The Brothers Hawthorne

Four brothers. Two missions. One explosive read.

Grayson Hawthorne was raised as the heir to his billionaire grandfather’s fortune, taught from a young age to put family and legacy above all. When Grayson is pulled into a twisted game with his half-sisters and the woman he once loved, he’ll stop at nothing to win — even if it means questioning everything he thought he knew about himself.

Jameson Hawthorne is a risk-taker, a thrill-seeker, always chasing the next big challenge. When his father’s shady past comes back to haunt him, Jameson is drawn into a dangerous con that will put his skills to the ultimate test — and force him to confront the one puzzle he can’t solve: his own heart.

In this thrilling, dual-POV novel, the Hawthorne brothers take center stage — with all the riddles, romance, and family secrets fans of *The Inheritance Games* have come to crave.

TWELVE AND A HALF YEARS AGO

The chapter opens with Grayson and Jameson Hawthorne, two brothers who thrive on bending rules, preparing to outsmart their family's Christmas morning tradition. The rule states no one may leave their rooms before seven, but the brothers cleverly set the clocks forward to 6:25, ensuring an early start. Their competitive spirit ignites as they race through Hawthorne House, only to discover their five-year-old brother, Xander, has already arrived by creatively rolling instead of stepping. The scene captures the Hawthorne siblings' playful rivalry and ingenuity, setting the tone for their

dynamic.

Upon reaching the Great Room, the brothers are stunned to find it stripped of all Christmas decorations and presents. The absence of holiday cheer suggests their grandfather has retaliated against their rule-breaking. However, Jameson's sharp eye spots a lone ornament hidden in the tree, containing the first clue in a puzzle. This discovery shifts the narrative from disappointment to intrigue, as the brothers realize their grandfather has replaced traditional gifts with an elaborate game—a hallmark of the Hawthorne family's unconventional traditions.

The siblings split up to search the estate's six Christmas trees, each yielding an ornament with a puzzle piece. Assembling the pieces reveals a blank square, but with the final clue—a keychain flashlight—they uncover hidden instructions pointing to the southwest corner of the estate. The brothers' excitement grows as they decode each step, showcasing their teamwork and problem-solving skills. Nash, the eldest, takes charge, driving them toward the next phase of the game in a golf cart, hinting at a grander surprise awaiting them.

The chapter concludes with the brothers arriving at the southwest corner, their anticipation palpable as they glimpse an undisclosed but awe-inspiring sight. The narrative underscores the Hawthorne family's love for challenges and games, blending mischief with deeper themes of familial bonds and tradition. The cliffhanger ending leaves readers eager to discover the nature of the final "present," reinforcing the book's tone of mystery and adventure.

CHAPTER 1: GRAYSON

The chapter opens with Grayson Hawthorne immersed in a rigorous knife-fighting practice session, embodying the Hawthorne family ethos of perfection and relentless self-improvement. His disciplined approach reflects years of mastering combat techniques, emphasizing stance, fluidity, and precision. Grayson’s choice of a simple, understated dagger underscores his preference for practicality over ornamentation. The narrative highlights the Hawthorne legacy of obsession with mastery, as Grayson recalls his grandfather’s expectation that they not just study but dominate any skill they pursue.

Grayson’s younger brother, Xander, interrupts his training, teasing him about his lack of hobbies and workaholic tendencies. Their banter reveals the brothers’ dynamic, with Xander advocating for balance while Grayson remains single-minded in his pursuits. The conversation shifts to Grayson’s commitment to Avery Grambs, the inheritor of the Hawthorne fortune, and their shared mission to donate $28 billion within five years. Grayson’s dedication to this promise reflects his unwavering sense of responsibility and loyalty to Avery, who has become family.

The brothers’ exchange delves into their personal lives, with Grayson inquiring about Xander’s relationship with their father, Isaiah, the only paternal figure who actively engages with his son. This moment of vulnerability contrasts with Grayson’s typically controlled demeanor. Xander deflects the conversation back to Grayson’s brooding nature, joking about writing a humorous guide titled *The Care and Feeding of Your Broody Twenty-Year-Old Brother*. Their playful rivalry underscores the deep bond beneath their teasing.

The chapter concludes abruptly with a tense moment as both brothers receive a cryptic “Nine-one-one” text from their older brother, Nash. This cliffhanger hints at an impending crisis, shifting the tone from lighthearted sibling interaction to urgency. The

message’s ambiguity leaves readers anticipating the next development, effectively setting the stage for the unfolding drama in the Hawthorne family saga.

CHAPTER 2: JAMESON

The chapter opens with Jameson Hawthorne and Avery at Iguazú Falls, the world's largest waterfall system. Jameson is consumed by a sense of hunger—for adventure, for Avery, and for the thrill of danger. Standing on a walkway near the edge of a dramatic drop-off, he teases Avery about daring him to cross the railing, showcasing his reckless charm. Avery, though playful, firmly discourages him, hinting at the tension between his impulsiveness and her caution. The majestic, unstoppable force of the falls mirrors Jameson's own relentless pursuit of excitement.

Back at their secluded jungle villa, the dynamic between Jameson and Avery shifts to a more intimate tone. Avery presents a coin toss game—"heads or tails"—symbolizing their flirtatious banter and unspoken attraction. Jameson, ever the provocateur, leaves the choice to her, reveling in the anticipation. Their chemistry is palpable as Avery challenges him with a touch and a daring look, suggesting a deeper game with cards. The moment is charged with playful tension, highlighting their complex relationship.

The mood shifts abruptly when a satellite phone interrupts their exchange. The call is from Grayson, Jameson's brother, confirming they've received Nash's summons—a "nine-one-one" code demanding their presence. Jameson jokes about Grayson's past reluctance to respond, referencing an embarrassing incident involving leather pants. Despite his teasing, it's clear the Hawthorne brothers adhere to this ritual without question, emphasizing their unbreakable bond and the consequences of defiance. Avery, ever the mediator, steps in to confirm their compliance, cutting short Jameson's antics.

The chapter concludes with Avery and Jameson preparing to leave for London, acknowledging the inevitability of responding to the family summons. The interruption underscores the constant pull between Jameson's desire for freedom and the obligations tying him to his family. Avery's role as both a grounding force and a willing

participant in his adventures is evident, setting the stage for their journey ahead. The blend of danger, intimacy, and familial duty paints a vivid picture of their intertwined lives.

CHAPTER 3: JAMESON

Jameson, aboard a private jet at night, struggles with the oppressive quiet as Avery sleeps on his chest. The stillness triggers his restlessness, a trait he begrudgingly shares with his troubled mother, Skye. His mind drifts to unresolved events in Prague, a mystery that tempts him despite his efforts to suppress it. The chapter establishes Jameson's internal conflict: his craving for danger and puzzles clashes with his need to protect Avery from the truth, fearing the consequences of making his thoughts real.

Avery, perceptive as ever, notices Jameson's turmoil and calls it "our look," recognizing their shared obsession with solving mysteries. Jameson wrestles with the urge to confide in her but resists, knowing it could unleash reckless behavior. He distracts himself by shifting the conversation to his impending return from a gap year, though his restlessness persists. The tension between his desire for greatness and his fear of endangering Avery underscores their dynamic.

Jameson reflects on the Hawthorne family's legacy of achieving "great things"—grand, impactful feats—but feels inadequate compared to Avery's philanthropic mission and his brother Grayson's accomplishments. Despite being part of her world-changing efforts, he senses he's merely observing from the sidelines. Avery subtly probes about Prague, referencing his mysterious return at dawn with injuries, but respects his boundaries, refusing to force the truth from him.

Their conversation culminates in a charged moment, with Jameson deflecting her curiosity through intimacy and playful banter. He teases her with the nickname "Mystery Boy," a callback to their past, while internally battling the urge to reveal his secrets. The chapter ends with their unresolved tension, highlighting Jameson's internal struggle between his love for Avery and his self-destructive impulses, setting the stage for future confrontations about Prague and his quest for greatness.

CHAPTER 4: GRAYSON

Grayson and his brothers reunite in their London flat, a place unchanged over the years, where Nash surprises them with a velvet box containing a stunning black opal ring. The ring, a family heirloom from their grandmother, is intended for Nash’s partner, Libby. The brothers are stunned, especially when Nash reveals he has already proposed with his own ring, signaling a significant shift in their lives. The realization that Nash and Libby are engaged hits Grayson hard, underscoring how much has changed since their grandfather’s death and their disinheritance.

The brothers’ reactions range from Xander’s exuberant celebration—complete with a wrestling hug—to Jameson’s playful declaration of an impromptu bachelor party. Nash, however, remains the voice of reason, setting ground rules to keep Jameson’s antics in check. The dynamic between the brothers is both chaotic and affectionate, with Grayson observing their interactions closely. Nash’s engagement marks a turning point, forcing Grayson to confront the inevitability of change and the new roles they must all adapt to.

Amid the celebration, Nash’s underlying concern for his brothers becomes apparent. He subtly shifts the focus to Jameson’s recent reckless behavior, hinting at unresolved issues. Grayson senses Nash’s protective instincts and questions his own role in the family’s evolving dynamics. The chapter highlights the tension between their shared past and the uncertain future, with Nash’s engagement serving as a catalyst for deeper reflections.

The chapter closes with the brothers agreeing to a bachelor party under Nash’s conditions, invoking their childhood "tree house rules" to maintain trust and secrecy. Grayson is left grappling with his emotions, recognizing that their bond, though unbreakable, must now accommodate new relationships and responsibilities. The scene captures a poignant moment of transition, blending humor, brotherly love, and

the bittersweet acceptance of change.

CHAPTER 5: GRAYSON

The chapter opens with Grayson and his brothers—Jameson, Xander, and Nash—reflecting on their eventful night, which included adventurous activities like ice-climbing and clubbing. Nash humorously references being duct-taped, while Grayson feels a bittersweet pride as he congratulates Nash, acknowledging life's inevitable changes. The brothers' camaraderie is evident, but Grayson's internal struggle with moving forward lingers. Nash privately hands Grayson their grandmother’s black opal ring, a symbolic gesture that leaves Grayson questioning why he was chosen over Jameson, hinting at deeper familial dynamics and unspoken expectations.

Grayson wakes up the next morning with the ring still on his mind, storing it securely in his luggage. His instinct to protect what matters underscores his role as the responsible Hawthorne brother, even as he grapples with emotional detachment. On the terrace, Avery joins him for breakfast, teasing about the brothers' legendary night. Their conversation shifts to Jameson’s behavior, with Avery cryptically suggesting he’s searching for something—or avoiding it. Grayson’s guarded response about his own state reveals his habitual deflection, though Avery’s presence seems to soften his usual reserve.

The mood lightens as Xander and Jameson burst onto the scene, bantering about consequences and Avery’s upcoming meetings in London. Grayson’s protective instincts resurface when he warns Avery about Xander’s dubious "book," showcasing their sibling rivalry. However, the moment is interrupted by an urgent phone call, prompting Grayson to retreat privately. His abrupt departure and serious demeanor hint at a looming crisis, contrasting with the earlier playful atmosphere and reinforcing his role as the family’s problem-solver.

The chapter closes with Grayson answering the mysterious call, signaling a shift from personal reflections to external challenges. His terse remark, “I assume we have a

situation,” leaves the reader anticipating the next development. This ending underscores Grayson’s constant balancing act between familial bonds and his responsibilities, while also setting the stage for future conflicts. The interplay of humor, tension, and emotional depth paints a vivid portrait of the Hawthorne brothers’ complex relationships.

CHAPTER 6: JAMESON

The chapter opens with Jameson observing his brother Grayson's unusual display of emotion, sparking curiosity and playful banter among the siblings. Avery questions Jameson's motives, while Xander jokes about eavesdropping on Grayson's phone call. The lighthearted exchange reveals the dynamic between the brothers, with Jameson teasing Xander about his lack of stealth and referencing their night out. The conversation shifts to the paparazzi situation, with Oren, Avery's security detail, reporting on the presence of British tabloids. Despite the tension, Avery remains determined to proceed with her meetings, showcasing her resilience.

Jameson offers to distract the paparazzi, highlighting his penchant for trouble, but Avery declines with a brief, teasing kiss. Left alone on the terrace, Jameson savors a croissant, reflecting on the sudden quietness. The tranquility is interrupted when Grayson reappears with a suitcase, announcing his departure for unspecified "personal business." Jameson, intrigued by Grayson's uncharacteristic secrecy, presses for details, but Grayson remains evasive. Their interaction underscores the brothers' complex relationship, with Jameson challenging Grayson's controlled demeanor.

As Grayson leaves, Jameson receives a call from Oren, who reports an unexpected delivery for him. The porter presents a silver tray with a single calling card, piquing Jameson's curiosity. The card bears the name "Ian Johnstone-Jameson" and an address, along with a handwritten time of 2 PM. The mysterious nature of the delivery immediately captivates Jameson, who examines the card with a magician's finesse. The chapter ends on a cliffhanger, leaving the significance of the card and its sender open to interpretation.

The chapter effectively blends family dynamics, mystery, and intrigue, setting the stage for future developments. Jameson's playful yet observant nature contrasts with Grayson's reserved demeanor, while Avery's determination and Oren's vigilance add

depth to the narrative. The unexpected delivery introduces a new layer of suspense, hinting at deeper secrets and potential conflicts. The author masterfully balances dialogue, action, and introspection, creating a compelling and engaging read.

CHAPTER 7: JAMESON

Jameson Hawthorne slips away from his family and security to visit Ian Johnstone-Jameson, a man he believes to be his father, at an upscale London residence. Despite the opulence of the building and the guarded demeanor of its security, Jameson gains entry using an invitation card. The encounter is charged with tension as Jameson, driven by curiosity rather than emotional need, prepares to engage in a psychological duel with Ian. The lavish flat, adorned with artwork and marked by a stark black "B" in the marble foyer, sets the stage for their meeting.

Ian, a man in his mid-forties with an air of amusement, greets Jameson with a mix of familiarity and detachment. Their physical resemblance is noted, but Jameson remains guarded, refusing to reveal any vulnerability. Ian proposes a game: three questions from Jameson in exchange for answering one of his own. This exchange underscores the power dynamics at play, with both men testing each other’s boundaries. Jameson’s first question—about Ian’s motives—reveals Ian’s pursuit of pleasure, challenge, and victory, mirroring traits Jameson recognizes in himself.

The conversation delves deeper as Jameson probes Ian’s definition of winning, uncovering his profession as a professional poker player and his strained relationship with his family. Ian’s casual admission that his family is unaware of Jameson’s existence stings, but Jameson masks his reaction. He strategically avoids asking about Ian’s brothers, focusing instead on gathering leverage. The chapter highlights Jameson’s sharp intuition as he deciphers Ian’s tells, recognizing the man’s carefully constructed facade of indifference.

As the encounter unfolds, Jameson reaffirms his self-reliance, drawing strength from his Hawthorne identity. The chapter captures the psychological chess match between father and son, with neither willing to concede emotional ground. Jameson’s calculated demeanor and Ian’s playful yet evasive responses create a tense atmosphere, leaving

readers anticipating the next move in their high-stakes game. The chapter ends with Jameson poised to ask his final question, hinting at deeper revelations to come.

CHAPTER 8: JAMESON

Jameson Hawthorne grapples with the lingering impact of meeting his estranged father, Ian Johnstone-Jameson, a professional poker player from a wealthy family. Despite initially refusing Ian's request, Jameson is haunted by his father's observation about his insatiable drive to play and win. Seeking solace on a rooftop, he reflects on his privileged upbringing and the emotional weight of this encounter. Avery, his perceptive companion, joins him, challenging his attempts to downplay the significance of the meeting while recognizing his internal conflict.

The rooftop conversation reveals Jameson's vulnerability as he confesses his father's desire for a favor. Avery fiercely asserts that Ian has no right to make demands, yet she sees through Jameson's facade of indifference. Their dialogue exposes his unresolved feelings about fatherhood, particularly after witnessing his brother Grayson's negative experience. Jameson's witty deflection contrasts with Avery's directness, highlighting his struggle between pride and curiosity about his father's motives.

Jameson eventually confides in Avery about "The Devil's Mercy," a secretive London gambling establishment tied to Ian's proposition. His adrenaline-fueled excitement betrays his true desire to engage with the challenge, despite his initial refusal. Avery accurately discerns his unspoken yearning for the game's high-stakes thrill, recognizing how it aligns with his competitive nature and need for purpose beyond his family's legacy.

The chapter culminates with Jameson embracing the opportunity, inviting Avery to join him in the venture. His decision marks a turning point, transforming his father's request into a personal quest for adventure. The exchange underscores their dynamic partnership and Jameson's inability to resist a high-risk, high-reward scenario—even when it involves complicated family ties. The rooftop setting symbolizes his

characteristic approach to life: balancing on the edge while maintaining control over his choices.

CHAPTER 9: GRAYSON

Grayson Hawthorne arrives in Phoenix after a flight, greeted by multiple voicemails—most from his brother Xander, with one crucial message from his private investigator, Zabrowski. The investigator reveals that Juliet "Gigi" Grayson is being held in custody without formal charges, suggesting external influence at play. Grayson sees an opportunity in the legal gray area, recognizing that her detention may lack proper justification. His calculated mindset is evident as he prepares to intervene, leveraging his resources and the Hawthorne name to navigate the situation.

Equipped with a Ferrari 488 Spider—a deliberate choice for making an impression—Grayson reflects on his connection to Juliet and her twin sister, Savannah. Though they share a father, the twins are unaware of Grayson’s existence or their father’s death. Sheffield Grayson, their father, had met a grim fate after targeting Avery Hawthorne, and Grayson has since kept tabs on the twins. His mission is clear: resolve the immediate crisis without revealing his identity or forging personal ties.

Upon arriving at the Phoenix Police Department, Grayson commands attention effortlessly. His demeanor exudes authority, and he wastes no time demanding Juliet’s release. The officers’ reactions range from awe to suspicion, particularly when a higher-ranking lieutenant questions his identity. Grayson’s strategic bluffing comes into play as he implies connections to powerful figures, leaving the lieutenant to weigh the risks of defiance. His confidence and unshakable presence reinforce his unspoken threat.

The chapter underscores Grayson’s mastery of psychological leverage and his ability to manipulate situations without overt aggression. He operates on the principle that assumed authority is more effective than asserted power. As the confrontation unfolds, Grayson’s focus remains on extracting Juliet efficiently, avoiding unnecessary revelations about their shared past. The tension builds as the officers grapple with his

imposing presence, setting the stage for a high-stakes resolution.

CHAPTER 10: GRAYSON

The chapter opens with Grayson encountering Juliet "Gigi" Grayson in an interrogation room, where her lively demeanor contrasts sharply with the tense setting. Gigi, with her wavy brown hair and bright blue eyes, jokes about telekinesis and references *Matilda* by Roald Dahl, displaying a carefree attitude despite her circumstances. Grayson, though reserved, is intrigued by her energy and commands the officer to leave them alone. Gigi’s cheerful banter and playful attempts to manipulate the situation with exaggerated expressions reveal her charismatic yet reckless nature.

Grayson’s internal conflict becomes apparent as he observes Gigi, who mistakenly assumes he was sent by her lawyer, Mr. Trowbridge, or her absent father. Her rapid speech and unfiltered honesty hint at a deeper vulnerability beneath her exuberant facade. Grayson, however, remains detached, focusing on his goal of extracting her from the police station without revealing his true connection to her. The dynamic between them is tense yet oddly compelling, as Gigi’s optimism clashes with Grayson’s controlled demeanor.

As they leave in Grayson’s car, Gigi’s excitement overrides any caution, and she continues to probe Grayson about his motives. Her mention of a safe-deposit box and her father’s disappearance piques Grayson’s interest, though he avoids confirming any connection to Sheffield Grayson. Gigi’s belief that her father had a "good reason" for leaving and her possession of a key to the box suggest a hidden family mystery. Grayson’s stoic responses and internal restraint highlight his reluctance to engage emotionally, even as Gigi’s questions grow more pointed.

The chapter ends with Gigi’s hopeful yet naive insistence that her father’s actions were justified, while Grayson remains silent about the truth. Her mention of the safe-deposit box under a false name hints at unresolved secrets tied to Sheffield Grayson. Grayson’s calculated demeanor and Gigi’s unrestrained optimism create a compelling

tension, setting the stage for further revelations about their shared family history and the mysteries surrounding her father’s disappearance.

CHAPTER 11: GRAYSON

Grayson arrives at the Haywood-Astyria hotel, where his elite status is immediately recognized by the staff. He checks in using a exclusive black-and-gold card, bypassing formalities, and inquires about the pool. His demeanor is controlled, but beneath the surface, he is grappling with the aftermath of his encounter with Gigi. The chapter highlights his need for physical exertion to escape his thoughts, as he pushes himself to swim relentlessly, using the punishing activity to maintain a sense of control over his emotions.

While swimming, Grayson reflects on the revelations about his father, Sheffield Grayson, and the existence of his half-sisters. His phone rings repeatedly, and he eventually responds to Xander's playful yet insistent messages. Their conversation reveals Grayson's internal conflict: he feels a responsibility to protect his sisters from the truth about their father's dark past, particularly his involvement in events connected to Avery. Grayson's protective instincts are evident as he vows to prevent Gigi from accessing a safe-deposit box that could expose damaging secrets.

The dialogue between Grayson and Xander underscores the complexity of Grayson's situation. Xander, though lighthearted, probes gently, revealing Grayson's unspoken fears about the consequences of the safe-deposit box's contents. Grayson admits that Gigi reminds him of Xander, hinting at an unexpected connection that complicates his mission. Xander warns Grayson about the moral dilemma of lying to Gigi, emphasizing the emotional toll it may take. Grayson's resolve is unwavering, but the chapter subtly hints at his underlying vulnerability.

The chapter concludes with Grayson's determination to handle the situation alone, despite Xander's offer of support. His internal struggle between duty and personal connection is palpable, as he prepares to confront the challenges ahead. The narrative leaves readers questioning how far Grayson will go to protect his family's secrets and

what sacrifices he might have to make. The tension between control and emotional vulnerability remains a central theme, setting the stage for further developments in the story.

ELEVEN YEARS AND TEN MONTHS AGO

The chapter opens with Grayson and Jameson Hawthorne in their tree house, showcasing their contrasting personalities—Grayson's disciplined nature and Jameson's reckless daring. Their playful banter reveals a unique dynamic: though Jameson is technically younger, their birthdays are just a day apart, making them the same age for one day each year. The conversation shifts to their impending birthdays, which involve a ritual set by their grandfather: investing money, cultivating a skill, and completing a challenge. This year, Jameson anticipates being forced to fight Grayson, a test of the martial arts they've practiced, while Grayson dreads his own upcoming duel.

The brothers discuss their grandfather's demanding expectations, emphasizing the pressure to excel. Grayson reveals his challenge was to create a perfect haiku—a 17-syllable poem that must be emotionally resonant and flawless. Jameson, meanwhile, was tasked with building a card castle using 500 cards without adhesives, a feat he accomplished by ingeniously carving slits into the floor and walls of their family home. His determination and unconventional solution highlight his resourcefulness, though Grayson is both impressed and horrified by the audacity of damaging their grandfather's prized house.

The chapter delves deeper into their relationship, marked by a mix of rivalry and loyalty. Grayson promises not to go easy on Jameson in their fight, sealing it with a solemn gesture unique to them. Jameson's fierce insistence on fairness underscores their mutual respect, even as they prepare to compete. Their shared understanding of their grandfather's harsh standards binds them together, though their approaches differ—Grayson seeks perfection, while Jameson thrives on creativity and risk.

