

Chapter 86

Chapter 86 of *All the Colors of the Dark* opens with Misty eagerly awaiting the arrival of the 42 bus after school. Her anticipation is clear as she waits for Patch, who steps off the bus and is greeted with her joyful leap into his arms. This affectionate moment highlights the deep connection they share. At sixteen, Patch has made the decision to leave school behind and take up a job at the Bell Lewis Company, where he works long shifts, including four bus rides to the mines every day. The underground environment is harsh, and his interactions with the older, more experienced miners are filled with difficulty. Yet, despite the challenges, Patch slowly adapts to the physically demanding tasks—drilling, blasting, and hauling—becoming part of his daily routine. The cold, dark setting reminds him of his past, particularly of Grace, whose memory still lingers in his mind, making the harshness of the mines a constant backdrop to his internal struggle.

In his first week at the mines, a co-worker asks Patch about his love life, and Patch, with a sense of pride, mentions that he has "a girl." As time goes on, Misty matures into a beautiful young woman, and their relationship grows even deeper. Their shared experiences—ranging from outdoor adventures to culinary mishaps—become a significant part of their bond. Patch is both supportive and amused by Misty's attempts at cooking, enduring her dishes, even though some of them challenge his palate in unexpected ways. These moments, filled with laughter and affection, strengthen their connection and reveal the ease with which they navigate their young love. Meanwhile, the Meyers, though observant, see their daughter's romance as a typical adolescent infatuation, though it's clear to the reader that there is more to this bond than they realize. Misty's romantic journey with Patch, though innocent, becomes a pivotal part of her life, and their relationship continues to evolve.

As the seasons pass, Misty earns her driver's license in the fall of 1978, and she and Patch embark on a trip to Petra. While Misty stays comfortably warm in her Mercedes,

Patch's chance encounter with Carol Birch, a mother whose daughter, Melinda, has been missing for four years, marks a pivotal moment in the chapter. Their conversation, held amidst the icy streets of Petra, is filled with a sense of loss and longing that resonates deeply with Patch. Carol, carrying the heavy burden of hope and grief, shares the painful reality of her ongoing search for Melinda. This exchange leaves a lasting impression on Patch, and he leaves the encounter with a photograph of Melinda, a tangible reminder of the search for lost loved ones. The photograph evokes a melancholy within him, as he draws parallels between Melinda's disappearance and his own quest for Grace. The encounter serves as a stark reminder of the unyielding nature of grief and the personal cost of unresolved loss.

Upon returning home, Patch pins Melinda's photograph to his bedroom noticeboard, a quiet symbol of the emotional toll that both Grace and Melinda's stories have on him. Later, under the stars, Patch shares a special, intimate moment with Misty, reflecting on the weight of their lives. Their bond grows as they discuss Patch's work and his persistent search for Grace. The quiet night, filled with conversation and shared vulnerability, offers a brief respite from the complex emotions that both characters are experiencing. Despite their connection, Patch's anxiety about his past and his unresolved feelings for Grace continue to weigh heavily on him. Misty, meanwhile, excels academically and remains a grounding presence in Patch's life, yet her own uncertainties about their future occasionally surface. The playful banter between them—often revolving around silly topics like cupcakes—provides a temporary escape, but the reality of Patch's emotional burden remains ever-present.

While Misty navigates her future with confidence, excelling in her studies and planning ahead, Patch is still caught in the throes of his search for Grace. His efforts, however, bring him little comfort, as the constant worry that his search may ultimately be in vain lingers in his mind. The chapter captures the duality of youth—on one hand, the joy of first love and the other, the weight of unresolved pasts and uncertain futures. Patch's internal struggle is palpable as he continues to carry the burden of his search, questioning if it will ever lead to answers. Meanwhile, Misty's invitation to prom,

extended through the delivery of roses from Jimmy Walters, adds another layer of complexity to Patch's emotional landscape. As Misty encourages Patch to consider the invitation, Norma reminds him of the rumored connection between Patch and Misty, subtly acknowledging the tensions that still exist in Patch's heart. This situation forces Patch to confront his past and his growing feelings for Misty, who represents a possible future that he is reluctant to fully embrace.

The internal conflict Patch faces in Chapter 86 is layered with emotional depth. His growing relationship with Misty contrasts sharply with the lingering memory of Grace, whom he continues to search for despite the mounting uncertainties. Misty's presence in his life offers him moments of happiness, but his unresolved quest for Grace weighs heavily on him. The chapter provides readers with a poignant exploration of youthful love and the complexities of growing up amidst emotional turbulence and uncertainty. Patch's struggle between the past and the present, between his deep love for Misty and the unresolved grief for Grace, serves as the emotional crux of the story, showing the delicate balance of seeking closure while still moving forward in life. As the narrative unfolds, readers are left to ponder the fate of these characters, caught between their desires, their pain, and their potential for growth.