

Chapter 30: The Investigation Deepens

On July 27, 2021, *Chapter 30* unfolds as Holly Gibney arrives at Avram Welch's condominium in Sunrise Bay, a space filled with tokens of his past—model ships in bottles and a framed photo of his late wife, Mary, who tragically succumbed to lung cancer despite never smoking. Welch reflects on significant moments in his life, from undergoing a double knee replacement to his final visits to the local bowling alley, where he shared time with Cary Dressler and their team, the Golden Oldies. He recalls Cary as an eccentric but well-liked presence in the group, noting how marijuana use during their games seemed to improve performance for most—except for Roddy Harris, who always chose to abstain.

As Welch speaks, Holly carefully observes him, weighing the possibility that he could be the Red Bank Predator, a theory that directly conflicts with her instincts. Despite her investigative training, the notion of Welch as a cold-blooded serial killer doesn't sit right, his demeanor and recollections lacking the undercurrent of deception she usually detects in dangerous individuals. Still, she knows that even the most unassuming people can hide monstrous secrets, forcing her to keep an open mind as she pieces together the scattered clues.

Meanwhile, Barbara is lost in the depths of Randall Jarrell's poetry, absorbed in the quiet beauty of his words when an unexpected call from her brother, Jerome, interrupts her reverie. Jerome, full of excitement, shares his plans for an upcoming weekend in Montauk, a rare break from the intensity of their ongoing discussions about Holly's investigation. Their conversation soon shifts to Barbara's own literary ambitions, with her revealing that Olivia Kingsbury had secretly submitted her work for the prestigious Penley Prize, a revelation that catches even her by surprise.

Jerome's response is one of pure enthusiasm, his pride in his sister's accomplishments evident as he encourages her to embrace the opportunity. Yet the moment of celebration is brief, as Jerome pivots back to Holly's case, revealing that her latest findings may have inadvertently exposed the presence of a serial killer operating near Deerfield Park or the local college. The thought shakes Barbara from her literary musings, her mind now split between personal success and the unsettling mystery that seems to be unfolding around them.

Sensing the urgency in Jerome's voice, Barbara quickly shifts gears, now fully engaged in the conversation about Holly's investigation. Jerome explains that a sudden realization about the case has led him to believe they are dealing with something far larger than a few missing persons, suggesting a pattern that had previously gone unnoticed. His request for Barbara to retrieve an orange flash drive from their father's study hints at new evidence or a crucial connection that could finally bring the case into focus.

The contrast between Barbara's literary aspirations and the dark reality of a potential serial killer lurking in their midst adds a sense of tension, bridging the gap between the personal and the investigative. Though she had been prepared to celebrate her own success, she now finds herself drawn into the complexities of Holly's case, unable to ignore the gravity of what her brother is suggesting. As she processes Jerome's words, she understands that this discovery could shift the entire course of the investigation, and possibly their lives, forever.

With each new revelation, the threads of Holly's case grow more entangled, pulling in those closest to her as the stakes rise. Whether Welch is truly a suspect or simply an aging man lost in nostalgia remains uncertain, but Holly knows better than to ignore any detail, no matter how small. As she leaves Sunrise Bay, she can't shake the feeling that the truth is closer than ever, waiting to be uncovered in the places no one dares to look.