

Chapter 150

Chapter 150 begins with Patch behind the wheel, pushing through a grueling seven-hour drive that leaves him physically worn and emotionally spent. As the road stretches endlessly before him, drowsiness creeps in, making it hard to focus. He rolls down the window, letting in thick, humid air that does little to wake him but serves as a sharp reminder of the journey's weight. Clutched in one hand is an old ordinance map—creased, weathered, and scribbled on so much that any original markings are nearly unreadable. The river he stops at offers no clarity either; just a muddy current flowing without purpose. Once dreamed-of gold, long since gone, is now replaced by murky silt—an echo of faded hopes. He realizes with each mile that the search for Grace might not end in a miraculous reunion but rather in silence and surrender.

As the outskirts of Monta Clare come into view, a strange heaviness returns. The familiar roads, the worn signs, the houses slightly changed—all seem to mock him with a past he both clings to and wishes to forget. Turning onto Rosewood Avenue, memories he tried to bury resurface uninvited. Parade Hill looms in the distance, a quiet sentinel bearing witness to his failures. Parking just out of sight, he approaches Misty's place, hesitating for a moment. The urge to speak to her is strong, but so is the fear that nothing he says could undo what has already unraveled. He admits to missing the movie she once suggested, a small moment that symbolizes how often he's missed being there for her. Her nod isn't bitter, only resigned—it speaks volumes about the low bar of expectation he's created for himself.

Hoping to salvage something, Patch offers an idea—maybe they could go somewhere, together. Misty gently but firmly declines, explaining that she can't walk the same path again, not when it leads nowhere. It isn't rejection out of spite, but a decision carved from years of surviving disappointment. Before he leaves, she leans in and kisses him on the cheek, a brief, almost tender act that lingers with unspoken

meaning. As he steps away, unsure of what the gesture truly meant, a glint of yellow in the bushes catches his eye. It's a child's hairband, simple and faded, and yet it hits him like a wave—one of those ordinary things that hold extraordinary memory. Bending to retrieve it, he's pulled deeper into reflection, unsure whether it's sorrow or sentiment guiding his next steps.

Just when he builds the courage to turn back and knock on her door, light flares in a nearby window. He peers through it instinctively—and what he sees stops him cold. Misty, smiling faintly, is with someone else. That single glimpse is enough to shatter the fragile hope he carried all this way. He backs away slowly, the hairband still in his hand, his chest tight with realization. The world hasn't paused for him—it has spun forward, without waiting.

The emotional core of this chapter lies in its raw portrayal of regret, longing, and the painful sting of irrelevance. Patch's journey, both literal and emotional, is filled with a yearning to reconnect—to be needed, to be forgiven, and to belong. But the stark reality he faces is that people move on, even when we're not ready. He can burn through gas and time chasing ghosts, but sometimes, the past refuses to offer closure. This chapter doesn't just reveal where Patch has been—it shows how far he still has to go. The silence left in the wake of that flickering window is louder than any words Misty could have spoken. And in that silence, Patch begins to understand the price of absence and the permanence of choices left too long unanswered.