

Chapter 38: Holly Gibney's Disappearance and Penny's Growing Fear



Penny Dahl glances at the time on her phone—10:15 PM—and redials the number, her fingers tightening around the device as unease creeps in. *Chapter 38* of her night unfolds with growing tension. Voicemail. Again. She inhales sharply and leaves another message, her voice now edged with impatience and concern. “It’s Penny Dahl again. Where are you? Call me as soon as you get this. It’s important.” The night is growing darker, quieter, and the dwindling fireflies seem to mirror the diminishing hope she clings to. Holly Gibney is not the type to forget an appointment, let alone leave someone waiting without a call or explanation. Something is wrong.

The weight of silence settles around Penny’s shoulders, wrapping her in a sense of dread she can’t shake. Holly had promised to check in, had assured her there would be updates about Bonnie’s disappearance. Penny had held on to that promise like a lifeline, believing—or forcing herself to believe—that tonight would bring answers. But as the minutes stretch into an hour, her frustration curdles into fear. She had met Holly only weeks ago, but she knew enough to recognize this wasn’t like her. Holly was meticulous, responsible, and when she said she would do something, she followed through. The fact that she was now completely unreachable felt like a warning Penny didn’t know how to decipher.

By 11 PM, Penny has given up pacing and settles on the porch, her phone resting in her lap, her eyes flickering to the dim screen every few seconds. The air feels heavier now, thick with an unease that has nothing to do with the late hour. Something has happened. She can feel it. Every instinct in her is screaming that this is more than a

simple missed call, and she can't ignore it any longer. She swipes through her contacts, finds the number she had saved just in case, and presses the call button.

Detective Isabelle "Izzy" Jaynes answers on the third ring, her voice groggy but alert. Penny wastes no time, launching into a hurried explanation, her words tumbling over each other as she struggles to articulate her fear. "She was supposed to call me—hours ago. She had something about Bonnie. She wouldn't just disappear on me like this." The detective listens, her responses measured but serious, and Penny clutches the phone tighter, holding on to the only thing she has left—the hope that someone is taking this as seriously as she is.

As soon as the call ends, Penny wraps her arms around herself, trying to stave off the chill that has nothing to do with the weather. The dark sky looms above, pressing down on her as she sits on the porch, waiting. But waiting feels unbearable. She considers calling again, but what good would that do? If something had happened to Holly—if she had uncovered something dangerous—then every second wasted could mean the difference between life and death.

Her mind races through worst-case scenarios. What if Holly had finally gotten too close to the truth? What if the people responsible for Bonnie's disappearance had been watching, waiting for the moment Holly became a threat? What if Penny had been sitting here in the dark while something terrible was happening?

By midnight, she can't take it anymore. She gets up, phone still in hand, heart pounding. If Holly wasn't coming to her, then maybe she needed to go to Holly. But she knew nothing about private investigations or how to track someone down. All she had was an address—Holly's office, Finders Keepers—and a sense of urgency that refused to let her sit still.

The night stretches ahead, vast and uncertain, and Penny knows she is about to step into something far bigger than herself. But what else can she do? With Bonnie still missing, and now Holly—the only person who had cared enough to help—also unaccounted for, Penny feels like she is losing the last thread of control she had left.

As the porch light flickers above her, Penny takes one last deep breath before heading toward her car. She has no plan, no answers—but she knows she can't just sit here, waiting for the worst to find her.

