

Chapter 32

Chapter 32 begins with Leighton abruptly waking up to the sound of a door slamming against the wall, followed by the harsh voice of a man in her home. Her dream of lightning splitting the tree in their front yard is shattered by this sudden, jarring disruption, dragging her from a peaceful slumber into the chaos that defines her reality. The man's voice, harsh and commanding, insists that the household chores need to be corrected immediately, disrupting her younger sisters, Juniper and Campbell, and creating a tense atmosphere. Leighton's protective instincts kick in as she pleads with him to spare the girls, but his response is one of anger and frustration, revealing a deeply ingrained pattern of emotional violence that has become all too familiar. Leighton, unable to escape the tension in the room, silently seethes with rage, feeling helpless as her mother stands by, mouthing apologetically, but unable to intervene. The chapter immediately sets the stage for the overwhelming sense of powerlessness and fear that Leighton has come to accept as part of her everyday life.

In an attempt to gain some control over the situation, Leighton pushes past the man and takes Juniper into the living room, where they sit quietly, anxiously waiting for the next round of orders. The bright lights that flood the house feel stark and unforgiving, amplifying the already oppressive atmosphere of fear and uncertainty. When the man returns, his actions grow more erratic and aggressive as he tosses their folded towels onto the floor, demanding that the girls show him the correct way to fold them. The underlying tension is palpable as Leighton's heart sinks, knowing that no matter how hard they try, it will never be enough. Juniper, who is clearly upset by the constant failure to meet his harsh expectations, becomes visibly distressed, her quiet sobs filling the room. Leighton tries to keep her composure, but the man's anger soon shifts to her, and he calls her vile names before throwing a vase against the wall, as though to punctuate his cruel words. This eruption of aggression shocks Leighton, but she resolutely holds back her tears, determined to maintain her composure, even as every word and action from the man chips away at her emotional stability. As she meticulously folds the towels, trying to prove that she is capable, Leighton suppresses the emotional turmoil threatening to overwhelm her, trying to meet his impossible standards, all while battling the intense internal conflict that comes with living in such a toxic environment.

After the others retreat upstairs, Leighton is left behind to clean up the shards of glass from the broken vase, her mind swirling with thoughts of the chaos that dominates her home. She methodically turns off the lights in the house, each click of the switch amplifying the silence that follows the explosion of emotions. As she glances into the bathroom mirror, the empty shelves once filled with towels serve as a striking visual reminder of the emptiness in her life. The absence of the towels symbolizes the absence of peace and security in her world, reinforcing her feelings of instability. Exhausted and emotionally drained, Leighton decides to study for an important calculus exam, trying to find an escape in her studies, but her focus slips as the weight of her home life drifts back into her thoughts. The paradox of her situation becomes clearer as she wrestles with the desire to escape from her troubled home life, yet fears what would happen to her younger sisters if she were to leave. The chapter concludes with Leighton staring into the early light of the morning, overwhelmed with a sense of dread about the unchangeable world around her. Her internal struggle becomes a powerful symbol of the tension between the yearning for freedom and the crushing sense of responsibility she feels toward her sisters. The emotions of helplessness, exhaustion, and fear create a vivid portrayal of the complexity of her world, leaving readers to reflect on the impact of a difficult home life on a person's sense of identity and their ability to hope for a better future.