

Chapter 29

Chapter 29 begins with a decision so reckless it surprises even me. Running through the neighborhood in the early morning, I tell myself it's just another jog, nothing suspicious. But my pulse races for more reasons than cardio. I'm on my way to Tripp Ingraham's house—a man recently charged with murder. The logic is flimsy at best, but his late-night texts haven't left my mind. There's a part of me, deeper than instinct, that whispers he's telling the truth. Tripp has plenty of flaws—he drinks too much, says the wrong things, and leans far too hard into entitlement—but something about him doesn't match the profile of a killer.

His house looks abandoned by hope. Overgrown bushes line the front, and dead petals scatter across cracked pavement like remnants of something once cared for. When he finally answers the door, I barely recognize him. His skin is sallow, eyes darkened with exhaustion, and a sour smell clings to the air as I step inside. The place reeks of booze and neglect, a sad echo of someone unraveling. I refuse to sit. I cross my arms and demand he get to the point. Tripp offers a half-hearted smirk, tries to soften the tension with sarcasm, but the weariness behind his eyes tells me he's got more to say.

He talks about Eddie—how perfect he must've seemed when I met him. Charming, wealthy, magnetic. But Tripp cuts through the surface: "He's poison," he says. "And so is Bea." It's not bitterness in his voice—it's regret. He tells me Blanche wanted to move, that she'd started talking about Bea like a weight she couldn't shake. "Bea took her whole damn life," he says, "and still couldn't give her space." The story that unfolds next stops my breath. Tripp admits Bea invited him to the lake that weekend. He thought it was a peace offering. Instead, it might have been a setup.

According to him, he passed out from too much alcohol and woke up alone. The boat was gone. Bea and Blanche were missing. He assumed they'd gone out together. Only

later did he learn they were both already dead. “Rotting in that water,” he whispers, voice cracking. Tripp swears he had nothing to do with it, but his fingerprints are on the boat, and someone used his credit card to buy rope and a hammer. “I was afraid,” he says. “But you still have a chance, Jane. Walk away.” I hear desperation in his voice—real fear, not just self-preservation. That, more than anything, tells me something bigger is at play.

Back at the house, I’m frantic. Tripp’s warning echoes in my ears, and I tear through the rooms like I’m possessed. I rip open drawers, dump out boxes, and flip through every pocket of Eddie’s clothes. Adele barks nervously, circling my feet as if trying to anchor me. Cushions are tossed, books scattered, closets emptied. Somewhere in this house, I’m sure there has to be a trace—a receipt, a weapon, a bloodstain. You don’t commit murder without leaving something behind. You just don’t. But hours pass, and the only thing I’ve gained is exhaustion.

Eventually, I collapse on the floor of the coat closet, surrounded by torn lining and shoe dust. I’m shaking from adrenaline and disbelief. Adele watches me from the hallway, silent now, like she knows something’s changed. I’m not even sure what I’m doing anymore—trying to find proof, or trying to give myself a reason to leave. Tripp might be right. Whatever happened up there on the lake wasn’t just tragic—it was calculated. And even if Eddie didn’t swing the hammer, he knows more than he ever let on.

Just as I’m about to give up, something catches my eye. A jacket, crumpled in the corner of the closet, looks unfamiliar. I reach for it, and my fingers brush against a weight in one pocket. Heart hammering, I pull it out. But it’s not a weapon. It’s a paperback novel. A romance. Not the kind Eddie usually reads. Not military thrillers or finance exposés—but something soft, even sentimental.

And that’s when the worst thought creeps in. Maybe the real clue isn’t about what Eddie did. Maybe it’s about what he *felt*. Maybe someone else committed the murder—but Eddie covered it up out of love. Out of guilt. Out of something that complicates this even further. I sit in the wreckage of our perfect life, surrounded by

broken things, and realize: this story isn't over. It's barely begun.

