

Chapter 13: Targeting Bonnie Rae

On January 6, 2021, Emily (Em) and her husband, Rodney (Roddy), sit in their comfortable living room, watching the chaos unfold on their television screen as a mob storms the U.S. Capitol. The room is dimly lit, casting long shadows on the walls as the flickering images of rioters breaking windows and clashing with police reflect off the glass coffee table. In *Chapter 13*, Em outwardly expresses shock at the scene, her voice tinged with just the right amount of disapproval, yet something about the moment excites her in ways she would never admit. She has always been drawn to moments of transformation, upheaval, and the unpredictability of human behavior, though she ensures that no one—not even Roddy—knows the full extent of her fascination.

Roddy, on the other hand, watches with weary disinterest, his fingers idly rubbing at the joints in his hands, aching as they always do in the cold of winter. His concerns are more immediate—his arthritis, their carefully curated routines, and their next necessary action. While Em lets herself be momentarily captivated by the unraveling of order, Roddy's mind is elsewhere, focused on the practicalities of their secret life. He listens as his wife murmurs something about the way America's middle class is shifting, her words more observation than opinion, but beneath her detached analysis, he knows there's something deeper—something far less academic.

In the next room, Bonnie Rae, their employee and an unknowing pawn in their twisted existence, sits with a laptop, watching the same historic moment unfold. She had been working on a digital assignment for Em, creating holiday greetings for a set of personal contacts, but the sheer magnitude of what was happening on live television had distracted her. When Em enters the room, however, the television is abruptly switched off with a sharp flick of the remote, and Bonnie is directed back to her work. Em feigns mild frustration with technology, pretending to need Bonnie's assistance in handling

the simplest of digital tasks, but in truth, she enjoys the small power dynamics of playing the intellectually superior but technologically inept mentor.

As the evening darkens, so too does the tone of their conversation when Em returns to the living room and settles beside Roddy. Their small talk drifts toward their secret ritual—one they have practiced for years under the guise of necessity. Em retrieves a small container from the coffee table, unscrewing the lid to reveal a thick, creamy lotion with a faintly musky scent. Without hesitation, she begins rubbing it into Roddy's hands, the mixture working its way into his aging skin, soothing the persistent ache in his joints. What they are doing is not just unconventional—it is horrifying, but to them, it is simply another part of their existence.

The lotion, made from the rendered fat of their last victim, Peter Steinman, is something they both believe in. Em insists it has restorative properties, a natural remedy for the pain that comes with age, a justification that has allowed them to continue their horrific practices without guilt. Roddy, though less philosophical about their methods, accepts it for what it is—an advantage, a means of survival, a secret too dangerous to abandon. And now, they need more.

Their conversation turns to the question of their next source. Bonnie Rae is discussed with eerie detachment, as if she were no more than a problem to be solved rather than a person with hopes, dreams, and a life of her own. Em, ever pragmatic, points out that Bonnie's recent personal struggles—a difficult breakup, her estrangement from her mother, the workplace harassment she has endured—make her an ideal candidate. She has few people who would immediately come looking for her, no strong ties that would cause instant concern. They rationalize her selection the way others might deliberate over which restaurant to dine at—cold, calculated, and absent of empathy.

Roddy, though he ultimately agrees, hesitates slightly, not out of morality but out of caution. Their methods have worked for years, but with technology and surveillance advancing, each disappearance poses a greater risk. Em dismisses his concerns with quiet confidence, pointing out how predictable human behavior is, how easy it is to

manipulate circumstances in their favor. People disappear all the time, she reminds him, especially those who already feel invisible.

The evening stretches on, the television now displaying something mundane in the background, but the true horror is taking place within the walls of their home. Em massages another layer of the human-derived lotion into Roddy's skin, her movements slow and deliberate, her mind already planning the details of their next steps. Their conversation continues, marked by the casualness of discussing something as ordinary as weekend errands, yet the subject matter is anything but.

As the chapter draws to a close, the juxtaposition between the Capitol riots—a moment of public, chaotic violence—and the quiet, calculated evil inside Em and Roddy's home becomes strikingly clear. One is loud, disorderly, and openly aggressive; the other is methodical, insidious, and hidden beneath layers of charm and civility. Bonnie Rae, sitting just a few rooms away, remains unaware that she is no longer just an employee but a carefully selected target. The decision has already been made. She just doesn't know it yet.