The chapter concludes with the brothers contemplating their next challenges. Jameson whimsically suggests knife fighting, while Grayson, inspired by Jameson's photography

of his card castle, leans toward mastering photography himself. This moment hints at their evolving aspirations and the unspoken bond that drives them to push each other forward. The blend of tension and camaraderie sets the stage for their ongoing struggles under their grandfather’s exacting regime, leaving readers curious about their next steps.

CHAPTER 12: JAMESON

Jameson Hawthorne selects a striking medieval crypt as the meeting location for his discussion with Ian, showcasing his flair for the dramatic. Avery accompanies him, and Ian quickly notes her presence, hinting at his awareness of her identity as the Hawthorne heiress. The conversation swiftly turns to Ian's lost family estate, Vantage, which he gambled away in a high-stakes game. Ian reveals the estate's significance and his connection to it, setting the stage for the central conflict: reclaiming Vantage from the elusive and powerful Proprietor of the Devil's Mercy, an exclusive secret gambling club.

Ian explains the enigmatic nature of the Devil's Mercy, detailing its strict rules and the anonymity of its leader, the Proprietor. Membership is nearly impossible to obtain, requiring an emissary to extend an invitation rather than seeking it out. Ian hints at a path forward but emphasizes the need to first gain entry into the club. He then reveals the existence of an annual high-stakes event called the Game, where the winner can claim any prize the house has won in the past year—including Vantage. This becomes Jameson's ultimate goal, though the odds seem stacked against him.

Jameson questions the feasibility of the plan, pointing out the numerous hurdles: gaining membership, impressing the Proprietor, and winning the Game. Ian acknowledges the challenges but insists Jameson is the right person for the task, urging him to make himself "impossible to refuse." The tension between the two builds as Jameson probes Ian's motives and past failures, revealing Ian's desperation to reclaim Vantage. Avery interjects with practical concerns, such as Jameson's age and nationality, which historically disqualify him from membership, adding another layer of complexity to their mission.

The chapter ends with Jameson and Avery grappling with the enormity of the task ahead. Ian's cryptic guidance leaves them with more questions than answers, but the

stakes are clear: Vantage's recovery hinges on their ability to navigate the shadowy world of the Devil's Mercy. Jameson's determination and strategic mind are put to the test as he begins to formulate a plan, setting the stage for the high-risk adventure that lies ahead. The dynamic between the three characters—Jameson's boldness, Avery's pragmatism, and Ian's calculated desperation—drives the narrative forward with palpable tension.

CHAPTER 13: JAMESON

The chapter opens with Jameson and Avery alone in a crypt, strategizing their next move. Avery decides to call Alisa Ortega, her formidable lawyer and fixer, to accept an invitation to a high-profile London event. Jameson recognizes the opportunity to gain attention from influential figures, aligning with his penchant for impossible challenges. The scene sets the tone for their dynamic—Avery’s boldness and Jameson’s strategic mind—as they prepare to step into a world of wealth and power.

As they prepare for the event, Jameson dons a formal morning coat and selects a top hat, his excitement palpable. Nash, his older brother, interrupts with a cryptic warning about Jameson’s pursuit of Ian, hinting at unresolved family tensions. Jameson dismisses Nash’s concerns, asserting his loyalty to their chosen family—the Hawthornes and Avery. The exchange reveals Jameson’s determination and Nash’s protective instincts, adding depth to their sibling relationship.

The focus shifts to Avery’s stunning transformation for the event. Dressed in a white lace gown that accentuates her figure, she embodies elegance and allure. Jameson is captivated, his attraction to her undeniable. The stylists complete her look with a striking hat adorned with a jeweled black rose, heightening her magnetic presence. The scene underscores their chemistry and the anticipation of their next adventure.

The chapter concludes with Jameson guessing their destination—the races—as he takes Avery’s hand, electrified by her touch. Their playful banter and shared excitement mark the beginning of a high-stakes mission. The chapter masterfully blends tension, romance, and intrigue, leaving readers eager to see how their plans unfold in the glamorous yet dangerous world they’re about to enter.

CHAPTER 14: JAMESON

Jameson and Avery arrive at an exclusive, high-society event reminiscent of the Kentucky Derby but with a royal twist. The atmosphere is opulent, filled with elite attendees dressed in top hats and elegant attire, all vying for attention. Despite the presence of royals, Avery becomes a focal point due to her status as the Hawthorne heiress and her recent decision to give away a vast fortune. The absence of press and personal security adds to the event's exclusivity, setting the stage for their strategic maneuvering among the wealthy and powerful.

As the event progresses, Avery and Jameson skillfully navigate conversations, leveraging Avery's newfound notoriety to their advantage. They drop cryptic hints about their true intentions, particularly regarding Avery's horses, Thamenold and Lady Monoceros. Jameson's playful rearrangement of Thamenold's name—"The old man"—hints at deeper layers of meaning tied to their grandfather's legacy. Their interactions are calculated, designed to pique curiosity and draw out potential allies or adversaries who might recognize their subtle cues.

The duo engages in a game of verbal chess, with Jameson deliberately mentioning "Devil’s Mercy" instead of the correct "Devil’s Duel" to test the waters. This misdirection serves as a coded message, aiming to identify individuals familiar with hidden networks or secretive dealings. Avery’s coy responses and Jameson’s strategic pauses create an air of intrigue, leaving their wealthy counterparts both intrigued and slightly unsettled. Their goal is clear: to uncover a connection to a shadowy world beneath the surface of high society.

By the chapter's end, Jameson reflects on their progress, acknowledging the uncertainty of their plan. They have sown the seeds of curiosity and speculation, but the response from the elite crowd remains unpredictable. The chapter leaves readers with a sense of anticipation, as Jameson and Avery’s calculated risks could either lead

them closer to their objective or expose them to unforeseen dangers. The blend of glamour, strategy, and underlying tension encapsulates the duo's dynamic and the high-stakes world they inhabit.

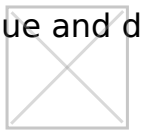
CHAPTER 15: JAMESON

Jameson and Avery attend an exclusive after-party at a private club, where they strategically mingle with the younger socialite crowd. They ensure their presence is noted by requesting the hashtag *TDM* accompany any online photos. Amidst the buzz, Jameson remains hyper-aware of the whispers surrounding them—comments about his past, Avery’s appearance, and the enigmatic Hawthorne brothers. One remark stands out: a reference to *That Duchess*, an elegant woman in a striking yellow dress who commands attention. Jameson signals Avery with a coded touch, directing her focus toward the duchess, who exudes confidence and aristocratic charm.

The duchess, with her sharp British wit, engages Jameson and Avery in conversation, revealing her disdain for societal expectations with her drink order: "Prosecco and the tears of my enemies." Her presence hints at a deeper narrative, as she speaks of existing "too loudly" for those who wish to silence her. Meanwhile, Avery proposes a risky plan to draw out the mysterious Proprietor’s emissaries by separating from Jameson, despite his reluctance. With Oren, their bodyguard, discreetly positioned nearby, Jameson agrees but remains on edge, counting down the minutes until her return.

Outside the club, Jameson’s tension mounts as he fiddles with a concealed pocket watch, its hidden compartment holding an object he struggles to discard. His solitude is interrupted by the club’s waiter, who reveals himself as an operative with a shifting accent and unsettling demeanor. The boy’s sudden transformation from unassuming server to potential threat puts Jameson on high alert. Their exchange grows tense as the waiter implies his employer views Jameson as the "bigger liability," setting the stage for a confrontation.

The chapter culminates in a standoff between Jameson and the waiter, whose true allegiance and motives remain ambiguous. Jameson’s instincts kick in as he assesses his opponent’s physicality and the isolated setting, preparing for a possible altercation. The waiter’s cryptic message about his employer’s interest in Jameson—not Avery—hints at a larger game at play, leaving Jameson to navigate this unexpected threat while the clock ticks down on Avery’s safety. The encounter underscores the high-stakes intrigue and danger lurking beneath the glamorous surface of their world.



CHAPTER 16: JAMESON

Jameson and Avery return to the Hawthorne flat to find a cryptic message from Xander consisting of four sticky notes with seemingly random words. Their adrenaline-fueled minds quickly decode the message as "Going to check on Gary," revealing Xander's playful yet strategic communication style. The moment is interrupted by a call from Nash, who expresses concern for Jameson's well-being, subtly reminding him he doesn’t have to face challenges alone. The exchange highlights the brothers' bond and Jameson's growing reliance on Avery, who stands by him as they prepare for the next phase of their adventure.

Their quiet moment is disrupted when Oren alerts them to an intruder on the terrace. The mysterious messenger, who has previously appeared in different personas, lounges casually with a glass of wine, showcasing his chameleon-like ability to blend into any environment. Jameson questions his legitimacy, suspecting a con, but the messenger proves his connection to the Devil's Mercy by producing an ornate black-and-silver envelope. The intricate platinum embossing on the envelope hints at the high-stakes world they’re entering, leaving Jameson and Avery both intrigued and wary.

The messenger reveals the terms of their invitation: Avery is offered limited access to the Devil's Mercy for a week, provided she loses £200,000 at the tables. When she insists on Jameson’s inclusion, the messenger raises the stakes, demanding £500,000 in losses over three nights. The terms suggest a calculated move by the Factotum, the Mercy’s second-in-command, who seems intent on testing Avery’s resolve. The messenger’s dismissive tone and emphasis on Avery’s singular importance hint at deeper motives, leaving Jameson to question why the Factotum is so invested in her participation.

The chapter closes with tension mounting as Jameson and Avery weigh the risks of accepting the offer. The messenger’s cryptic warnings and the exorbitant financial demand underscore the dangerous game they’re being drawn into. Jameson’s protective instincts clash with Avery’s determination, setting the stage for a high-stakes confrontation with the shadowy figures controlling the Devil's Mercy. The encounter leaves both characters—and readers—questioning the true cost of their next move.

CHAPTER 17: GRAYSON

Grayson approaches the situation with Gigi as a complex problem requiring multiple potential solutions. His primary strategy involves ensuring she loses the key to her father's safe-deposit box, which would prevent her from accessing any incriminating evidence. However, he acknowledges other angles, such as monitoring her movements and preventing her from identifying the box's registered name. To re-engage with her, Grayson creates a social media account and carefully crafts a message, wary of sending unintended signals. His calculated approach reflects his methodical nature, though he remains aware of the ethical dilemmas involved in deceiving her.

The interaction between Grayson and Gigi unfolds through a series of playful yet strategic messages. Gigi responds with humor, sending cat memes and teasingly inviting him over, displaying a surprising level of trust. Grayson, however, is conflicted, recalling his brother Xander's warning about the inevitable betrayal. Despite his guilt, he recognizes the advantage of Gigi's trust and continues the charade. Their exchange highlights the contrast between Gigi's lightheartedness and Grayson's internal tension, as he balances his mission with growing discomfort about manipulating her.

Grayson attempts to subtly warn Gigi about her naivety, sending messages cautioning her against trusting him and revealing his own ulterior motives. Gigi dismisses his warnings, insisting that his assistance in finding her father is all that matters. This frustrates Grayson, who feels a pang of guilt but doubles down on his deception by falsely claiming to have a girlfriend to deter any romantic misinterpretations. His actions underscore the moral complexity of his mission, as he struggles with the consequences of his calculated lies.

The chapter concludes with Gigi bombarding Grayson with more cat pictures and a playful question about their roles in their "investigation." Grayson's internal conflict persists, torn between his objective and the growing realization of Gigi's vulnerability.

The dynamic between the two characters sets the stage for further tension, as Grayson's plan hinges on gaining her trust while wrestling with the ethical implications of his actions. The chapter leaves readers anticipating the consequences of their evolving relationship and Grayson's eventual choices.

CHAPTER 18: GRAYSON

Grayson arrives at the Grayson mansion in his Ferrari, noting the meticulously symmetrical architecture and the imposing fountain adorned with bronze sculptures. As he steps out of the car, he reflects on his strained relationship with his father, Sheffield Grayson, who viewed him as a risk rather than a son. The opulence of the estate contrasts with Grayson's internal turmoil, highlighting the emotional weight of his family legacy. His thoughts are interrupted by Gigi, who emerges unexpectedly, brimming with energy and a plan to uncover secrets related to her father's mysterious safe-deposit box.

Gigi enthusiastically shares her theory that Mr. Trowbridge, her family's lawyer, might know the alias her father used to open the box. She recounts seeing mysterious men in suits visiting her mother, an event that left her mother distraught. Grayson, maintaining his composure, questions the logic of her plan but subtly considers his own agenda, including the possibility of stealing her key. The dialogue reveals Gigi's impulsive nature and Grayson's calculated demeanor, as he weighs the risks of involving himself further in her quest.

The conversation shifts to Gigi's insistence on throwing a party as their next move, which Grayson finds absurd. Despite his skepticism, he allows himself to be pulled along, revealing a reluctant tolerance for her antics. As they enter the mansion, Grayson is momentarily unsettled by memories of his father's dismissive words, but Gigi's playful interruption—introducing her exotic cat, Katara—distracts him. The contrast between Grayson's introspection and Gigi's carefree attitude underscores their dynamic.

Gigi dashes off, declaring her intention to find someone who can help, leaving Grayson to follow. The chapter ends with a sense of momentum, as Grayson is drawn deeper into Gigi's world of spontaneity and intrigue. Their partnership, though fraught with

tension, hints at potential collaboration as they navigate the mysteries surrounding their families. The chapter balances Grayson’s internal conflict with the external plot, setting the stage for further developments.

CHAPTER 19: GRAYSON

Grayson follows Gigi through her family's opulent home, meticulously noting details like the children's paintings displayed as art in the hallway. The twins' contrasting personalities become apparent as Gigi leads him to a mirrored basketball court where Savannah, her fraternal twin, is practicing shots in a silver skirt and heels. Savannah's precision and focus are striking, as is her disregard for Grayson's presence. The scene establishes Savannah's controlled, icy demeanor and hints at the siblings' complex dynamic, underscored by Gigi's playful warnings and Savannah's silent dominance of the space.

After Savannah finishes her basketball routine, she ignores Grayson entirely, forcing him and Gigi to follow her back down the hall. The twins' interactions reveal Savannah's authority—she dismisses them abruptly, only to summon them later to the patio. The sprawling outdoor space, complete with a winding pool and lavish amenities, reflects the family's wealth. Grayson's discomfort resurfaces as he notices childhood handprints in the cement, a subtle reminder of the past he shares with these strangers. The setting underscores the tension between opulence and unresolved family history.

Savannah finally engages with Grayson, her sharp gaze assessing him with cold precision. Gigi reveals their plan to throw a party to find their missing father, but Savannah dismisses the idea, insisting their father left willingly. The sisters' exchange highlights their conflicting perspectives—Gigi's hopeful determination versus Savannah's resigned realism. When Gigi manipulates Savannah into contacting her boyfriend Duncan for help, Savannah's calculated compliance suggests she has her own agenda. The power struggle between the twins takes center stage, with Grayson as an outsider observing their dynamic.

As Gigi leaves to retrieve Savannah's phone, Savannah asserts her dominance by declaring Grayson will be gone before her sister returns. The chapter ends with a tense standoff between Grayson and Savannah, emphasizing her control and his unresolved role in their lives. The siblings' contrasting approaches to their father's disappearance—Gigi's relentless pursuit versus Savannah's acceptance—foreshadow deeper conflicts. Grayson's presence disrupts the twins' equilibrium, setting the stage for further confrontation and revelations about their shared family ties.

CHAPTER 20: GRAYSON

In Chapter 20, Grayson engages in a tense yet revealing conversation with Acacia, his late father's wife, in the kitchen of her home. Acacia, a maternal figure with a quiet strength, discloses that she learned about Grayson's existence 22 months ago, on the day of her mother's funeral. Grayson, wary of disrupting her family, assures her he has no such intentions. The dialogue hints at past betrayals, including Sheffield Grayson's affair with Grayson's mother, and Acacia's surprising lack of resentment toward Grayson despite the circumstances.

The conversation delves into the complexities of family dynamics, particularly how Acacia's daughters, Savannah and Gigi, have been affected by Sheffield's actions. Acacia reveals that Savannah, who idolized her father, has known about Grayson since she was 14, while Gigi remains unaware. Grayson senses Acacia's pain but also her resilience, as she refuses to blame him for his father's mistakes. The discussion touches on Sheffield's financial dependence on Acacia's family, contradicting his self-made image, and Grayson begins to see Acacia as a compassionate yet formidable figure.

Grayson probes further, asking about recent visits from "gentlemen in suits," hinting at potential legal or financial troubles. Acacia deflects, but Grayson's concern suggests deeper layers to the family's struggles. The chapter also explores Savannah's relationship with her father, revealing how she sought his approval through basketball, a connection to Sheffield's late nephew, Colin. Acacia implies that Savannah may judge her for staying with Sheffield after learning of his infidelity, but she asserts her strength, refusing to be seen as weak.

The chapter concludes with Gigi's abrupt interruption, lightening the mood as she announces a party and references "step negative one," signaling the end of the serious conversation. Grayson and Acacia share a silent understanding, their heart-to-

heart over for now. The interaction leaves Grayson with a nuanced view of Acacia and the family’s tangled history, setting the stage for further exploration of their relationships and unresolved tensions.

CHAPTER 21: GRAYSON

In Chapter 21, Grayson accompanies Gigi to their father’s office, where she reveals she found a key to a safe-deposit box hidden inside the computer. Grayson, aware of his ulterior motives, examines the key and considers creating a flawed duplicate to thwart Gigi’s search. He takes detailed photos of the key under the pretense of analyzing its etchings, while Savannah, Gigi’s sister, openly distrusts Grayson’s intentions. The tension between the characters escalates as Savannah accuses Grayson of dismissing the possibility of their father’s infidelity, highlighting the underlying family conflicts.

Gigi’s enthusiasm for uncovering their father’s secrets contrasts with Savannah’s skepticism and Grayson’s calculated demeanor. Grayson subtly pockets an index card that had held the key, suspecting it might hold hidden significance. Gigi, undeterred by her sister’s reluctance, rallies the group to search the office for clues about the alias their father might have used for the safe-deposit box. The dynamic between the trio reveals their conflicting motivations: Gigi’s chaotic curiosity, Savannah’s protective distrust, and Grayson’s hidden agenda.

As the search progresses, Grayson methodically examines the office, from the desk to the artwork, while keeping an eye on the sisters. The mention of their late cousin Colin hints at the family’s unresolved grief and the shadow he casts over their lives. Grayson’s internal reflections reveal his empathy for the twins’ struggles to live up to their father’s expectations, drawing parallels to his own experiences. The chapter underscores the theme of familial legacy and the lengths to which each character will go to uncover—or conceal—the truth.

The chapter concludes with Grayson’s meticulous yet fruitless search, leaving the mystery of the safe-deposit box unresolved. The interactions between Grayson, Gigi, and Savannah deepen the intrigue, as alliances and suspicions shift. The narrative sets the stage for further exploration of the Hawthorne family’s secrets, with Grayson’s

actions suggesting he may play a pivotal role in either revealing or burying them. The tension between trust and deception remains central, leaving readers eager to see how the characters’ conflicting goals will unfold.

CHAPTER 22: GRAYSON

Grayson exits the house and overhears a tense conversation between Acacia and Kent Trowbridge, a lawyer. Acacia is visibly upset, accusing Trowbridge of leaving her daughter unattended overnight without notifying her. Trowbridge defends his actions, claiming the child needed to learn a lesson, while Acacia asserts he has no right to interfere. Grayson, skilled at blending into his surroundings, silently moves closer to observe the exchange. The confrontation reveals underlying tensions, with Trowbridge addressing Acacia formally as "Mrs. Grayson," a pointed choice suggesting power dynamics at play.

The argument escalates as Acacia reveals her concerns about investigators and her struggle to protect her daughters without adequate resources. Trowbridge dismisses her efforts, reminding her of her□□□□ situation—her parents and husband are gone, and financial constraints weigh heavily. Acacia insists she will handle things herself, but Trowbridge persists, offering his support in a way that feels overbearing. The tension peaks when Trowbridge places a hand on Acacia’s shoulder, prompting Grayson to intervene deliberately, making his presence known with calculated steps.

Grayson’s arrival shifts the power dynamic. He introduces himself with deliberate calm, forcing Trowbridge to acknowledge him. The lawyer recognizes the Hawthorne name, and Grayson subtly asserts dominance by implying he knows more than he reveals. Trowbridge retreats, promising to speak with Acacia later, but Grayson ensures the interaction ends on his terms. He waits until Trowbridge leaves before addressing Acacia, choosing not to pry into the details of their conversation, instead maintaining a composed demeanor.

The chapter concludes with Grayson making a phone call to Zabrowski, a contact whose usefulness he questions. His tone is firm, giving Zabrowski one chance to prove his worth. This action underscores Grayson’s strategic mindset and his preference for

control. The chapter highlights Grayson’s ability to navigate tense situations, his protective instincts toward Acacia, and his calculated approach to power and information.

CHAPTER 23: JAMESON

The chapter opens with Jameson and Avery receiving a mysterious black envelope adorned with a platinum thread and a wax seal bearing a geometric design. Inside, they find an invitation to the opera accompanied by an ornate key, hinting at another enigmatic challenge. Jameson, intrigued by the puzzle-like nature of the seal and the invitation, eagerly anticipates the adventure ahead. His excitement is palpable as he informs Avery of their destination, setting the stage for a high-stakes game that aligns with his love for the impossible and the hidden.

As Avery prepares for the opera in an elegant black-and-gold gown, the tension between the two characters intensifies. Jameson assists her with the dress, but the moment becomes charged with emotional and physical intimacy. Avery uses their code word, "Tahiti," to demand honesty, breaking through Jameson’s usual playful deflection. The exchange reveals their deep connection, as Jameson’s touch and whispered confessions convey vulnerability beneath his confident exterior. The scene underscores the complexity of their relationship, blending attraction with unspoken emotional stakes.

Beneath the surface of their banter and chemistry, Jameson grapples with unresolved feelings about his brother, Ian. When Avery presses him, he admits that part of him seeks to prove himself to Ian, to make him regret his absence. This confession exposes Jameson’s insecurities and longing for validation, contrasting sharply with his usual self-assured demeanor. Avery’s unwavering support and affirmation—calling him brilliant, devious, and kind—highlight her role as his emotional anchor, even as he struggles to fully believe her words.

The chapter closes with a poignant yet playful exchange, as Jameson zips up Avery’s dress and declares his insatiable nature as a Hawthorne. The moment encapsulates their dynamic: a blend of tenderness, ambition, and unresolved tension. Avery’s

declaration that Jameson is "everything" underscores the depth of their bond, while his response reflects his perpetual drive for more. The chapter leaves readers anticipating the next phase of their journey, both in the mysterious game and in their evolving relationship.

CHAPTER 24: JAMESON

Jameson and Avery attend the opera but leave their private box after twenty minutes, following mysterious instructions. They part ways with Avery's bodyguard, Oren, who reluctantly allows them to proceed alone. In the elevator, Jameson uses a gold key to activate the control panel, causing all buttons to light up emerald green. Avery inputs a code, plunging the elevator into darkness as it descends far below the ground floor, hinting at a hidden, subterranean world awaiting them.

The elevator opens into a vast, man-made cavern with an underground river. A single torch illuminates the space as they step out, revealing a tunnel-like structure. A young boy, around eleven or twelve, stands silently by the water's edge, holding a lantern. Without a word, he boards a gondola-like boat and waits for Jameson and Avery to join him. Despite their offers to help or concerns about his well-being, the boy insists he is fine and takes control of the boat, poling them down the dark river.

As they journey through the tunnel, the walls reveal an eerie, quartz-like glow. The boy remains silent until Avery remarks on their isolation, prompting him to cryptically explain that there are many paths to their destination, the Mercy, but only for those who are welcome. The boat navigates several bends before arriving at a torch-lit beach, where a door stands guarded by Rohan, dressed in a red tuxedo. His confident demeanor suggests he has achieved a significant victory.

