

Chapter 37

Chapter 37 — Chapter 37 begins in a hospital room that smells like antiseptic and regret. I haven't been admitted since I broke my elbow at fifteen trying to impress a skater boy. I hated hospitals then, and being here now hasn't improved my opinion. I'm told I'll be discharged tomorrow, but I don't even know where "home" is anymore. The estate in Thornfield is gone—burned down to the bones—along with any future I thought I was building. Maybe it's strange that what I fixate on isn't the fact that my fiancé trapped his wife in a panic room. The real shock lies in how much sense that truth makes, as if all the disjointed feelings I had before had been waiting for confirmation.

Now, everything lines up—my doubts, my discomfort, the flickers of instinct I'd ignored. When Bea ran up those stairs to get to Eddie, I saw something I didn't recognize in myself. That love—wild, desperate, reckless—wasn't mine. It never had been. Eddie might have said the right things, but whatever he felt for me didn't burn like that. When the panic room door opened, the fire rushed out like it had been waiting. I backed away as instinct took over, stumbling into the night. I ran, the grass scraping my knees as I hit the lawn, my lungs tight from the smoke. In the end, I did what I've always done. I saved myself.

That realization cuts deeper than I expected. Because if I saved myself, I also left them behind. I survived the fire, walked away without burns—just smoke in my throat and ash in my memories. Nurses say I'm lucky, and I suppose I am. But luck doesn't change the fact that my world has burned to the ground. I'm floating now, untethered from everything I thought I had. Just as I'm sinking into that thought, a quiet knock pulls me back. It's Detective Laurent. I sit up too quickly, heart spiking as if it still expects bad news.

She enters like it's a social visit, smiling gently, her posture relaxed. But her eyes are too observant. I can't read her expression, and that makes me uneasy. I nod when she asks to talk and try to seem normal, like I'm just another victim. She starts gently, asking how I'm doing. My throat still hurts, so I rasp that I'm okay. "It all feels unreal," I say, because it does—too much like a movie, too little like a life. Then she drops the real news, the kind that makes your stomach twist.

She tells me Eddie didn't make it out. I nod slowly, because I've practiced this moment. I pretend I didn't know, and it isn't hard. What catches me off guard is her next statement—that their working theory is Eddie set the fire on purpose. That he tried to kill me and himself. The shock I show isn't an act. I genuinely hadn't considered that angle. "He did it on purpose?" I ask, and she nods, confirming it with a sigh that carries too many stories.

Then she tells me what the investigation has uncovered—Eddie's car was seen near the lake the night Blanche disappeared. A neighbor reported seeing him leave the house late. The pieces are forming a picture, and it's worse than I imagined. The detective says they suspect Eddie murdered Blanche and possibly Bea too. My hand flies to my mouth in disbelief. It's a lot to absorb. She mentions Tripp, how he was used to flush Eddie out, how he's been cleared. It's strange feeling sorry for someone like Tripp, but I can't help it. He was a pawn, just like the rest of us.

Detective Laurent leans in and takes my hand. She says she's sorry. But my thoughts are spinning. If they think Bea is dead, then that means they never found her body. And if that's true, she's still out there. My heart thuds at the thought. Bea—alive and hiding—possibly watching everything unfold from some quiet corner. The detective mentions they may reach out again with more questions. I thank her, keeping my voice even, but inside, I'm already somewhere else.

As she walks to the door, I can't stop myself. I ask, "Did you... is Eddie's body..." The question trails off, but it's heavy with meaning. What I really want to know is, was he really in there? Is this over? Or am I still a character in someone else's unfinished story?