

Chapter 149

Chapter 149 begins as Saint wakes early in the mountain town, a place whose age is stitched into every building she passes. The streets still bear the character of the gold rush era, where miners once labored with little more than hope in their hands and grit in their souls. She walks with her camera, documenting structures like the Chinese Laundry House and the Pollock House, each a testament to lives that came before. The crisp air carries the scent of pine and dust, mixing with her thoughts as she kneels to retrieve a conker fallen from a horse chestnut tree, its texture reminding her of the unpredictability of life. These quiet moments stir memories of the people she's lost and the pieces of herself that vanished alongside them. As the wind rustles the leaves, she's reminded that healing sometimes arrives in fragments—not in clarity, but in presence.

Inside a nearby toy store, Saint's gaze lingers on a handcrafted wooden train, its polished surface catching the light through the window. The shelves are lined with stories—fairy tales, folk legends, historical tomes—offering the comfort of forgotten childhoods. Her attention is pulled toward a mother and child, their exchange light and affectionate. She watches quietly as they read together, the child pointing excitedly at a page in *Where the Wild Things Are*. That title lodges in her thoughts, stirring a mixture of nostalgia and longing. For Saint, these tender, ordinary scenes bring a bittersweet ache, a reminder of what she never had and what was stolen too soon from others. She notes the book's title in her phone, as if holding onto a piece of the moment might help bridge the distance between the lives she investigates and her own.

Back at the motel, she finds Patch just arriving, his face drawn and weary from a long drive through the night. His eyes are rimmed with fatigue, yet they still search hers with quiet urgency. They exchange only a few words, but so much rests between the

lines—unspoken grief, unresolved tension, and the fragile hope that maybe this time they'll understand each other better. Together, they head to the police station to meet Mrs. Reynolds. Patch carries a wrapped canvas—one of his most personal pieces, a painting of the daughter he barely knew. The air is heavy with memory as they enter the building, but there's a shared determination in their silence. Even amid the pain, there is still purpose: connection through remembrance, and through art.

Later at the Blue River Café, Patch's hands shake slightly as he stirs his coffee, his mind tangled in thoughts of Summer Reynolds—the girl he painted yet never met. Saint breaks the quiet with the latest news: DNA results from the Tooms farm have turned up no matches, leaving them with more questions than answers. The sting of disappointment hits Patch hard, and he slams his fist against the table, the sound of shattering china startling nearby patrons. The frustration spills out before he can stop it, a response not just to this moment, but to years of unresolved grief. Saint, ever the steady anchor, quietly apologizes to the waitress and cleans up the mess, her patience as practiced as her heartbreak.

As dusk paints the café windows in shadow, their discussion turns toward the remaining open cases—Summer Reynolds and Callie Montrose. Both girls exist now as names in folders, haunting Patch more deeply than he'll admit. Saint updates him on Richie Montrose, who was recently involved in a violent bar incident, showing how intertwined these lives remain. Patch's voice is tight as he wonders aloud how many more girls there could be, how many might still be lost in the shadows, unnamed and unheard. For every face he paints, another is left behind, a truth that gnaws at him in quiet hours. Saint doesn't offer easy comfort, only her presence and shared resolve. The chapter closes not with closure, but with a lingering question: how do you grieve those you've never truly known, and still keep searching?