

Chapter 156

Chapter 156 begins with Patch committing himself to an intense week of transformation. With the framing complete and the stucco properly cured, he takes up his brushes to breathe life into the home he has long imagined. Every surface is deliberate—walls painted a clean, bright white, and the shutters colored in a fluid Aegean blue that seems to shimmer like shifting water. These colors trigger deep memories, reminding him of vibrant feathers and sunlit shores. His careful attention to contrast—light and shadow, brightness and stillness—mirrors the internal changes unfolding within him. Each coat of paint doesn't just cover drywall; it reflects years of hopes, grief, and longing for something stable.

He reminisces about dancing on those unfinished wooden floors, tap shoes striking rhythm until joy filled the room. The sound, he recalls, felt like proof he was alive. Determined to match the beauty of his vision, Patch embarks on a mission to locate authentic heart pine flooring. He combs through salvage yards for weeks, inspecting planks for the exact patina and grain he imagined, rejecting anything that fell short of what he saw in his mind's eye. He doesn't just want floors—he wants history beneath his feet, something rooted. In building this house, he is also building memory and meaning.

Patch reflects on the structure's past. There had been just one bedroom once—for himself and his mother—while the remaining spaces were rented to boarders, each carrying their own stories. He recalls a woman who taught him the elegance of cosmetics and a preacher bound for Pearl River County, whose presence seemed to leave behind both questions and silence. Even with five bedrooms now, Patch envisions occupying only a portion of the home. The large den, kitchen, and dining space, crafted for gatherings and ritual meals, especially Thanksgiving, feel more like dreams than practical arrangements. He keeps Grace's voice in his head, reminding

him of the importance of candlelight and tablecloths, of taking the time to honor tradition.

When Saint dubs the sunlit room an orangery—a word unfamiliar to Patch—it sticks. He is enchanted by the light that cascades from the ceiling, illuminating the white walls with a gentle, golden glow each morning. Yet not everything unfolds smoothly. Building the exterior staircase tests his patience. After multiple failed attempts, he calls in Saint’s cousin Patrick, a skilled carpenter, to help complete it during the Labor Day weekend. The final result, almost identical to Patch’s vision, moves him so deeply he throws his arms around Patrick in gratitude, prompting a humorous moment as Patrick pleads for Saint to intervene and release him from the emotional bear hug.

Later, as they all share a comforting meal of Brunswick stew and homemade corn muffins, Saint’s grandmother surveys the home with approval. Her admiration carries weight—not just because of her age, but because of the wisdom she brings. Her words of praise feel like a benediction, validating not just Patch’s hard work but also his ability to create something beautiful out of his pain. This house is more than shelter; it’s a manifestation of survival, a monument to everything he has lost and tried to rebuild. Each brushstroke, beam, and board holds a part of his journey, reminding him that creating something enduring out of chaos is possible, even if it takes time and stubborn effort.

The chapter closes on a note of quiet satisfaction, but also subtle restlessness. The physical work is nearing completion, but the emotional construction—the rebuilding of relationships, the quiet unpacking of grief—continues. Patch sits beneath the soft golden light of the orangery as twilight approaches, listening to the fading echoes of laughter from the kitchen. Despite the beauty around him, a sense of incompleteness lingers. Yet, this moment of stillness—of building something not just with hands, but with heart—is enough to carry him into tomorrow.