Evelyn casually drops a bombshell: her publicist has received an email from the protagonist's editor inquiring about a potential photo shoot for the June cover. This unexpected development sends the protagonist into a swirl of uncertainty, as they realize they have not yet shared their plans with their team, adding another layer of complexity to an already complicated situation.

The protagonist is keenly aware that they need to update their editor, Frankie, on the circumstances, but they remain unsure about how to proceed. There's a slight hesitation in their response, a tint of embarrassment as they admit they have not made their next move clear yet. Evelyn, sensing the protagonist's discomfort, reassures them with a calm and understanding demeanor. She expresses no judgment, subtly acknowledging the often-blurry line between truth and fabrication in their industry. Evelyn's words ring with a knowing confidence: "You'll do what you need to do." Yet, despite this reassurance, the protagonist remains uncertain about what actions to take next.

Later, when the protagonist returns home, they are greeted by a heavy package from their mother, sitting just inside their building's door. It takes considerable effort to drag it inside, and upon opening the box, the protagonist finds it filled with photo albums from their late father. Each album is stamped with "James Grant" in the corner, a reminder of the father's career as a photographer in the film industry. The protagonist,

feeling compelled to reconnect with a piece of their past, sits down on the floor and begins flipping through the albums. These candid on-set photos capture fleeting moments of directors, actors, and extras, showing a side of Hollywood that most people never see—the raw, unscripted moments where no one is posing for the camera. The protagonist remembers how much their father loved his work, especially taking photos of people unaware of him. It's clear that he thrived in capturing the unnoticed moments, offering a glimpse into the behind-the-scenes world of cinema.

The protagonist reflects on their own childhood, recalling a time when they were just six years old, visiting their father on a work trip in Vancouver. The cold, distant environment of the city, coupled with their father's long absences, left an impression on them. It was during that trip that their father imparted a piece of advice that would shape the protagonist's entire life: "You have to find a job that makes your heart feel big, not small. Promise me that." The protagonist made that promise, but by the age of eight, they had lost him. That advice stayed with the protagonist throughout their life, pushing them to pursue a career that would fuel their passion and expand their soul, a mission that was both empowering and challenging. In high school, they dabbled in various activities—photography, theater, and sports—but nothing seemed to click. It wasn't until they started writing about people in college that they felt a deep connection to something. Writing, they realized, was the job that would make their heart feel big.

The protagonist's journey led them from composition classes at USC to journalism school at NYU, and from there to a career that fluctuated between freelance work for obscure blogs and eventually finding a stable position at *Vivant*. Along the way, they met David, worked with various publications, and eventually landed the story of a lifetime with Evelyn. Reflecting on their father's words, the protagonist realizes that their entire career trajectory—one defined by passion for storytelling and connection—has been rooted in that promise. They wonder briefly if they would have pursued this path with such determination if their father had still been alive to guide them. Would his untimely death have made his advice feel more precious, or would

they have taken it for granted if it had been available indefinitely?

As the protagonist reaches the end of the last photo album, they come across images that are far more personal. The photos, taken at a family barbecue, show a side of their parents' lives that had nothing to do with Hollywood. The protagonist's mother, who appears in the background of many of the images, was a constant presence, yet there's something about seeing these candid moments that highlights how much their father loved capturing the essence of ordinary life. One photo stands out: a shot of the protagonist as a young child, eating cake with their hands, looking directly into the camera with their father's arm around them and their mother holding them. The image captures a fleeting moment of familial love, untouched by the industry's demands. The protagonist reflects on their name—Elizabeth Monique Grant—and how it changed after their father's death. Initially called Elizabeth, they became Monique to honor their father's love for the name, a tribute to a part of him that would never leave them.

This reflection brings the protagonist to a deeper understanding of their identity and the sacrifices made by both their parents. Their mother, a white woman, and their father, a Black man, had faced immense challenges raising a child in a racially divided society. The family's struggles to find a place where they felt accepted, moving from Baldwin Hills to Brentwood, are a testament to the difficulties of living in a world that wasn't ready for their love. It wasn't until much later that the protagonist met someone, Yael, who shared a similar background—a biracial person with a Dominican father and Israeli mother. Yael's sense of self, grounded in her unique identity, made the protagonist feel less isolated, as they, too, navigated the complexity of being "half something." Growing up feeling like two halves—one piece of each parent—was a challenge, but it also shaped who the protagonist became. This complex identity is something the protagonist continues to grapple with, even as they carve out a place for themselves in Hollywood.