

Chapter 17

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Today Andrew and Nina have an appointment with that fertility specialist. They've both been nervous and excited about the appointment all week. I heard snatches of their conversation during dinner. Apparently, Nina got a bunch of fertility tests and they're going to be discussing the results today. Nina thinks they're going to be doing IVF, which is expensive, but they've got money to burn.

As much as Nina gets on my nerves sometimes, it's sweet how the two of them are planning for the new baby. Yesterday, they were talking about how they were going to turn the guestroom into a nursery. I'm not sure who is more excited—Nina or Andrew. For their sakes, I hope they get pregnant soon.

While they're at the appointment, I'm supposed to be watching Cecelia. Watching a nine-year-old girl shouldn't be difficult. But Cecelia seems determined to make it so. After a friend's mother dropped her off after God knows what lesson she had today (karate, ballet, piano, soccer, gymnastics—I've completely lost track), she kicks one of her shoes off in one direction, the second in another, and then throws her backpack in yet a third direction. Luckily, it's too warm for a coat, or else she would have to find a fourth place to abandon her coat.

"Cecelia," I say patiently. "Can you please put your shoes in the shoe rack?"

"Later," she says absently, as she plops down on the sofa, smoothing out the fabric of her pale yellow dress. She grabs the remote and flicks on the television to an obnoxiously loud cartoon. An orange and a pear appear to be arguing on the screen. "I'm hungry."

I take a deep, calming breath. "What would you like to eat?"

I assume she's going to come up with something ridiculous that I need to make her, just to get me to sweat. So I'm surprised when she says, "How about a bologna sandwich?"

I'm so relieved by the fact that we have all the makings of a bologna sandwich in the house that I don't even insist that she say please. If Nina wants her daughter to be a brat, that's her prerogative. It's not my job to discipline her.

I head to the kitchen and grab some bread and a pack of beef bologna from the overflowing fridge. I don't know whether Cecelia likes mayonnaise on her sandwich, and furthermore, I'm sure I'll put too much or too little on it. So I decide to just give her the bottle of mayonnaise and she can portion it out herself to the exact perfect amount. Ha, I've outsmarted you, Cecelia!

I return to the living room and place the sandwich and mayonnaise on the coffee table for Cecelia. She looks down at the sandwich, crinkling her brow. She picks it up tentatively and then her face fills with disgust.

"Ew!" she cries. "I don't want that."

I swear to God, I'm going to strangle this girl with my bare hands. "You said you wanted a bologna sandwich. I made you a bologna sandwich."

"I didn't say I wanted a bologna sandwich," she whines. "I said I wanted an abalone sandwich!"

I stare at her, open-mouthed. "An abalone sandwich? What is that?"

Cecelia grunts in frustration and throws the sandwich on the ground. The bread and meat separate, landing in three separate piles on the carpet. The only positive is that I didn't use any mayonnaise, so at least I don't have to clean up mayonnaise.

Okay, I've had enough of this girl. Maybe it's not my place, but she's old enough to know not to throw food on the floor. And especially if there's going to be a baby in the house sometime soon, she needs to learn to act like a child her age.

“Cecelia,” I say through my teeth.

She lifts her slightly pointed chin. “What?”

I’m not sure what would’ve happened between me and Cecelia, but our showdown gets interrupted by the front door unlocking. That must be Andrew and Nina, back from their appointment. I turn away from Cecelia and plaster a smile on my face. I’m sure Nina will be bursting with excitement over this visit.

Except when they come into the living room, neither of them are smiling.

That’s an understatement. Nina’s blond hair is in disarray and her white blouse is wrinkled. Her eyes are bloodshot and puffy. Andrew doesn’t look so great either. His tie is half undone, like he started to pull it off and then got distracted during the process. And actually, his eyes look bloodshot, too.

I squeeze my hands together. “Everything okay?”

I should have just kept my mouth shut. That would have been the smart thing to do. Because now Nina directs her gaze at me and her pale skin turns bright red. “For God’s sake, Millie,” she snaps at me. “Why do you have to be so nosy? This is none of your goddamn business.”

I swallow. “I’m so sorry, Nina.”

Her eyes drift down to the mess on the floor. Cecelia’s shoes. The bread and baloney near the coffee table. And sometime in the last minute, Cecelia has scurried out of the living room and is nowhere to be seen. Nina’s face contorts. “Is this really what I have to come home to? This mess? What am I paying you for anyway? Maybe you should start looking for another job.”

My throat constricts. “I... I was going to clean that up...”

“Don’t do any work on my account.” She shoots Andrew a withering look. “I’m going to go lie down. I have a pounding headache.”

Nina stomps up the staircase, her heels like bullets on each step, punctuated by the door to their bedroom slamming shut. Obviously, something did not go well at that appointment. There's no point in trying to talk to her right now.

Andrew sinks onto the leather sofa and drops his head back. "Well, that sucked."

I bite down on my lip and sit beside him, even though I sense I probably shouldn't.

"Are you okay?"



He rubs his eyes with his fingertips. "Not really."

"Do... do you want to talk about it?"

"Not really." He squeezes his eyes shut for a moment. He lets out a sigh. "It's not going to happen for us. Nina is not going to get pregnant."

My first reaction is surprise. Not that I know much about it, but I can't quite believe that Nina and Andrew aren't able to pay their way out of this...