

Chapter 38

Chapter 38 begins with Kitty anxiously watching the rearview mirror, her voice trembling as she wonders if Patricia will be all right. They sit silently in Maryellen's parked minivan, far from the bright lights and curious eyes of town, wrapped in darkness and fear. Mrs. Greene affirms that they are all fine, but their silence betrays their shared doubt—especially regarding Patricia's condition. As the clock strikes seven, they realize time is no longer on their side. There's no more space for hesitation; action must replace fear. The decision is made quietly, and the three women step out into the cold, armed not with certainty, but with a sense of necessity.

Carrying a red-and-white Igloo cooler and a Bi-Lo grocery bag, they move quickly and quietly down Middle Street, choosing stealth over convenience. Their dark clothing and deliberate silence reflect the weight of their mission. Kitty, always one to distract with nervous chatter, begins talking about Christmas gifts—her way of coping with the mounting pressure. Maryellen's sharp response snaps her back into the moment. Each woman carries a different fear—Kitty's is emotional, Maryellen's is practical, and Mrs. Greene's is hardened resolve. They reach James Harris's home, a looming structure of shadow and silence, and remove their shoes before slipping onto the porch, choosing to trade comfort for silence. Every detail, from hidden lights to echoing cheers in the distance, underscores the dread pressing down on them.

Inside the house, the chill deepens. The only sound is a radio playing classical music—serene, yet deeply out of place. They climb the stairs as quietly as possible, moving with the unease of people walking into a nightmare they wish they could wake from. A sound upstairs breaks their tension—a low, rhythmic noise drawing them toward the master bedroom. What they find stuns them into frozen disbelief. Patricia, under some unnatural trance, lies exposed, and James Harris crouches between her legs, feeding with monstrous hunger. His body pulses like a machine driven by primal

need, and for a long moment, none of them can move. The stench of blood and flesh fills the air, thick and offensive.

Kitty, regaining her senses first, swings her bat with all the strength she can muster. Her blow lands with a sickening metallic crack, but it hardly fazes Harris. Patricia moans in a mix of pain and pleasure, lost to the horror around her. A second swing connects harder, but still, he doesn't stop feeding. When Harris finally turns, his face is smeared with blood and madness. Kitty swings again, but this time he's ready. He knocks the bat away, grabs her by the shoulders, and slams her back against the doorframe, then throws her across the room with terrifying ease. Her body crashes into an armchair, but she scrambles back up, refusing to surrender.

Mrs. Greene swings her hammer, but it glances off Harris's skull. He disarms her effortlessly, sending her stumbling into the bathroom. Maryellen, paralyzed by fear, drops both her weapon and her control, the knife landing beside a puddle of her own urine. Harris advances on Mrs. Greene, dragging her back across the tile. Her attempt to resist is brave but futile—his strength is unnatural, overwhelming. Just as he looms to strike, Kitty charges from behind and crashes into him like a wrecking ball, forcing him into the bathroom. Their bodies slam against the porcelain and tile, and they collapse in a tangle.

Kitty, though outweighed and bruised, refuses to let go. She presses him into the ground, using everything she has to keep him pinned. Her screams for the knife go unanswered until Mrs. Greene shouts for Maryellen to throw it. For once, Maryellen responds—not perfectly, but enough. The knife lands near Mrs. Greene, who miraculously catches it. Kitty holds on, her hands digging into Harris's skin as he bucks and thrashes beneath her. She finds her moment, and with both hands gripping the handle, she drives the blade down into his exposed spine.

Harris's scream is more than sound—it's vibration, pain, rage, and fear all at once. Kitty grinds the blade upward, feeling it slice through tissue and bone. Harris jerks, flails, tries to lift her off, but she adjusts her weight and forces the knife deeper. His power begins to fade, his body weakening beneath her, his motions slowing. Finally,

the force that once made him unstoppable gives way. Kitty, breathless, bloodied, and exhausted, remains on top, pushing down with everything left in her body. What's left of Harris gurgles beneath her, the monster finally breaking into pieces. And still, she holds on—because anything less might not be enough.

