

EPILOGUE

The epilogue reveals Chris's lingering trauma from his past experiences, symbolized by his obsession with open windows and fresh air. Despite his efforts to avoid confinement, he is occasionally overwhelmed by the scent of prison, triggering panic attacks that leave him displaced in his own home. His parents struggle to understand his distress, highlighting the isolation of trauma that cannot be easily communicated to those who haven't shared the experience. This sets a tone of unresolved tension and emotional fragility as the chapter unfolds.

The Gold family's move becomes a focal point, with neighborhood gossip hinting at deeper reasons behind their relocation. Michael Gold had wanted to leave town entirely, but Melanie insisted on staying close to their daughter Emily's memory. Their new house, rumored to have a bedroom reserved for Emily, underscores the family's inability to fully let go. Gus and James Hart observe the move in silence, their unspoken grief and guilt palpable as they watch their former neighbors depart, marking the end of an era for both families.

A poignant moment occurs when Michael's truck pauses near Gus, offering a fleeting chance for closure. Their silent exchange—filled with pain, unspoken apologies, and mutual understanding—culminates in Michael driving away without a word. This moment encapsulates the unresolved emotions between the two families, emphasizing how some wounds remain too deep for words. The scene underscores the theme of missed connections and the weight of shared tragedy.

Chris, watching the Golds leave, discovers an old tin-can message system he and Emily used as children. The decayed fishing line and blank note inside the can symbolize the fading memories of their childhood bond. The emptiness of the note leaves Chris questioning whether the message was ever there or if time has erased it, mirroring his struggle to reconcile the past. The chapter closes with a sense of

ambiguity, suggesting that some losses are too profound to be neatly resolved or understood.

