

Air

Before She Said Yes

“We’ll do Sunday at your house,” her sister said. “That’s easiest for everyone.”

Anna nearly agreed.

She could already picture the arrangements: borrow chairs, change her plans, make something their mother could eat. Her sister sounded relieved. It would be unkind to disturb that relief.

Then Anna noticed how tightly she was holding the phone.

She had wanted Sunday to herself. A whole day with no preparations and nobody expected at the door.

“Of course,” she said. “Sunday is fine.”

Her sister thanked her and began listing what everyone would bring. Anna wrote it down.

By Saturday afternoon, the kitchen was full of groceries. She had canceled a walk with a friend, moved her laundry, and borrowed folding chairs. When her sister called to ask if they could arrive early, Anna said yes again.

On Sunday, everyone enjoyed the meal.

Anna watched her brother lean back while she cleared the plates. A sharp thought came: Nobody ever notices how much I do.

Then her sister asked where the coffee was.

“Am I supposed to do everything?” Anna said.

The room went quiet.

“I was only asking,” her sister replied.

Anna felt heat rise into her face. She apologized, explained that she was tired, and put the kettle on. Soon she was making extra efforts to get the conversation flowing again. When everyone left, her sister hugged her.

“You should have said if this was too much.”

Anna nodded. She could not find an answer that would not begin another uncomfortable conversation.

The house was quiet at last. She sat among the borrowed chairs and replayed the moment she had snapped. She felt guilty about her tone, then resentful that nobody had helped, then guilty about the resentment.

On her phone was a message from the friend whose walk she had canceled: “Hope you had a lovely family day.”

Anna began typing, “Yes, it was lovely.”

She stopped and looked at the words.

She realizes that she had known what she wanted before the first phone call ended.

She pressed send and felt resentful.

This can change.