

# Chapter 24

Chapter 24 begins with an innocent question—"Are you okay?"—but what follows reveals how far from okay things really are. The days have become heavy with heat, but my morning jogs bring a short-lived clarity, the kind that comes from movement and quiet. I like the early hours, before the world fully wakes, before the pretense sets in. The air is still, the sun soft, and for a few moments, I feel like myself again—whoever that's becoming. My runs sometimes cross paths with Emily and Campbell. Emily always waves, but Campbell's smile feels like it's being pulled too tightly across her face, as if she's clenching something behind her teeth. It makes me wonder if she suspects something. Or knows more than she's letting on.

The wedding dress hangs upstairs, still wrapped in plastic, its elegance now tinged with unease. I'd bought it in a rush of optimism, back when everything with Eddie felt like a fairytale. Now, even the smallest sound in the house makes me tense. This morning, I heard a dull thump—like the one I remember from the night the news came about Blanche. My heart lurched, even though I knew it was probably nothing. Or at least, I told myself that. Afterward, I called Eddie. Just hearing his voice made the world feel less sharp. He always sounds so sure. So steady. But lately, I've started to wonder if that steadiness is real, or if it's another performance—just like everything else in Thornfield Estates.

My thoughts keep circling back to Tripp. He's still lounging in his house, drinking on the porch, making phone calls like his life hasn't just been upended by a murder charge. He killed her. Or at least, that's what the evidence suggests. A hammer was purchased. A woman was found with a shattered skull. And yet, Tripp is still free. Still golfing, still being greeted like a misunderstood neighbor instead of a possible killer. I think about what would've happened if it were me. A woman with my background, my past. I wouldn't have been sipping cocktails and calling lawyers from my living room.

I'd be in a jumpsuit, waiting behind bars for a court date I'd never afford.

Eddie's take on the whole thing is both cynical and infuriating. "This is Alabama," he says, shrugging. "Money buys forgiveness. Or at least, delay." He's not wrong, but the way he says it, so casually, so detached—it gnaws at me. It makes me feel like maybe he understands this system too well. Like he's speaking from experience. I keep following every article, every update on Tripp's case. I tell myself it's because I care about justice, about Blanche. But deep down, I know it's something darker. I want to see what happens to a man like that. I want to know if the rules ever actually apply.



Summarver

There's still no body confirmed for Bea. Her disappearance is a ghost shadowing everything else, and people don't talk about her anymore. Not really. It's easier to pretend she never existed. Just another Southern woman who drifted out of her own life one day and never came back. But I can't forget her. Not when I'm living in her house, surrounded by her furniture, and trying to plan a wedding in the space she once ruled. It makes me wonder if houses remember the people they belonged to. If walls can hold secrets, if floorboards can echo footsteps that aren't mine.

Late at night, the tension coils tighter. The sounds, the shadows, the empty rooms—it all feels like a warning. The other night, I caught myself locking the bathroom door behind me, even though I was alone. Even though no one was home but me and Adele. When Eddie called, I told him I'd just been feeling off. He offered to come home early, but I said no. I need him to believe I'm okay. Because if he thinks I'm not, everything might unravel.

So I smile when people ask how the wedding planning is going. I nod when they comment on how lucky I am. I pretend I don't hear the things they say about Blanche or Tripp or Bea when they think I've stepped away. But underneath the routine and the rosé and the perfectly manicured lawns, something is rotting. And I think I'm starting to smell it.