

Chapter 163

Patch sat with Saint on the rear deck, the charcoal grill cooling beside them, as a gentle breeze caused white ash to swirl. Earlier that day, he had attended the law offices of Jasper and Coates, both now marked by their wealth, dressed in tailored navy suits and accessorized with gold cufflinks and watches. Uncertainty loomed over him as he awaited the reason for his summons, sharing the waiting area with Mrs. Meyer. Her grip on his hand reflected a profound sorrow, indicative of a tragedy that had stripped her spirit. She appeared a woman shattered by loss, her child's absence weighing heavily on her.

The proceedings were swift. Misty had left her estate primarily to her daughter, with a minor donation to charity; her trust was to be annulled and reallocated. However, she bequeathed a picture to Patch, a poignant reminder of their connection. Jasper, the lawyer, cleared his throat and without fanfare announced, "Charlotte Mary Grace Meyer will be left in the sole custody of Joseph Henry Macauley."

As Patch sipped a beer, pondering, Saint returned from the kitchen, tossing away remnants of their meal. Sitting beside him, Saint commented on Mrs. Meyer's unspoken feelings about the custody decision. Patch shared that she likely anticipated this outcome, while Saint remarked on their grandmother's advanced age, highlighting her inability to provide the vibrant life Charlotte deserved. Their conversation turned to the complexities of parenting, with Patch reflecting on Charlotte's missteps and youth-related indiscretions.

Saint pointed out the difference between their experiences: "Kids do stupid things," she asserted lightly, recalling a whimsical time when she fashioned him a new eye from papier-mâché. The conversation shifted deeper; Patch considered whether he was fit to take custody of Charlotte, aware of the dilapidated Meyer house and the life it represented.

Despite Patch's discomfort, Saint urged him to understand their situation better: "We all see you, Patch. To move forward, we must face the past." This prompted Patch to question what that meant for him, leading Saint to suggest that Misty aimed to liberate him from his burdens. However, Patch hesitated, uncertain about the freedom thrust upon him—"What if I don't want to be free?"

Saint implied that staying in his current state would lead to stagnation and despair. They discussed the unsolved case of a girl from Oklahoma linked to Eli Aaron, whose untimely death left a haunting void. Together, they lamented their lack of fortune, with Saint dryly suggesting that breaks often arrive when one stops searching, prompting Patch to muse on the possibility of this latest girl being Grace, though he dismissed his own hope.