

Chapter 30

Chapter 30 unfolds with Patricia gripped by a surge of fear and uncertainty as she realizes the depth of her perilous situation. Her body feels paralyzed as electricity courses through her arms and legs, holding her in place as her thoughts race. The chilling realization dawns on her that at any moment, Slick might arrive at the back door, unknowingly leading James straight to her. Patricia knows that Slick, unable to lie convincingly, would inadvertently reveal that she was there to meet her, putting their escape plan at risk. The mounting dread is almost suffocating, but Patricia focuses, trying to maintain control over the chaos unfolding around her.

Lora, unexpectedly appearing in the doorway of the guest room, adds to the tension. Patricia's heart races as she struggles to communicate the urgency of the situation to Lora, silently pleading for her to understand. She watches, every muscle tense, as Lora takes a moment before responding with a subtle movement, holding out a gloved hand. Patricia, trying to keep her focus amidst the panic, quickly grabs a ten-dollar bill and, with trembling hands, drops it into Lora's palm, hoping the bribe will help them close off the attic stairs. The seconds stretch out as Patricia listens intently, her heart pounding in her chest. With a quiet, almost imperceptible action, Lora shuts the trapdoor, and for a fleeting moment, Patricia breathes a sigh of relief.

Despite the immediate danger, Patricia knows that her task isn't over. The suitcase, which holds the horrifying evidence of Francine's remains, must be carefully replaced to avoid discovery by James. Her body aching from exhaustion, she struggles to move the heavy suitcase, each step a painful effort as she drags it back into place. The attic feels suffocating, with the dim light casting eerie shadows over the scene. Patricia's hands are raw and covered in dust as she continues her task, determined not to leave any trace of their presence. In the dim, cramped space, mothballs glitter like small pearls, a reminder of the heavy weight of the situation. Despite the physical pain and

mental strain, Patricia perseveres, knowing that this is their only chance to escape undetected.

The sounds from below are growing louder, each creak and groan of the house making Patricia's heart race. She knows that James is just below her, searching, and it's only a matter of time before he remembers the attic and decides to investigate. With each passing second, her anxiety grows as she tries to steady her breathing and maintain control. The muffled sounds of doors opening and closing below her only heighten her sense of urgency. Her pulse quickens as she worries that any mistake could expose them. Every movement is calculated, every sound amplified in the silent tension of the attic.

In a desperate attempt to erase any evidence of her presence, Patricia meticulously brushes away any trace of her actions. The white cockroach poison is smeared across the floor, and drag marks from the suitcase are clearly visible. With careful precision, she smooths the powder to disguise the trail, hoping that it will be enough to confuse any searchers. As she works, she becomes more aware of her surroundings—the musty smell of the attic, the insects crawling over her body, and the ever-present fear that James could be inches away from discovering her. Despite the horror surrounding her, Patricia remains focused, determined to protect herself and her secret.

Patricia's hiding place is chosen with care, but it's not without its own dangers. She squeezes into a pile of old, rotting clothes, hoping it will shield her from view. The smell of decay fills her senses as she buries herself deeper into the pile, trying to make herself as small as possible. Her body shakes with fear, and the overwhelming discomfort of the situation only amplifies her panic. She can hear James's voice, calling to her, taunting her, and every part of her screams to flee, but she knows there's nowhere to go. The tension in the air is thick, and Patricia is trapped, relying solely on her wits and her determination to survive.

The quiet of the attic is broken only by the occasional noise from below, the sounds of James searching and calling her name. The weight of the moment bears down on

Patricia, but she forces herself to remain still, knowing that any movement could give her away. Her mind races, wondering how much longer she can hold on before he discovers her hiding spot. She knows that James is dangerous, and if he finds her, it could be the end. The minutes stretch into what feels like hours, and Patricia's body aches from staying so still, but she doesn't dare move.

Finally, the trapdoor creaks open, and Patricia's heart leaps into her throat. James is coming up. The moment she has feared has arrived, and she can hear his heavy footsteps climbing the ladder. The attic fills with light, and Patricia knows this is her last chance to remain undetected. She lies perfectly still, trying to blend into the pile of clothes, praying that he won't see her. As James's voice calls out to her, his words taunting and mocking, Patricia is forced to fight down the overwhelming urge to scream. The insects crawling over her body seem to press against her skin, a constant reminder of how trapped she truly is. She holds her breath, hoping that the roaches and spiders will not betray her position.

Patricia's mind races, and she wonders if there's any way out. The silence that follows James's last call is deafening, and Patricia wonders if he has left or if he's just biding his time. Her body is stiff, every muscle aching from the tension, but she knows she cannot move. She has to stay hidden, to remain as still as possible, and hope that James gives up and leaves. The uncertainty of her situation is unbearable, but she holds on, focusing on the faint sounds of movement beneath her, praying for a chance to escape.