Avery expresses concern for the boy's welfare, but he proudly declares his loyalty to Rohan, whom he refers to as the Factotum. The boy aspires to one day hold the same position for Rohan when he becomes the Proprietor. This exchange underscores the secretive and hierarchical nature of the world they've entered, leaving Jameson and Avery to face whatever awaits them beyond the door, surrounded by an air of mystery and anticipation.

CHAPTER 25: JAMESON

Jameson discovers that Rohan is not merely a messenger but the Factotum, the right-hand man of the mysterious Proprietor of the Devil’s Mercy. The chapter opens with Jameson recalling Ian’s cryptic words about the Proprietor’s succession and the organization’s hidden workings. Avery confronts Rohan about the unethical use of child labor, to which Rohan responds with a chilling justification, hinting at his own traumatic past. The tension escalates as Rohan unlocks a hidden door, inviting them into a secretive world with a foreboding warning: “The house always wins.”

The setting inside the Devil’s Mercy is opulent yet ominous, featuring a domed Roman-style room with five grand arches, each representing a deadly sin. Jameson notes the intricate design, including marble arches, black curtains, and a central infinity symbol made of onyx and agate. Rohan’s disembodied voice demonstrates the room’s acoustic tricks, adding to the surreal atmosphere. As Jameson and Avery explore, Rohan reveals the purpose of each archway, starting with Sloth (massage and relaxation) and Gluttony (gourmet food and drinks), all while maintaining a playful yet threatening demeanor.

The tour continues with Lust, where private chambers hint at illicit activities, and Rohan issues a stark warning against non-consensual actions. The fourth archway reveals Wrath, a boxing ring where members gamble on brutal fights. Rohan’s description of the violence and his ambiguous history with the ring suggest a darker underbelly to the Mercy’s operations. Jameson’s curiosity and competitive nature are piqued, but the underlying danger is palpable, reinforcing the theme of risk and consequence that permeates the chapter.

Throughout the chapter, Jameson’s strategic mind analyzes every detail, drawing parallels between the Mercy’s labyrinthine design and his own family’s secrets. The dynamic between him, Avery, and Rohan is charged with unspoken threats and power

plays. The chapter culminates in a sense of anticipation as Jameson prepares to navigate this treacherous world, where every choice could lead to victory or ruin. The Devil’s Mercy emerges as a place where desire and danger intertwine, and Jameson’s resolve to outplay the house is put to the test.

CHAPTER 26: JAMESON

Jameson enters an opulent gaming room reminiscent of a historic ballroom, struck by its grandeur and the mystery of how deep underground it lies. His focus wavers between the architectural marvel and the unsettling revelation that Rohan knows Ian is his father. The room features Venetian-style gold moldings, a sapphire-and-gold carpet, and antique tables hosting various games. As Jameson observes a dealer in a ballgown handing dice to a player, a woman named Zella—referred to as "the Duchess"—approaches him, explaining the rules of "hazard," an archaic dice game. Her poised demeanor and cryptic remarks immediately signal her calculated nature.

Zella introduces herself with deliberate ambiguity, dismissing titles as distractions from the true nature of power dynamics. She probes Jameson and Avery’s identities, hinting at the political undercurrents of the venue, which she calls "the Mercy" or "court." The Duchess reveals the space thrives on alliances, bargains, and the insatiable hunger for power among the wealthy. As she escorts them through the room, Jameson notes the scarcity of women, prompting Zella to imply Avery’s exceptional status—either due to her talent or the Proprietor’s interest. Jameson’s excitement grows at the challenge of catching the Proprietor’s attention to join the elusive "Game."

Zella guides them past tables of obscure games like whist and piquet, explaining their historical origins while emphasizing the Mercy’s timeless atmosphere. Jameson inquires about poker, learning it’s a relatively modern addition played on the balcony. The Duchess’s words carry double meanings, suggesting the "games" extend beyond the tables into strategic social maneuvering. When Jameson asks about the Proprietor’s presence, Zella cryptically replies that he is omnipresent in his domain. Before departing, she offers Avery alliance and warns of the room’s dangers, leaving Jameson to translate her parting "bonne chance" as both a blessing and a subtle

challenge.

Left alone, Jameson surveys the room, electrified by the possibilities. The chapter closes with him and Avery heading toward the poker balcony, his whispered question—"Ready to lose?"—hinting at the high-stakes gambles ahead, both literal and metaphorical. The setting, rich with intrigue and historical echoes, sets the stage for a deeper exploration of power, identity, and the games people play beyond the tables.

CHAPTER 27: GRAYSON

Grayson meticulously works on creating a digital model of Gigi’s key, using photographs and precise calculations. When the hotel concierge offers assistance, he requests a 3D printer without explanation, showcasing his resourcefulness and discretion. After completing the model, he creates a second, slightly altered version to render it useless, hinting at his conflicted feelings toward Gigi. The chapter then shifts to his internal struggle over what to wear to a high school party, highlighting his discomfort with casual social norms and his preference for the formality of suits, which he views as armor.

The narrative transitions to Grayson’s phone call with Zabrowski, a private investigator, as he demands detailed information about Kent Trowbridge. The investigator reveals Trowbridge’s wealthy background and long-standing connection to Acacia Grayson’s family, the Engstroms. Grayson’s sharp, commanding tone underscores his impatience with incomplete answers, reflecting his Hawthorne upbringing, which emphasizes control and precision. The conversation also hints at Grayson’s growing concern for Acacia and her daughters, suggesting deeper motives behind his inquiries.

Zabrowski discloses the dire financial situation of the Grayson family, explaining that Acacia’s joint assets with her husband are frozen due to his legal troubles, while her personal trust has been drained. The girls’ trusts, however, remain intact but are controlled by Trowbridge as the trustee. Grayson’s reaction is icy and calculated, revealing his anger and determination to uncover the full extent of the financial and legal mess. His demand for the trust paperwork and investigation details underscores his strategic mindset and protective instincts toward the family.

The chapter concludes with Grayson’s silent resolve to intervene, as he pieces together the implications of Trowbridge’s role and the financial manipulation at play.

His grandfather’s teachings about never allowing others to fail him echo in his actions, reinforcing his relentless pursuit of control and justice. The tension builds as Grayson prepares to navigate both the high school party and the darker, more complex web of family secrets and power dynamics, setting the stage for further confrontation and revelation.

CHAPTER 28: GRAYSON

In this chapter, Grayson Hawthorne's priorities shift as he realizes the urgency of accessing his father's safe-deposit box before the FBI discovers its existence. He suspects the box may contain evidence of his father's crimes, including payments made to stalk and kidnap Avery, the Hawthorne heiress. Grayson fears that if authorities uncover these transactions, they might reevaluate his father's disappearance, leading to dangerous questions. This realization propels him into action, determined to prevent any threads from unraveling that could expose his family's secrets.

Grayson examines a mysterious object he took from his father's study, initially mistaking it for a USB drive. Upon closer inspection, he realizes it's something else entirely, with small pegs inside its casing. Alongside a seemingly blank index card, the items remind him of the cryptic games his grandfather used to orchestrate. Though Grayson reminds himself this is no game, he can't help but approach the puzzle methodically, examining the card's notches and considering invisible ink as a possible clue. His analytical mindset takes over, despite the high stakes.

The chapter includes a lively phone conversation with Xander, Grayson's brother, who immediately senses something is amiss. Their banter reveals Grayson's guarded nature, as Xander teases him about his uncharacteristic use of "hello" and probes about his feelings. Grayson deflects, focusing instead on the mysterious objects and his growing responsibility toward protecting his newfound sisters. Xander's playful insistence on discussing emotions contrasts sharply with Grayson's stoicism, highlighting their differing personalities.

The chapter ends with an enigmatic phone call from an unidentified woman, whose voice captures Grayson's attention. Her refusal to identify herself only heightens his curiosity, suggesting she may play a significant role in the unfolding mystery.

Grayson's instinctive suspicion and determination to uncover her identity hint at deeper layers to the story, leaving readers anticipating the next development in this high-stakes family drama.

CHAPTER 29: GRAYSON

Grayson finds himself at a high school party hosted at the Trowbridge residence, reluctantly accompanying Gigi, who teases him about his discomfort with casual attire. The modern, open-plan house is filled with teenagers engaging in typical party antics, including poorly aimed Ping-Pong ball tosses. Grayson observes the scene with his usual analytical detachment, noting the absence of adults and the chaotic energy. Gigi, seemingly unfazed, assigns him the role of distraction while she plans to sneak into the private wing, though she offers no clear instructions, leaving Grayson to navigate the unfamiliar social terrain on his own.

Savannah, Grayson's counterpart in demeanor, stands on a glass staircase with Duncan, a boy Gigi dismisses as bland but socially prominent. Grayson notes Savannah's composed indifference to Duncan's advances, mirroring his own reserved nature. Gigi thrusts a bottle of alcoholic lemonade into Grayson's hands, instructing him to blend in, but his attempts at normalcy are short-lived. He takes a sip of the overly sweet drink, grimacing internally, while continuing to assess the party's dynamics, unimpressed by the ostentatious decor and lack of sophistication.

Grayson's presence soon attracts attention, particularly from a group of girls who recognize him as a Hawthorne. They bombard him with intrusive questions about his past relationship with Avery, offering misplaced sympathy and requests for photos. Grayson remains stoic, deflecting their advances with curt responses, but their chatter shifts to mocking Savannah, whom they deride for her aloofness and perceived arrogance. Grayson's patience wears thin, and he sharply shuts down their criticism, revealing a protective streak toward Savannah despite their similarities in emotional reserve.

As the girls persist in their gossip, a male partygoer joins in, amplifying the negativity. Grayson's irritation grows, and he silently wills Gigi to send her elusive signal so he

can escape the awkward encounter. The chapter highlights Grayson’s discomfort in casual social settings, his sharp observational skills, and his underlying loyalty to family—even when it clashes with his preference for control and order. The party serves as a backdrop for his internal struggle between maintaining his composed facade and reacting to the chaos around him.

CHAPTER 30: GRAYSON

Grayson and Gigi successfully infiltrate Kent Trowbridge’s private office during a party, leveraging Gigi’s lock-picking skills and Grayson’s keen observational abilities. Gigi reveals her penchant for learning unconventional skills out of boredom, while Grayson meticulously scans the room for inconsistencies. They discover a hidden key under a rug, granting access to a desk drawer containing a list of passwords. Gigi immediately focuses on the computer, labeling Grayson as "magic" for his находчивость, while he discreetly photographs the passwords for future use, ensuring they cover their tracks.

As Gigi immerses herself in searching the computer, Grayson investigates the room further and uncovers a concealed safe behind a hinged bookshelf. His Hawthorne upbringing equips him with lock-picking expertise, but before he can attempt to open the safe, voices approach the office. Grayson quickly resets the shelf and locks the door, while Gigi, noticing the safe, refuses to leave without completing her data extraction. The tension rises as the intruders—Savannah and Duncan Trowbridge—enter the room, forcing Grayson and Gigi to hide behind the desk.

The dynamic between Savannah and Duncan grows increasingly uncomfortable as Duncan pressures her with possessive and invasive behavior. Grayson, though conflicted about eavesdropping, observes Duncan’s aggressive advances and Savannah’s controlled but firm resistance. The scene underscores Savannah’s resilience and Duncan’s entitlement, adding a layer of tension to the chapter. Grayson’s silent anger at Duncan’s actions hints at a protective instinct, though he remains hidden to avoid compromising their mission.

The chapter ends on a cliffhanger, with Grayson and Gigi trapped in the office as the confrontation between Savannah and Duncan unfolds. The dual narrative—Grayson and Gigi’s covert mission and Savannah’s strained interaction with Duncan—creates a sense of urgency and unpredictability. Grayson’s strategic mindset and Gigi’s audacity

shine through, while the unresolved tension leaves readers anticipating the next development in both plotlines.

CHAPTER 31: GRAYSON

The chapter opens with Grayson confronting his older brother Nash, who has unexpectedly appeared while Grayson is engaged in a personal mission. Nash, ever the protective sibling, hints that Grayson is in over his head, but Grayson insists he has everything under control and doesn't need assistance. Their tense exchange reveals underlying familial dynamics, with Nash subtly reminding Grayson of his place as the younger brother. Grayson's frustration is palpable, especially when Nash reveals that Grayson has been unaware of being tailed by another party, undermining his claim of control.

Grayson's focus shifts to the black car following him, which he now notices maintains a precise distance. Determined to confront the threat, he maneuvers his car to force a confrontation, driven by a mix of strategy and pent-up aggression. Nash lingers nearby, observing but not interfering, as Grayson prepares to face the unknown pursuer. The tension builds as Grayson waits for the black car to return, his pride and independence clashing with the reality of the danger he's in. The scene underscores Grayson's stubborn self-reliance and his refusal to acknowledge Nash's concern.

The confrontation escalates when the driver of the black car steps out—a tall, lean, and visibly armed man with a calm yet menacing demeanor. Grayson sizes him up, noting his confidence and physical prowess, and demands to know his identity. The stranger cryptically responds that his employer is more important than his name, heightening the mystery. Grayson's attempt to guess the employer—suggesting "Trowbridge"—is met with a refusal, further intensifying the standoff. The exchange highlights Grayson's arrogance and the stranger's unnerving composure.

The chapter reaches its climax when the stranger reveals he works for "Eve," a name that clearly unsettles Grayson. This revelation hints at a deeper, possibly personal connection, leaving Grayson momentarily speechless. The encounter ends on a

cliffhanger, with the stranger’s smug smile suggesting Grayson is entangled in a larger, more dangerous game than he realized. The chapter masterfully blends action, family tension, and intrigue, setting the stage for further conflict and exploration of Grayson’s vulnerabilities.

NINE YEARS AND THREE MONTHS AGO

The chapter opens with Jameson Hawthorne standing at the base of a tree house, frustrated by his broken arm and the presence of his grandfather, Tobias Hawthorne, instead of his brothers. Tobias's pointed questions immediately set a tense tone, as he challenges Jameson's intelligence and decision-making. The distant sound of Grayson's violin playing underscores the theme of perfection, a recurring pressure in the Hawthorne family. Jameson's defensive admission about his motorbike crash hints at his internal struggle with failure and the high expectations placed upon him.

Tobias seizes the moment to deliver a harsh truth: Jameson's mind is "ordinary" compared to his brothers' exceptional abilities. Grayson is methodical and precise, Xander is brilliantly unconventional, and even Nash's capabilities are ambiguously superior. The word "ordinary" strikes Jameson deeply, forcing him to confront his insecurities. Tobias, however, doesn't leave him without hope; he suggests that Jameson can train himself to see the world differently, to overcome his perceived limitations through sheer determination and focus.

The conversation shifts into a pivotal moment as Tobias challenges Jameson to rise above his weaknesses. He emphasizes that true success comes from wanting it more than others and seeing opportunities where others see obstacles. Jameson's defiant response—"Whatever I have to"—reveals his resolve to prove himself. Tobias's cryptic final words, "I'll see you at the top," serve as both a literal and metaphorical challenge, pushing Jameson to reject the easy path and embrace the struggle.

In the final scene, Jameson chooses to climb the tree house the hard way, ignoring his injury and the pain, symbolizing his commitment to surpassing his limitations. The chapter closes with his determination to become the best, driven by Tobias's harsh but motivating words. This moment encapsulates the Hawthorne family's relentless pursuit of excellence and the personal sacrifices required to achieve it.

CHAPTER 32: JAMESON

In Chapter 32 of *The Brothers Hawthorne*, Jameson continues his strategic exploration of the Devil’s Mercy, an underground gambling hall. While Avery loses at poker upstairs, Jameson focuses on observing the establishment’s hidden surveillance systems, including mirrored walls, peepholes, and dealers’ jeweled necklaces likely equipped with listening devices. He recalls Rohan’s earlier warning about the Proprietor’s omnipresence and aims to intrigue him. Jameson plays various games, mastering complex rules like those of Piquet, and wins consistently, all while subtly challenging the unseen Proprietor to take notice of his skills.

Jameson’s calculated moves and confidence draw attention as he navigates the gambling hall’s intricate dynamics. He excels at games requiring strategy, such as Hazard and Piquet, and even begins counting cards in vingt-et-un to amplify his winnings. His defiance of Rohan’s warnings reflects his Hawthorne pride and penchant for risk. Meanwhile, the hall buzzes with rumors about Avery’s losses, drawing more patrons. Jameson’s actions suggest he is playing a larger game, one where his victories are less about money and more about proving his worth to the elusive Proprietor.

The tension escalates when Rohan, the Factotum, intervenes at the vingt-et-un table, confronting two men who have broken the establishment’s rules. Rohan’s charismatic yet menacing demeanor unsettles the players as he delivers a cryptic ultimatum: if he wins the hand, the men face dire consequences, but if they win, they must fight each other. The scene underscores the Mercy’s ruthless underbelly, where power and punishment are disguised as games. Jameson, ever observant, notes the hall’s eerie silence during this confrontation, recognizing the unspoken authority Rohan wields.

The chapter closes with Jameson acutely aware of being watched, both by the dealers’ surveillance and the unseen Proprietor. His calculated risks and Rohan’s display of

control highlight the high-stakes environment of the Devil’s Mercy. Jameson’s determination to impress the Proprietor—combined with the hall’s atmosphere of danger and intrigue—sets the stage for further confrontation. The chapter masterfully blends tension, strategy, and psychological warfare, leaving readers eager to see how Jameson’s gambits will unfold.

CHAPTER 33: JAMESON

The chapter opens with Jameson engaging in a game of whist with Branford, who plays with cold efficiency and dismissive attitude. Despite Jameson's quick learning, Branford's superior skill leads their team to lose, though Branford's partner, Zella, remains indifferent. Branford's abrupt shift from standing to sitting signals the arrival of Avery and a mysterious man at the top of a grand staircase, disrupting the room's dynamics. The man, referred to as the Proprietor, commands immediate respect, evident as the entire room inclines their heads in deference.

The Proprietor is described as an enigmatic figure with slicked-back white hair and a platinum cane, exuding authority. His presence evokes a regal atmosphere, as if the attendees are bowing to royalty. Avery, accompanying him, takes his arm as they descend the staircase, further emphasizing his significance. Branford acknowledges the Proprietor with a subtle nod, hinting at an underlying connection or hierarchy. The scene sets the stage for a power dynamic, with the Proprietor at its center and the others reacting to his dominance.

Jameson, however, defies the unspoken rules of the room. Unlike the others, he refuses to lower his head or remain seated. Instead, he boldly approaches Avery and the Proprietor, making direct eye contact and even winking at the latter. This act of defiance highlights Jameson's fearless and rebellious nature, contrasting sharply with the submissive behavior of the crowd. His actions suggest a willingness to challenge authority and embrace risk, regardless of potential consequences.

The chapter concludes with Jameson's audacious gesture, leaving the reader to ponder the implications of his defiance. His wink at the Proprietor underscores his confidence and unpredictability, while the final line—"What was life without a little risk?"—encapsulates his daring philosophy. This moment sets up tension for future interactions, as Jameson's refusal to conform may have significant repercussions in the

unfolding narrative.

CHAPTER 34: JAMESON

The chapter opens with Jameson and Avery returning through an underground canal in silence. Jameson, poling the boat, senses Avery's tension and deduces she has been offered entry into "the Game." When Avery confirms this, Jameson reacts sharply, fearing she may have tried to extend the offer to him as well. His frustration stems from a deeper insecurity about being perceived as ordinary, though he quickly regrets his outburst. The tension between them is palpable, underscored by the dim lighting and confined space of the canal.

Their emotional exchange escalates into a passionate moment, with Avery challenging Jameson's gentleness. The physical connection between them is intense, serving as both a comfort and a distraction from Jameson's feelings of inadequacy. Despite the intimacy, Jameson cannot shake the thought that he has failed yet again. Avery, however, shifts the focus by revealing she has more to share about the man Jameson played whist against earlier, hinting at a significant discovery.

Avery discloses that the man, known as Branford, holds a courtesy title and is actually the heir to the Earl of Wycliffe. She traces a "W" on Jameson's palm, symbolizing the Wycliffe name, and reveals Branford's full identity: Simon Johnstone-Jameson, Viscount Branford. This revelation adds a layer of intrigue and personal stakes, as the connection to the Wycliffe family suggests deeper implications for Jameson and Avery's unfolding story.

The chapter closes with Jameson processing this new information, his heightened senses still attuned to Avery's presence. The revelation about Branford's true identity not only shifts the dynamics of their current situation but also hints at future conflicts or alliances. The emotional and physical intensity between Jameson and Avery remains unresolved, leaving readers anticipating the next developments in their complex relationship and the broader narrative.

CHAPTER 35: JAMESON

Jameson confronts Ian in a hotel room, having scaled the building to reach him. He reveals he knows Ian’s flat at King’s Gate Terrace actually belongs to his brother, Simon, the Viscount Branford. Ian, though initially drunk, sobers quickly as Jameson presses him for answers. The tension between them is palpable, with Jameson accusing Ian of sending him unprepared into the Devil’s Mercy, where he encountered Simon. Ian dismisses Simon’s involvement but hints at a deeper rivalry, suggesting Simon is leveraging Ian’s recent losses to gain an advantage in the Game.

The conversation shifts to Ian’s family dynamics, drawing parallels between his position as the third son of an earl and Jameson’s as the third grandson of a billionaire. Ian reveals his mother left him Vantage, a prized possession, and offers to pass it to Jameson if he wins it back from Simon. This promise strikes Jameson deeply, though he remains wary of Ian’s motives. Ian’s bitterness toward Simon is evident, and his offer seems driven as much by spite as by genuine intent to reward Jameson.

Jameson shares that Avery has been invited to the Game, while he has not, prompting Ian to strategize. Ian’s urgency suggests the stakes are high, and he presses Jameson for details on his efforts to secure an invitation. Jameson, however, turns the tables, demanding to know why Ian was banned from the Devil’s Mercy. Ian admits to losing too often and displaying a temper, which made the Factotum, Rohan, distrust him. This revelation adds complexity to Ian’s character and raises questions about his reliability.

The chapter ends with Jameson recounting a tense encounter at the Devil’s Mercy, where Rohan disciplined two men for past transgressions. Ian analyzes the situation, recognizing Rohan’s methods of maintaining order. The exchange underscores the cutthroat nature of the Game and the power dynamics at play. Jameson’s determination to secure an invitation is clear, but the chapter leaves lingering doubts about Ian’s trustworthiness and the true cost of winning Vantage.

CHAPTER 36: GRAYSON

In this chapter, Grayson confronts a spy sent by Eve, a woman who previously betrayed him. The encounter is tense and calculated, with Grayson maintaining a cold detachment as he assesses the situation. The spy, a dark-eyed boy with tattoos, implies that his actions are directed by Eve’s desires, not his own. Grayson reflects on Eve’s betrayal, recalling how she used him to gain control of her great-grandfather’s fortune and empire. The chapter sets the stage for a power struggle, with Grayson wary of the spy’s dangerous allegiance to Vincent Blake, Eve’s employer.

The dialogue between Grayson and the spy is measured and strategic, with both characters carefully choosing their words. Grayson avoids revealing emotion, asking the spy if he blindly follows Eve’s orders. The spy remains eerily still, responding cryptically that Grayson doesn’t want to know what he’s capable of. Grayson asserts that Eve means nothing to him now, framing her betrayal as a lesson in the consequences of his own mistakes. The spy’s calm demeanor and lack of reaction suggest he is a formidable opponent, unshaken by Grayson’s attempts to provoke him.

As the confrontation escalates, the spy begins to circle Grayson, taunting him with the revelation that Eve didn’t send him to Phoenix to watch Grayson. This implies there is another target, adding intrigue to the narrative. Grayson’s internal monologue reveals his lingering bitterness over Eve’s betrayal, though he outwardly projects indifference. The spy’s parting words hint at a larger scheme, leaving Grayson—and the reader—to question Eve’s true motives and the extent of her manipulation.

