

Chapter 35: The Smell of Failure

Elizabeth Zott's morning routine takes an unexpected turn when she arrives at the boathouse for her pre-dawn rowing practice, only to find the parking lot teeming with cars. What had always been a quiet and solitary ritual is now disrupted by a surprising influx of women, all inspired by her casual mention of rowing during a segment on her TV show, *Supper at Six*. Among the commotion, the faint **smell of failure** lingers for Dr. Mason, a fellow rower and longtime advocate for getting more people involved in the sport, who approaches Elizabeth with a mixture of irritation and awe. He confesses that despite years of encouraging his wife to take up rowing, she only decided to join after watching Elizabeth's show. Though annoyed at the logistical chaos caused by the new crowd, Mason's words serve as an inadvertent acknowledgment of Elizabeth's growing influence. For Elizabeth, the sight of these women represents more than just a crowd—it's a tangible reminder of the impact her words have beyond the confines of her kitchen studio.

This unintended consequence of her influence is not the only reminder of her growing notoriety. Outside the KCTV Studios, Elizabeth encounters a picketer clutching a sign that condemns her as a "GODLESS HEATHEN," a stark reflection of the divisive opinions her unconventional approach has sparked. Walter, her producer, is visibly concerned. He chastises her for the bold statements she frequently makes on air, warning her of the consequences that come with challenging societal norms so openly. Death threats have started to arrive, and Walter urges her to tone down her rhetoric for her safety. However, Elizabeth is unyielding, determined to maintain her integrity and use her platform to inspire change, even if it means facing hostility. Her resolve, though admirable, is also tinged with a fierce protectiveness over her daughter, Madeline, whom she works tirelessly to shield from the harsher realities of her public life.

In the midst of these tensions, Elizabeth finds an unexpected ally in her dog, Six-Thirty. His loyalty and intelligence are a source of comfort, and his unexpected arrival at the studio one day causes a stir among the staff. While Walter initially dismisses Six-Thirty's presence as a distraction, Elizabeth sees him as more than just a pet. As her show continues to challenge traditional norms, the addition of Six-Thirty brings an element of relatability and warmth that resonates with her audience. He becomes a silent but significant presence on *Supper at Six*, embodying the connection and authenticity that Elizabeth strives to convey through her cooking segments.

Six-Thirty's contributions to the show, however, extend far beyond entertainment. During a live taping, the dog's uncanny intuition becomes evident when he senses something amiss with a member of the audience. His persistent unease catches Elizabeth's attention, prompting a closer look that eventually leads to the discovery of a bomb threat. The incident shocks everyone but reinforces Six-Thirty's role as not only a beloved member of the team but also a protector. For Elizabeth, the event is a sobering reminder of the dangers that come with being a public figure, as well as the lengths she must go to safeguard her team, her family, and herself.

As the chapter unfolds, it delves into the complexities of Elizabeth's life as both a private individual and a public figure. Her unflinching dedication to her principles often puts her at odds with those who want her to conform to societal expectations, yet it also endears her to a growing audience of women who see her as a symbol of empowerment. The public's polarized reactions to her show underscore the broader cultural tensions of the era, highlighting the challenges faced by women who dare to defy convention.

Amid these challenges, Elizabeth's relationship with Madeline remains a cornerstone of her life. She navigates the fine line between shielding her daughter from the pressures of fame and preparing her to face a world that often underestimates and undervalues women. Their bond, built on love, trust, and shared resilience, is a poignant counterpoint to the hostility Elizabeth faces in the public sphere.

This chapter masterfully intertwines moments of tension, humor, and triumph, painting a vivid picture of a woman who refuses to back down in the face of adversity. Elizabeth's journey is not just about challenging societal norms—it's about carving out a space where authenticity and courage can thrive, even in the most unlikely circumstances. Through her actions and the unexpected support of Six-Thirty, she continues to inspire those around her, proving that even in the face of resistance, change is always possible.