

Part VI: Bea

You are being provided with a book chapter by chapter. I will request you to read the book for me after each chapter. After reading the chapter, 1. shorten the chapter to no less than 300 words and no more than 400 words. 2. Do not change the name, address, or any important nouns in the chapter. 3. Do not translate the original language. 4. Keep the same style as the original chapter, keep it consistent throughout the chapter. Your reply must comply with all four requirements, or it's invalid. I will provide the chapter now.

PART VI BEA

NOVEMBER, FOUR MONTHS AFTER BLANCHE

Eddie didn't hesitate today.

He came right in and sat down next to me, his thigh touching mine. When he said, "Are you okay up here?" I could smell the mint on his breath.

For some reason, that made it easier. Knowing he'd brushed his teeth before coming to see me, that he was expecting—hoping?—for this.

But then I'd gotten ready, too. I don't have much in the way of makeup in here, but I'd taken a shower, pinched my cheeks to put some color in them, brushed my hair. It was a little longer now, closer to how it looked when we first met, and I figured that could only help with what I needed to do.

Ever since that last visit, when the look on his face changed as soon as I mentioned Hawaii, I'd known we would end up here, that the easiest and best way of keeping myself alive, reminding him that he needed me, was through the one thing that had never let us down.

Sex.

But it's one thing to consider seducing the man who murdered your best friend, the man who's keeping you locked up, the man you thought you knew, the man you married.

It's another thing to go through with it.

I took his hand in mine, feeling the calluses on his palms, remembering that I'd always liked that about him, how he worked with his hands, how he wasn't like the Tripp Ingrahams of the world with their soft, pale fingers.

He was beautiful.

He always had been.

I focused on that, taking a deep breath as I let my fingers run over his knuckles.

I couldn't think about those hands on Blanche, couldn't think about them pulling me into this room. Instead, I thought of all the times I'd wanted those hands on me, the times I'd thought I'd die if he didn't touch me.

It had been like that, right from the start.

"Bea, what are you doing?" he murmured as I leaned closer, letting my lips brush the shell of his ear.

"I miss you," I answered, and realized all at once that it was true.

I did miss him.

Not the Eddie who killed Blanche. I didn't know that Eddie. But the Eddie from before, the one who had swept me off my feet with his easy smiles, his charm, the way he'd known exactly what I wanted before I knew it myself.

I focused on those early days now. Before we moved here, before things went darker than I knew they could.

"Do you remember that first night in Hawaii?" I asked him, rising up from the bed to stand in front

of him, my hands on his shoulders.

His own hands easily came to rest on my waist, almost like a reflex.

“I invited myself to your room,” he said as I slid my hands from his shoulders, down his chest, moving even closer so that he had to open his legs to let me step between them. “You said you weren’t that kind of girl.”

The corner of his mouth kicked up a little at that, a dimple deepening, and I leaned down to kiss that spot, feeling him suck in his breath.

“I wasn’t,” I said. “Until you.”

Then I kissed him.

This part was so much easier than I thought it would be, maybe because kissing Eddie had always been one of my favorite things.

Or maybe because as I re-created that first night for us, it was easy for me to slip into it, too. I wanted Eddie to forget where we were, what had happened, what he’d done, but I was doing it, too. Forgetting.

Slipping.

His mouth under mine made that so easy, and I wrapped my arms around his neck, pulling him in, my fingers in his hair—

“No, no, Jesus, Bea, this is fucked up.”

Eddie pushed me away, his breath coming fast.

I stepped back from the bed as he stood up, nearly stumbling in his haste to get to his feet.

His face was red, his eyes almost glassy as he raked a hand through his hair.

“We can’t,” Eddie said, and my heart sank.

“I shouldn’t have come today,” he continued, moving past me. “I don’t know what the fuck I was thinking, I don’t know—”

I reached for him before he could walk out, and he stopped, looking down at my fingers loosely cuffing his wrist. The energy in the room shifted, tightened, and sharpened.

