

# Chapter 26

Chapter 26 begins with Patricia trying to maintain her composure as she gets caught in her own thoughts while driving. Her palms sweat on the steering wheel as she heads up Rifle Range Road, questioning her decision to visit Mrs. Greene. Patricia had hoped that Mrs. Greene might not even be home, and the relief that followed was almost palpable when she considered just turning back. The area around her had changed significantly, with new construction beginning to take over, and the familiarity she once knew was slipping away. Patricia tried to shake off her discomfort, but her mind was full of clutter, and as she passed familiar landmarks, a sense of unease grew. When she finally arrived at Mrs. Greene's house, the construction noise from Gracious Cay was overwhelming, but Patricia still tried to stay focused on her purpose.

The ringing of her phone interrupted her thoughts. It was James Harris. He was calling to check on Blue, and as Patricia spoke with him, a strange sense of disconnection enveloped her. Despite knowing Blue was safe and in good hands, the conversation felt tense. Patricia found herself forced to engage in small talk with James, and her discomfort only grew as they discussed Blue's behavior. It was strange to hear James express genuine concern about her children, something that felt a bit too familiar and unsettling. As she continued her conversation, Patricia couldn't help but feel like she was caught between her past and present.

After hanging up with James, Patricia stood in her kitchen, feeling the weight of the conversation settle around her. She thought about the tension in her family, the changes she had made, and the things she'd tried to avoid. Her phone call with James had brought back uncomfortable memories. It reminded her of how she'd pushed people away in the past, especially James, but now she was faced with the reality that he was still a part of her life, even if she wasn't ready for him to be. Patricia couldn't deny the growing sense of unease, but she quickly shifted her focus to her daily tasks.

Cleaning out the kitchen cabinets seemed like a manageable way to occupy her mind, but as she began to organize, she was suddenly overcome by the smell of Miss Mary's room.

The familiar scent of cleaning products used in Miss Mary's room triggered a wave of memories, and Patricia found herself standing in front of a locked door that led to the old garage room. The memories of caring for Miss Mary rushed back, and for a moment, Patricia was lost in the past. With the key in hand, she opened the door and found the room empty. No scent lingered, no familiar clutter remained. Patricia locked the door again, but the unsettling feeling stayed with her as she moved on to her next task. On the sun porch, the sun's glare made her pause as she noticed the magazines Carter had left behind. Walking back through the dining room to the kitchen, she had to pass the door to the den again. That's when she heard it—soft whispers.

Patricia froze. She heard her name being called softly, and a chill ran down her spine. She glanced through the crack in the door and saw the image of a pair of eyes staring back at her. For a moment, she thought she had imagined it, but the whispered voice, faint and distant, grew louder in her ears. Her mind raced, and before she knew it, the whispers turned into something far more sinister. Miss Mary's voice seemed to echo in the room, her words clear and chilling. Patricia tried to dismiss it, but the voice was persistent, warning her of something terrible. Her instincts screamed for her to leave the room, but she couldn't.

As Patricia stood frozen, trying to make sense of what she was hearing, Ragtag, the dog, trotted past her, breaking the trance-like state she was in. Patricia questioned what was happening. Could she be losing her mind? She had always been a skeptic, dismissing the talk of ghosts and spirits as mere superstition. But the voice, the words, and the eerie feeling in the air felt too real to ignore. Miss Mary had always been a figure of mystery, someone who seemed to have powers beyond what Patricia could comprehend. And now, it seemed that Miss Mary was trying to reach her—again.

Patricia's grip tightened on the magazines she was holding, and she forced herself to move forward, but the voice did not stop. The words grew more desperate, more urgent. Patricia couldn't tell if it was a hallucination or something more. She thought back to the many times Miss Mary had spoken of warnings in cryptic ways, but this felt different. It wasn't just a warning—it felt like a cry for help. She thought of the children, of the danger they might be in. The voice's repeated phrases about "the nightwalking man" and "taking the children" haunted her thoughts.

Despite her skepticism, Patricia knew she couldn't ignore what she had just experienced. She had always dismissed these things as figments of an overactive imagination, but today, something had changed. It wasn't just Miss Mary's voice she had heard. There was a sense of urgency, a fear that something had to be done. Patricia's world had always been one of logic and reason, but now she found herself questioning everything. Was it possible that something darker was at play? She turned away from the door and walked back through the dining room, trying to shake off the feelings that had gripped her. But the thought lingered: the nightwalking man, the devil's son—had Miss Mary truly warned her of something much more sinister than she had ever realized?