

Chapter 13

Chapter 13 begins with Patricia witnessing the grim reality of Miss Mary's declining health, her injuries too severe for recovery. The emotional burden weighs heavily on Carter, who channels his grief into relentless work, pretending everything remains under control. Though Patricia senses his pain, she's unsure how to comfort him and instead steps up to manage what remains—repairing broken routines, battling a worsening rat problem at her house, and tending to Ragtag, their injured dog, who may not survive the trauma. Amid the chaos, grief lingers, but practical duties pull her forward.

The community's response to Miss Mary's death is a mixture of compassion and avoidance. Neighbors show up with food and condolences, but none can erase the hollow quiet that now fills Carter's home. Patricia finds herself stuck between wanting to help and feeling intrusive, especially as she wrestles with unresolved tension with Mrs. Greene, who was also harmed in the attack. That emotional gap widens with each failed gesture, even as Patricia seeks redemption through small, deliberate acts. The rats gnawing through her walls feel symbolic—persistence, invasion, decay—all creeping in beneath the surface.

Efforts to restore normalcy are made more difficult by Carter's stubborn silence and the heaviness left behind. The rat infestation worsens, and Ragtag's condition declines, his wound refusing to heal. Carter, unwilling to put the dog down, avoids facing another loss, forcing Patricia to handle decisions she isn't emotionally ready to make. With each passing day, Patricia becomes more entangled in the burdens of others, her own feelings overlooked as she cleans up, coordinates, and copes. It's not heroism—it's duty, made heavier by the absence of gratitude or closure.

Later, Patricia reflects on Mrs. Greene's situation, acknowledging her part in the events that led to the woman's injury. A sense of guilt surfaces—not just for what happened, but for how Patricia's privileged detachment has kept her from understanding what others endure. These reflections push her to confront uncomfortable truths about racial disparities and social blind spots that have long existed in their town. Though well-meaning, her actions often come across as transactional, revealing a pattern of control disguised as kindness. It's an awakening wrapped in shame.

A brief but tense encounter with a group of teenagers exposes more than just friction between generations. Patricia hears the coded mockery in their voices, their eyes daring her to challenge them. The old safety she once associated with her neighborhood no longer exists. Walls are being redrawn—some literal, some invisible—as distrust seeps into once-familiar places. Her instinct to protect clashes with the fear of being perceived as another entitled outsider, complicating even her smallest interactions.

With Kitty at her side, Patricia visits Mrs. Greene, bearing a financial gift disguised as a gesture of goodwill. The offer is met with polite but firm resistance. Mrs. Greene, sitting upright in her recliner despite lingering pain, makes it clear that dignity cannot be bought or borrowed. What she seeks is employment, not pity—a way to support herself without relying on the charity of those who had previously looked past her struggle. This quiet defiance stirs something in Patricia that goes beyond guilt: a respect that hadn't been there before.

What lingers most is Mrs. Greene's unwavering pride in the face of discomfort. Even after injury and insult, she demands control over her own path forward. The rejection of charity is not about pride alone—it's about reclaiming agency in a world where so many decisions are made without asking. Patricia leaves that visit subdued, her earlier assumptions fractured. It's the first moment she truly sees Mrs. Greene as her equal, not just as a figure of sympathy or blame. The distance between them narrows slightly—not enough to call them friends, but enough to call it progress.

Back home, Patricia walks into the decaying scent of Ragtag's decline and the sound of something scratching behind the kitchen wall. The dog's breathing is faint, his eyes glazed. She knows what must be done but waits anyway, unwilling to let another life slip away just yet. It's not cowardice—it's fatigue. Mourning, caregiving, guilt, and survival all blur together in the dim lighting of her home, and still, she presses on. Chapter 13 doesn't offer redemption, but it does reveal growth, earned inch by inch in uncomfortable truths and difficult goodbyes.

