

Chapter 26: The Mystery of Disappearance

On July 27, 2021,  *Chapter 26* of Holly Gibney's investigation takes a new turn when she receives a call from Emilio Herrera, an employee at Jet Mart, about a regular customer who mysteriously vanished. The missing person in question, Cary Dressler, was a familiar face at the convenience store, often stopping in for his favorite high-caffeine sodas. Known for his laid-back demeanor, long blond hair, and a distinctive moped covered in stickers, Cary was a figure that most locals recognized. Emilio's concern about Cary's disappearance sparks Holly's curiosity, especially when she learns that he was last seen frequenting the store during the politically charged atmosphere surrounding Trump's campaign.

Digging deeper into Cary's life, Holly uncovers his fondness for Drive-In Rock, a secluded area where he would often watch movies, indulging in his solitary yet seemingly content lifestyle. This detail intrigues Holly, as it suggests that Cary found comfort in routines and places of quiet retreat. His habits, while unassuming, make his disappearance all the more suspicious, especially when juxtaposed against his known reliability and established community ties. Holly begins to wonder if his vanishing is connected to something far more deliberate than it initially appears.

Holly's investigative journey takes her to key locations linked to Cary, including Jet Mart and Strike Em Out Lanes, where he had worked as a league scheduler. Conversations with individuals from these places reveal a multifaceted image of Cary—not just a casual worker or stoner, but a diligent employee and a kind soul who left a lasting impression on those around him. Haverty, the owner of the bowling alley, recounts how Cary was instrumental in keeping the league organized and describes him as someone who had overcome personal struggles to build a stable life. The

suddenness of his disappearance, coupled with his unclaimed paycheck, raises even more questions, suggesting a forced departure rather than a voluntary one.

As Holly connects the dots, a troubling pattern emerges. Cary's disappearance is not an isolated incident; other missing persons cases seem to be tied to the Red Bank Avenue area. The eerie proximity of these cases sets off alarm bells for Holly, who begins to suspect that a predator might be leveraging their intimate knowledge of the community's vulnerabilities. Her investigation now extends beyond Cary, as she realizes she could be uncovering the traces of a larger, more sinister threat lurking in plain sight.

Haverty's insights into Cary's past reveal a young man who was resilient, working hard to distance himself from a troubled history. Movies and work became his sanctuary, offering him stability and a sense of purpose. Holly pours over photographs from the bowling alley's team archives, noticing Cary's prominent presence in the images and the palpable void his absence has left among the team. His popularity and contributions to the bowling community make the mystery of his disappearance even more unsettling.

Further inquiries lead Holly to Hugh Clippard, another member of the bowling community, who might hold critical information about Cary's life and habits. The possibility of a predator exploiting vulnerabilities within the community weighs heavily on Holly, reinforcing her sense of urgency. Her personal connection to the case deepens, driven by an empathy for Cary and an unwavering determination to find the truth.

Holly's methodical investigation highlights the delicate balance between community and isolation, where seemingly mundane lives can hold dark secrets. Each step forward paints a clearer picture of Cary Dressler's life—a man caught between the simple joys of routine and the complex web of human connections that tied him to his community. As Holly delves deeper, the shadows within the Red Bank Avenue area grow more pronounced, leaving her to confront the chilling realization that Cary's

disappearance might only be the beginning of a much larger story.

The chapter underscores Holly's relentless pursuit of answers, blending meticulous detective work with an empathetic understanding of human nature. Cary's disappearance becomes more than just a case—it transforms into a lens through which Holly uncovers the fragility and resilience of the people she encounters. As the pieces begin to align, Holly knows the truth is within reach, but also that finding it may lead her to face something far more dangerous than she had anticipated.

