

Chapter 143

Chapter 143 begins with Misty driving her '85 Mustang along Interstate 35, the wind whipping against the window as she and Patch continue their journey. Misty, dressed in boots and a raincoat, hides her blonde hair beneath a soft cream woolen hat. Their first stop is by the peaceful Gold Run River, where Patch rolls down the window to take in the calming stillness, appreciating the tranquility of the moment. This pause is fleeting, and soon they find themselves at the edge of a narrow, deep box canyon, its stark beauty evoking memories of Grace, whose body has long returned to the earth, now part of the landscape.

After a brief rest, Misty leans back in her seat, drifting off to sleep, leaving Patch with his thoughts as the night deepens. Alone, Patch steps out of the car and looks out over the expansive, wooded landscape, the woods stretching out for miles, covering over a million acres. As Misty wakes, she takes his hand, leading him through rough terrain, where they encounter fallen joists, recalling vague and unsettling memories of Tooms's accounts regarding the tragic end of a young girl. The vastness of the landscape and the desolation of the surroundings weigh heavily on Patch's mind, causing him to reflect on the sorrow embedded in this place.

The scenery is vivid and detailed, with great oaks stretching towards the sky and a shimmering stream cutting through the rocks, glinting like shattered glass in the sunlight. Following instructions given by Saint, they navigate through shortleaf pine trees, finally arriving at a rusted sign marking their destination. Patch looks at the sign and exclaims, "This is it," signaling that they have reached the location they were seeking, but his expression is clouded with doubt and uncertainty about what they will find.

Misty, tired from the slow and exhausting walk, reflects on the distance they've covered, noting the road they're on hasn't been used in a long time. Saint's meticulous mapping had helped guide them along the route, which Tooms may have used when accessing the forest, and the possibility of finding something there grows more certain with each step. As they climb a steep trail, Patch expresses disbelief that Tooms could have carried a girl such a long way, a chilling thought that causes Misty to pull her hat and coat tighter against the wind, the harsh reality of their investigation settling in.

As they descend, Patch carefully examines the dirt, searching for clues that might explain what happened in this quiet, secluded place. Soon, they come into sight of the access road, where Misty remembers a storm that had blocked travel during her own

abduction years ago. This revelation sparks a troubling thought in Patch's mind—if the road was indeed impassable, it would have been impossible for Tooms to have buried the girl in this location, adding a new layer of complexity to their investigation.

Returning to their starting point, the silence between them is heavy, each lost in thought as they contemplate their findings. Patch makes a call from home, and Saint answers quickly, as always. Despite their conversation, Patch remains firm in his belief that Tooms is lying, yet the unsettling possibility that the girl may still be alive lingers in the air, unanswered and unresolved. The chapter closes with a sense of tension and uncertainty, as both Patch and Misty grapple with the implications of what they've discovered, unsure of where the truth lies.

This chapter weaves the complex emotions of guilt, frustration, and the search for justice, encapsulating the haunting uncertainty that lingers throughout their investigation. As Patch and Misty move deeper into the unknown, their reflections on the past and the unresolved mysteries of the present converge in a powerful narrative of tension and emotional struggle. The journey continues, but the weight of their findings and the murky future that lies ahead remain a heavy burden.