

Chapter 74

Chapter 74 of *All the Colors of the Dark* opens with a quiet and intimate scene where Saint helps Patch sift through his father's belongings. Together, they sort through clothes that hold memories of the past, selecting pieces that Patch can wear for the occasion. As Patch changes into the clothes, Saint steals glances at him, a complex mixture of admiration and sorrow in her eyes. Her gaze lingers on the scars that tell a deeper, untold story, the kind only he truly understands. As she reflects on these silent marks, she feels compelled to take action, motivated by a need to understand more about Patch's life and the events that shaped him. Determined, she reaches out to several organizations that might provide answers, including the Federal Missing Persons Unit and the Aileen Plattas Foundation. Her inquiries reveal the existence of small, often overlooked agencies, struggling to preserve memories and provide aid for those affected by loss—agencies whose efforts remain quietly underfunded and largely unnoticed by the broader world.

While Saint is actively involved in trying to uncover more about Patch's past, Patch himself seems preoccupied with his present appearance. Nervously, he admits that he is unsure about how he looks, especially since he feels unprepared for the upcoming event. His discomfort becomes apparent, and to ease the tension, Saint playfully offers him a bright red bowtie, teasing him as he attempts to figure out how to wear it. As Patch fumbles with the tie, the playful exchange helps to diffuse the anxiety that has clouded the moment. Still, the emotional undercurrents between them are undeniable. Patch confesses, in a rare moment of vulnerability, that he has missed her during the time they were apart. Saint, moved by his admission, turns her head, hiding the emotions that are welling up inside of her. Even though she tries to keep her feelings guarded, this moment marks a significant step in their growing connection. They are no longer merely two individuals thrown together by circumstance; they are two

people now bound by a shared history and unspoken bond.

The two of them head out to Main Street, where Saint uses the last of her money to buy a peach-colored bouquet. Despite Patch's hesitation and reluctance to indulge in what feels like a superficial gesture, Saint is determined to follow through. She carries the flowers with an air of quiet purpose, though her thoughts remain scattered. As they walk through the town, they bump into Jimmy Walters, who comments on Saint's outfit, offering a lighthearted remark about Joseph's return. The conversation that ensues brings an unexpected sense of clarity to Saint, as she listens to Jimmy express gratitude for prayers answered. His innocent view of the world, full of hope and simplicity, makes her long for a time when life felt less complicated. However, despite Jimmy's warmth and easygoing nature, Saint's thoughts keep drifting back to Patch, torn between the connection she feels with him and the simpler, more carefree relationship she senses in Jimmy.

After parting ways with Jimmy, Saint returns home to change into dungarees, a more comfortable and familiar choice. As she stands in front of the mirror, she applies makeup with careful precision, choosing colors that remind her of her childhood. There is a sense of nostalgia in this act, as though she is trying to reconnect with the person she used to be before everything got so complicated. She steps outside, camera in hand, and finds herself lying on a blanket in the long grass of the thicket. As the sun begins to set, she captures images of the Tooms house, lost in thoughts of Patch and the emotions she has yet to fully understand. Though the peacefulness of the moment contrasts sharply with the turmoil she feels inside, Saint can't help but acknowledge the growing sense of loss that she feels toward Patch. The more she tries to understand him, the further away he seems, as if the distance between them is only growing with time. The chapter ends on a poignant note, as Saint silently confronts the complexity of her feelings, caught between her past and the uncertain future with Patch.