

Chapter 21

Chapter 21 begins with a veneer of normalcy, the keyword introducing a chapter that swings rapidly from cozy calm to pointed discomfort. After a pleasant dinner, conversation flows easily, wine loosens their smiles, and the glow of shared laughter briefly restores the illusion of harmony. But that peace begins to erode the moment they step back into the house. Eddie's posture shifts—his jaw tightens, his voice flattens—and the connection they shared at dinner slips away. Rather than join the narrator in the living room, he pours himself another drink and heads out back, leaving her to wonder what soured his mood so quickly.

Later that night, the narrator wakes to find the other side of the bed still empty. Curious, she goes searching and discovers Eddie outside, fumbling near the boathouse with a flashlight. He claims he's looking for a key he misplaced, muttering about needing to check something in the shed. His tone is strained, his words too casual. There's no real urgency behind his explanation, and yet the task seems to carry weight. The narrator offers to help, but he brushes her off, insisting it's nothing. Watching him from the porch, she notices the way his shoulders slump slightly—an unguarded moment of defeat or regret, perhaps—but when he turns to face her again, that moment is gone.

Back in the bedroom, she lies awake, turning over every strange detail in her mind. There's a lingering chill in the room, not from the air but from the suspicion that something just beneath the surface is being hidden. Eddie's behavior that night scratches at her peace. Why now? Why that key? She wonders if it's connected to the other moments that haven't added up—the quick shifts in his mood, the unfinished stories about Bea, the silence that fills the gaps in their conversations.

The next day brings no answers, only new complications. As she scrolls through her inbox, sipping her coffee, Eddie appears in the doorway, his laptop in hand and his expression unreadable. He asks, carefully but not casually, about several unexpected withdrawals from their shared account. Her heart skips, but she keeps her expression neutral, claiming they're for wedding preparations—dress fittings, vendor deposits, deposits she can't really prove. He doesn't press for receipts but suggests she use a new credit card instead, one he hands her right there at the kitchen island.

The moment feels transactional, not generous. Like a way to keep tabs under the guise of convenience. She nods, smiles, and accepts it, but inside, there's a tightening. Eddie never directly accuses her, but the question was clear. He doesn't trust her fully, just like she doesn't trust him. And yet they're planning a life together, inviting guests, choosing cake flavors. The contradiction of it all settles heavily on her shoulders.

Later that afternoon, the narrator sits alone, looking out at the lake from the back deck, the same view that once felt like a promise of peace. Now, every gentle ripple carries a whisper of secrets. She replays the conversation, the way he looked at her, and the odd timing of the bank issue. Eddie's past—especially his connection to Blanche and Bea—casts a long shadow, one that lengthens with every evasive smile and vague explanation.

She tries to dismiss the thoughts. Tells herself everyone has doubts. But it's getting harder to pretend she hasn't seen the cracks forming in the picture-perfect surface of their life. Trust is being tested in quiet ways, in late-night disappearances, in whispered accusations, in financial oversight masked as support.

And as the day slips into dusk, she wonders what else Eddie is hiding—what else lies locked behind doors, or perhaps, floating beneath still waters just out of reach.