

# Chapter 10

Chapter 10 begins with Patricia doing her best to comfort Mrs. Greene, who is shaken after the chaos of the evening. They sit quietly together, watching Miss Mary finally drift off to sleep. Once Patricia is alone, a heavy mix of guilt and confusion floods her thoughts—she knows her decision to introduce James Harris to the group caught everyone off guard, and now the evening has soured. A hot wind whips through the trees, the kind that feels charged with something unnatural. As she stands alone in the driveway, exposed beneath the dim glow of a distant streetlamp, Patricia is gripped by the eerie memory of Miss Mary and Mrs. Savage's recent strange behavior. The scent of decay and unease lingers, and with a sudden bolt of fear, she bolts inside and slams the front door. The deadbolt is locked in haste, her pulse racing.

As the house settles into uneasy silence, the phone suddenly shrieks, sending a jolt through Patricia. It's Grace Cavanaugh on the other end, her voice crackling through the static, calling late to check on Miss Mary and to gently express disappointment over the disrupted book club evening. Grace's tone is civil but cool, her disapproval barely hidden beneath polite phrases. Patricia, still shaken, apologizes for springing James Harris on the group without warning. Grace chalks the evening up to the book selection and curtly ends the call. Alone again, Patricia reflects on Carter's absence—he should be home, especially now. She climbs the stairs, hoping for reassurance from her children, but instead, she finds something that freezes her to the floor: Korey, standing in the dark, whispering about a man on the roof.

The fear becomes palpable. Patricia tries to steady herself and confirm what Korey saw. There's nothing visible from the window, only shadows and movement in the wind—but Korey is firm. She believes what she saw. Down the hall, Blue echoes the same fear, describing someone in the backyard. The illusion of safety within the house begins to unravel. Then Patricia hears it herself—a deliberate, unmistakable footstep

above her. Not a creak. Not the wind. Someone is walking on the roof. Her instincts shift instantly from disbelief to survival. She gathers both children and moves them downstairs, trying to act calm even as her mind races.

She double-checks each door and window, deadbolting every possible entry, her hands trembling. Miss Mary, barely conscious, stirs in her room, unaware of the rising tension around her. Patricia scans the floodlit backyard, watching for any movement beyond the glowing perimeter. Her grip tightens on the phone, but when she calls 911, the signal crackles and fails. Panic sharpens. Her bathroom window—left open earlier—is the weak link, and she knows it. Racing upstairs, she hears something moving above her, something moving fast. Her breath burns and legs ache, but she hurls herself toward the open window and slams it shut just in time. A shadow flashes by—close, too close.

Now there's no doubt. The children need to get out. The plan is made quickly: the kids will hide with Miss Mary, and Patricia will run to the neighbors' to call the police. As she opens the door, her heart pounds—and someone steps inside. It's James Harris. Patricia's scream dies in her throat as he grabs her arms, speaking calmly. Relief floods her for a moment. He explains he saw the lights and wanted to check in. Patricia tries to explain the danger, but James insists there's no need to call the police. He presses past her, toward Miss Mary's room. Suddenly, Patricia no longer feels safe.

She tells him no—firmly, loudly. His demeanor shifts slightly, just enough for her to notice. Why doesn't he want her to call for help? The moment stretches, tension climbing, until blue lights flash outside and flood the windows with police searchlights. James steps back. Officers arrive and begin checking the house. Patricia, the children, and Miss Mary are moved into the garage room to stay together. James gives a statement and disappears before Carter finally returns home. Patricia doesn't speak much; she's shaken, aware that something is deeply wrong but unsure how to name it.

In real-world terms, moments like these reflect how women are often made to second-guess their instincts, even in threatening situations. According to FBI data, most home intrusions happen during the night when people are least prepared. Patricia's story

underscores the importance of trusting one's gut and having safety plans in place—like escape routes, secure locks, and emergency contacts. This chapter also reminds us how fear, once dismissed, can erupt when least expected—and how, sometimes, the real danger wears a familiar face.

