

CHAPTER 86: GRAYSON

Grayson Hawthorne finds himself alone after completing his mission in Phoenix, having secured Gigi's release and resolved the situation with the safe-deposit box. Despite his outward composure, he grapples with the emotional toll of his actions, particularly the betrayal of his sisters, who remain unaware of his motives. He rationalizes his isolation, focusing on work to distract himself, but a moment of vulnerability leads him to revisit photos of Gigi, highlighting his internal conflict between duty and personal connections. The weight of past mistakes—Emily's death, losing Avery, and Eve's betrayal—haunts him, reinforcing his belief that caring for others inevitably leads to loss.

As Grayson prepares to leave, he methodically handles loose ends, including disposing of the fake journal and photographs to avoid FBI scrutiny. His detachment shatters when he notices an error in the date on one of his father's surveillance photos, sparking unresolved anger and confusion about his father's obsession with him. The brief moment of weakness is quickly suppressed as he forces himself back into a pragmatic mindset. However, his resolve is tested when he receives a call from an unknown girl, whose voice momentarily soothes him before he harshly cuts her off, further isolating himself.

The chapter intensifies as Eve, a figure from Grayson's past, calls to inform him about Vincent Blake's critical condition. Grayson remains cold, accusing her of involving the FBI and threatening his sisters, despite her protests. Their exchange reveals Grayson's deep-seated distrust and emotional armor, as he refuses to engage with her vulnerability. Eve's desperation and Grayson's rigid refusal to empathize underscore the toxic dynamics of their relationship. The call ends with Eve's bitter resignation, leaving Grayson to stew in his self-imposed solitude.

The chapter concludes with Grayson's internal struggle between his ingrained belief that he must remain emotionally detached to protect others and the lingering pain of his loneliness. His interactions with the unknown girl and Eve highlight his inability to reconcile his need for control with his latent desire for connection. The narrative leaves Grayson at a crossroads, hinting at the unsustainable nature of his isolation and the inevitable reckoning with his past mistakes and emotional barriers.

