

Chapter 42: Holly Gibney's Crossroads

Holly Gibney sits on her balcony, basking in the warmth of an August morning while grappling with the weight of recent changes in her life. *Chapter 42* finds her at a crossroads, with Finders Keepers temporarily closed, leaving the future of her investigative work in limbo. For the first time in years, she faces the prospect of a life without the relentless pursuit of justice. Pete, her unwavering colleague, has been considering retirement, and with her newfound financial security following an unexpected inheritance, Holly is in a position to do the same. Yet, the idea of stepping away from investigations doesn't bring the relief she expected. Instead, it leaves her feeling unsettled, as though she's teetering on the edge of an abyss, unsure whether to embrace a life of quiet detachment or to continue confronting the horrors she has battled for so long. The work has shaped her, defined her, and despite the trauma it has caused, she questions if she could ever truly leave it behind.

The cases she has handled over the years flood her mind, each leaving behind its own lingering scars. Some were inexplicable, steeped in supernatural horror, but others—perhaps the most disturbing of all—were rooted in the sheer depravity of human nature. Roddy and Emily Harris stand out among the latter, their crimes a stark reminder that real monsters do not always lurk in the shadows or whisper from beyond the grave. Often, they reside in plain sight, behind the friendly smiles of neighbors, coworkers, or even family members. Holly has always been more disturbed by the mundane nature of such evil than by anything paranormal. She reflects on the cruel irony that, while supernatural forces might threaten from the periphery, it is often the human predators, those who operate in broad daylight, that do the most damage. The thought makes her uneasy, reinforcing the idea that walking away from her career might mean leaving people vulnerable to those who would do them harm.

Her thoughts are interrupted by a phone call from Barbara Robinson, a woman whose life has been similarly shaped by encounters with darkness. Barbara's voice is filled with excitement as she shares the news of her recent success—winning the Penley Prize and seeing her poetry published, a triumph over the horrors she has endured. For a brief moment, Holly allows herself to feel genuine happiness, sharing in Barbara's victory, which serves as proof that survival is possible, that trauma does not have to define a person's future. The conversation is a welcome reprieve from the storm of thoughts swirling in Holly's mind, and she finds herself genuinely moved by Barbara's accomplishment. Through her writing, Barbara has reclaimed some measure of control over her past, transforming pain into something meaningful. It is a reminder that healing takes many forms, and perhaps, for Holly, the path forward is not just about fighting evil but finding a way to exist outside of it.

As she sets the phone down, the weight of her own indecision presses in once more. She has the means to retire, to step away from the darkness and finally live a life free from the constant battle against corruption and violence. She envisions a future of quiet mornings, reading on her balcony, free from the tension that has followed her for so long. But the peace she imagines feels hollow, like an existence detached from purpose. Can she really turn her back on the work that has defined her for so long? Even if she walks away, would the ghosts of past cases, the unanswered questions, and the unresolved injustices ever truly leave her? The idea of retirement should bring relief, yet all she feels is the nagging sensation that she is abandoning something—someone—who still needs her help.

As if on cue, the phone rings again, pulling her from her thoughts. The sound echoes through the room, carrying with it the weight of a decision she cannot postpone any longer. She hesitates for only a moment before reaching for the receiver, her hand steady, her mind made up. Whatever awaits on the other end of the line, she knows she cannot ignore it. Retirement may offer comfort, but her conscience will not allow her to embrace it just yet. There is still work to be done, still battles to fight. As she lifts the phone to her ear, she understands that some people are simply not meant for peaceful lives, and perhaps, neither is she.