

Chapter 24

The chapter opens with Marla firmly situated in the conservatory, determined not to leave until she sees Gary. Despite the tension surrounding the absent groom, Marla insists on indulging in the wedding brunch, sparking a lighthearted debate about the propriety of eating the food when the wedding itself is in question. As others gradually join, including family members and friends, they share anecdotes about Gary's past—highlighting his mischievous youth and the impact of a childhood fire caused by his doughnut obsession. These stories, seemingly meant for Phoebe's comfort, paint a vivid picture of Gary's character and his lifelong struggle to be "Mr. Perfect."

Throughout the morning, Phoebe remains hopeful for Gary's arrival, but he fails to appear. The family's concern is palpable, with Jim vocally urging Gary to come down and join them. Despite reassurances that Gary is simply dealing with a breakup, Phoebe feels compelled to reach out, sending him a text to let him know he is in their thoughts. This gesture underscores her empathy and desire to support him during a vulnerable moment. Meanwhile, Phoebe's ex-husband texts her, a reminder of ongoing personal complexities and the tentative nature of their relationship.

As the scene shifts to the wedding lobby, new guests arrive, and preparations for the new wedding of Sophia and Stephen are underway. Pauline's efforts to welcome attendees contrast with Lila's absence, who is instead distant and preoccupied with her own life in Canada. The mingling guests exchange farewells and promises to stay in touch, though Phoebe doubts these connections will endure beyond this fleeting gathering. The atmosphere is bittersweet, capturing the transient nature of relationships and moments shared during the wedding week.

Finally, Phoebe's interaction with Jim reveals a tender attempt to maintain friendship despite changed circumstances. Their playful banter and mutual understanding hint at the possibility of continued connection beyond the wedding. Meanwhile, Phoebe's text

exchange with Gary reveals a return to familiarity and shared history, as they reminisce about youthful antics. This dialogue, occurring while Phoebe shops for luggage, symbolizes a tentative step toward reconnection, blending humor with an undercurrent of emotional complexity. The chapter closes with an open-ended sense of hope and uncertainty about what lies ahead.

