

## Chapter XII

Chapter XII paints a vivid scene of a chilly New York evening on March 10, 2014, where Addie LaRue, filled with a sense of quiet determination, opts for an arduous walk across Manhattan instead of taking the subway. The wind stings her skin, and the winter chill is sharp in the air, but Addie finds comfort in the long, solitary walk. She dislikes the suffocating feeling of being trapped in the underground tunnels, and thus chooses the freedom of walking, even if it means enduring the elements. Her journey culminates at the Baxter on Fifty-sixth, a tall building that houses James St. Clair's apartment, a space that has become a comforting refuge for Addie in the time since their initial meeting. She bypasses the front desk attendant's casual questioning, knowing well that the city's bustling anonymity often works in her favor.

James, with his affable nature and warmth, had drawn Addie in when they first met at a downtown coffee shop, a meeting that began with casual conversation but quickly blossomed into something more meaningful. He wasn't just a fleeting acquaintance, but someone who had shown an unexpected kindness and curiosity, unlike many others in Addie's life. Their connection grew through shared late-night coffees, impromptu ice cream breaks in the dead of winter, and quiet evenings spent talking for hours. Addie cherished these moments, feeling a rare sense of being seen and understood—something she had learned not to expect. James had quickly become someone who offered her a semblance of normalcy, a place to land where she wasn't just an invisible figure in the crowd. Their connection seemed to offer a fleeting sense of home, an illusion of stability in a world that continuously left her adrift.

Once inside James's apartment, Addie allows herself a moment to take in the small luxuries of his life, luxuries she could never truly keep for herself due to her curse. Her inability to hold onto possessions or leave any lasting trace of herself is both a blessing and a curse, leaving her forever untethered. Despite the warm environment of James's apartment, a small, unwanted ring that lies on his coffee table serves as a subtle reminder of her inability to truly claim ownership of any part of her existence. The ring symbolizes the loss and emotional baggage she carries, reminding her of the history that continues to haunt her. Yet, even amidst these constant reminders of impermanence, Addie finds comfort in the space. As she settles in, her thoughts turn back to their growing connection, and she reflects on the conversation they had about their personal lives and the secrets they had shared. James's vulnerability in revealing his struggles with identity and the pressures of his career allowed Addie to see him in a new light. She understands the weight of his fear of being judged and how it aligns with her own burdens of concealment and silence.

Their time together, however brief, offers a moment of clarity for both of them. Their shared confessions, vulnerabilities, and acceptance of one another mark a rare instance where they both feel understood. Addie recognizes the beauty in their connection, not for what it could become, but for what it offers in the moment: a space to breathe, to share, and to be seen as they truly are. Despite the knowledge that their time together is finite, they both find solace in the simplicity of their shared experiences. Addie's visit isn't about rekindling anything from the past or forcing a deeper relationship—it is simply about finding warmth in another person and a brief escape from the solitude that typically defines her life. The apartment, though temporary, serves as a sanctuary of understanding, where Addie can let her guard down and exist in a space that feels, for a moment, like home. Her time spent there reinforces the importance of connections, even fleeting ones, in a world where permanence feels like an impossible dream.