

Olivia 7

Olivia wakes from a vivid nightmare in which Asher, wearing her late father's suit with his mouth sewn shut, tries to communicate with her. He presents a yellow index card listing three names—her father, Lily, and Asher—with the first two crossed out.

Disturbed, Olivia rises before dawn, her anxiety heightened by the recent courtroom revelations. As she prepares coffee and steps outside to fetch the newspaper, she discovers the word "murderer" scrawled in red paint on her barn, a stark accusation tied to Asher's ongoing trial. The teakettle's whistle inside mirrors her inner turmoil.

Detective Mike Newcomb arrives to investigate the vandalism, though he admits the chances of catching the perpetrator are slim. Olivia senses his discomfort, a tension stemming from his role in testifying against Asher. Despite his apology for the situation, Olivia resents his involvement in the trial, even as she acknowledges his professional duty. Their interaction underscores her isolation and the weight of public judgment. Meanwhile, her internal conflict grows—is she protecting Asher or convincing herself he's innocent?

Olivia's partner, Jordan, is furious she called the police without consulting him, arguing that the vandalism is inevitable given the public's perception of Asher's guilt. Their heated exchange reveals Jordan's frustration at his inability to shield Olivia and Asher from the town's scorn. Olivia insists on asserting control over her property, but Jordan warns that legal acquittal won't erase the stigma. Their argument highlights the emotional toll of the trial and the divide between Olivia's defiance and Jordan's pragmatism.

The chapter captures Olivia's escalating distress as the trial's fallout invades her personal life. The vandalism symbolizes the community's condemnation, forcing her to confront the limits of her protection. Her interactions with Mike and Jordan reflect the broader themes of justice, loyalty, and the inescapable court of public opinion. The

chapter ends with Olivia grappling with her role in Asher's defense and the realization that innocence in law may not translate to innocence in the eyes of others.

