

Chapter 224

Chapter 224 begins with a shift in narrative attention, focusing squarely on Joseph Macauley as Saint momentarily steps back from her investigation into Richie Montrose's murder. Throughout her day, she is inundated by updates from multiple jurisdictions—Sheriff's departments, task force coordinators, and Himes—all frantic about one urgent matter: Patch has disappeared. His vanishing act spreads quickly across media outlets, including national platforms like The New York Times, which delve into his eccentric past as both an artist and a fugitive known for his unmistakable pirate-like eye patch.

As law enforcement widens the search, Michaels voices concern over Patch's increasing celebrity, noting that someone with such a distinctive appearance won't stay hidden long. In contrast, Warden Riley takes to the press with a composed face, adopting the familiar tone of a politician caught in crisis. He advises residents to remain cautious—lock their doors and stay alert—while simultaneously assuring them that capture is inevitable, even as search teams sweep through neighborhoods with K9 units.

Later that evening, Saint locates Sammy on a second-story balcony, where he sips Laphroaig from the bottle and gazes into the dusk with an oddly celebratory air. Their conversation meanders toward Nix, a name that stirs shared history, as Sammy casually mentions seeing him just the day before. Saint, moved by the memory, reflects on Nix's steady presence—a man who, in spite of the chaos that often surrounded their lives, always seemed to operate with quiet integrity and an unwavering sense of duty.

As the mood deepens, Saint changes the tone with a revelation: a worker, allegedly by accident, cut the cable that powered the prison's security network. The timing felt too

convenient, raising questions about whether this was mere happenstance or a coordinated maneuver. Sammy listens intently, and though he appears calm, the tight grip on his glass betrays unease, especially as Saint lists names of staff who may have helped enable Patch's escape.

Sammy brushes off any personal connection to the situation, asserting he's had no involvement in any plot or underhanded dealings at the facility. Still, Saint continues to push, pointing to the mounting coincidences and the possibility that bribery played a role—suggesting that someone close to Patch may have manipulated events to help him vanish. Her voice trembles with the fear that Patch's freedom might cost him his life, not grant him a future, especially if those who helped him now want to erase the evidence.

Despite Sammy's defensive posture, Saint holds her ground, challenging him to see the larger picture—that this isn't just about one man's escape, but a web of decisions influenced by greed, power, and possibly betrayal. She reminds him that their shared affection for Patch complicates everything, especially when personal loyalties collide with moral obligations. Sammy, visibly rattled but not defeated, remains silent, caught between wanting to protect the truth and the guilt he perhaps carries for not asking more questions sooner.

As night envelops the balcony, the weight of uncertainty lingers between them. Saint turns her gaze to the distant glow of sirens moving through the streets, a quiet acknowledgment of the scale of what lies ahead. Her thoughts spiral not just around Patch's location, but the emotional residue left behind—broken trust, unanswered questions, and a growing sense that the story is far from over.

This chapter explores the complexity of relationships bound by shared history and hidden truths. It balances urgency with introspection, as Saint moves beyond mere investigation into the murky waters of personal accountability. The deeper she digs, the more entangled she becomes in a network of affection, suspicion, and the unpredictable consequences of human desperation.