The chapter ends on a suspenseful note, with the spy walking away after delivering his cryptic message. Grayson is left to ponder the implications, reinforcing the themes of trust, power, and deception. The encounter underscores Grayson’s resolve to avoid future vulnerabilities while hinting at deeper conflicts to come. The sparse, tense dialogue and vivid descriptions of the spy’s demeanor create a palpable sense of

danger, setting the tone for the next chapter.

CHAPTER 37: GRAYSON

Grayson becomes increasingly certain that Eve has someone surveilling his family, a realization that unsettles him as he recalls a tense encounter with her. The memory of their meeting by the pool haunts him—Eve's resemblance to Emily and her sharp, self-deprecating remarks about being an "affair baby" stir conflicting emotions. Noticing her injury, Grayson feels a protective rage, vowing that whoever harmed her will pay. This memory reinforces his determination to address the threat posed by Eve's watcher, whom he now suspects is monitoring him as well.

Upon returning to his hotel, Grayson meticulously checks for surveillance devices, confirming the room is secure before focusing on his tasks. He ignores multiple messages from Gigi, who is desperate for a photo of Trowbridge's passwords. Despite his growing fondness for her, Grayson alters the password image to mislead her, ensuring her efforts will fail. He prints duplicate keys—one real, one decoy—and sends them to Zabrowski, along with a demand for information on the mysterious blond watcher. Grayson's actions reveal his calculated, strategic mindset, even as he grapples with guilt over manipulating Gigi.

Grayson shifts his attention to two cryptic items: a fake USB drive and an index card with unexplained notches. Frustrated by his inability to decode their significance, he questions whether he's overanalyzing them. His thoughts drift to Savannah and the unfair treatment she endures, though he dismisses it as irrelevant. After sending the keys to the front desk, he retreats to the bathroom, turning the shower to its hottest setting. The physical exertion of holding himself in a doorway push-up position becomes a meditative act, allowing him to temporarily clear his mind of distractions.

As steam fills the room, Grayson's reflection fades from the mirror, symbolizing his desire to escape his thoughts. The chapter closes with fragmented memories of past conversations, hinting at unresolved tensions and emotional wounds. Grayson's

disciplined routine and meticulous actions contrast with his inner turmoil, painting a portrait of a man struggling to maintain control amid mounting pressures. The chapter underscores his complex relationships and the moral ambiguities of his choices, leaving his next steps uncertain.

CHAPTER 38: GRAYSON

Grayson awakens from a vivid nightmare featuring a labyrinth of glass shards reflecting key figures in his life—Avery, Emily, Eve, and the twins Gigi and Savannah. The dream leaves him unsettled, and he realizes he has overslept. Checking his phone, he finds no updates on the mysterious "List" or from Gigi, but he resists the urge to follow up, trusting his strategic delay. Grayson reflects on his plan to manipulate Gigi's access to password-protected files and considers the advantage of Eve redirecting her spy's focus onto him, which could protect his family.

The narrative shifts to Grayson meeting his private investigator, Zabrowski, after a morning swim. Zabrowski delivers two forged keys matching Gigi's, which Grayson inspects before pocketing. The PI updates him on Sheffield Grayson's legal troubles, revealing tax evasion, offshore income concealment, and potential embezzlement from a company he co-owned with his mother-in-law. Grayson deduces Sheffield sold the company to avoid scrutiny from the trusts' trustee, Trowbridge. Though the FBI's progress is unclear, Grayson is relieved they haven't located Sheffield, ensuring Avery's safety.

Zabrowski also provides a file on Mattias Slater, Eve's spy, whose father had a criminal history with one conviction—possibly linked to Vincent Blake. Grayson recalls Slater's ominous warning and learns about his struggling mother, hinting at potential leverage. He instructs Zabrowski to prioritize uncovering trust paperwork while continuing to investigate Slater. The exchange underscores Grayson's methodical approach to gathering intelligence and neutralizing threats.

The chapter concludes with a lighter tone as Grayson encounters Gigi causing a scene in the hotel lobby. She theatrically mimics his mannerisms while questioning security about his whereabouts, amusing the guards despite their refusal to cooperate. Grayson intervenes, exasperated but subtly amused by her antics. This moment

contrasts with the tension of earlier scenes, highlighting Gigi's unpredictable energy and Grayson's grudging tolerance for her as he navigates their alliance.

CHAPTER 39: JAMESON

The chapter opens at the Devil’s Mercy, an underground fighting venue with a vintage boxing ring marked by fraying ropes. Jameson warns Avery against staying, but Rohan, the enigmatic Factotum dressed in a casually unbuttoned tuxedo, insists she remain and even place bets. Avery questions the fairness of wagering against the house, but Rohan dismisses her concerns, implying their deal’s financial terms are already settled. His relaxed demeanor unsettles Jameson, who senses Rohan’s focus has shifted to the unfolding "Game," suggesting a larger scheme is already in motion.

The atmosphere is electric as the venue fills with a predominantly male crowd, ranging from young men to elderly patrons. Jameson distracts Rohan by asking which fighter Avery should bet on, and Rohan hints at the house fighter’s advantage. Rohan then takes center stage, announcing the brutal rules: fights continue until a fighter yields or is knocked unconscious, with no gloves or mercy allowed. His commanding presence and the crowd’s fervent response underscore the violent, high-stakes nature of the event.

Jameson observes the fights with analytical precision, ignoring the bloodshed to study the fighters’ weaknesses and movements. Avery, concerned, urges him not to participate, but Jameson is resolute, stealing Rohan’s phrase to emphasize his determination. Avery, however, declares she’ll bet on him, showing her unwavering support. The tension builds as a house fighter emerges victorious, and Rohan calls for a challenger.

The chapter climaxes as Jameson, with a characteristic Hawthorne smirk, volunteers to fight, silencing the crowd. His bold declaration sets the stage for a high-stakes confrontation, highlighting his fearless nature and the deepening rivalry with Rohan. The scene leaves readers anticipating the physical and psychological battle to come, reinforcing the themes of risk, strategy, and loyalty central to the narrative.

CHAPTER 40: JAMESON

Jameson, the leanest and most cocky of his brothers, enters a fight with an unassuming appearance that belies his true capabilities. Despite looking like a privileged prep school boy, his scars hint at a high pain tolerance and hidden strength. The crowd underestimates him, except for Rohan, who observes him with newfound interest. Jameson prepares barefoot and bare-chested, exuding confidence as the house fighter dismisses him as an easy opponent. His mindset is clear: life is a game, and he plays to win, setting the stage for an unexpected showdown.

The fight begins with Jameson deliberately mocking his opponent by mirroring his movements with eerie precision, a tactic designed to provoke. As the house fighter grows increasingly frustrated, Jameson shifts to dodging punches, exploiting the man’s anger and imbalance. Seizing the perfect moment, he delivers a decisive spinning kick to the opponent’s head, knocking him out cold. Victorious, Jameson perches on a ring post, taunting the crowd for another challenger while locking eyes with Avery and noticing the disguised Proprietor in the shadows.

The Proprietor, now revealed, commands attention by striking his cane and applauding slowly. His presence signals a shift in the dynamic as he instructs Rohan to step into the ring. Jameson watches as Rohan removes his tuxedo jacket, his expression unreadable, hinting at a more formidable opponent. The tension escalates, with Jameson realizing the Proprietor’s gaze mirrors his grandfather’s—a reminder that approval often precedes another test. The chapter ends on a cliffhanger, leaving readers anticipating the next confrontation.

This chapter highlights Jameson’s strategic brilliance and ability to manipulate situations to his advantage, even as he navigates deeper layers of power and deception. His victory against the house fighter is overshadowed by the looming threat of Rohan and the Proprietor’s calculated moves. The narrative underscores themes of

perception, control, and the constant pursuit of proving oneself, leaving readers questioning whether Jameson’s confidence will hold against the challenges ahead.

CHAPTER 41: JAMESON

The chapter opens with Jameson assessing his opponent, Rohan, a formidable Factotum whose physical prowess and lack of visible weaknesses signal a brutal fight ahead. Jameson feels a surge of adrenaline, anticipating the pain and challenge, yet embraces the confrontation with a mix of excitement and grim determination. Despite Rohan's superior strength and technique, Jameson remains undeterred, mentally preparing for the inevitable physical toll. The stage is set for a high-stakes battle where Jameson's resilience will be tested against Rohan's relentless fighting style.

As the fight progresses, both combatants sustain significant injuries, with Jameson bleeding and bruised but refusing to yield. Rohan, though equally battered, commands Jameson to stay down, a directive he defiantly ignores. Jameson's laughter underscores his unyielding spirit, a hallmark of the Hawthorne family's tenacity. Despite his swollen eye and cracked ribs, Jameson manages to land impactful blows on Rohan, demonstrating his skill and determination. The physical and psychological intensity of the fight escalates as Jameson pushes through the pain, rising to his feet with a manic resolve.

Realizing he can't match Rohan's strength or reach, Jameson shifts tactics, abandoning conventional strategy for sheer audacity. He charges at Rohan, using a risky maneuver to gain the upper hand, showcasing his adaptability and willingness to embrace danger. The crowd watches in awe as Jameson's unorthodox approach momentarily staggers Rohan, who eventually stays down—not due to defeat, but because of an unspoken order from the Proprietor. This revelation hints at the deeper power dynamics at play, leaving Jameson to ponder the true nature of his victory.

In the aftermath, Jameson, barely standing, is supported by Avery and Zella, who chastise him for his recklessness. His humorous yet pained remarks highlight his defiance, even as Avery expresses frustration over his brothers' potential reactions.

The chapter closes with Jameson scanning the crowd for the vanished Proprietor and Rohan, underscoring the enigmatic and manipulative forces surrounding the fight. The encounter leaves Jameson physically broken but mentally unbroken, reinforcing his reputation as a relentless and unpredictable fighter.

CHAPTER 42: JAMESON

Jameson, battered from a brutal fight, is brought to an opulent room in the Devil’s Mercy by Zella, a mysterious figure who seems to know the establishment’s unwritten rules. The room’s luxurious details—a waterfall wall, warm stone floors, and silk sheets—contrast sharply with Jameson’s injuries. Despite Avery’s insistence that he rest, Jameson is fixated on the upcoming "Game," where the Proprietor will select participants. His determination to prove himself and win back Vantage for his brother Ian drives him, even as Avery reminds him of his own worth and the importance of his well-being.

Zella, revealing her knowledge of the Game, offers cryptic advice on how to gain the Proprietor’s attention: surprise him, offer something he desires, or pose a threat. Her motives remain ambiguous, as she hints at her own strategic interests while acknowledging Jameson’s reckless ambition and his bond with Avery. The tension between trust and manipulation lingers as Zella departs, leaving Jameson to ponder her words and his next move. Her parting remark about "shattering glass" suggests there are multiple ways to disrupt the status quo.

Avery confronts Jameson about his late-night visit to Ian, learning that Ian promised to leave him Vantage if he wins it back. Avery challenges Jameson to claim the prize for himself, but his conflicted loyalty to Ian and his own ambitions complicate the decision. Despite his physical pain, Jameson’s focus remains unshaken: he must secure an invitation to the Game. His resolve is unwavering, and Avery, though concerned, supports him by providing pain relief and insisting on accompanying him.

The chapter culminates with Jameson preparing to re-enter the Devil’s Mercy, his body aching but his mind sharp. The interplay of strategy, risk, and personal stakes underscores the high-stakes world he navigates. Avery’s presence as his ally highlights their deepening connection, while Zella’s enigmatic role adds layers of intrigue. As

Jameson steels himself for the next challenge, the stage is set for a confrontation that could redefine his path—and the rules of the Game itself.

CHAPTER 43: JAMESON

Jameson and Avery find themselves in a mysterious establishment called the Devil’s Mercy, where Jameson, despite being injured, focuses on his goal: accessing a leather-bound book of high-stakes wagers. The bartender, adorned with a distinctive ring, offers them soup and spirits, but Jameson is intent on the book, which contains centuries of bets on everything from social scandals to life-and-death outcomes. The atmosphere is tense, with other patrons observing their interaction, and Jameson senses the bartender’s loyalty to the unseen Proprietor, who may be watching through hidden means like the ring or a mirror.

As Jameson flips through the ancient book, he discovers bets dating back to 1823, each entry detailing bizarre and personal wagers between wealthy individuals. The bartender explains the rules: long-term bets are placed here, while short-term wagers require a different book. Jameson’s presence draws attention, and one patron provocatively bets on his early demise, highlighting the dangerous undercurrent of the place. Avery, though supportive, steps back, allowing Jameson to take the lead as he strategizes how to impress the Proprietor and gain an invitation to the elusive "Game."

The tension escalates when Rohan, the Factotum, enters the room and taunts Jameson, suggesting a bet on Avery breaking up with him. Jameson, undeterred, makes a bold wager: 50,000 pounds that the Proprietor will choose someone other than Rohan as his heir. This move reveals Jameson’s intuition that Rohan’s position is not yet secure. The stakes rise further when Jameson adds another 50,000-pound bet, claiming the Proprietor is already dying and has only two years left. This audacious declaration shocks the room and visibly unsettles Rohan, whose reaction suggests Jameson has struck a nerve.

The chapter culminates in a charged standoff, with Jameson’s calculated risks exposing hidden dynamics within the Devil’s Mercy. His bets are not just about money

but about challenging the Proprietor’s authority and testing Rohan’s loyalty. The bartender dismisses the second wager as untouchable, leaving Jameson’s next move uncertain. The scene underscores Jameson’s daring nature and his ability to read people, while Avery’s silent support and Rohan’s hostility add layers to the unfolding power struggle. The chapter ends with a sense of impending confrontation, as Jameson’s gambits set the stage for deeper intrigue.

CHAPTER 44: JAMESON

Jameson ventures alone into an opulent setting adorned with chiffon canopies, where he encounters a woman dressed in historical attire. Despite noticing his injuries, she offers help, but Jameson declines, focused on his purpose—placing a short-term bet. His mind races through strategic options, ultimately settling on a high-stakes wager about wheat prices, drawing on forbidden knowledge from a past event in Prague. This choice reflects his penchant for risk and desire to surprise the Proprietor, showcasing his calculated yet daring nature.

The chapter highlights Jameson's relentless drive as he transitions to the gaming tables, his body exhausted but his mind razor-sharp. He joins a whist game with Branford, Zella, and Avery, leveraging the dynamic to his advantage. His taunting remark about dealing hints at underlying tensions, while his observation of Branford's poker face underscores the family's hidden complexities. The scene crackles with unspoken rivalries and strategic maneuvering.

A pivotal moment occurs when Rohan interrupts, announcing the Proprietor's summons for all four players. Zella's correct guess that Branford isn't the sole focus adds a layer of tension, revealing her perceptiveness. Rohan's subtle reaction and eventual confirmation that the entire group is required heighten the suspense, leaving readers curious about the Proprietor's intentions. The interaction underscores the power dynamics at play in this high-stakes environment.

The chapter masterfully blends tension, strategy, and character dynamics, with Jameson at the center of the action. His bold wheat bet and seamless transition to the whist game demonstrate his adaptability and cunning. The cliffhanger ending, with the group summoned to the Proprietor's office, sets the stage for further intrigue, leaving readers eager to uncover the consequences of Jameson's risky choices and the secrets lurking beneath the surface.

CHAPTER 45: JAMESON

Jameson finds himself in a modest office with Zella and Branford, facing the enigmatic Proprietor of the Mercy. A large, metal-covered book on the desk immediately captures their attention, its significance clear from the others' reactions. The Proprietor dismisses Avery and Rohan, leaving the trio to discuss their purpose. Jameson notes the Proprietor's unremarkable appearance, contrasting with his formidable reputation, and senses the gravity of the moment as the man asserts they know why they've been summoned.

The tension escalates as the Proprietor reveals Zella's assured place in the Game, handing her envelopes—one for Avery—before she departs. He then turns to Branford and Jameson, stating their participation isn't guaranteed. Branford negotiates terms, while the Proprietor hints at the need for compromising stakes, emphasizing the value of "skin in the game." Jameson remains focused, undeterred by Branford's dismissive remark about his resemblance to his brother, as the Proprietor probes his potential and connection to the Hawthorne legacy.

The Proprietor tests Jameson's perceptiveness, questioning how he deduced his terminal condition. Jameson reveals his observations: the Proprietor's resemblance to his ailing grandfather, the calculated testing of Rohan in the ring, and a subtle tremor when Avery took his arm. His honesty and sharp intuition impress the Proprietor, who acknowledges his fighting spirit and strategic mind. The exchange underscores Jameson's ability to read people and situations, a skill honed by his grandfather's training.

The chapter culminates in a psychological duel, with the Proprietor admiring Jameson's boldness while subtly reminding him of his outsider status. Jameson's refusal to be intimidated and his willingness to engage in the Game's high-stakes dynamics highlight his determination. The Proprietor's cryptic remarks and the unresolved

question of Jameson’s participation leave the chapter on a cliffhanger, setting the stage for further intrigue and competition in the Mercy’s shadowy world.

CHAPTER 46: GRAYSON

The chapter opens with Grayson riding in a car with Gigi, whose reckless driving prompts him to comment on her poor skills. Their conversation quickly shifts to Gigi probing Grayson about his relationship with Savannah, noting their strange behavior around each other. She directly accuses him of still having feelings for Savannah, which Grayson vehemently denies. Instead, he describes his supposed girlfriend as smart, unpredictable, and someone who makes him feel accepted despite his imperfections. Gigi remains skeptical but plays along, questioning how they met, to which Grayson fabricates a story about a grocery store encounter.

As the drive continues, Gigi challenges Grayson's stoic facade, insisting they've become friends despite his reluctance to admit it. Their banter is interrupted when Grayson urgently warns her to brake as they arrive at a bank. Gigi, undeterred, remains eager to accompany him inside, but Grayson insists she stay behind to avoid recognition. He convinces her to hand over a key necklace, claiming it's necessary for their mission. Grayson's internal conflict is evident as he feels a pang of guilt for deceiving her, but he remains focused on the task at hand.

The dynamic shifts when Savannah unexpectedly arrives, revealing her calculated and controlled demeanor. She questions Gigi about a fake ID, which Gigi willingly hands to Grayson. Upon inspecting it, Grayson is startled to discover the ID bears his own eyes and a name tied to his family history: Tobias Davenport. This revelation hints at a deeper connection between Savannah's actions and Grayson's past, leaving him unsettled. Savannah's presence adds tension, as her sharp tone and hidden motives contrast with Gigi's openness.

The chapter concludes with Grayson grappling with the implications of the fake ID and Savannah's involvement. The name "Tobias Davenport" suggests a deliberate reference to his family, raising questions about Savannah's intentions and knowledge

of his background. Grayson’s internal struggle between his mission and his growing unease about the situation underscores the chapter’s tension. The interactions between the three characters—Gigi’s spontaneity, Savannah’s calculated moves, and Grayson’s guardedness—create a compelling dynamic that drives the narrative forward.

CHAPTER 47: GRAYSON

Grayson is consumed by fear that the contents of his father's safe-deposit box may reveal damning evidence about Sheffield Grayson's activities, including surveillance of Avery, a plane bombing attempt, and a longstanding vendetta against the Hawthorne family. The name on the ID he holds seems to confirm his suspicions, prompting him to prevent Gigi and Savannah from accessing the box. Determined to vet the contents first, Grayson devises a plan to switch the keys, slipping the real one into his pocket while handing Savannah a decoy. Despite the smooth execution, he feels uneasy, as if he's lost something important.

At the bank, Savannah takes charge with icy determination, demanding access to the box under Tobias Davenport's name. She presents forged documents, including a notarized statement, showcasing her willingness to break the law. The bank employee, initially helpful, grows increasingly hostile as Savannah's condescending demeanor provokes him. Grayson observes the tension but refrains from intervening, noting the employee's shift from eagerness to please to a desire for control. The confrontation escalates as the employee reveals only Tobias Davenport and Acacia Grayson are authorized to access the box—a slip that Savannah exploits.

Outside the bank, Grayson confronts Savannah, realizing she never intended to open the box but instead sought information. Savannah, pragmatic and self-assured, asserts her independence, dismissing Grayson's protective instincts. She makes it clear that neither she nor Gigi needs his interference, emphasizing her control over the situation. Grayson internally acknowledges his capability to handle the matter but chooses not to challenge her, instead insisting he is not her enemy—a claim undermined by his own doubts.

The chapter highlights the complex dynamics between Grayson and Savannah, marked by mutual distrust and power struggles. Grayson's internal conflict—between

his protective instincts and his deception—adds depth to his character. Savannah's calculated actions and unwavering confidence underscore her resilience and resourcefulness. The unresolved tension between them sets the stage for further conflict, as both navigate their father's dark legacy and their own conflicting agendas.

CHAPTER 48: GRAYSON

The chapter opens with Grayson returning to the Grayson house, where Gigi and Savannah react to his presence with mixed emotions. Gigi is morose about their mother's isolation in the library, while Savannah is openly hostile, ordering Grayson to wait outside. Gigi confides in Grayson about her family's dynamics, revealing her mother's retreat to the library and Savannah's obsession with basketball. Grayson, meanwhile, struggles with his growing attachment to the girls, recognizing the danger of emotional involvement. The conversation shifts to the mysterious safe-deposit box under a fake name, hinting at darker secrets tied to their late father.

Grayson decides to seek out Acacia Grayson in the library rather than wait passively. He overhears her pleading for a job, revealing the family's financial struggles despite her poised demeanor. When Grayson confronts her, Acacia deflects questions about the safe-deposit box, admitting she was excluded from her husband's financial affairs. Her vulnerability surfaces as she reflects on her marriage, hinting at regret but emphasizing her unwavering love for her daughters. Grayson's presence forces her to confront painful truths, including the possibility that her husband married her for her wealth.

Acacia shares a poignant moment with Grayson, discussing the futility of "what-if" scenarios once children are involved. She confesses that despite her hardships, she wouldn't change her past because it led to her daughters' existence. Her emotional account of a postpartum dream underscores her devotion to Savannah and Gigi, framing motherhood as her ultimate priority. Grayson is visibly affected by her raw honesty, struggling to maintain his usual detachment. The conversation highlights Acacia's resilience and the complex emotions binding the family together.

The chapter closes with Grayson grappling with the weight of Acacia's revelations and his own unresolved feelings. His mission to uncover the truth about the safe-deposit

box becomes entangled with the family's emotional turmoil. The interactions reveal deeper layers of each character—Acacia's quiet strength, Savannah's defensive anger, Gigi's longing for connection, and Grayson's internal conflict. The stage is set for further exploration of the Grayson family's secrets and the impact of their shared history on their present dynamics.

CHAPTER 49: GRAYSON

The chapter follows Grayson Hawthorne and Acacia as they return to the bank to access a safe-deposit box. Acacia presents the decoy key Grayson had swapped earlier, but it fails to open the box, just as he had planned. The bank manager is about to deny them access when Savannah unexpectedly produces a second key from a chain around her neck, surprising everyone, including Grayson. This twist disrupts Grayson's carefully laid plans, leaving him momentarily stunned by the unforeseen development.

Grayson's internal monologue reveals his frustration at being caught off guard, as he hears the voice of his late grandfather, Tobias Hawthorne, chastising him for not anticipating every possibility. The appearance of Savannah's key forces Grayson to confront his own oversight, highlighting his struggle between calculated strategy and emotional distractions. Meanwhile, Acacia uses the new key to successfully open the safe-deposit box, marking a pivotal moment in their mission.

