

Chapter 81

Chapter 81 of *We Solve Murders* unfolds with Steve's growing skepticism toward Max Highfield as they travel from St. Lucia to Dublin. His doubts begin to surface when he reads an interview where Max claims that *The Rose of Sarasota* is his best work yet. Disappointed by the film's lack of acclaim, Steve finds himself unable to endure more than eight minutes of the movie, humorously pointing out that Max's character is an army explosives expert called "Joe Blow." Steve's frustration with Max only intensifies as he reflects on how the film's underwhelming plot and characters fail to live up to Max's lofty self-assessment. As the flight continues, Steve's thoughts shift from the film to more personal memories, including his cat Trouble, whom he used to spoil with leftovers from his neighbor's roast chicken. Trouble, spoiled by this indulgence, had grown accustomed to high-quality food, refusing to settle for anything less, much like Steve's own discomfort in the luxurious private Learjet he now finds himself in. Although the jet is undeniably fancy, its cramped space and lack of certain comforts remind Steve that even the most lavish things can fall short of expectations.

Despite the Learjet's luxury, Steve continues to feel a sense of dissatisfaction, noting that it feels smaller compared to the larger private jets he has flown in before. His craving for a bacon sandwich, which remains unfulfilled due to the lack of a private chef, adds to his growing discontent. This moment of discomfort leads him to resolve that once he and Rosie confront Max and uncover the truth about François Loubet, he will avoid flying in private jets again. Sitting with Rosie, Steve reflects on their investigation, acknowledging that they have confirmed Max's identity as Joe Blow, thanks to the network of influencers connected to him. In a rare moment of levity, Rosie teases Steve about the jet's size, and the two engage in lighthearted banter about their encounters with celebrities. These fleeting moments of humor provide a temporary escape from the seriousness of their mission, reminding them of the

importance of staying grounded amid the tension and challenges that come with their investigation.

As their conversation shifts to the more pressing concerns of their investigation, Rosie voices her concerns about the potential threats posed by Eddie Flood or Vasiliy Karpin, two men deeply tied to the criminal elements they're investigating. These individuals represent a dangerous aspect of the world they've ventured into, and both Steve and Rosie understand the stakes have grown higher. However, the conversation takes an unexpected turn as they momentarily discuss a quiz competition, offering a brief respite from the dark realities of their work. This light diversion highlights the contrasts in their lives—Rosie now living on a private island, while Steve finds solace in the companionship of his cat, Trouble. As they reflect on their lives and the inevitability of aging and loss, the conversation takes on a bittersweet tone. Despite the heaviness of their investigation, there's an undercurrent of humor that helps them cope with the weight of their circumstances. Steve then suggests that Rosie might leverage her status as the second-biggest author to meet with Max, proposing a potential collaboration to advance their investigation. They both acknowledge their trust in their colleague Jeff, though they are still wary of Max's involvement with Loubet. Rosie, not convinced of Max's intellectual abilities, recalls his cluelessness in a *Vanity Fair* interview, which further solidifies her skepticism. The chapter ends with Steve contemplating the small inconveniences of flying privately, marking a moment of quiet reflection. This casual thought contrasts with the complexity of their investigation, signaling that even amid the chaos, small, human moments continue to shape their experience. The realization that relationships, even those forged through shared challenges, bring a sense of meaning amidst the turmoil, leaving Steve with a bittersweet understanding of what truly matters in the end.