

Chapter 31

Chapter 31 unfolds as a brief moment of peace, offering a welcome respite from the usual chaos that engulfs life. Saturday night is spent in quiet harmony, with the girls immersed in their reading, while I struggle with the complexities of *Portrait of an Old Crow*. This rare calm provides a fleeting sense of normalcy, and I savor the tranquility that fills our home. After enduring a life filled with constant turmoil, experiencing a little boredom is nothing short of magnificent. The stillness in the air is a stark contrast to the usual noise and upheaval, giving me a taste of what it feels like to exist without the ever-present weight of stress.

However, by Sunday, optimism begins to cloud my judgment, making me feel reckless and naive. Dad returns early from a construction job that had been interrupted by rain, and as we gather around for dinner, he suggests a game night, reminiscent of the fun we used to have at our grandparents' house. Campbell and I exchange a look, uncertain yet hopeful that this gesture might indicate a shift, that the storm inside our home may finally be passing. I silently wish for some kind of warning, a narrator to caution me whenever I dare to hope, knowing that moments of happiness are often followed by chaos. There's an undeniable sense of tension that follows these brief bursts of joy, making it impossible to fully relax and embrace the fleeting moments of peace.

The evening takes a turn when Dad starts searching for his wallet, his frustration building as he realizes it's missing. Mom suggests checking the truck, and as they head outside to look, Campbell and I begin to search the house, feeling the tension rise with each passing minute. Despite our efforts, the wallet remains elusive, deepening Dad's irritation and setting the mood for the evening. Just when it seems like the situation might escalate, Juniper finds the wallet near the front door, claiming it must have fallen from Dad's jacket. A wave of relief washes over us, but the brief

moment of happiness is quickly overshadowed as we dive into the game of Apples to Apples, our minds still slightly on edge. The joy of finding the wallet doesn't last, and the realization that the peace we've briefly felt can be so easily disrupted hangs heavy in the air.

As the game progresses, the underlying sense of unease grows, as if we're walking on a fragile, rickety bridge that could collapse at any moment. The lighthearted atmosphere quickly shifts when Dad pauses during the game, his apology for losing the cash in his wallet sinking the mood back into seriousness. These apologies have become a routine part of our family dynamics, like a dance we all know too well, but the rapidity with which Dad offers them provides a flicker of hope—an indication that he recognizes his actions and their impact. Yet, despite the apologies, the weight of unspoken tension continues to simmer beneath the surface, unaddressed and unresolved. Mom tries to redirect us back toward joy, but it's clear that the unresolved issues, especially Dad's, continue to shape the air around us. The scars from his upbringing, the anger he carries with him, are never far behind, shaping the way we interact with one another and the way we navigate our relationships.

The desire to break free from this cycle of inherited pain becomes ever more evident, but the reality of our situation often pulls us back. While trying to enjoy our time together, it's impossible to ignore the physical and emotional scars that hold us captive, continuing to dictate our actions and emotions. In this chapter, the fleeting moments of joy are contrasted with the deep-seated struggles that remain unresolved, leaving a sense of entrapment within the legacy of pain. Though we long for something different, it seems that the fear and anger passed down through generations continue to cast a shadow over our lives, affecting the relationships that matter most.