

Chapter 34

Chapter 34 begins with the arrival of Slick at the hospital, where her condition is rapidly deteriorating. The doctors are perplexed by her symptoms, which are progressing at an unusual rate. They've confirmed that Slick suffers from an autoimmune disease, where her immune system is attacking her own cells, yet the cause of her ailment remains unclear. Despite the doctors' efforts to manage her oxygen levels and monitor her health, there is a pervasive sense of uncertainty. For Patricia, the confirmation of the diagnosis is both terrifying and enlightening. It reveals the true nature of James Harris—he isn't human, and his actions have directly caused Slick's suffering. The realization that he has infected her with something deadly adds weight to the fear Patricia is already feeling.

Leland, Slick's partner, is a regular visitor but is visibly uncomfortable each time. When Patricia tries to engage him in conversation, Leland urges her to keep the diagnosis a secret. He fears that people might speculate and link Slick's condition to something like AIDS, which could cause unnecessary rumors and damage. Despite Patricia's unease, she agrees to keep quiet. However, this secrecy breeds more tension between her and Leland, especially as she feels the heavy weight of her own helplessness in the face of Slick's condition.

By Friday, the hospital enforces stricter protocols, with visitors required to wear gowns and masks. Slick, pale and fragile, is confined to her bed, surrounded by IVs and medical tubes, her body struggling to fight off the disease inside her. Patricia spends her nights by her side, reading aloud from books in a futile attempt to provide comfort. As Slick drifts in and out of consciousness, her words become faint, but they bring a smile to her face when she recognizes the familiar words from the book. Maryellen arrives later that day and expresses frustration about the current book club's choice, suggesting the books no longer provide the thrills they used to.

The atmosphere in Slick's room grows more somber as Patricia, Maryellen, and Slick share a moment of quiet camaraderie despite the gravity of their situation. Slick's condition worsens, yet the connection between the three of them remains a constant. As they attempt to navigate the heavy silence, Patricia finds herself reflecting on their shared history and the absence of their other friends. Maryellen, concerned for Kitty, shares unsettling news about her—Kitty has been drinking heavily, haunted by persistent nightmares, and is increasingly paranoid about the safety of her children. Patricia makes a mental note to check in on Kitty soon but decides to focus on Slick for now.



Summary

The chapter takes a dark turn when James Harris unexpectedly appears at the hospital, disguised behind a mask. He approaches Slick's bed, pretending to offer sympathy, but his presence is anything but comforting. Patricia instinctively steps between him and Slick, determined to shield her friend from the man who has caused so much harm. His words, though laced with false concern, only serve to amplify the tension. He expresses his "care" for the family, but Patricia can sense his manipulation beneath his façade. He makes a subtle, but significant, move by suggesting he could help her if she only allowed him to, further cementing the idea that he wants more from her than just friendship.

In a moment of clarity, Patricia realizes that James Harris has insinuated himself so deeply into her life that he now holds sway over her every move. He has twisted the truth and played on her fears to create a bond of dependence. As he leaves, Patricia feels the weight of her decision to trust him in the past. She silently vows to protect her children from him, even if it means sacrificing her own safety. Before parting ways with James, she cleverly manages to turn the situation in her favor, ensuring that his manipulation of her doesn't go unnoticed.

As the chapter concludes, Patricia's internal battle intensifies. The emotional turmoil, coupled with the looming danger of James Harris, forces her to confront the reality of her choices. She realizes she must act quickly to save her family, but the question remains: Can she protect them from a man who has proven himself to be a predator

hiding in plain sight?



Summaryer