

Chapter 81

On the flight from St. Lucia to Dublin, Steve begins suspecting Max Highfield after reading an interview where Max declared his film **The Rose of Sarasota** as his best work. Disappointed by its lack of acclaim, Steve manages to endure only eight minutes of the movie before humorously noting that Max's character is an army explosives expert nicknamed "Joe Blow." As he and Rosie head to Dubai, Steve recalls memories of feeding his cat, Trouble, leftovers from his neighbor Margaret's roast chicken, which spoiled the cat for store-bought food—a situation he now parallels with his discomfort on this private Learjet.

Despite being luxurious, this jet feels cramped compared to others, and Steve is disappointed there's no private chef available for his craving of a bacon sandwich. He resolves that after they confront Max and identify François Loubet, he will avoid flying again. Sitting with Rosie, Steve acknowledges their findings: they've confirmed Max is indeed Joe Blow, thanks to influencer connections. Rosie playfully critiques the jet's size, and a light banter ensues about celebrity meetings.

Rosie expresses cautious concern about possible threats from Eddie Flood or Vasiliy Karpin. Their conversation shifts to more mundane topics like a quiz competition, revealing contrasting personalities—Rosie, who now lives on a private island, and Steve, whose feline companion is his closest friend. As they engage in deeper discussions about age and loss, both reflect on the inevitability of death, evoking a melancholic yet humorous tone.

Steve suggests Rosie could leverage her second-biggest-author status to meet with Max, hinting at collaborative ideas. They discuss their ongoing investigation regarding Loubet, expressing trust in their colleague Jeff, while anxiously pondering whether Max could also be implicated as Loubet. Rosie doubts Max's intellect, reminiscing about his cluelessness seen in a **Vanity Fair** interview. The chapter wraps up with Steve musing about missing these moments, even the little inconveniences of private jets, signaling a bittersweet realization about relationships formed amidst their investigations.