

Chapter 20

Chapter 20 begins with a suggestion that feels more like a test—an invitation wrapped in nonchalance. Eddie, pouring coffee in the morning light, proposes a weekend at the lake, speaking casually as though the place didn't carry the weight of two deaths. The narrator, mid-page in a bridal magazine, is momentarily thrown. It's not just the idea of going there—it's what it might reveal. Her instincts tighten, warning her there's something he's not saying, but she agrees anyway, partly from curiosity, partly from fear of what her refusal might provoke.

Their drive to Smith Lake starts lighthearted enough. Rural Alabama rolls past the car windows, and lunch in Jasper offers a glimpse of a relaxed, charming Eddie. He fits in so seamlessly it's unnerving—equally at home in designer suits and barbecue joints. The narrator plays along, trying to enjoy the ease between them, but unease simmers just beneath her smile. When they arrive at the lake house, the scenery turns serene and unnervingly still. The lake glistens in the sun, but its beauty feels deceptive, a veneer over something heavy and unresolved.

Inside, the house is designed to feel rustic, masculine, intentionally different from the refined elegance of their home in Thornfield Estates. Dark wood, nautical accents, and heavy furniture dominate the space. Bea may have designed it, but it feels like she was creating an image of Eddie—not herself. That realization unsettles the narrator. There's a familiarity here that aligns too perfectly with Eddie's preferences, which suggests Bea had been trying to mold something—or someone—into place. And while the decor seems benign, it hints at deeper attempts to control or preserve parts of their marriage.

Later, Eddie opens up unexpectedly, his voice low and reflective as he watches the water. The quiet around the lake, once peaceful, now feels oppressive. He talks about

the lake's depth, the underwater forest left behind when the area was flooded. The idea of trees still standing beneath the surface, untouched and hidden, becomes a metaphor for everything left unsaid between them. The narrator imagines Bea's body caught in those submerged branches, a haunting picture that lingers long after the conversation ends.

As the evening sets in, the mood remains subdued. The stillness of the lake wraps around the house like a blanket, making every creak and breeze feel amplified. While Eddie prepares dinner, the narrator walks out to the dock alone. She watches the gentle ripple of the water and tries to picture how things might have unfolded that night—how two women ended up dead in a place this calm. It doesn't feel like a crime scene. And maybe that's what makes it so terrifying.

Back inside, they eat by the window, the silence between them thicker than before. Eddie talks about how he didn't sleep for weeks after it happened. About how every night, he imagined the noise Bea might've made as she fell, the splash, the last breath. The narrator listens but says little. She doesn't know whether to feel sorry for him or scared of him. Maybe both.

Later, as she lies in the guestroom bed staring at the wooden beams above, she replays every word of their dinner. Every pause. Every look. It's not what Eddie says that unnerves her most—it's what he doesn't. There's no mention of Blanche, no direct description of what happened that night, no concrete answers. Just murmurs about darkness, trees, and silence.

Before she drifts off, she wonders if Eddie brought her here to test her loyalty or to see if she'd ask too many questions. Either way, she senses that something about this trip isn't about relaxation. It's about control. And that realization chills her far more than the deep waters outside ever could.