The tension escalates as the bank manager retrieves the box and leaves the group to examine its contents privately. Acacia hesitates before opening the box, exchanging glances with her daughters and Grayson, underscoring the significance of the moment. The chapter builds suspense around the box's contents, leaving readers curious about what secrets it might hold and how they will impact the characters.

The chapter ends with a striking revelation: the first thing Grayson sees inside the box is a photo of himself. This cliffhanger suggests a deeper connection between Grayson and the Hawthorne family's secrets, setting the stage for further revelations. The unexpected twist and emotional undertones emphasize the themes of trust, deception, and the consequences of underestimating others.

EIGHT YEARS AGO

The chapter opens with Grayson Hawthorne confronting his grandfather, Tobias Hawthorne, after a competition involving a ring of ornate keys. Grayson had come in third place, behind his brother Jameson, and Tobias remarks on his performance without overt praise or criticism. The keys, each uniquely designed, were part of a challenge to unlock the front door of Hawthorne House. Grayson struggles with his grandfather's ambiguous feedback, particularly when Tobias suggests he might be growing comfortable with losing, a notion Grayson vehemently rejects. The tension between them underscores the high expectations placed on Grayson.

Tobias probes Grayson's mindset, questioning whether he is content with being ordinary or strives to be extraordinary. Grayson asserts his uniqueness, but Tobias pushes further, demanding to know why he is held to a higher standard than his brothers. The conversation reveals Tobias's belief that Grayson must embody more than just the Hawthorne name—he must surpass it. Grayson's frustration simmers beneath his controlled exterior as he grapples with the weight of his grandfather's expectations and the implicit comparison to his siblings.

The confrontation takes a personal turn when Tobias dismisses Grayson's initial answer—that his worth stems from being a Hawthorne—as a failure. Tobias emphasizes that Grayson's destiny is distinct: he is being groomed as the family's future leader. This revelation shocks Grayson, though he realizes on some level he has always known it. Tobias's harsh tone and physical gesture—gripping Grayson's chin—drive home the gravity of this responsibility. Grayson finally vocalizes his understanding: someday, he will inherit the mantle of protecting and growing the Hawthorne legacy.

The chapter concludes with Tobias affirming Grayson's realization but imposing secrecy, forbidding him from discussing their conversation with his brothers. This

moment cements Grayson's isolation and the burden of his future role. The exchange highlights the toxic dynamics of the Hawthorne family, where love is conditional on performance, and individuality is sacrificed for legacy. Grayson's internal conflict—between resentment and acceptance—sets the stage for his character's development and the pressures he will face as the chosen heir.

CHAPTER 50: JAMESON

In this chapter, Jameson Hawthorne finds himself in a high-stakes negotiation with the enigmatic Proprietor of the Devil’s Mercy. After Branford is taken away to face consequences, Jameson is tasked with writing down a secret on a scroll using a sharp, blade-like quill and dark purple ink. The Proprietor explains that the secret must be compelling enough to grant Jameson entry into the Game, and he will need to provide proof if it passes scrutiny. Despite his body’s physical reactions—dry mouth, sweating palms, and a racing heart—Jameson remains composed, calculating the risks and rewards of revealing his hidden knowledge.

Jameson reflects on the danger of his secret, which he has kept even from his brothers and Avery, recognizing that some truths are too perilous to share. He sees this moment as his only opportunity to seize an advantage, driven by his innate fearlessness and ambition. When the Proprietor questions his resolve, Jameson responds with calm irreverence, asking about the fate of his secret if he wins or loses. The Proprietor clarifies that a victory would result in the scroll’s destruction and the return of his proof, while a loss would grant the Proprietor unrestricted use of the secret, even beyond his lifetime.

Determined to proceed, Jameson writes his secret in four carefully chosen words, leaving the ink to dry as the Proprietor evaluates its worth. Once approved, Jameson reveals that the proof lies in a hidden compartment of his pocket watch, which contains a translucent bead filled with liquid. The Proprietor, seemingly satisfied, hands Jameson an envelope—an invitation to the Game. However, when Jameson opens it, a powdery substance incapacitates him, causing his muscles to fail and his lungs to seize.

As darkness overtakes him, the Proprietor delivers a chilling welcome: “Welcome to the Game, Mr. Hawthorne.” The chapter ends with Jameson’s fate uncertain, leaving

readers to wonder about the true nature of the Game and the consequences of his calculated risk. The encounter underscores the themes of danger, secrecy, and the high stakes of power plays in this shadowy world.

CHAPTER 51: JAMESON

Jameson awakens disoriented on a cold stone floor, greeted by Avery’s concerned presence. As his vision clears, he recalls being drugged and brought to an unfamiliar location—Vantage, an estate resembling a medieval castle. The room is austere, with stone walls, ornate ceiling detailing, and only a long wooden table as furniture. Jameson notes his pockets are empty, leaving him isolated. Avery confirms it’s early morning, and they’re surrounded by three other players: Branford, Zella, and an enigmatic woman named Katharine. Rohan, the Factotum, lounges nearby, exuding confidence as he prepares to oversee the Game.

The atmosphere is tense as Rohan reveals the rules of the Game, emphasizing its high stakes. Three hidden keys and three boxes are scattered across the estate, with two boxes containing players’ secrets—likely those of Jameson and Branford, who were forced to divulge personal information to enter. Katharine questions whether Jameson and Avery will be allowed to collaborate, hinting at underlying rivalries. Rohan’s smug demeanor suggests he relishes his newfound authority, while Zella’s taunts imply a power struggle. Jameson remains observant, analyzing each player’s motives and Katharine’s resemblance to his grandfather, a detail that unsettles him.

Jameson’s focus shifts to the potential danger Avery’s presence poses, as her involvement could expose his secret. The chapter underscores the psychological tension of the Game, where trust is scarce and alliances are fragile. Rohan’s cryptic remarks about "power and riches" heighten the suspense, leaving the players—and readers—wondering what horrors or revelations the boxes might hold. The setting, with its oppressive stone walls and lack of furnishings, mirrors the cutthroat nature of the competition, where every move could be a misstep.

The chapter ends on a cliffhanger, with Jameson grappling with the implications of his written secret and the Proprietor’s manipulative design. The Game’s

structure—combining physical exploration with psychological warfare—sets the stage for a high-stakes battle of wits. Jameson’s internal dread contrasts with his outward calm, showcasing his strategic mind and emotional resilience. The players’ dynamics, from Katharine’s calculating gaze to Rohan’s theatrical flair, promise further intrigue as the hunt for the keys begins.

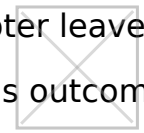
CHAPTER 52: JAMESON

In this chapter, Jameson reflects on his upbringing playing strategic games with his grandfather, recognizing the value of observation before action. The scene unfolds with a tense exchange between Katharine Payne, a seasoned Member of Parliament, and Branford, a member of the Johnstone-Jameson family. Katharine’s cryptic remarks suggest she is acting on behalf of Bowen Johnstone-Jameson, Branford’s brother, hinting at a deeper power struggle. Jameson, alongside Avery and Zella, watches the interaction closely, analyzing the dynamics and hidden motives at play. The dialogue reveals layers of political and familial intrigue, with Katharine’s poised demeanor masking calculated moves.

Jameson’s attention shifts to Zella, a duchess whose enigmatic presence adds complexity to the game. Her reputation as "That Duchess" and her bold actions, like breaking into the Devil’s Mercy, suggest she is a formidable player. Katharine’s pointed comment about Zella’s ailing husband momentarily cracks the duchess’s composed facade, exposing vulnerabilities. Branford’s blunt questioning about Bowen’s intentions further escalates tensions, highlighting the siblings’ rivalry. Jameson pieces together that the Proprietor’s selection of players—himself, Avery, Branford, and Katharine (representing Bowen)—is deliberate, possibly tied to a larger pattern or code.

The chapter delves into Jameson’s internal struggle as Branford dismissively refers to his grandfather as "the old man," a remark that stings. Katharine’s insinuation that Jameson is merely a pawn for Ian’s agenda forces him to confront his motivations. Though he claims to play for himself, doubts linger. His observational skills come into focus as he scans the room for clues, zeroing in on a book by the window—a potential key to unraveling the game’s mysteries. The interplay of power, loyalty, and strategy underscores the chapter’s tension.

The narrative culminates in Jameson’s realization that the game’s players are interconnected in ways beyond surface-level competition. Branford’s revelation that Jameson is Ian’s son adds emotional weight, while Katharine’s probing questions challenge his autonomy. Zella’s role remains ambiguous, but her resilience hints at her significance. Jameson’s ability to decode patterns, honed by his grandfather’s teachings, becomes crucial as he seeks to understand his place in the unfolding drama. The chapter leaves readers anticipating how these alliances and rivalries will shape the game’s outcome.



CHAPTER 53: GRAYSON

Grayson is confronted with a shocking discovery when Gigi shows him a safe-deposit box filled with photographs of himself at various stages of his life, all collected by her father, Sheffield Grayson. The images range from his teenage years to infancy, including a newborn photo likely obtained through a hospital bribe. Grayson maintains his composure, relying on his disciplined mindset to assess the situation, but the implications unsettle him. Gigi, confused and distressed, presses for answers, unable to reconcile why her father would have such an extensive collection of pictures of someone she believed was unrelated to their family.

The tension escalates as Savannah reveals the truth: Sheffield had an affair with Grayson's mother, Skye Hawthorne, years earlier, making Grayson their half-brother. Gigi reacts with a mix of shock, disgust, and betrayal, struggling to process the revelation. She accuses Grayson of withholding the truth, while Savannah and Acacia attempt to calm her. The emotional weight of the situation is palpable as Gigi grapples with the idea that her father may have had a hidden connection to Grayson, questioning whether Sheffield ever acknowledged him as a son.

Grayson clarifies that Sheffield explicitly rejected him during their sole meeting, emphasizing that he was never part of their family. Despite this, the photographs suggest a lingering, unexplained interest from Sheffield, leaving Grayson and the others to wonder about his motives. Gigi, still reeling, demands to know why Grayson is helping her search for Sheffield if he harbors no familial bond or affection for him. Her emotional outburst underscores the complexity of their newfound relationship and the unresolved questions surrounding Sheffield's actions.

The chapter ends with Grayson asserting that he doesn't hate Sheffield or his half-sisters, though the depth of his feelings remains ambiguous. The discovery of the photographs forces all characters to confront hidden truths and fractured family

dynamics, setting the stage for further revelations. The emotional intensity and unresolved tension highlight the chapter’s focus on identity, secrecy, and the consequences of buried pasts.

CHAPTER 54: GRAYSON

Grayson retrieves a briefcase from a bank safe-deposit box containing photographs and withdrawal slips, evidence tied to his father Sheffield Grayson. Despite his fragmented thoughts and emotional turmoil, he maintains a controlled demeanor, demanding a briefcase from the bank employee with calculated precision. The contents of the box—particularly the photographs—haunt him, as they reveal his father had been secretly keeping tabs on him for years. Grayson’s internal conflict is palpable, but he suppresses his emotions, focusing instead on the practical task at hand.

After leaving the bank, Grayson takes his Ferrari and sits in the parking lot, wrestling with the weight of his discovery. The valets’ excitement over the car contrasts sharply with his somber mood. He contemplates the implications of his father’s surveillance, feeling betrayed and unsettled. The photographs symbolize a lifetime of hidden attention, forcing Grayson to confront the lies he’s been told about his family and his place in it. His restraint begins to fray as he considers the possibility of recklessness to escape his thoughts.

Driving on the highway, Grayson battles an urge to push the Ferrari to its limits, mirroring his brother Jameson’s risk-taking tendencies. However, he hears his grandfather Tobias Hawthorne’s voice in his mind, reminding him of his responsibilities and the expectations placed upon him. The realization that his grandfather had disinherited the family before his birth adds to his sense of betrayal. Grayson’s anger and pain simmer beneath the surface, but he resists the temptation to let go, pulling over to regain control.

A call from his great-grandmother Nan interrupts his spiraling thoughts. Her sharp intuition immediately detects his distress, though he attempts to deflect her concerns. When he asks if his mother Skye ever took pictures of him as a child, Nan’s dismissive

response hints at deeper family tensions. The chapter ends with Grayson grappling with the unresolved emotions surrounding his father’s actions and the fractured dynamics of the Hawthorne family.

CHAPTER 55: GRAYSON

Grayson Hawthorne enters the hotel lobby, where the manager apologizes for an earlier misunderstanding involving his guest, Gigi. His thoughts briefly linger on Gigi's reaction to discovering his identity, but he dismisses the manager's concerns with icy detachment. Undeterred, the manager offers to clear the pool for him, hinting at his privileged status. However, Grayson steps outside to find the pool occupied by Eve, a figure from his past who evokes a mix of tension and unresolved emotions. Their previous interactions flash through his mind, revealing a complex dynamic marked by pain and defiance.

Eve's presence immediately disrupts Grayson's composure, stirring memories of their charged conversations about strength and vulnerability. As he attempts to leave, Mattias Slater, Eve's formidable guard, blocks his path. The standoff highlights Grayson's internal struggle—balancing his pride with the urge to confront Eve. Despite his resolve to remain indifferent, Eve's taunts and the click of Slater's gun force him to pause. Her calculated words and physical proximity chip away at his apathy, exposing the raw emotions beneath his controlled exterior.

The confrontation escalates as Eve challenges Grayson's assumptions about her motives and choices. She admits to her isolation as Vincent Blake's heir, a role she secured through betrayal. Grayson remains outwardly cold, refusing to acknowledge her vulnerability, but her reference to Avery and his sisters ignites his fury. Eve's confession—that she's alone and constantly fighting to prove herself—hints at her desperation, yet Grayson sees it as another manipulation. Slater's blunt admission that Eve has only one loyal ally underscores her precarious position, further complicating Grayson's perception of her.

In the final exchange, Eve grabs Grayson's chin, demanding his attention and revealing a flicker of hurt beneath her defiance. She teases future demands, leaving

their conflict unresolved. Grayson’s internal tension peaks as he wrestles with his disdain for her tactics and the lingering pull of their history. The chapter ends with Eve’s cryptic warning, setting the stage for further confrontation and underscoring the themes of power, betrayal, and the masks both characters wear to survive their high-stakes world.

CHAPTER 56: GRAYSON

Grayson struggles to maintain his composure after an encounter with Eve, seeking solace in memories captured in his phone. He scrolls through photos, pausing on images of his brothers and Avery, using these moments to ground himself. A picture of Avery’s hand on a sword reminds him of their bond, reinforcing his resolve against Eve’s manipulations. Grayson regains control, restarting the elevator and affirming his self-discipline, signaling his emotional resilience and determination to stay composed.

Upon reaching his hotel floor, Grayson encounters Savannah waiting outside his suite. She confronts him about her father’s legal troubles, revealing she knows about the FBI investigation and frozen accounts. Savannah’s directness and athletic stance underscore her readiness to take action. Grayson remains guarded, neither confirming nor denying his intentions, but Savannah’s insistence on protecting her family hints at a growing alliance between them.

Savannah shares her discovery about her father’s cryptic calendar entries, deciphering the shorthand he used for family events. She connects this to the "KM" notation from the bank, suggesting it refers to someone close to their father. Grayson deduces it stands for "Kim," clarifying she wasn’t a mistress but likely another family connection. This revelation deepens the mystery surrounding Sheffield Grayson’s actions and motives, while Savannah’s resourcefulness impresses Grayson.

The chapter culminates in a tense yet collaborative dynamic between Grayson and Savannah. Her willingness to trust him, despite their fraught history, underscores her desperation to safeguard her family. Grayson, though conflicted about involving her, recognizes her determination. Their interaction sets the stage for a potential partnership to unravel the family’s secrets, blending Savannah’s resolve with Grayson’s strategic mind, as both navigate the looming threat to their family’s stability.

CHAPTER 57: GRAYSON

The chapter opens with Grayson's momentary alarm as he observes Gigi's unusually still demeanor, only to realize she is intoxicated and cheerfully reciting a nonsensical riddle about penguins. Her playful antics, including attempts to tickle Grayson despite his protests, create a lighthearted atmosphere. The dynamic between the characters is established through their banter, with Xander and Nash amusingly egging Gigi on. Savannah, Gigi's twin, steps in to take her home, but Gigi resists, insisting on her autonomy while continuing her drunken antics.

Gigi's drunken ramblings take a more serious turn as she demands to see photos from a mysterious box, theorizing they might be decoys or clues to a deeper mystery. Her persistence and erratic behavior highlight her curiosity and stubbornness. Grayson, though exasperated, finds himself reluctantly engaging with her, while Nash and Xander enjoy the chaos. The siblings' interactions reveal their close yet teasing relationships, with Nash referencing "tree house rules" to justify their involvement in Grayson's affairs.

Beneath the humor, Grayson grapples with internal conflict, reflecting on his role as a brother and the secrets he keeps to protect his family. His thoughts reveal a sense of responsibility and guilt, emphasizing the theme of familial loyalty. Gigi's drunken insistence on seeing the photos inadvertently touches on Grayson's hidden burdens, creating a subtle tension amidst the comedy. The chapter balances light-hearted moments with underlying emotional stakes, showcasing the complexity of sibling relationships.

The scene culminates with Gigi declaring her independence, refusing to be treated as incapable despite her intoxicated state. Her demand to see the photos underscores her determination, while Grayson's reluctance hints at deeper unresolved issues. The chapter ends on a note of playful defiance, leaving the reader curious about the

significance of the photos and Grayson's secrets. The interplay of humor, family dynamics, and underlying tension makes this chapter both entertaining and thematically rich.

CHAPTER 58: GRAYSON

In this chapter, Grayson reluctantly allows a determined and intoxicated Gigi, along with Savannah, Xander, and Nash, into his black-card suite. The group examines a briefcase of photographs left by their father, with Grayson methodically checking each one for clues while maintaining emotional control. The photos only have dates written on the back, sparking speculation about their father's intentions. Gigi suggests their father might be trying to communicate something, while Savannah cynically counters that he left because he didn’t care, revealing the siblings' conflicting perspectives on their absent father.

Tensions rise as Gigi and Savannah confront their unresolved feelings about their father. Gigi accuses Savannah of being the favored daughter, to which Savannah responds that even that wasn’t enough to make him stay. The emotional exchange highlights their shared pain and longing for answers. Savannah admits she initially wanted to prove their father’s innocence but now seeks understanding about his abandonment. Gigi’s playful yet probing nature contrasts with Savannah’s guarded demeanor, creating a dynamic interplay of emotions and unresolved family drama.

The chapter takes a darker turn when Savannah reveals their father’s alleged crimes—embezzling from their grandmother and draining their mother’s trust. Gigi, shocked by this revelation, humorously deflects with a request for another mimosa, lightening the mood momentarily. The siblings’ banter about Gigi’s low alcohol tolerance provides comic relief, but the underlying tension remains. Gigi’s sudden declaration of forgiveness toward Savannah and Grayson underscores her desire for unity, even as she teasingly calls out Grayson for being overly serious.

The chapter concludes with Gigi playfully teasing Grayson, attempting to tickle him, before Savannah redirects the conversation. She announces they already know their next destination, implying the search for their father will continue. This ending leaves

the reader curious about the siblings’ next steps and how their relationships will evolve as they confront their father’s legacy. The mix of humor, tension, and emotional depth captures the complexity of family dynamics and unresolved past traumas.

CHAPTER 59: JAMESON

Jameson and Avery find themselves in a grand, castle-like manor after hearing church bells, with Branford leading the way. The unlocked door suggests an urgency to their mission. Jameson quietly informs Avery that they must locate ocean-side smugglers' caves to unravel their next steps. As they navigate the labyrinthine corridors, Jameson reflects on Ian’s connection to the manor, pushing aside thoughts of Ian’s brothers, Simon and Bowen. The pair eventually discovers a banquet hall adorned with intricate wood paneling and icicle-like moldings, leading them closer to their escape route.

Exiting through the front door, Jameson and Avery are met with a sprawling landscape of overgrown gardens and distant cliffs overlooking the ocean. Jameson sheds his tuxedo jacket as they sprint toward the horizon, their goal clear despite the untamed surroundings. Avery, hindered by her ballgown, keeps pace as they traverse a stone garden filled with moss-covered pathways and statues. The tension rises when they encounter a locked iron gate, but their combined effort forces it open, allowing them to proceed toward the cliffs.

Upon reaching the cliff’s edge, Jameson realizes the daunting height—a 300-foot drop to the ocean below. The pair scans the area for a viable path down, but the steep terrain offers no obvious solutions. Avery’s subtle gesture directs Jameson’s attention to a cluster of wild poppies, mirroring the one he’d previously found in a book. This detail hints at a potential clue or hidden passage, reigniting their determination to uncover the smugglers' caves despite the physical and mental challenges they face.

The chapter culminates with Jameson and Avery standing at the precipice, their partnership and resourcefulness tested by the perilous landscape. Jameson’s internal struggle—balancing his personal secrets with the immediate mission—adds depth to their race against time. The wild poppies serve as a symbolic link to their broader quest, suggesting that the answers they seek are within reach if they can decipher the

clues. The chapter leaves readers anticipating their next move as they confront the cliffs and the mysteries hidden below.

CHAPTER 60: JAMESON

Jameson and Avery discover a hidden staircase carved into the cliffs, nearly invisible and lacking any safety measures. Despite the danger, Avery refuses to stay behind, quickly shedding her dress to reveal practical undergarments that allow her to move freely. Jameson, though distracted by her appearance, remains focused on their mission to find a key. Their playful banter hints at a deeper connection, with Avery teasingly correcting Jameson that they'll celebrate only after finding all three keys, showcasing their competitive yet affectionate dynamic.

The descent down the treacherous staircase tests Jameson's physical limits, but his resilience and Avery's natural agility keep them moving forward. They reach a narrow, gravelly beach with multiple caves, their options sprawling before them. Avery's quick thinking mirrors the Hawthorne family's analytical prowess, and Jameson admires her adaptability. The pair's synergy is evident as they assess their surroundings, their shared determination driving them toward the next clue.

Jameson spots a stone statue partially submerged near the beach's edge, and they sprint toward it without hesitation. The wind whips around them, but neither slows down, their focus unwavering. Upon reaching the statue, Jameson notices it depicts a woman and gestures for Avery to take the lead, playfully deferring to her. This moment underscores their mutual respect and the balance between their personalities, as well as Jameson's willingness to let Avery shine.

The chapter captures the thrill of their adventure, blending danger, intellect, and chemistry. Jameson's risk-taking nature and Avery's calculated boldness complement each other, making them a formidable team. The statue's discovery marks a pivotal point in their quest, leaving readers eager to see what secrets it holds. Their unspoken bond and shared excitement for the challenge ahead hint at deeper emotional layers beneath their adventurous exterior.

CHAPTER 61: JAMESON

Jameson and Avery find themselves standing before a mysterious statue of a woman, her intricate details suggesting a blend of realism and mythology. The statue’s outstretched hand points toward the ocean, while the phrase "Ladies first" lingers as a clue. Surveying their surroundings, they spot five potential smugglers' caves, each a possible hiding place for a key. Their urgency intensifies when Katharine, a rival, appears on the cliffside staircase, forcing them to act quickly. Jameson wades into the water, searching for hidden objects, but his efforts prove futile, prompting a reevaluation of the statue’s significance.

Avery’s keen observation reveals that the statue might rotate, sparking a collaborative effort between her and Jameson. As they turn the statue, it locks into place with a chime of bells—a deliberate mechanism tied to the game’s design. The number of bells corresponds to the statue’s position, and they deduce that aligning it to ring a single bell will reveal the correct path. Their synchronization and trust in each other’s instincts highlight their dynamic partnership, even as Katharine closes in on their location.

