

Chapter 86

In a sunlit Dubai morning, Rosie enjoys breakfast on a terrace, anticipating a meeting with Max Highfield before the Diamond Conference. She hopes to glean information from him, disguising her interest as a proposal for him to star in a film based on her book, with Steve as a fictional movie producer. Her anxiety is notable; until Max is found, Amy remains in jeopardy, raising the stakes of her mission.

Suddenly, a large figure interrupts her thoughts. It's Vasilij Karpin, an imposing man in swimwear, known for his wealth. Rosie recognizes him and feels vulnerable without Amy's protection against this man, who has been closely pursuing her. Faced with Karpin, Rosie labyrinths her way through her thoughts, deciding to engage cautiously. She firmly states her breakfast rule: she won't dine with anyone who wishes to kill her. Karpin, unfazed, claims he has no such rules, introducing himself.

As Rosie prepares for an encounter that could go south, she sarcastically questions whether Karpin is there for an apology or a more grim reason. Karpin amusingly references a less-than-flattering comparison of his looks as a "bulldog chewing a nettle," which Rosie deflects by claiming it was a mistranslation.

In a surprising twist, Karpin pulls out a copy of her book, **Dead Men & Diamonds**, asking Rosie to sign it for his sister-in-law, Yevdokiya-Ivanovna. He recounts a humorous exchange that led to him joking about a hit on Rosie, assuring her he no longer intends to harm her. Humor gives way to seriousness as Rosie questions whether he's hired someone named Eddie Flood to do the job instead. Karpin claims ignorance of Flood.

Rosie feels a mix of relief and confusion. The conversation ends with Karpin's playful suggestion of his readiness to fulfill any future 'hits' she might need—an absurdity that leaves Rosie both amused and perturbed. After Karpin departs, Rosie's mind races as she recalls the suspicious figure of Eddie Flood, who she believes might not be a threat to her but raises questions about his true intentions.