

Chapter 35

Chapter 35 begins with Patricia discovering her daughter Korey in a horrifying and deeply traumatic situation involving James Harris. The scene erupts in chaos as Patricia fights to break their contact, using Korey's own soccer cleat to strike James and separate them. James, displaying something monstrous and inhuman, recoils briefly but quickly overpowers Patricia, throwing her against the wall and pinning her down. She realizes in that instant how severely she has failed as a mother. Her decision to ignore the warning signs, to rationalize her suspicions, and to allow James into their lives has brought immense danger directly to her children. Patricia sees the physical evidence of her daughter's repeated victimization—marks of bruising and punctures that make it clear this wasn't a single occurrence. Her heart aches with guilt and dread.

When Blue, her young son, hears the commotion and calls out, Patricia quickly composes herself and lies to protect him. She sends him back to bed without revealing what has happened, shielding him from the truth. James, completely nude and covered in blood, escapes out the window, leaving Patricia alone with a daughter who whimpers as if trapped in a nightmare. Seeing the wound on Korey's leg up close, Patricia recognizes multiple signs of infection, overlapping injuries, and undeniable proof that this predator has fed on her child before. Every detail of that moment etches into her memory—the pain, the horror, and most of all, her own complicity in allowing it to happen.

Her mind reels as she mechanically cares for Korey, cleaning her wounds and applying ointment. Though she wants to bandage the injuries, she can't bring herself to admit, even in silence, the depth of what her daughter endured. It's too soon. Everything around her feels wrong. The house remains still, too normal in contrast to the violence upstairs. The porch lights flick off, the dog stirs gently on the couch, and everything

feels unchanged—except for Patricia. Inside, she is unraveling.

Patricia vomits from the weight of her own emotions. That night, she can't sleep. The reality of what's happened keeps replaying in her head. She knows she must act, but she also understands the complexity of the situation. The next morning, Korey behaves as if nothing has happened. Still withdrawn and moody, there's no indication that she even remembers or acknowledges what occurred the night before. Patricia is stunned by this disconnect but tries to maintain normalcy, sending both children off to school.



Soon after, the phone begins to ring. It's James. At first, Patricia refuses to answer. But when she finally picks up, her question is direct and burning: "How long?" Instead of apologizing, James attempts to rationalize what happened. He explains it as a rare medical condition, likening it to a form of organic dialysis—requiring him to use others' bodies to filter his blood. He insists Korey wasn't harmed and had agreed willingly, claiming he would never coerce her.

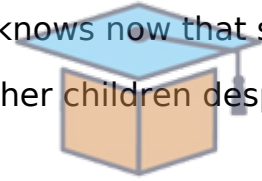
Patricia sees through his manipulation. His voice lacks remorse. It's not guilt but self-pity that she hears. James begins to express his desire to replace Carter, to integrate into Patricia's life permanently. He presents it as an opportunity—a way to be valued and loved within her family. But Patricia knows the truth: this man is a predator. Not in the metaphorical sense, but in every tangible, horrific way. He feeds off people, deceives them, takes from them, and discards them.

He casually mentions discovering Francine's driver's license in his car. A chilling admission. Patricia realizes with horror that he found the evidence she had planted in hopes of exposing him. Any chance of a quick resolution through law enforcement has just evaporated. Her one card has been played—and lost. His tone changes slightly as he reminds her not to keep him waiting. It's clear he's now watching her closely.

After hanging up, Patricia collapses under the full weight of her failure. She did not keep her children safe. The monster wasn't just hiding in the shadows; he had been invited in, welcomed at her dinner table, treated like a friend. Her home had become

his hunting ground, and her family was the prey. Now, Patricia must grapple with what to do next—not only to save her daughter but to ensure that no one else becomes his victim.

What follows is a transformation within Patricia. Her fear evolves into resolve. She recognizes the need for action—not just as a mother, but as someone who has been forced to confront pure evil face-to-face. Chapter 35 closes on this note of grim determination. The boundaries between ordinary life and unimaginable horror have dissolved. Patricia knows now that she can no longer wait for help. She will have to become the shield her children desperately need.



Summary