

Olivia 6

The chapter opens in a tense courtroom scene where chaos erupts after a shocking revelation. Olivia observes Asher, the defendant, who appears to be praying or begging for forgiveness as the judge struggles to restore order. The attorneys, Jordan McAfee and Gina Jewett, are visibly shaken, with Jordan reserving the right to recall the witness. The judge dismisses the court early, admonishing the jury to avoid media influence. Olivia remains seated, dreading the media frenzy outside, while Asher stares blankly, seemingly overwhelmed by the turn of events.

Jordan leads Olivia and Asher through a side exit to avoid the press, taking refuge in a conference room. He frantically reviews the autopsy report, realizing a critical detail was overlooked: Lily, the victim, was transgender. Jordan explains how this revelation gives the prosecution a motive—trans panic—which could severely damage Asher's defense. He warns Asher not to disclose whether he knew about Lily's identity, as ignorance is their only defense. Asher collapses onto the table, drained of energy, while Olivia grapples with her own suspicions about his reaction.

Later, Olivia encounters Ava Campanello, Lily's mother, in the courthouse bathroom. Ava is gaunt and avoids eye contact, her grief palpable. Olivia is struck by the contrast between their losses—Ava mourning Lily, while Olivia fears losing Asher. She wonders if she would similarly seek vengeance if their roles were reversed. The encounter leaves Olivia emotionally paralyzed, torn between empathy for Ava and her loyalty to Asher.

The chapter underscores the escalating stakes of the trial, with the new evidence threatening to sway the jury against Asher. Olivia's internal conflict mirrors the broader themes of perception and bias, as Jordan scrambles to adapt their strategy. The tension between truth and legal tactics is laid bare, leaving Olivia—and the reader—questioning what Asher truly knew and whether justice can be served amidst

such complexity.