Guided by the statue’s final position, they sprint into the smallest cave, plunging into darkness without a light source. The cave’s twists and turns force them to rely on touch, with Avery noting the dampness of one passage. Jameson proposes they split up to cover more ground, each taking the other’s assigned path to maximize efficiency. The tension mounts as they navigate the treacherous environment, aware that Katharine could be moments behind them, potentially better equipped with a flashlight.

The cave eventually leads Jameson to a shallow pool, where he unexpectedly encounters Branford, his uncle, holding both a lantern and the coveted key. The chapter ends on a cliffhanger, leaving readers to wonder about Branford’s role in the

game and the implications of his sudden appearance. The interplay of strategy, trust, and rivalry drives the narrative forward, setting the stage for the next phase of their high-stakes adventure.

CHAPTER 62: JAMESON

Jameson is consumed by frustration after Branford finds the first golden key in the smugglers' cave, a discovery that highlights Branford's advantage from growing up on the estate. As Jameson exits the cave, he reflects on how Branford's familiarity with the manor and its secrets gave him an edge, possibly bypassing the need to decode Rohan's clues. The thought of losing gnaws at him, and he worries that Katharine and Zella might already be ahead in the Game. Despite his irritation, he forces himself to focus on finding the remaining two keys, refusing to believe the first key is the one that unlocks the ultimate prize.

Avery's calm presence grounds Jameson as they regroup. She reassures him that the key Branford found is likely not the most important one, given how easily multiple players located the cave. Jameson agrees, recognizing that the next key must be theirs. His competitive drive kicks in as he replays Rohan's cryptic instructions, analyzing every word for hidden meaning. The stakes are high, and Jameson knows that winning requires meticulous attention to detail—something the Hawthorne family fortunes have always depended on.

As they climb back up the cliff, Jameson meticulously reviews Rohan's exact phrasing, searching for clues. He fixates on terms like "no rest for the wicked" and "smuggle nothing out," convinced they hold significance. The mention of a "mark" instead of a chip or token stands out, suggesting deeper symbolism. He also considers whether "leave no stone unturned" refers to something beyond the statue, possibly hinting at another hidden location. Every word feels intentional, and Jameson is determined to decipher the puzzle before his rivals do.

The chapter ends with Jameson still deep in thought, mentally cataloging Rohan's every statement for overlooked hints. He refuses to be distracted by thoughts of his father or uncle, focusing solely on the Game. With Avery by his side, he remains

determined to outmaneuver Branford and the others, knowing that the next key could decide everything. The tension builds as Jameson's analytical mind races, setting the stage for the next phase of the high-stakes competition.

CHAPTER 63: GRAYSON

Grayson, along with his sisters Savannah and Gigi, arrives at Kimberly Wright's home—their estranged aunt—after obtaining her address with ease. Nash and Xander wait outside, giving Grayson space to confront this familial encounter alone. As they approach the modest yellow house with barred windows, Grayson reflects on his growing acceptance of the twins as his sisters, despite lingering doubts about their bond. The trio is greeted by Kimberly, a brusque woman in a bathrobe, and her overweight dachshund, Cinnamon. Kimberly immediately recognizes their resemblance to her brother, hinting at the unresolved tension surrounding their father.

Inside the cluttered den, Gigi’s forced cheerfulness masks deeper emotions, while Savannah remains composed. Kimberly observes Gigi’s resemblance to her brother, Shep (later known as Sheffield Grayson), stirring mixed feelings in Grayson. The conversation turns somber as Savannah reveals their father’s disappearance, clarifying he abandoned the family voluntarily. Kimberly reacts with shock, questioning why the police weren’t involved, but Gigi insists their father chose to leave. Grayson notes Gigi’s pain, reminding himself of his role in maintaining this narrative to protect the twins from darker truths.

Kimberly shares a framed photo of Shep as a teenager with his younger half-brother, Colin, offering a glimpse into their father’s past. She recounts how Shep lived with her after their mother’s death, caring for Colin while she worked. Grayson focuses on the name "Shep," avoiding deeper scrutiny of the photo. Kimberly reveals Shep distanced himself after college, abandoning his roots and adopting a new identity. Her bitterness is palpable as she describes his neglect of her family, though he remained close to Colin. This revelation adds layers to Grayson’s understanding of his father’s fractured relationships.

The chapter underscores Grayson’s internal conflict as he navigates newfound family ties and the weight of his father’s secrets. Kimberly’s candid storytelling forces the siblings to confront their father’s flaws and the impact of his choices. Grayson’s protective instincts toward Gigi and Savannah clash with his own unresolved emotions. The visit leaves them with more questions than answers, highlighting the complexity of family bonds and the lingering scars of abandonment. The chapter closes with a sense of unfinished business, setting the stage for further revelations.

CHAPTER 64: GRAYSON

Grayson and his sisters discover a mysterious wooden box hidden behind loose panels in a closet. The box, resembling a puzzle, has no visible hinges or openings, prompting curiosity about its contents. Grayson methodically examines it, identifying seams and testing individual wooden strips until he successfully removes one, revealing a hidden tool and a finger-sized hole. His sisters suggest brute-force methods, but Grayson insists on solving the puzzle properly, suspecting the box may have security measures to protect its contents.

The siblings learn the box is a complex puzzle requiring precise manipulation. Grayson uses the uncovered tool—a thin, dual-ended instrument—to probe the box, eventually triggering a mechanism by sliding a panel. Despite their progress, the box remains sealed, frustrating Gigi and Savannah, who advocate for more aggressive approaches. Grayson warns against damaging the box, theorizing it might be booby-trapped or designed to destroy its contents if tampered with. His grandfather’s fondness for puzzle boxes suggests the challenge is intentional, meant to deter unauthorized access.

After systematic attempts, the siblings unlock the box’s top layer, only to find another smooth, polished wooden surface with a small rectangular slot. Gigi speculates they need a key with tiny pins, while Grayson realizes the slot resembles a USB port. This triggers his memory of an object hidden in Sheffield Grayson’s office—a seemingly insignificant item he now understands is the missing key. The discovery hints at a deeper connection between the box and the family’s secrets.

The chapter builds tension as Grayson’s deductive skills and patience contrast with his sisters’ impulsiveness. The puzzle box serves as a metaphor for the Hawthorne family’s enigmatic nature, with each layer revealing more complexity. Grayson’s realization about the hidden key underscores the theme of concealed truths, setting

the stage for further revelations. The siblings’ collaborative yet contentious dynamic adds emotional depth to the intellectual challenge, leaving readers eager to uncover the box’s secrets.

SIX YEARS, ELEVEN MONTHS AGO

The chapter opens with a vivid depiction of the Hawthorne family's extravagant Fourth of July carnival, complete with rides and games. Jameson, hidden in the tree house, observes his older brother Grayson and Emily Laughlin, a close family friend, as they sneak away from the festivities. Emily, who has a heart condition, defies her mother's restrictions to join the Hawthorne brothers. The tension between the three is palpable, especially when Emily boldly declares her intention to kiss Grayson, teasing him about his cautious nature. Jameson, ever the daring one, interrupts and kisses Emily first, setting the stage for a moment of rivalry and intimacy between the brothers.

The dynamic between the characters deepens as Emily, after kissing Jameson, turns her attention back to Grayson. Despite his initial reluctance, Grayson eventually kisses her, a moment that lingers longer than Jameson's. Their grandfather, Tobias Hawthorne, suddenly appears, having overheard the exchange. His presence shifts the tone from playful to serious, though he doesn't directly address the kiss. Instead, he subtly asserts his authority, reminding the boys of their privileged lives and the expectations placed upon them. Emily departs, leaving the brothers under their grandfather's scrutinizing gaze, which hints at his awareness of the underlying tensions between them.

Tobias Hawthorne uses the fireworks as a metaphor to deliver a pointed lesson about family loyalty. He emphasizes the unique bond between the four Hawthorne brothers, framing it as an unbreakable alliance against the world. His words, "Family first," resonate deeply, especially with Grayson, who seems to have heard this mantra before. The grandfather's stern yet loving demeanor underscores his belief in discipline and focus, qualities he expects from his grandsons. His questioning of whether they fear him reveals his desire to instill both respect and love, rather than intimidation, in their relationship.

The chapter concludes with Tobias Hawthorne challenging the boys to reflect on why he doesn't use physical punishment to discipline them. Jameson responds with flattery, but the grandfather corrects him, stating simply, "Because I love you." This moment encapsulates the complex dynamics of the Hawthorne family—where love, expectations, and rivalry intertwine. The chapter leaves readers with a sense of the weighty legacy the brothers carry and the emotional undercurrents that shape their relationships, particularly between Jameson and Grayson, as they navigate their grandfather's demanding vision for their future.

CHAPTER 65: JAMESON

Jameson and Avery return to the starting room of the game, guided by the inscription "Leave no stone unturned." Recalling Rohan's earlier clues, they deduce that each key likely follows a pattern combining spoken hints and physical objects. Focusing on the stone walls, they search for movable stones but find none within reach. Their teamwork shines as Jameson lifts Avery to check higher stones, yet their efforts yield no results, prompting them to reconsider their approach.

Determined to solve the puzzle, Jameson attempts to climb the wall but falls, landing near the fireplace. Noticing its stone construction, he and Avery meticulously inspect it, finding nothing at first. Their persistence leads them to the firewood storage, where they discover logs with carved letters. Working together, they extract and arrange the letters, initially forming disjointed words like "Lofty," "crush," and "awe," which seem unrelated to their goal.

Realizing their initial arrangement might be incorrect, Jameson reorders the letters, forming the phrase "WATCH YOURSELF." This cryptic message could serve as a warning or a clue tied to the game's mechanics. Jameson interprets it as a hint to look for a mirror or camera, recalling Rohan's earlier teachings about deeper meanings in puzzles. However, he remains uncertain whether this clue corresponds to one of the remaining keys or another aspect of the game.

The chapter highlights Jameson and Avery's problem-solving dynamic and their ability to adapt when initial strategies fail. Their discovery of the carved letters and the resulting phrase adds a layer of intrigue, leaving the reader curious about the next steps in their quest. The interplay between logic, memory, and teamwork underscores the challenges of the game while maintaining suspense about its ultimate resolution.

CHAPTER 66: JAMESON

Jameson carefully observes the room's ornate ceiling, noting its intricate blue and gold design featuring an elaborate X with diamond-shaped squares on either side. Within these diamonds are shields containing symbols like Greek letters, a flower, a lion, and a sword. He recalls key phrases from Rohan, but nothing clicks until he shifts his focus from the details to the broader pattern—the X itself. This realization sparks a connection to Rohan's earlier hint about "the mark," suggesting the X might literally mark a hidden spot.

Beneath the X on the ceiling lies a table, and Jameson quickly moves to inspect its underside. With Avery's help, he discovers small, coaster-sized disks in each corner. Avery identifies them as "wheels," recalling Rohan's cryptic instruction to "let the wheels turn a bit" before the game begins. The duo realizes these wheels are not just decorative but functional, likely part of a mechanism to unlock something hidden.

Working together, Jameson and Avery attempt to turn the stubborn wheels. After applying upward pressure and persistent effort, the wheels begin to rotate. Once all four are turned repeatedly until they can move no further, a hidden compartment on the table's side suddenly opens. This breakthrough confirms their theory that the wheels were the key to uncovering the next clue in the game.

Inside the compartment, they find a key, marking a significant step forward in their quest. The chapter highlights Jameson's keen observational skills and Avery's quick thinking, as well as their seamless collaboration. The discovery of the key not only advances the plot but also reinforces the theme of teamwork and deciphering hidden clues in high-stakes situations.

CHAPTER 67: JAMESON

Jameson and Avery are in the midst of a high-stakes game, having just obtained an ornate golden key adorned with jewels and pearls. Jameson is captivated by the key, recognizing it as one of two needed to win, but he remains cautious about its true purpose. The odds of it being the correct key are uncertain, and he refuses to settle for mere chance, determined to find better alternatives. Their dialogue reveals a competitive edge, with Jameson emphasizing that Hawthornes don’t accept unfavorable odds when there’s a way to tip the scales in their favor.

The pair revisits the clues they’ve gathered, including phrases like "smuggle nothing out" and "let the wheels turn," trying to decipher their meanings. Avery quietly murmurs additional idioms, such as "leave no stone unturned" and "no rest for the wicked," which catch Jameson’s attention. He recalls a stone garden but dismisses the idea of searching there blindly, trusting his intuition that a more definitive clue lies within their current room. The tension builds as Jameson’s focus narrows on the phrase "no rest for the wicked," sensing it holds deeper significance in the context of their game.

Jameson dissects the phrase, linking it to biblical connotations of eternal punishment and the absence of mercy—themes that resonate with the game’s ominous title, "Devil’s Mercy." Avery picks up on his train of thought, suggesting fire and brimstone as possible metaphors. Their shared realization leads them to fixate on the stone fireplace in the room, silently agreeing it might hold the next clue. The chapter highlights their seamless partnership, where unspoken cues and mutual understanding drive their strategy forward.

As they move toward the fireplace, Jameson poses a rhetorical question about finding a way to start a fire, hinting at their next move. The chapter ends on a note of anticipation, leaving readers eager to see how the duo will unravel the next piece of

the puzzle. The dynamic between Jameson and Avery, combined with the clever interplay of clues and intuition, creates a compelling narrative of intrigue and determination.

CHAPTER 68: JAMESON

Jameson and Avery, racing against competitors Branford and Katharine, search for clues in a high-stakes game on a cliffside estate. After finding matches in the kitchen, they return to the starting room, where they encounter Zella, the duchess, who seems aware of their progress. She hints that Branford has already found one key, leaving her with only one chance to turn the game in her favor. Jameson notices her lack of concern and deduces she knows more than she lets on, especially when she spots the matches in his hand and directs their attention to the fireplace.

Zella's cryptic remark about the fireplace—"No rest for the wicked"—suggests a hidden clue tied to fire. Jameson hesitates, weighing the risks of acting in her presence versus losing time. Avery asserts their claim to any potential key, but Zella dismisses the idea, implying the fireplace holds no key. Jameson realizes Zella has already seen and concealed the clue by rearranging the logs. Concerned about breaking the game's rules, Avery questions whether burning the logs is allowed, prompting Jameson to improvise by sacrificing his shirt to ignite the fireplace.

As the flames consume his shirt, invisible ink on the fireplace stones is revealed, displaying the clue "DIAL 216." Zella thanks Jameson mockingly before departing, likely to act on the clue. Jameson and Avery, however, suspect a deeper layer to the puzzle. Instead of rushing to a phone, Jameson hints at an alternative interpretation, and Avery recalls a sundial in the stone garden, connecting it to the numbers 216. Their quick thinking suggests they're one step ahead of Zella and their rivals.

The chapter highlights the tension and strategic maneuvering between the characters as they navigate the game's challenges. Jameson's resourcefulness and Avery's sharp intuition shine as they decode clues while outmaneuvering their competitors. The dynamic between them and Zella adds intrigue, hinting at unresolved history and rivalries. The chapter ends on a note of anticipation, with Jameson and Avery poised to

uncover the next piece of the puzzle, demonstrating their teamwork and cunning in the face of high-stakes competition.

CHAPTER 69: JAMESON

Jameson and Avery rush to the stone garden’s sundial, their focus on finding a second key to secure an advantage in the high-stakes game they’re playing. Jameson remains vigilant, aware that rivals like Branford could be lurking nearby. The discovery of two keys would not only help him win but also protect a personal secret, creating a potential stalemate if Branford uncovers compromising information. The urgency is palpable as Jameson prioritizes securing the key above all else, demonstrating his relentless determination to outmaneuver his opponents.

The sundial’s intricate design becomes the center of their attention, with Jameson deciphering the numerical clue "216" as a perfect cube (6×6×6). Avery’s mathematical insight reinforces the symbolism, hinting at a deeper, possibly ominous meaning tied to the number. Jameson methodically examines the sundial’s stationary bar, dismissing the moving shadow as irrelevant, and begins counting stones in a precise pattern. His meticulous approach highlights his strategic mindset, while Avery’s amused commentary adds a touch of levity to their tense mission.

After several attempts, Jameson notices subtle irregularities in the stones—a smear of dirt and missing grass—leading him to dig beneath a specific one. Despite the physical toll, including a torn fingernail, he persists, driven by an unwavering resolve to win. The narrative underscores his resilience and the psychological weight of his family legacy, as memories of his father’s expectations echo in his mind. His efforts are rewarded when he unearths a burlap sack containing a golden key adorned with a maze-like design, solidifying his belief that this key is pivotal to victory.

Their triumph is short-lived as Katharine interrupts, demanding the key with an air of authority. Avery defiantly questions her, but the tension escalates when Jameson’s father, Ian, arrives and commends his son’s success. The chapter ends on a cliffhanger, leaving readers to wonder whether Jameson will relinquish the key or

leverage it against his father’s ambitions. The confrontation sets the stage for a power struggle, blending familial dynamics with the game’s cutthroat stakes.

CHAPTER 70: GRAYSON

Grayson, along with Gigi and Savannah, examines a puzzle box in Colin’s old room, with Grayson privately confident he can solve it. Gigi notices his focused expression and teases him about his "hamster wheel" of thoughts, while Grayson maintains his usual composed demeanor. He suggests re-examining the box for clues, though he already suspects the solution lies elsewhere—likely connected to his father’s hidden system involving a safe-deposit key. The tension rises as Kimberly Wright, Colin’s mother, abruptly interrupts, demanding they leave and accusing Grayson of being a Hawthorne, a family she blames for her son’s death.

Kimberly’s hostility escalates as she reveals her brother Shep’s hatred for the Hawthornes, claiming Toby Hawthorne caused Colin’s death in a fire and that the family covered it up. Grayson remains calm but assesses his options to defuse the situation, while Gigi defends him, insisting he isn’t responsible for the past. Kimberly’s anger peaks as she orders them out, but Grayson subtly shifts tactics, reassembling the box and preparing to negotiate. The confrontation highlights the deep-seated resentment between the families and Grayson’s strategic approach to conflict.

Recognizing Kimberly’s desperation, Grayson employs the Hawthorne method of resolving disputes: bribery. He pulls out a stack of hundred-dollar bills, offering them in exchange for the box. His calm authority and the flash of money silence Kimberly, who reluctantly takes the cash but reiterates her demand for them to leave. Grayson’s calculated move demonstrates his ability to manipulate situations to his advantage, blending threat and persuasion. The exchange underscores the Hawthorne family’s reliance on wealth and power to control outcomes, even in emotionally charged moments.

The chapter concludes with Grayson securing the puzzle box and leading his sisters out, having navigated the confrontation with cold efficiency. His brief moment of

empathy—acknowledging Shep’s rejection—softens Kimberly just enough to secure compliance. The scene reinforces Grayson’s role as a master strategist, capable of balancing ruthlessness with subtle emotional appeals. It also deepens the mystery surrounding the box and the Hawthorne family’s dark history, setting the stage for further revelations about their past conflicts and secrets.

CHAPTER 71: GRAYSON

The chapter opens with Savannah driving in tense silence, broken only by Xander's attempt to lighten the mood with a failed knock-knock joke. The group's unease grows as Xander reveals that Jamie is unreachable and Oren's security team may have lost track of Avery and Jamie—or been instructed not to follow them. Grayson remains skeptical, knowing Oren's reliability, but the situation hints at deeper complications. The conversation shifts when Gigi presses Grayson about their father's cryptic threat against the Hawthornes, forcing Grayson to confront painful family history while strategizing how to secure the puzzle box in their possession.

Grayson reflects on his father's vendetta against the Hawthorne family, revealing he was conceived as an act of revenge against his grandfather. Xander deflects with humor, but Grayson's admission about his origins underscores the family's fractured dynamics. Gigi questions why their father kept photographs of Grayson if he resented him, adding another layer of mystery. Savannah tries to redirect focus to their immediate mission, but Nash interrupts with urgent news: the Grayson household is surrounded by FBI agents, signaling imminent danger.

Grayson swiftly takes charge, orchestrating a seat shuffle to position Xander as the driver and conceal the puzzle box under Nash's shirt. He instructs the group on how to handle the FBI encounter, emphasizing feigned ignorance and outrage. Savannah hesitates but complies, while Gigi embraces her role as a distraction, joking about her caffeine-fueled theatrics. The scene highlights Grayson's strategic mind and the group's reliance on his leadership, even as tensions simmer beneath the surface.

The chapter closes with the group preparing to face the FBI, each member playing a assigned role. Grayson's calculated instructions contrast with Gigi's playful bravado, showcasing their differing approaches to crisis. The unresolved questions about the puzzle box, Avery's whereabouts, and the FBI's presence set the stage for escalating

conflict. Grayson's internal conflict—balancing duty against loyalty—hints at deeper emotional stakes as the Hawthorne-Grayson rivalry reaches a critical point.

CHAPTER 72: GRAYSON

The chapter opens with Grayson, Savannah, and Gigi being intercepted by an FBI agent at their driveway. The agent demands identification and attempts to assert authority, but Grayson counters with calculated indifference, refusing to engage on the agent's terms. Savannah defends Gigi when the agent physically restrains her, displaying a sharp, commanding tone. Grayson’s composed demeanor and strategic silence signal his familiarity with power dynamics, while Gigi’s quirky remark about telekinesis adds a touch of levity to the tense encounter. The scene establishes Grayson’s protective role and the family’s unyielding demeanor under pressure.

Inside the property, Acacia, visibly shaken but composed, advises against provoking the agents. Grayson observes her fragility despite her attempts to appear confident. The agents’ invasive search of the home distresses Savannah, who voices their violation, while Acacia’s emotional reaction hints at deeper turmoil. Grayson steps in, offering physical and emotional support, though he senses Acacia is trying to comfort *him* instead. This moment reveals a poignant undercurrent—Grayson’s reflection on the maternal care he missed growing up, contrasting with the self-reliance he and his brothers developed.

Grayson shifts focus to practicality, reviewing the warrant and identifying its unusual scope. He questions the timing and intensity of the search, suspecting external manipulation—possibly linked to Eve’s earlier cryptic behavior. Acacia admits her financial inability to hire a lawyer, and while Gigi offers to use her trust, Savannah hesitates, suggesting restrictions. Grayson intervenes, proposing legal assistance at no cost, but Acacia insists on handling things herself. The exchange underscores the family’s strained resources and Grayson’s instinct to shield them, even as Acacia resists out of pride or protectiveness.

The chapter closes with the arrival of a woman in a navy suit, whom Grayson immediately recognizes as the lead agent. Her authoritative presence signals a shift in the confrontation. The unresolved tension—combined with Grayson’s suspicions about the warrant’s motives—hints at larger conspiracies at play. The family’s solidarity and Grayson’s strategic mind take center stage, setting the stage for a deeper conflict involving power, loyalty, and the Hawthorne legacy.

CHAPTER 73: GRAYSON

Grayson reunites with his brothers Nash and Xander in their suite, where they examine a puzzle box connected to their father, Sheffield Grayson. Grayson reveals the missing piece—a small device their father carried—while avoiding discussion of the FBI's recent search. The brothers tiptoe around Grayson's emotional state, offering support through humor and cookies rather than direct questions. Grayson's tension is palpable as he confirms Sheffield's alleged financial crimes against his own family, including stealing from Grayson's half-sisters' trusts.

The conversation shifts to Eve, a mysterious figure manipulating events, possibly behind the FBI investigation. Nash checks Grayson's emotional stability, while Xander lightens the mood with absurd apologies and an oversized Oreo. Grayson admits he's "slipping" by becoming emotionally invested in protecting his half-sisters Gigi and Savannah, as well as their mother Acacia. Nash reframes this vulnerability as "living," highlighting the Hawthorne brothers' unique dynamic of balancing toughness with care.

Grayson outlines his plan to sanitize the puzzle box's contents, removing evidence linking Sheffield to attacks on Avery Grambs and his disappearance. Xander questions whether Grayson is truly comfortable with deceiving his sisters, given their recent bond. Flashbacks show the girls protecting Grayson from their aunt and Acacia's quiet solidarity, complicating his resolve. Despite this, Grayson proceeds, inserting the device into the box with resigned determination.