Moving toward him, I cupped his face in my hand and he didn’t turn away.

“It’s okay,” I told him, my voice soft. “It’s okay.”

“It’s not,” he protested, but he didn’t move, and I leaned in.

“If you really don’t want to, we don’t have to,” I said, keeping my voice steady. “But I want to. I want you to understand that. I want this, Eddie. I want you.”

And I did.

I honestly did.

Which was maybe the worst part of all of it.

There was no holding back when I kissed him this time, no tentative testing of lips and tongue. I kissed him like I had that very first night, and he gave in, like I’d known he would.

It was amazing, really, how easy it was. How quickly our bodies remembered each other.

You love me, I told him with every kiss, every touch, every gasp.

Remember that you love me, that what we have is good and right and worth something.

Remember you’re mine.

But in trying to make him remember all that, I’m remembering, too.

How good he feels. How much I loved him.

Reader, I fucked him.

And when it was over and we lay in the bed, sweat still sticking his skin to mine, something about the quiet made me reach out, tracing my finger over his heart. “You know that I still love you,” I said, my voice barely above a whisper. “You know I’d never do anything to hurt you.”

I wanted him to hear what I was trying to say. If you let me out, I’ll never tell what happened.

We’ll figure it out.

But it was the wrong thing to say.

Eddie sighed heavily, pulling away from me and reaching for his clothes, still in a pile beside the bed.

I could see in the stiffness of his movements that I’d pushed too far. He’d heard what I was saying,

and he didn't like it.

And when he walked out without another word, I wondered if I was going to have to start all over again.

Bea had put that moment with Eddie and Blanche out of her mind when she sees them at lunch in the village.

She was supposed to be at the Southern Manors offices in nearby Homewood, but she'd wanted to drop by one of the Mountain Brook boutiques and see what was in the front windows.

Instead, she sees her husband and her best friend sitting at one of the café tables, laughing over salads like they're in a fucking Cialis commercial, and the anger nearly chokes her, shocking in its force.

It isn't just the two of them together—it's that it's so public, that anyone can see them, that people will see them, and they'll talk.

People might even feel sorry for her.

She stands there on the sidewalk underneath an awning, shielded by her sunglasses, and in her mind, Bea can see other faces turned to her, other expressions of pity with just a touch of schadenfreude, and suddenly her hands are shaking, and her feet are moving and she's crossing the street to stand in front of their table, taking a small, savage delight in the way they both flinch at her bright greeting.

There are blueprints on the table between them. Eddie's contracting business (the business she paid for, the one she gave him) is doing an addition on Blanche's house. It's all innocent really. Just a friendly working lunch to go over some details.

But it's not just this lunch. It's that ever since Blanche came up with this idea for Eddie to renovate her house, Eddie has been there all the time.

Or Blanche has been at Bea's house, sitting on the back deck with Eddie, drinking Bea's wine and showing Eddie some Pinterest board of her "dream kitchen."

And Eddie just smiles at her, indulges her.

Takes her out to lunch, apparently.

"You embarrassed me," Eddie tells her later, the two of them making dinner in the kitchen together, Bea on her third glass of wine, the stereo up just a little too loud. "Actually," he goes on, "you embarrassed yourself."

Bea doesn't answer because she knows that will infuriate him, and it does.

With a huff, Eddie tosses the kitchen towel he'd had on his shoulder to the counter and heads out to the back deck, taking her glass of wine with him.

They don't talk about it again, but the next time Blanche and Bea have coffee, Blanche is all apologies and brittle smiles and then—

"You always overreact, Bea."

Bea thinks about that for a long time, that tossed-off statement as Blanche scraped the whipped cream off her coffee with a wooden stirrer, the slight bite in the words, the implied judgement.

But two days later, Bea picks up Eddie's phone—he doesn't password lock it, wouldn't even think to, which is classic Eddie—and sees the text.

It's a selfie of Blanche. Nothing sultry or sexy, nothing tacky, but a shot of her face pulling an exaggerated frown.