

Epilogue

Epilogue — I still think about them—Eddie and Bea. Even after everything that happened, their shadows linger in quiet corners of my mind. One afternoon, while loading groceries into my trunk, I caught a glimpse of someone who looked like her. It wasn't possible, of course. By then, Alabama was far behind me, along with everything tied to Mountain Brook. I'd moved to the peaceful slopes of North Carolina, using Bea's money not for extravagance, but for a modest cabin tucked into the trees. Turns out, the South held a gentler side after all—one I hadn't expected to love.

The SUV that rolled by that day seemed too deliberate, too familiar. A woman in sunglasses glanced out, her figure half-hidden behind tinted windows. In the passenger seat, someone slouched—unclear, indistinct, maybe not even a man. Adele, my dog, barked sharply, her gaze fixed on the passing car, and for a split second, I felt a pair of eyes meet mine. It could've been a trick of the light or just my nerves playing games. That was only months after the fire, a time when fear still sat just beneath my skin. I was still raw, always expecting the past to resurface.

I tell myself that Bea couldn't have survived. The moment she opened the panic room door, flames surged like a living beast, swallowing everything in an instant. I recall the acrid scent of scorched hair and something else—something that smelled too much like roasted flesh. They claimed they found Eddie's teeth in the aftermath, but part of me flinches at that. I remember watching his teeth fly when I struck him once, hard and desperate, so maybe what they found wasn't proof at all. That uncertainty festers in me, unanswered. It's why I still look over my shoulder, as if the past might come driving up in an SUV at any moment.

In quiet hours, I imagine them alive. It's easier than accepting the alternative. Maybe they faked it all—disappeared to some remote island, far from anyone who'd recognize

them. Bea always had a way of slipping out of tight corners, and Eddie? He was many things, but he wasn't stupid. I envision them on a quiet stretch of beach, somewhere forgotten by maps. Palm trees sway gently, waves whisper over white sand, and they live without the weight of secrets or the burden of legacy.

In these mental snapshots, Bea's skin glows in the sun, her laughter light and untroubled. Her long hair is tied back casually, and her hand finds Eddie's without hesitation. He's changed—scarred, weathered, not the man he once was, but still by her side. I see his fingers, marked with burns, curling around hers with a kind of practiced tenderness. They sit together on worn driftwood or a faded blanket, sharing moments instead of memories, their past buried like the estate they left behind. I can almost hear her say, "We're together now. That's what matters."

There's something tragically romantic in that image—the kind of love story born out of ruin. No money, no mansion, no social status to uphold. Just two people who burned everything down and walked away, hand in hand. It's not forgiveness I offer them in these daydreams, but understanding. Perhaps escaping justice was their final act of devotion. Maybe they believe they're free now, far away from a world that judged them too quickly, or not enough.

But I know better. Trauma doesn't disappear just because you change your view. Even on an island, ghosts can find you. And guilt? It lingers like smoke, impossible to outrun. I sometimes wonder if Bea wakes up gasping, hearing the fire again. Or if Eddie feels that moment replay—the crack of bone, the sound of his world collapsing.

Still, I let them live in my imagination. Because the truth is messier, heavier. If they did survive, I'll likely never know. That mystery is mine to carry, tucked between cracked floorboards and grocery bags. Sometimes it comforts me to believe that they found peace somewhere warm and far away. Other times, it haunts me.

And perhaps that's the real ending—not one of justice or revenge, but ambiguity. A life left open-ended, the way some stories demand. Not everything needs closure. Some scars are meant to remain visible.