The chapter underscores Grayson's internal conflict between his protective instincts and the Hawthorne family's ruthless pragmatism. His brothers provide both comic relief and emotional grounding, allowing him moments of vulnerability rarely shown to others. The puzzle box serves as a metaphor for Grayson's struggle—methodically dismantling painful truths while reassembling a safer fiction for those he cares about,

even as it costs him personally.

CHAPTER 74: GRAYSON

Grayson successfully unlocks a hidden compartment in a puzzle box, revealing glass vials designed to destroy its contents if tampered with. Inside, he finds a Montblanc pen and a leather-bound journal, likely containing records of his father Sheffield Grayson’s final actions. The journal’s potential to incriminate the Hawthorne family raises the stakes, prompting Grayson and his brothers to scrutinize its contents. The pen, initially suspected as a clue, is dismissed as a distraction, emphasizing that this is no ordinary Hawthorne game but a serious pursuit of hidden truths.

The journal is filled with seemingly random numbers, which Grayson deduces are part of an elaborate code. His attempts to decode it using basic ciphers fail, leaving him frustrated but determined. Xander and Nash join the effort, with Xander suggesting a substitution cipher approach. Grayson, however, shifts his focus to understanding his father’s mindset, imagining Sheffield meticulously writing in the journal and questioning where he might have kept a cipher key. This mental exercise leads him to reconsider the puzzle box for hidden compartments.

Grayson discovers a nearly invisible seam in the box’s compartment, revealing a hidden cipher wheel—a tool for decoding the journal’s numerical entries. The wheel, featuring letters and digraphs on the outer ring and disordered numbers on the inner ring, explains why earlier decoding attempts failed. The Hawthorne brothers, familiar with such puzzles, recognize the need to align the inner wheel correctly to crack the code. Grayson’s persistence and attention to detail highlight his analytical prowess and determination to uncover his father’s secrets.

As the brothers work together, the chapter underscores their dynamic: Grayson’s methodical approach, Xander’s enthusiasm for puzzles, and Nash’s steady support. The discovery of the cipher wheel marks a turning point, offering hope of deciphering the journal’s contents. The chapter ends on a note of anticipation, leaving readers

eager to see how the decoded information will impact the Hawthorne family and their ongoing mysteries. The blend of tension, family bonds, and intellectual challenge drives the narrative forward.

CHAPTER 75: JAMESON

In this chapter, Jameson faces a pivotal moment as his father figure, Ian, unexpectedly arrives during the high-stakes Game. Ian commends Jameson's efforts but demands he hand over the keys he has obtained, revealing a shift in their alliance. Jameson, feeling betrayed, refuses, realizing Ian now views him as disposable. The tension escalates as Avery stands by Jameson, questioning Ian's motives, while Katharine, aligned with Ian, coldly insists on retrieving the keys for her own agenda.

Jameson's internal conflict deepens as he grapples with Ian's betrayal. He recalls how Ian once praised his cunning and mercilessness, only to now dismiss his role in the Game. The emotional weight of their relationship becomes clear—Jameson had believed himself indispensable, but Ian's sudden alliance with Katharine undermines that trust. The keys symbolize not just victory but Jameson's worth, making his refusal a defiant stand against being used and discarded.

The power dynamics shift further as Katharine and Ian pressure Jameson to comply. Katharine's smug demeanor hints at a larger scheme involving Ian's brother, while Ian's threats reveal his ruthless priorities. Jameson, however, refuses to back down, recognizing that Ian's promises—like reclaiming the family estate, Vantage—were empty. The chapter underscores Jameson's realization that Ian values power over loyalty, leaving him to confront his own naivety and resolve.

The confrontation culminates in a tense standoff, with Jameson embracing his defiance despite the risks. His bruised face mirrors his emotional wounds, yet his smile signals resilience. The chapter closes with Jameson reclaiming agency, rejecting Ian's manipulation, and preparing to face the consequences of his choice. The stakes are higher than ever, setting the stage for a dramatic escalation in the conflict.

CHAPTER 76: JAMESON

Jameson and Avery continue their quest to uncover the secrets of the Hawthorne family, focusing on finding the remaining treasure boxes hidden within the manor. Despite the emotional turmoil and physical pain Jameson endures, he remains determined, fueled by Avery’s unwavering support. Their bond deepens as they share a tender moment, reinforcing their partnership. Ignoring Ian’s distractions, they channel their energy into solving the final clues, confident in their ability to win the game.

Inside the manor, Jameson and Avery search for hidden compartments behind mirrors, eventually discovering a secret room on the fourth floor. The room, dimly lit by candles, contains portraits of Ian and his family, including one of Jameson himself. This revelation stirs conflicting emotions in Jameson, who grapples with his connection to a family he never knew. The discovery of his portrait hints at a deliberate inclusion in the game, raising questions about who orchestrated it.

Behind Jameson’s portrait, they find a jeweled chest matching one of the keys. The chest’s emerald and gold design suggests it holds his personal secret. Jameson deduces that the portrait was recently commissioned, likely by Rohan, adding another layer of intrigue. As adrenaline surges through him, he and Avery quickly locate a second chest behind Branford’s portrait, which contains a scroll revealing Branford’s acknowledgment of a son. This discovery shocks Jameson, who knows little about his uncle’s life.

The chapter culminates with Jameson and Avery on the brink of uncovering the game’s final secrets. The scroll’s revelation about Branford’s son hints at deeper family mysteries yet to be unraveled. Jameson’s instincts and determination drive him forward, even as the emotional weight of his newfound connections weighs heavily. The chapter leaves readers anticipating the next twist in the Hawthorne saga, as

Jameson and Avery prepare to face whatever lies ahead together.

CHAPTER 77: JAMESON

Jameson endures physical strain and pain as he climbs a chain to retrieve a silver chest, ignoring his injuries in his determination to succeed. Below him, Simon Johnstone-Jameson holds a secret involving four words, including "Heiress," which becomes pivotal. Despite the wire cutting into his hands and blood slicking his grip, Jameson finally tears the chest free and drops it to Avery, who catches it. After descending halfway, he leaps down, landing in a crouch, his body aching but his focus unwavering as he turns to reclaim the chest and key from Avery.

The tension escalates as Zella, the duchess, intervenes, demanding the key or threatening to reveal Jameson’s secret aloud. She reveals she has switched the parchment containing his secret, outmaneuvering Branford, and taunts Jameson with her ability to exploit the situation. Jameson, prioritizing Avery’s safety over winning, urges her to hand over the key, but Avery hesitates, mouthing, "I can’t." The standoff intensifies as Zella begins a countdown, forcing Jameson to confront the stakes of his secret being exposed.

Avery defies Zella, lunging at her and wrestling the parchment away. Despite Rohan’s commanding intervention, Avery holds the parchment to a candle flame, reducing Jameson’s secret to ashes. Her bold act protects Jameson but violates the Game’s rules against violence. Zella, poised and calculating, seizes the opportunity to point out Avery’s infraction, which could lead to her expulsion and forfeiture of the key. Rohan’s reaction is momentarily unreadable, but he confirms the consequences with a practiced smile, leaving Avery’s fate uncertain.

The chapter concludes with Jameson’s secret destroyed but at the cost of Avery’s potential disqualification. Zella’s strategic manipulation highlights her cunning, while Avery’s defiance underscores her loyalty to Jameson. The Game’s rules now threaten to strip Avery of her key, shifting the power dynamics. Jameson’s internal

conflict—between winning and protecting Avery—reveals his deeper priorities, even as the consequences of their actions remain unresolved.

CHAPTER 78: GRAYSON

Grayson spends the night decoding his father Sheffield Grayson's encrypted journal, meticulously transcribing the contents into his own notebook. Initially, the journal appears to be a ledger documenting embezzled funds, providing enough detail for authorities to trace the illegal transactions. However, as Grayson progresses, the entries shift from financial records to personal confessions, revealing Sheffield's simmering anger rather than guilt. The tone grows increasingly volatile, hinting at deeper family conflicts and unresolved vendettas.

The journal entries expose Sheffield's rage following his mother-in-law Cora's funeral, where his wife Acacia learns damaging secrets from a man named Trowbridge. Sheffield resents Acacia's compassion and interference, particularly regarding a mysterious "son" connected to the Hawthorne family. His bitterness intensifies after Tobias Hawthorne's death, as he fixates on Avery, the unexpected heir to the Hawthorne fortune. Sheffield becomes obsessed with proving her connection to Toby Hawthorne, whom he believes is still alive and deserving of retribution.

Grayson uncovers his father's escalating vendetta, including his decision to spy on Avery in hopes she would lead him to Toby. Sheffield's entries grow more unhinged, culminating in a chilling admission: he plans to murder Toby, believing he can evade consequences since Toby is legally dead. The journal also reveals Sheffield orchestrated the public confrontation during Grayson and Avery's interview, aiming to destabilize the Hawthornes. Grayson processes these revelations without pause, though the weight of his father's malice is undeniable.

The chapter concludes with Grayson recalling his impulsive kiss with Avery during the interview, a moment that shattered his usual control. This memory intertwines with the journal's revelations, emphasizing the cyclical nature of chaos in his life. As he decodes the final entries, Grayson confronts the unsettling truth: his father's vendetta

against the Hawthornes is deeply personal, and Avery is now entangled in its dangerous legacy.

CHAPTER 79: GRAYSON

In this chapter, Grayson meticulously studies his late father's handwriting to replicate the entries from Sheffield Grayson's journal. He practices the distinct features of the numerals—straight 1s, curvy 3s, and sharp 4s and 5s—until he can accurately recreate the text. After receiving a new journal from the hotel, he transcribes the entries, crafting a duplicate that ends just after the twins' grandmother's funeral. Grayson places this replica in the puzzle box's central compartment, ensuring it appears authentic, while discreetly hiding a fake USB under the outer layer. His actions are deliberate, aimed at controlling what his sisters discover about their father.

Grayson entrusts the original journal and his decoded notes to his brothers, Nash and Xander, instructing them to hide these items at Hawthorne House. By doing so, he ensures the truth about Sheffield Grayson's death remains concealed, protecting Avery and the twins from potentially damaging revelations. He also hands his brothers a notepad with his handwriting practice, ordering them to burn it to eliminate any traces of his forgery. Grayson's calculated moves demonstrate his protective instincts, as he balances transparency with secrecy to shield his family.

Despite his brothers' concern for his well-being, Grayson insists he is fine and chooses to stay behind to support Gigi and Savannah. He acknowledges the twins' need for his guidance, especially with ongoing challenges like dealing with the FBI, managing Acacia's finances, and monitoring Trowbridge. His resolve to stay highlights his sense of responsibility, even as Nash and Xander tease him about his role as the "big brother." Grayson's focus on protecting his sisters underscores his complex relationship with duty and family loyalty.

The chapter concludes with Grayson receiving humorous yet revealing texts from Gigi, who updates him on the chaotic state of their home and Savannah's withdrawal. Gigi's playful cat pictures and her mention of being outside his hotel add a lighthearted

touch, contrasting with the chapter's earlier tension. Her final text, praising Grayson's friend, hints at potential new developments. This ending balances Grayson's serious demeanor with moments of levity, showcasing the dynamic relationships within the Hawthorne family.

CHAPTER 80: GRAYSON

Grayson Hawthorne, a character who typically avoids close relationships, finds himself in a tense confrontation when he discovers Mattias Slater—an associate of Eve—interacting with his younger sister, Gigi. The chapter opens with Grayson's immediate suspicion and protectiveness as he steps between Gigi and Slater, who claims to be a friend. Gigi, however, remains playful and unfazed, teasing Slater about his brooding demeanor. Grayson's hostility is palpable as he demands Slater step back, highlighting his instinct to shield his sister from potential threats. The scene sets the stage for a clash between Grayson's guarded nature and Slater's enigmatic presence.

The tension escalates when Slater reveals that Vincent Blake, Eve's father, has suffered a severe heart attack, prompting his return to Texas. Slater implies Eve may be in danger due to her recent status as Blake's sole heir. Grayson, however, remains indifferent to Eve's predicament, questioning why this should concern him. Slater's cold, emotionless delivery underscores the gravity of the situation, while Grayson's dismissive response reflects his focus on protecting Gigi. The exchange hints at deeper conflicts, particularly Grayson's awareness of Eve's involvement with the FBI, suggesting unresolved animosity between them.

The confrontation turns physical when Slater swiftly maneuvers past Grayson to whisper a cryptic warning to Gigi, cautioning her about Grayson's hidden agenda. Grayson's restraint nearly snaps, but he manages to control his anger as security arrives. Before leaving, Slater delivers a veiled threat, implying Grayson's actions could endanger Gigi. Grayson's fury simmers beneath the surface, and he vows to confront Eve directly, accusing her of tipping off the FBI. The encounter leaves Grayson on edge, while Gigi remains curiously intrigued by Slater's dangerous aura.

In the aftermath, Gigi's playful curiosity about Eve and her apparent fascination with Slater's "bad news" persona frustrate Grayson. He sternly warns her against pursuing any connection with Slater, but Gigi's mischievous grin suggests she may not heed his advice. The chapter ends with Grayson ushering Gigi upstairs, delaying her questions about Eve and emphasizing his protective instincts. The dynamic between Grayson's seriousness and Gigi's lightheartedness adds depth to their relationship, while the unresolved tension with Slater and Eve foreshadows future conflicts.

CHAPTER 81: GRAYSON

In this chapter, Grayson and Gigi navigate a tense yet revealing conversation about family secrets and potential dangers. Gigi, brimming with curiosity, presses Grayson for details about Eve, whom he reveals is the biological daughter of his uncle Toby Hawthorne (now Toby Blake). Grayson explains the complicated family dynamics, emphasizing Eve's dangerous nature and warning Gigi to avoid a mysterious man she encountered earlier. Despite Gigi's playful resistance, Grayson insists she call him immediately if she sees the man again, hinting at Eve's involvement in recent FBI actions against Gigi's mother.

The duo shifts focus to solving a puzzle box, symbolizing their growing partnership. They methodically dismantle the box, revealing a hidden USB key. Gigi's spontaneous shake of the box dislodges the key, showcasing her intuitive approach. Grayson briefly second-guesses his decision to simplify the puzzle for her but pushes aside his doubts, recalling his family's mantra against regret. Gigi insists on waiting for her twin, Savannah, but Grayson senses tension when Gigi mentions a fight between Savannah and their mother about their trusts, prompting him to offer reassurance with an uncharacteristic hug.

Their dynamic lightens as Gigi playfully commands Grayson to pose for photos, capturing their progress with the puzzle box. She teases him about his stoic demeanor but succeeds in eliciting a genuine smile, even changing his phone wallpaper to their photo. Gigi's mischievous side emerges as she sends the pictures to herself and Xander, defying Grayson's half-hearted protests. The chapter highlights their evolving sibling bond, blending Grayson's protective instincts with Gigi's infectious energy.

The chapter concludes with Gigi impulsively deciding not to wait for Savannah and removing the final barrier to the journal inside the puzzle box. This moment underscores the trust and camaraderie developing between them, despite Grayson's

initial reservations. The interplay of family secrets, danger, and lighthearted moments creates a balanced narrative, showcasing Grayson's internal conflict between his guarded nature and his growing affection for Gigi. The unresolved tension around Eve and the mysterious man leaves room for future developments, maintaining suspense.

TWO YEARS AND EIGHT MONTHS AGO

Grayson Hawthorne is consumed by guilt and grief as he sits in the tree house, reflecting on Emily's death. He recalls his childhood obsession with perfection, symbolized by his meticulously crafted haikus, which now feel meaningless. The weight of his failure overwhelms him, as he blames himself for taking Emily to the cliffs where she died. His emotional numbness is palpable, as he repeats the word "dead" aloud, yet feels nothing—a stark contrast to the pain he believes he deserves.

Below the tree house, Jameson violently attacks the bridges and structures with an ax and other blades, channeling his rage over Emily's death. Nash intervenes, pleading with Jameson to stop, but Jameson continues destroying everything in his path, seemingly reveling in the chaos. Grayson watches, interpreting Jameson's actions as directed at him—a punishment for his role in Emily's demise. The brothers' shared grief manifests in destruction, with Jameson's reckless abandon contrasting Grayson's silent despair.

Nash attempts to mediate, urging Jameson to find a less self-destructive outlet for his pain. Jameson dismisses the concern, declaring that nothing matters unless one allows it to—a stark rejection of emotional vulnerability. Grayson, meanwhile, descends to the ground and picks up a longsword, mirroring Jameson's destructive impulses. The tension between the brothers escalates as Grayson confronts Jameson, admitting fault for Emily's death, but Jameson sarcastically rejects the apology, accusing Grayson of never accepting blame.

The chapter culminates in Grayson joining Jameson's violent outburst, swinging the longsword at the tree house. His actions symbolize his surrender to guilt and self-loathing, as he internalizes the belief that he killed Emily. The brothers' shared trauma fractures their relationship, leaving Nash as the only voice of reason amidst their spiraling grief. The chapter ends with Grayson embracing the pain he once avoided,

finally feeling the hurt he thought he deserved.

CHAPTER 82: JAMESON

The chapter opens with tension as Jameson Hawthorne reacts to Avery Grambs' removal from the Game by the Factotum, Rohan. Zella claims ownership of Avery's key, citing her status as the attacked party, while Jameson demands answers about Avery's whereabouts. Rohan dismisses their arguments, announcing the Game will restart with the striking of a bell, hinting at a new challenge involving heights. Jameson remains wary of Rohan's motives, sensing deception beneath his composed demeanor.

Jameson shifts focus to the silver chest in his possession, refusing to relinquish it despite Katharine's taunts. She questions his worth without the Hawthorne name or Avery's support, provoking him with comparisons to his more accomplished brothers. Branford intervenes, but Katharine's words linger, forcing Jameson to confront his insecurities about being perceived as ordinary. The chest becomes symbolic of his determination to prove himself independently.

Katharine's relentless psychological attack dredges up Jameson's past doubts, including his grandfather's harsh assessment of his abilities. She frames him as a typical third-born son—driven by unmet ambitions. Though Jameson recognizes her manipulation, her words strike a nerve, making him question his achievements and identity outside the family legacy. Branford's attempts to shield him only partially deflect the emotional onslaught.

As the chapter concludes, Jameson steels himself against Katharine's barbs, clinging to the chest as his sole advantage. He reflects on his brothers' strengths and his own unresolved potential, vowing to rise above comparisons. The ringing bell signals the Game's resumption, leaving Jameson poised to confront the next challenge—both externally and within himself—as he fights to redefine his place in the Hawthorne dynasty.

CHAPTER 83: JAMESON

Jameson springs into action after Rohan's cryptic hint about the key being hidden high, interpreting it as a challenge involving heights. He surveys the imposing Vantage estate, noting its castle-like structure with turrets and a towering clock tower. The setting sun casts an eerie glow on the cliffs surrounding the property, emphasizing its isolation. Realizing the bell tower is central to the clue, Jameson rushes toward it, undeterred by the treacherous drop below.

As Jameson reaches the tower, the metal gate unexpectedly rises, revealing his uncle, Simon Johnstone-Jameson. Their tense exchange reveals little, with Branford cryptically stating his role as the family head. Jameson presses for answers about Branford’s secret—his son—but receives no reply. Undaunted, he charges up the spiral staircase inside the tower, Branford close behind, both driven by the urgency of the Game.

Inside the tower, Jameson spots dozens of keys suspended near the massive bell, recognizing Rohan’s trick—only one is the real prize. Branford attempts to restrain him, warning against recklessness, but Jameson remains focused. The arrival of Zella, who lands atop the bell, heightens the stakes. Calculating the risky jump to the bell, Jameson decides to act, handing the silver chest to Branford to free his hands.

With Branford’s protests ringing in his ears, Jameson takes a daring leap toward the bell, embodying his fearless nature. The chapter ends on this cliffhanger, leaving his fate uncertain. The tension between family duty, personal ambition, and the thrill of the Game culminates in this pivotal moment, showcasing Jameson’s relentless determination to prove himself beyond the Hawthorne name.

CHAPTER 84: JAMESON

In Chapter 84, Jameson engages in a high-stakes competition with Zella inside a bell tower, searching for a golden key described as having a "head like a maze." The tension is palpable as both characters maneuver around the swinging bell, each attempting to outwit the other. Jameson remains focused on his task, ignoring Zella's attempts to distract him by referencing his secret and his desire to prove himself to his family. Instead, he turns the tables by probing her about her history with Rohan, aiming to unsettle her. The physical and psychological duel unfolds as they inspect dozens of keys, with Jameson determined to win despite the dangerous environment.

The chapter highlights Jameson's strategic mind and fearless nature as he navigates the perilous bell tower. Zella, equally determined, uses her agility and knowledge of Jameson's motivations to gain an edge. Their verbal sparring reveals deeper layers of their characters—Zella's calculated ruthlessness and Jameson's relentless drive to prove his worth. When Zella taunts him about his privileged background, Jameson remains undeterred, focusing instead on the faint sound of a key inside the bell. This moment underscores his ability to stay composed under pressure, even as the bell's violent swings threaten his grip.

As the competition intensifies, Jameson discovers hidden handles inside the bell, realizing Rohan may have designed the challenge with safety in mind. His hesitation—briefly recalling Avery and Ian's words—shows a moment of vulnerability, but he quickly regains his focus. The chapter builds suspense as Jameson maneuvers inside the bell, closing in on the key while Zella scrambles to keep up. His confidence and physical prowess are on full display, emphasizing his growth from a reckless thrill-seeker to a calculated competitor who balances risk with strategy.

The chapter culminates with Jameson poised to claim victory, his body moving with precision as he nears the key. The narrative captures his adrenaline-fueled mindset

and the sheer intensity of the game, leaving readers eager to see if he succeeds. Themes of competition, identity, and legacy are woven throughout, as Jameson's actions reflect his desire to carve out his own path while honoring the Hawthorne name. The cliffhanger ending sets the stage for the next chapter, where the consequences of his choices will unfold.

CHAPTER 85: JAMESON

The chapter opens with Jameson and Zella surviving a perilous situation, with Zella acknowledging her debt to Jameson. In a surprising move, she throws the key they risked their lives for down to Katharine, leaving Jameson stunned. Branford, Jameson's uncle, is furious, and tensions rise as Jameson insists on retrieving the chest. Branford's anger is palpable, hinting at deeper familial conflicts, particularly with his brother Bowen, who holds leverage over him. Katharine's arrival and her cryptic words—"Ontario. Versace. Selenium"—trigger Branford's compliance, revealing a prearranged code that forces him to hand over the chest.

Katharine's calculated actions dominate the scene as she takes control of the chest, delivering a pointed lesson to Jameson about power and manipulation. She opens the chest to find a silver ballerina, which she removes before discarding the box. Jameson, refusing to accept defeat, frantically searches the empty chest, driven by his relentless need to win. His internal struggle is underscored by memories of his grandfather's teachings and taunts about his worth without the Hawthorne name. Despite Branford and Zella urging him to let go, Jameson remains fixated on uncovering hidden clues, convinced the game isn't over.

The chapter delves into Jameson's psychological state as he recalls his grandfather's lessons about perception and strategy. The silver ballerina triggers a memory of a similar object from a past game, hinting at misdirection and deeper meaning. Jameson's determination to "see" the truth reflects his grandfather's influence, emphasizing the importance of perspective and creativity in solving challenges. His refusal to concede highlights his competitive nature and his fear of being ordinary, a theme central to his character arc.

