

CHAPTER 43

The protagonist dives into the pool, examining the intricate blue-green mosaic tiles at the bottom. Using a glass circle to filter the light, she discovers a hidden chessboard pattern beneath the tiles, a revelation that underscores Tobias Hawthorne's penchant for layered puzzles. The discovery triggers her recollection of earlier clues, including the Queen's Gambit and the phrase "Don't breathe," which guide her next steps. Determined to solve the mystery, she mentally maps the chess moves and prepares to interact with the tiles, sensing the depth of Hawthorne's cunning design.

After memorizing the chessboard's key squares, she repeatedly dives to manipulate the tiles, facing physical strain and the urgency of her dwindling breath. On her third attempt, she successfully triggers a chain reaction by pressing the correct tile, revealing a hidden compartment. Despite her body's desperate need for air, she retrieves a flat package just before the compartment closes. The tension peaks as she surfaces, gasping for breath, only to find Jameson waiting for her, his presence adding emotional weight to the moment.

Jameson helps her out of the pool, and their reunion is charged with unspoken understanding and shared purpose. The protagonist focuses on the retrieved package, which contains a vacuum-sealed fireproof pouch. Inside, they find a faded photograph of three women standing before a stone church, with Tobias Hawthorne's handwriting on the back indicating the location and date: Margaux, France, December 19, 1973. The date and place name immediately spark her curiosity, hinting at another layer of the puzzle.

The chapter ends with the protagonist and Jameson contemplating the significance of the photograph. The name "Margaux" could refer to a person or hold a deeper meaning within Hawthorne's intricate games. Their dynamic shifts back to collaboration, emphasizing their synergy in solving puzzles. The discovery sets the

stage for the next phase of their journey, leaving readers intrigued about the connection between the photograph and the larger mystery surrounding Hawthorne's legacy.

