

# Chapter 44

Chapter 44 unfolds with an intense surge of emotional tension as Leighton is suddenly awoken by her mother's distressed cry in the middle of the night. Instinctively, she rushes to her younger sisters, Cammy and Juniper, who are huddled together, whispering in fear that something terrible is happening to their mother. Driven by the urgency of the situation, Leighton quickly instructs the girls to hide in the armoire, telling them to remain silent and stay safe. Despite her own growing anxiety, she forces herself to leave them alone in the dark, knowing that their safety depends on their staying out of sight. The fear of what might happen next weighs heavily on her, but she knows she must protect her sisters while she faces the chaos unfolding downstairs.

Leighton moves cautiously down the stairs, each step filled with hesitation. When she reaches the bottom step, she freezes, her heart pounding as she listens to the unsettling sounds coming from the kitchen. Her mother's desperate plea for release echoes through the house, a cry that cuts through the tension like a sharp blade. Leighton's mind races, and she finds herself trapped between wanting to protect her mother and fearing the consequences of getting involved. In the darkness of the house, she tries to make herself as invisible as possible, hoping that her presence will go unnoticed. The weight of the situation presses heavily on her, and she struggles to suppress the urge to intervene, hoping that staying out of sight will keep her mother safe, even though it feels like a betrayal.

The atmosphere remains thick with dread as Leighton remains frozen, her thoughts filled with uncertainty. She notices a crack in the wall, growing larger as she tries to push against it, symbolizing the deepening fracture in their family. As the situation in the kitchen becomes clearer, Leighton realizes her mother has been crying, although she hasn't shown it directly. This realization deepens the emotional complexity of the

moment, and Leighton is consumed by the tension of the scene. Her mother, despite her visible distress, is still trying to maintain control, trying to manage the volatile situation with the man wielding the knife. The conflict intensifies, and Leighton feels a growing sense of helplessness as she watches her family torn apart by violence.

Unable to remain passive any longer, Leighton summons all of her courage and rushes into the kitchen, desperately urging her mother to leave with her. The scene erupts into a physical confrontation, with the man resisting violently, making it clear that any attempt to leave would be met with resistance. Leighton is caught in the midst of this chaos, her mother's protective instinct guiding her as she shields Leighton from the man's wrath. Overwhelmed by the terror of the moment, Leighton flees back to the armoire, tears choking her throat as she hides, feeling helpless in the face of the violence that has enveloped her family. The overwhelming weight of the situation presses down on her as she struggles to process the horror unfolding before her eyes.

After what feels like an eternity, the man finally leaves, and a heavy silence falls over the house. Leighton emerges from the armoire, her body trembling with exhaustion and relief. Though shaken by the events that have just transpired, there is a small flicker of hope in her heart. The calm that follows the storm feels fragile, and Leighton knows that, though the immediate danger has passed, the emotional toll of the night will stay with her for much longer. This chapter marks a pivotal moment of vulnerability and resilience for Leighton, as she navigates the complexities of familial love and violence, finding strength in the face of overwhelming fear.