In the final moments, Jameson closes his eyes, replaying the game's initial instructions and the clues he's gathered. His smile suggests a breakthrough, implying he's pieced

together a solution others overlooked. The chapter ends on a note of anticipation, leaving readers curious about Jameson’s next move and whether his insight will turn the tide in his favor. The interplay of family dynamics, power struggles, and intellectual rivalry creates a compelling narrative that drives the story forward.

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.

CHAPTER 87: JAMESON

Jameson confronts Katharine and Rohan near the cliffs, where Katharine demands the "mark" she believes she deserves for bringing the contents of the final box—a silver ballerina. Rohan, however, clarifies that the game's winner must correctly identify what the object represents, not merely possess it. Jameson interjects, recalling Rohan's exact words: the victor must reveal what is truly valuable in the third box. Katharine hastily guesses the ballerina itself, but Rohan dismisses her answer, turning to Jameson for his interpretation.

Jameson confidently declares the answer is "silence," explaining that the music box's absence of sound symbolizes the power of keeping secrets. Rohan, impressed, confirms Jameson as the winner, awarding him the stone mark—a half-black, half-white disk. Overwhelmed by euphoria, Jameson revels in his victory, feeling alive and triumphant. The moment underscores his independence from the Hawthorne name and his ability to succeed on his own terms.

Rohan grants Jameson a day to decide how to use the mark, but Jameson refuses to wait, sensing Katharine's calculating gaze and anticipating her next move. He recalls her previous manipulation of Ian and suspects she or Bowen may soon threaten or bargain with him. Meanwhile, Jameson observes Zella's subtle satisfaction, hinting at her own fulfilled agenda. His attention shifts to Branford, his uncle by blood but not allegiance, and to Vantage, his ancestral home through his paternal grandmother.

Jameson returns the mark to Rohan, expressing his fondness for the place but disdain for its bell—a symbolic rejection of its traditions. The chapter concludes with Jameson asserting his autonomy, having proven his strategic brilliance and resilience. His victory solidifies his identity beyond the Hawthorne legacy, setting the stage for future confrontations with Katharine and Bowen. The tension between familial ties and personal ambition remains unresolved, leaving readers anticipating his next move.

CHAPTER 88: JAMESON

Jameson enters Vantage with a newfound sense of ownership, feeling it truly belongs to him for the first time. Despite growing up in luxury, he reflects that nothing has ever been solely his until now. His companions, Zella and Rohan, observe him, but Jameson is too absorbed in the moment to acknowledge them. Branford, his uncle, interrupts with a stern demeanor, demanding a private conversation. The tension is palpable as Branford's sharp gaze hints at unresolved familial conflicts, setting the stage for a pivotal confrontation.

At the top of the staircase, Branford confronts Jameson about his reckless behavior, accusing him of having a death wish. Jameson denies this, revealing that his perspective on mortality has shifted, particularly because of Avery. Branford's scolding takes on a paternal tone, a dynamic Jameson resists but subtly acknowledges. The uncle's frustration stems from concern, not just anger, as he critiques Jameson's impulsive actions during the recent game. The exchange highlights Branford's deeper investment in Jameson's well-being, contrasting with Ian's neglect.

Branford reveals his intention to break the cycle of enabling Ian's behavior, declaring that the family's tolerance ends with Jameson. He assures Jameson that Vantage is rightfully his, won through honor rather than manipulation. Jameson, still defiant, questions Branford's earlier criticism of his methods, but Branford clarifies that Jameson's choice to prioritize Zella's safety over winning demonstrated integrity. This moment of recognition underscores Branford's respect for Jameson's character, despite their differences.

The chapter concludes with Branford affirming Jameson's ownership of Vantage, promising to protect his claim against any challenges, including from Ian. Jameson is moved by his uncle's unexpected support, realizing the significance of being treated as family. The storm brewing outside mirrors the emotional turbulence within, as

Jameson grapples with his newfound legacy and the weight of Branford’s approval. The scene sets the foundation for Jameson’s evolving role within the family and his future at Vantage.

CHAPTER 89: JAMESON

The chapter opens with Jameson reuniting with Rohan and Zella in the foyer after resolving family matters. Zella claims she didn't read Jameson's secret, and their exchange is laced with tension and veiled threats. Rohan interjects, noting Jameson's victory over both of them, while Zella hints at her future role in the Game, revealing the Proprietor has promised her a leadership position next year. This sparks a subtle power struggle, as Rohan's demeanor shifts, hinting at underlying rivalry and the Proprietor's love for competition.

Jameson then reunites with Avery, who eagerly demands details of his victory. Their interaction is charged with intimacy as Jameson recounts key moments of the Game, and their kiss reflects their deep connection and shared history. Avery's willingness to remain ignorant of Jameson's secret underscores her loyalty, though Jameson senses her curiosity. Their banter reveals mutual trust, with Avery pretending not to need answers if it's what Jameson requires, while he grapples with the weight of his unspoken truth.

The mood shifts when Oren interrupts, returning Jameson's phone and revealing Grayson's urgent "911" text. This abrupt interruption contrasts sharply with the earlier warmth, injecting a sense of impending crisis. Jameson's internal monologue hints at unresolved tension, as he postpones confronting his secret but acknowledges the inevitability of doing so soon. The chapter ends on a cliffhanger, leaving the nature of Grayson's emergency unknown but suggesting it will disrupt Jameson's hard-won moment of triumph.

Throughout the chapter, themes of competition, loyalty, and unspoken truths dominate. Jameson's victory is overshadowed by personal and relational complexities, while the introduction of Grayson's distress signal sets the stage for future conflict. The dynamic between characters—especially Jameson and Avery—highlights their

deep bond, even as external pressures threaten to unravel it.

CHAPTER 90: GRAYSON

Grayson returns to Hawthorne House, confronting the remnants of the tree house he and Jameson destroyed in their grief after Emily's death. As he navigates the damaged structure, his brothers Xander and Nash surprise him, having anticipated his arrival. Grayson avoids discussing the emotional turmoil that prompted his return, but his siblings create a lighthearted atmosphere, preparing for an impromptu slumber party. The scene sets the tone for a chapter balancing familial bonds with unspoken tensions.

The brothers engage in a chaotic game of "Drink or Dare," mixing absurd concoctions and issuing outrageous challenges. Jameson arrives with supplies for the game, and the siblings revel in the ridiculousness—Nash nearly eats his hat, Xander builds a self-slapping machine, and Grayson’s stoicism begins to crack. The game serves as a distraction from deeper issues, though Jameson’s bruised face hints at unresolved adventures in England. The playful dynamic contrasts with the underlying emotional weight Grayson carries.

As the night progresses, the brothers’ antics momentarily ease Grayson’s tension, but Jameson seizes the opportunity to push him emotionally. He dares Grayson to admit he’s not okay, forcing him to confront his feelings. Grayson initially resists, reaching for the dreaded drink instead, but Nash and Xander create a safe space for vulnerability. The moment marks a shift from humor to raw honesty, as Grayson’s defenses begin to crumble.

Grayson finally confesses his fear of losing people, acknowledging his strained relationships with his sisters and his struggle with imperfection. Nash reassures him of their unwavering support, emphasizing that Grayson hasn’t lost his brothers. The chapter closes with a poignant blend of humor and heartache, highlighting the Hawthorne siblings’ ability to balance chaos with compassion, even as Grayson grapples with his vulnerabilities.

CHAPTER 91: GRAYSON

Grayson seeks solace in swimming, not to escape his thoughts but to delay confronting them. When Avery joins him on the patio, their interaction is charged with unspoken emotions. Her expressive gaze conveys sympathy, frustration, and concern, while Grayson deflects with dry humor. The tension between them is palpable, yet there's a newfound ease in their proximity. Avery's directness cuts through Grayson's defenses as she references his sisters and their unresolved trauma, hinting at the weight of secrets he carries. Their exchange reveals a fragile connection, with Avery's presence offering a rare moment of comfort amidst his turmoil.

Avery confronts Grayson about his avoidance of emotional intimacy, challenging his tendency to retreat when others get close. She brings up Toby's revelation that Eve has been surveilling Grayson's sisters, though without hostile intent. Grayson's skepticism is tempered by his trust in Avery, who vouches for Toby's honesty. The conversation shifts to Vincent Blake's recovery, adding another layer of complexity to the family's precarious situation. Avery's measured tone and unwavering gaze force Grayson to reconsider his assumptions, highlighting her role as both confidant and provocateur in his life.

The dynamic between Grayson and Avery evolves as they navigate their shared history and unresolved tensions. Avery's suggestion that Grayson could shield his sisters with partial truths about their father's disappearance reveals her protective instincts. Grayson, however, remains wary of reopening old wounds. Their banter—laced with affection and exasperation—underscores the depth of their bond. When Avery mentions Toby's nickname for her ("horrible girl"), Grayson's deadpan agreement hints at their mutual understanding, blending humor with underlying sincerity.

The chapter culminates with Grayson realizing the implications of Toby’s intel: if Eve isn’t behind the FBI’s renewed interest in his family, the threat may lie elsewhere. This revelation propels him into action, prompting plans to return to Phoenix. The interaction leaves Grayson mentally reassessing the puzzle of his family’s safety, with Avery’s insights serving as a catalyst. Their exchange underscores themes of trust, survival, and the inevitability of facing one’s past, setting the stage for Grayson’s next steps in the unfolding drama.

CHAPTER 92: JAMESON

The chapter opens with Jameson Hawthorne reveling in the thrill of a new challenge, as the Hawthorne family bands together to support Grayson in his pursuit of justice. The group, including Avery, piles into an SUV, dressed in suits, signaling their unity and determination. Grayson reveals that the FBI recently raided the Grayson family home, an unexpected move he suspects was orchestrated by someone with a personal vendetta. The target of Grayson's investigation is Kent Trowbridge, a lawyer with ties to Acacia Grayson's family, who may be manipulating the situation for his own gain.

Grayson explains that Trowbridge likely accessed Acacia's trust fund, framing Sheffield Grayson for its disappearance. The trust, worth millions, was left to Acacia and her daughters, with Trowbridge serving as the trustee for the twins' funds. Grayson suspects Trowbridge's motives extend beyond financial gain, aiming to control Acacia by isolating her from support. The family pieces together how Trowbridge has been manipulating Acacia and her daughters, leveraging their trust funds and legal vulnerabilities to exert influence over them.

The tension escalates as Grayson reveals Trowbridge's tactics, including feeding Savannah damaging information about her father and orchestrating conflicts within the family. Nash and Jameson speculate on Trowbridge's endgame, with Grayson hinting at a deeper, more personal vendetta. The chapter highlights the Hawthornes' collective intellect and resourcefulness as they dissect the situation, with Jameson particularly energized by the challenge. Grayson's calm yet calculated demeanor underscores his determination to uncover the truth and protect Acacia and her daughters.

The chapter concludes with Grayson awaiting critical information from his private investigator, which will confirm his suspicions about Trowbridge's manipulation of the trust documents. The family's unity and strategic thinking are on full display, setting

the stage for a high-stakes confrontation. Jameson’s anticipation and Grayson’s meticulous planning create a sense of impending action, leaving readers eager to see how the Hawthornes will dismantle Trowbridge’s schemes and restore justice for Acacia and her family.

CHAPTER 93: JAMESON

The chapter opens with the Hawthorne brothers and Avery transitioning from an SUV to a private jet, where Grayson reveals crucial paperwork about a financial trust. The trust's funds are controlled by a trustee until the beneficiary, Savannah, turns 30 or gets married. Grayson's grim expression hints at the urgency of the situation, as Savannah is only 17 and dating the son of Kent Trowbridge, a man with sinister intentions. The group quickly realizes the gravity of the threat, as Trowbridge is manipulating Savannah's mother, Acacia, by draining her finances and using the FBI to pressure her.

Grayson's demeanor turns darker as he describes the abusive behavior of both Kent Trowbridge and his son. He recounts how Kent touches Acacia inappropriately, while his son does the same to Savannah, emphasizing the predatory nature of their actions. The brothers' reactions range from anger to determination, with Nash bluntly suggesting they "take him out." Jameson, intrigued by the challenge, eagerly asks Grayson for more details, signaling their collective readiness to confront the Trowbridges and protect Savannah and Acacia.

Grayson outlines their strategy, revealing he has leverage in the form of potential illegal activities tied to Kent Trowbridge, including suspicions that he emptied Acacia's trust. He mentions a safe in Kent's home office, which he previously attempted to crack, and shares that he has all of Kent's passwords, carelessly stored in his desk. This information excites Jameson, who sees it as a golden opportunity to outmaneuver their adversary. The brothers' confidence grows as they recognize the vulnerabilities in Kent's defenses.

The chapter concludes with Nash, Xander, and Avery exchanging knowing glances, hinting at a shared plan. Xander's grin and comment, "This should be fun," underscore the brothers' playful yet deadly serious approach to the impending confrontation. The

group’s camaraderie and resourcefulness are on full display, setting the stage for a high-stakes showdown with the Trowbridges. The chapter leaves readers anticipating the brothers’ next move, as they prepare to exploit Kent’s weaknesses and dismantle his threats.

CHAPTER 94: GRAYSON

Grayson Hawthorne meticulously plans his confrontation with Kent Trowbridge, a man he views as a straightforward problem to solve. With the help of his brothers, Grayson gathers incriminating evidence against Trowbridge within two days. He chooses a racquetball court as the setting for their encounter, knowing Trowbridge plays there weekly with a federal judge—the same judge who signed an FBI warrant targeting Grayson's sisters. Grayson's calculated appearance in an expensive suit and watch is designed to unsettle Trowbridge, setting the stage for a psychological battle.

The confrontation begins when the judge notices Grayson watching them and confronts him. Grayson remains composed, revealing his identity as a Hawthorne and subtly connecting the judge's warrant to Trowbridge's influence. Trowbridge attempts to dismiss Grayson, but the judge's hesitant response suggests Grayson's tactics are working. Alone with Trowbridge, Grayson drops hints about forensic accountants and a compromised safe, escalating the tension. Trowbridge's growing agitation reveals his vulnerability, while Grayson maintains a calm, almost conversational tone.

Grayson escalates the pressure by reciting the account number where stolen funds from Acacia Grayson's trust were deposited, as well as the combination to Trowbridge's safe. Trowbridge's attempts to deflect—by invoking Grayson's father—are met with icy precision. Grayson implies that the stolen money has been returned, framing Trowbridge for the theft while feigning innocence. The power dynamic shifts decisively as Grayson hints at damning emails, leaving Trowbridge visibly shaken and scrambling for control.

In the final exchange, Grayson's quiet confidence underscores his victory. He suggests the judge may no longer associate with Trowbridge, implying social and professional ruin. Trowbridge's bluster collapses under the weight of Grayson's revelations, and the chapter ends with Grayson's unspoken promise: Trowbridge's downfall is imminent.

The confrontation showcases Grayson’s strategic brilliance and the Hawthorne family’s relentless pursuit of justice—or vengeance—on their own terms.

CHAPTER 95: GRAYSON

Grayson lies awake at Hawthorne House, reflecting on the aftermath of his actions. He has resolved the issues with Trowbridge, secured Acacia’s financial stability, and ensured she has legal representation. Despite these accomplishments, he grapples with lingering questions about his past, particularly the "what-if" scenarios posed by Acacia. His thoughts drift to Nash’s reassurance about his capacity to love, symbolized by the ring hidden in his suitcase. A sudden phone call interrupts his introspection, but it’s not from the person he expects—instead, his sister Gigi arrives unannounced at the gate.

Gigi confronts Grayson about their mother’s restored finances, accusing him of either fixing the situation or convincing their father to do so. Grayson reveals that Trowbridge, not their father, was responsible for the embezzlement. Gigi’s anger is tempered by her inability to stay mad, especially when Grayson has done something kind. She oscillates between frustration and grudging admiration, even joking about her hatred for Duncan. Her playful yet pointed demeanor highlights her resilience and unwavering hope, despite the family’s turmoil.

The conversation takes a serious turn as Gigi presses Grayson about his motives. She challenges his earlier betrayal, pointing out that his actions—helping their mother and defeating Trowbridge—contradict his claim of being untrustworthy. Grayson admits he had no choice, hinting at a dark secret about their father. Gigi insists on referring to him as "our father," refusing to let Grayson distance himself from their shared family. Her persistence forces Grayson to confront the truth he’s been avoiding.

Grayson finally reveals their father’s darkest deed: an attempted murder involving a bomb meant to kill someone Grayson cares about. Gigi is stunned, recalling the media coverage that wrongly blamed their mother. Grayson’s confession shatters her illusions about their father, leaving her to grapple with the reality of his crimes. The

chapter ends on a tense note, with Gigi’s wide-eyed disbelief underscoring the emotional weight of Grayson’s revelation and the fractured legacy of their family.

CHAPTER 96: GRAYSON

Grayson begins the chapter by retrieving a briefcase of photographs from a safe-deposit box and taking them to a hidden desk in his childhood library. Inside the desk, he finds two journals—his father Sheffield Grayson's original and a translated version. He methodically places the photographs of himself, spanning nineteen years, into the desk, this time faceup. As he examines the photos, he notices discrepancies in the dates, particularly the months, which seem intentionally wrong. This discovery hints at a deeper purpose behind the collection, suggesting the photographs may hold coded information rather than sentimental value.

The narrative shifts as Grayson realizes the photos' dates correspond to a hidden numerical system. Over three days, he deciphers the pattern, uncovering seven offshore accounts containing millions of dollars. The accounts, linked to his father's illegal activities, are untraceable. Grayson contacts Alisa to discuss hypothetically leaking the information to the FBI, implying it could divert attention from Sheffield's whereabouts. Alisa agrees that with the right influence, the authorities might cease their pursuit. This revelation marks a turning point for Grayson, who sees it as a way to bury his father's secrets for good.

Emotionally, Grayson reflects on his relationship with Gigi, who now knows the truth about his past but hasn't abandoned him. This acceptance gives him a sense of closure and stability. Later, he unpacks a velvet ring box entrusted to him by Nash, confronting a question he's long avoided: "Why not you?" The ring symbolizes the possibility of love and commitment, a theme Grayson has resisted. He recalls the fabricated story about a girlfriend and Nash's own struggles with relationships, juxtaposing them with Nash's eventual happiness with Libby.

The chapter concludes with Grayson holding the opal ring, finally allowing himself to consider the idea of love and partnership. The question "Why not me?" lingers,

signaling a shift in his mindset. This moment of introspection suggests Grayson is ready to embrace vulnerability and the potential for a future beyond his family’s shadows, marking a significant emotional evolution.

CHAPTER 97: JAMESON

Jameson initiates the rebuilding of a tree house with his brothers, using the opportunity to share fragments of his recent adventures—meeting his father, winning a castle, and saving a duchess. He selectively reveals details about the Game, focusing on its riddles and challenges, including the silver ballerina puzzle. His brothers eventually solve it, prompting Grayson to pose his own cryptic riddle about the nature of a bet, which Jameson obsessively analyzes. The chapter hints at deeper family secrets as Grayson secretly reviews their grandfather’s files, adding intrigue to the Hawthorne legacy.

As the tree house is completed, Jameson finds himself alone with Avery in one of its towers. Their conversation shifts to the Game, with Avery reflecting on its exclusivity to the wealthy and powerful. Jameson recalls his grandfather’s belief that the games were meant to reveal their inherent extraordinariness. The emotional tension between them grows as Avery’s words and touch make Jameson feel validated and seen. Their bond deepens, culminating in a shared vision of creating a new, inclusive game for everyone.

Avery proposes designing an annual game with a substantial cash prize, open to all rather than just the elite. Jameson, captivated by the idea, envisions it as intricate and perfectly crafted. They tentatively name it "The Grandest Game," symbolizing their partnership and shared ambition. This moment marks a turning point for Jameson, who realizes he wants to be more than his grandfather’s legacy—both in his relationship with Avery and in his own self-worth. He resolves to trust her fully, signaling a departure from his past secrecy.

In a pivotal moment, Jameson uses Scrabble tiles to confess a life-altering secret: Alice Hawthorne, presumed dead, is alive. This revelation, spelled out on the board, shocks Avery and underscores the depth of Jameson’s trust in her. The chapter closes with an

unspoken understanding between them, as they commit to forging their own path while confronting the shadows of the Hawthorne family’s hidden truths. The scene blends emotional intimacy with lingering mysteries, setting the stage for future revelations.

SIX YEARS, ELEVEN MONTHS, AND ONE WEEK AGO

The chapter opens with a solemn warning about the intense and singular nature of a Hawthorne man's love, described as all-consuming and eternal. Tobias Hawthorne reflects on his own undying love for his late wife, emphasizing that such love leaves no room for another. This sentiment is framed as both a promise and a caution, suggesting that this depth of devotion is both a blessing and a potential source of destruction. The tone is grave, underscoring the weight of emotional commitment within the Hawthorne family.

Jameson, one of the Hawthorne grandsons, impulsively asks how his grandmother would have viewed him and his brother, Grayson. Tobias Hawthorne deflects the question, stating that the brothers are still "works in progress" and that judgment should be reserved until they are fully formed. This exchange highlights the generational tension and the pressure the grandsons face to live up to the Hawthorne legacy. The old man's response implies that their worthiness of their grandmother's approval is yet to be determined.

The dialogue reveals the Hawthorne family's complex dynamics, particularly the idealized and almost mythologized memory of the grandmother, Alice. Tobias's words suggest that her opinion holds significant moral and emotional weight, even in her absence. The brothers' curiosity about her perspective underscores their desire for validation and their awareness of the high standards set by their grandfather. The chapter paints a picture of a family bound by intense loyalty and unspoken expectations.

The chapter closes with an unsettling yet resigned tone, as Tobias's warnings about love and destruction linger. His acceptance of potential ruin as an inevitable part of deep love adds a layer of fatalism to the narrative. The interplay between past and present, memory and legacy, creates a poignant exploration of love, identity, and the

burdens of familial expectation within the Hawthorne lineage.

EPILOGUE: EVE

The chapter opens with Eve grappling with the death of Vincent Blake, her adoptive father, who succumbs to a second heart attack. Numb and isolated, she retreats to the Blake mansion, where she watches an interview featuring Avery Grambs, the young Hawthorne heiress. Avery’s public persona as a philanthropist and world changer contrasts sharply with Eve’s own sense of abandonment and bitterness. The interview highlights Avery’s decision to give away most of her fortune, a move Eve dismisses as performative, further fueling her resentment toward the Hawthornes and their privileged lives.

Eve’s emotional turmoil intensifies as she reflects on her exclusion from the Hawthorne family, particularly her estrangement from Grayson Hawthorne. Slate, her bodyguard, attempts to dissuade her from fixating on the interview, but Eve remains consumed by envy and unresolved anger. Avery’s announcement of an annual contest with life-changing prizes strikes a nerve, as Eve interprets it as another example of Avery’s effortless superiority and the support system she lacks. The chapter underscores Eve’s profound loneliness, despite her newfound wealth and power, as she realizes money cannot fill the void left by familial rejection.

The interview takes a darker turn for Eve when Avery hints at collaborating with others to design the contests, a reminder of Eve’s own isolation. This revelation hardens Eve’s resolve to take action. She turns off the television, signaling a shift from passive resentment to active confrontation. Eve proposes a deal to Slate, offering him a share of her inheritance in exchange for his help in orchestrating a meeting with Savannah Grayson, Grayson’s half-sister. Her plan suggests a strategic move to destabilize Avery’s world, mirroring the gamesmanship she feels has been wielded against her.

The chapter concludes with Eve positioning herself as Avery’s rival, determined to no longer be sidelined. Her decision to target Savannah reveals her intent to exploit the

Hawthorne family’s vulnerabilities, turning their own dynamics against them. Eve’s internal monologue frames her actions as a long-overdue retaliation, setting the stage for a personal and high-stakes conflict. The final lines emphasize her readiness to play the game on her own terms, marking a pivotal moment in her transformation from a grieving heir to a formidable adversary.