

Chapter 29

Chapter 29 begins with Nina returning home in the early afternoon after dropping Cecelia off at camp, carrying four large shopping bags from an unplanned spree. She drops the bags unceremoniously in the living room, her excitement palpable as she eagerly begins to share her finds with Millie. Nina's appearance, however, is far from the polished image she might usually project—her clothes are marked with sweat stains, and her hair is disheveled, making Millie question Andrew's continued affection for her. Millie is left confused, trying to reconcile the image of Nina with her own feelings about Andrew and the complexities of their relationships.

When Nina instructs Millie to carry the heavy shopping bags upstairs, it feels like another blow to Millie's already fragile sense of self. She is reminded of the imbalance of power within the household, with Nina continuing to act as if Millie's role is to serve her without question. The situation grows more uncomfortable when Nina comments on Millie's physical state, implying that she has grown soft and lazy. These words feel like a personal critique, adding to Millie's growing sense of frustration and self-doubt, and deepening the divide between them. Millie is left feeling belittled, but also increasingly aware of the subtle power dynamics at play, where her own needs and desires are often dismissed or overlooked.

As Millie struggles to carry the heavy bags, Nina shifts the conversation to an unexpected topic—Millie's failure to answer the house phone the previous night. This, Nina claims, is part of Millie's responsibilities, further placing Millie in a position where she feels like a servant, expected to manage every small detail without fail. Caught off guard and unsure about Andrew's late-night whereabouts, Millie stammers an excuse, unaware that Nina's suspicions about her actions are beginning to grow. Millie is burdened with the knowledge that Nina is completely unaware of the intimate moment she shared with Andrew, and the fear of Nina discovering their secret weighs heavily

on her. The tension of this unspoken truth continues to build as Millie feels the pressure of Nina's potential discovery—an event that could shatter the delicate balance of their already complicated relationships.

Once Millie manages to bring the bags upstairs to the master bedroom, her attention is drawn to the master bathroom, which is immaculately clean. The sight triggers a deeply disturbing memory—one that haunts Millie—of a young Cecelia, whom she remembers being forced under water in the bathtub by Nina in a chilling display of power. The memory of this event floods Millie with a sense of dread, as she imagines the pain and trauma Cecelia may have experienced in that moment. Standing in the large bathroom, Millie is confronted by the grim realization of the household's dark past, one that is fraught with secrets, manipulation, and emotional scars that have been buried but never truly healed. The heavy atmosphere of the house and the oppressive memories of Nina's control weigh on Millie, as she contemplates the emotional damage done and the difficult road ahead for her and Cecelia.

In this chapter, the narrative deeply explores the psychological effects of living in an environment controlled by a dominant, manipulative figure. Millie is caught in the emotional struggle between wanting to assert her independence and the overwhelming presence of Nina's influence, which continues to permeate every aspect of her life. Nina's actions, from belittling Millie's physical appearance to publicly revealing her past mistakes, serve to keep Millie in a constant state of submission and anxiety. Millie's internal conflict becomes more pronounced as she grapples with the growing distance between herself and Andrew, and the increasing weight of the secrets she is keeping from him.

The chapter also sheds light on the long-lasting effects of trauma and manipulation, especially within families. Nina's subtle, and not-so-subtle, control over Millie's life demonstrates how deeply entrenched power dynamics can shape one's sense of self-worth and identity. For Millie, every small act of rebellion or desire for autonomy feels like an uphill battle, as Nina's oppressive presence continues to undermine her at every turn. The revelation of Cecelia's past abuse also hints at a much deeper

emotional issue, one that suggests Nina's manipulation may have been at the root of much of the family's dysfunction. This creates a disturbing contrast between the seemingly perfect domestic setting and the dark undercurrents that threaten to unravel the household.

The themes of power, control, and emotional manipulation are central to this chapter, with Millie's struggle to reclaim her autonomy reflecting a universal desire for self-determination in the face of oppressive forces. The chapter also serves as a poignant reminder of the lasting effects that unchecked authority can have on individuals, particularly when emotional and psychological abuse are at play. Millie's journey is one of emotional resilience, as she seeks to navigate her relationships with Andrew and Nina while struggling with the weight of her past and the complex web of secrets that entangle her. For anyone who has experienced emotional manipulation or trauma, the chapter highlights the importance of breaking free from controlling environments in order to reclaim one's sense of self-worth and independence.