

Chapter 30

Chapter 30 begins by presenting a snapshot of the narrator's life, where normalcy is interwoven with the challenges she faces. After her father falls asleep, Leighton, along with her friend Sofia, heads to the mall for a much-needed distraction and some fun. The girls are on a mission to find the perfect dresses for an upcoming eighties-themed dance, where neon colors are in full swing. While Sofia slips into each dress with ease, Leighton finds herself struggling to feel comfortable in the bold colors and styles that are popular at the moment. These outfits, meant to represent a fun and carefree experience, end up highlighting Leighton's discomfort with her appearance. Her insecurities grow as she compares herself to Sofia, who seems to embody everything Leighton feels she is not. This dynamic of friendship and self-image sets the stage for the chapter's exploration of Leighton's internal struggles, reminding readers of the complex nature of teenage years.

The mood begins to shift when Sofia hands Leighton a beautiful black dress, its cut perfect and the fabric simple yet elegant. The dress, paired with pockets—a detail that Leighton loves—instantly sparks excitement in her, making her feel for a moment like she is living out a typical high school experience. The feeling of being part of something so ordinary and joyful brings a wave of relief and a sense of belonging, something Leighton has been yearning for. However, that sense of joy is quickly tempered when she sees the price tag, which is far beyond her budget. This moment of financial reality forces Leighton to consider her options and the weight of her current situation. As she debates the possibility of buying the dress, a conversation unfolds between the two friends, delving into priorities, family finances, and the limitations that come with not having much money. Sofia, understanding Leighton's predicament, encourages her to live in the moment and to not let money stand in the way of enjoying the dance and the memories they could create. It is through Sofia's

encouragement that Leighton begins to see the situation in a different light, understanding that sometimes the experience is more important than the cost.

The trip takes another turn when the girls discover a Tiffany Blue bike on clearance at a sporting goods store. Leighton finds herself caught in a dilemma, torn between spending her savings on the dress or investing in the bike. The decision weighs heavily on her, as she recognizes that the bike is something her younger sister, Campbell, would greatly appreciate. Ultimately, the choice is clear: the bike, which symbolizes both practicality and love, takes precedence. Leighton, eager to give her sister something special, decides to sacrifice the dress for now. With the decision made, the girls head home, where Sofia helps Leighton present the bike to Campbell in a surprising and heartfelt way. The gesture, though small, carries great significance, as Campbell's reaction shows just how much thought and care went into the gift. This moment captures the essence of sibling love, showcasing the simple joys of giving and receiving and how much such moments can mean to young people navigating complicated emotions and familial bonds.

The chapter concludes with Leighton finding herself alone with a pile of old dresses in her armoire. None of them fit her anymore, a realization that underscores her growth and the passage of time. It is in this moment of quiet reflection that Campbell bursts in with a bag containing the dress Leighton had tried on earlier, an unexpected but playful intervention. In a humorous and lighthearted exchange, Campbell hands over the dress with the stipulation that Leighton must wear it to the dance, or their friendship will be at risk. This playful ultimatum serves as a reminder of the importance of friendship and the small, sometimes trivial, things that can hold deep meaning in relationships. The chapter expertly captures the essence of adolescence, where moments of humor and play intertwine with deeper emotional reflections. Leighton's journey of self-acceptance, familial love, and friendship all come together in this chapter, presenting a rich tapestry of experiences that shape her world. Through these seemingly small yet significant moments, readers are reminded of the complexities of growing up and how each choice, no matter how trivial it may seem, plays a role in shaping one's sense of identity and connection to others.