

# Chapter 168

Chapter 168 of *All the Colors of the Dark* takes the reader on an emotional journey through Charlotte's slow adaptation to her new living circumstances. Initially, she feels a sense of discomfort as she finds herself in the unfamiliar setting of the local public library. The simple act of touching books that have been handled by others before causes Charlotte unease, revealing a deeper insecurity she feels about stepping into spaces that feel foreign. However, as time passes, Patch's presence becomes a calming force, and his selection of books evokes memories of Grace, his late wife. These books, which had been Grace's favorites, start to bring comfort to Charlotte, making her feel more at ease with the act of reading. At first, Charlotte resists Patch's attempts to read aloud, preferring instead to hide behind the sofa, but over time, she becomes captivated by the tales, especially "Treasure Island," marking a subtle shift in her character.

Their routine, grounded in everyday rituals, forms the backbone of their new life together. Early morning walks through the natural world become an important bonding experience for them. Charlotte helps Patch gather birchwood, slowly learning about the nuances of wood selection, and finds herself drawn to the distinct smell of birch. This small, sensory pleasure becomes symbolic of her gradual acclimatization to her new life. Their outings extend beyond nature, as they venture into Main Street, where they stop by Sammy's gallery. Sammy, intrigued by Charlotte but unsure how to engage with her, watches her closely, noting the bluntness in her demeanor. Her directness, especially in response to Sammy's quirky suggestions about social norms, contrasts sharply with his expectations. Still, her unvarnished authenticity earns a silent respect from him, as he begins to appreciate the unfiltered honesty she brings to every encounter.

In the studio, Patch attempts to nurture Charlotte's artistic abilities, pushing her to embrace the use of oil paints despite Sammy's reservations about her age and skill level. Patch's decision to encourage her comes from a place of belief in her potential, yet it also serves as a way to work through his own creative block. For Patch, the weight of expectations from New York dealers looms large, as they await his next body of work after a long hiatus. This external pressure exacerbates his internal struggle, as he juggles the responsibilities of being a father and an artist. Amid this tension, Patch and Charlotte share moments of levity, especially during their meals at Lacey's Diner, where Charlotte's messiness while eating contrasts with Sammy's distaste for the chaos. Sammy reminisces about past kitchen disasters, but his discomfort is tempered by the joy of being in their company. These moments showcase a warmth and understanding between them, as they navigate the complexity of their shared lives and support each other through their individual struggles.

Charlotte's afternoons spent with her grandmother, Mrs. Meyer, are quieter and more introspective. The relationship between the two women is fraught with subtle tension, especially regarding the unresolved grief Charlotte feels over her mother, Misty's death. Charlotte avoids speaking about Misty or visiting her grave, a clear indication that she is still working through her emotions in her own way. In contrast, Patch and Mrs. Meyer often exchange their concerns about Charlotte's emotional well-being, each trying to understand how best to support her. While the passage of time has softened some of the sharpness of their grief, the underlying pain remains, a testament to the complexity of loss and healing. Through these interactions, the theme of healing becomes central to the chapter, as both Charlotte and her family members navigate the ongoing journey of moving through their collective grief. The connections between them are rooted in love and understanding, even when words are unspoken, and this quiet bond forms the emotional core of their story.