

Chapter 39

Chapter 39 begins with rising panic and a sense of helpless urgency, as Kitty struggles to impose order in the aftermath of an encounter that has left Patricia unconscious and the house soaked in dread. She paces the room, repeating Grace's name, wishing someone older, wiser, or simply more decisive were in charge. The silence is broken by a sudden jolt—Patricia's body still, her breathing irregular, sending a wave of alarm through the group. Mrs. Greene surprises them all by stepping forward, performing CPR with the calm skill of someone who's seen worse and never flinched. Each compression and breath is measured, a rhythm born of lived experience and maternal strength. As Patricia begins to respond, her eyelids fluttering open slightly, relief washes over them—but the true threat remains just out of sight.

James Harris, though incapacitated, continues to exert a chilling influence. His voice, weak yet pointed, worms into the room like a toxin, offering delusions of eternal life and power. Despite being physically overpowered, he remains a psychological predator, his words laced with temptation and taunts meant to fracture their fragile alliance. Mrs. Greene, unshaken, dismisses his claims as the desperate whimpers of a monster unmasked. While Kitty wavers under the emotional strain, Maryellen and Mrs. Greene begin a dark task—dismembering Harris with hunting tools and unspoken resolve. The gruesome work is done not out of vengeance, but necessity. Their actions carry the weight of protection, of choosing the lives of their loved ones over the survival of someone who was never human to them.

Harris tries to bargain, dangling secrets and promises he can't keep, revealing his ties to the Wide Smiles Club—an eerie fraternity built on exploitation, death, and control. But his charisma crumbles, replaced by desperation as the women refuse to yield. They see through the thin veil of his supposed power, recognizing his isolation and fear beneath the arrogance. His final moments are not met with pity, but with resolve. It is

Maryellen who delivers the last blow, her hand steady, her eyes brimming not with hate but with understanding of what must be done. The silence that follows is heavy, not just from the act itself, but from the knowledge that no justice system could have handled what they've endured. In the dim light of that room, they become the judge, the jury, and the executioners of something beyond the reach of law.

Cleaning begins while Patricia sleeps in the other room, unaware of the gruesome justice enacted on her behalf. Kitty, still pale and shaken, keeps her distance but helps where she can, holding bags open, gathering cloths, muttering prayers. The others work with the same quiet efficiency used in cleaning houses or nursing the sick—methods passed down from generations of women expected to fix what others broke. Harris's remains are sorted, bagged, and sealed without ceremony. Their work is almost methodical, free from theatrics. There is no need to speak; their shared understanding is louder than any words.

In the quiet aftermath, fear still hangs like a mist. Even in death, Harris leaves behind the threat of the unknown—his cryptic references to others like him, the implications that the Wide Smiles Club isn't gone, only hiding. The women don't speak of what comes next, not yet. Their focus remains on cleaning the present, on restoring a sense of safety, even if temporary. The emotional weight of the night presses down on them, but they remain upright, bound by loyalty and the quiet promise that they will shield one another, no matter what it costs. Harris's last breath may have been drawn, but his shadow is not so easily erased.

The events of that night shift the dynamic between the women forever. No longer just friends, they are now bound by a shared secret, by the memory of a choice that changed them. Kitty, once hesitant, sees them with new eyes—capable not only of nurturing, but of protecting, even through darkness. The chapter ends not in triumph, but in a muted breath of relief, as they step back from the brink with trembling hands and bloodstained clothes. Yet beneath the surface, something strong begins to take root—a sisterhood forged not in celebration, but in survival. Their journey forward will not be easy, but it will be carried by the quiet courage born in rooms no one else will

ever understand.

