

# Chapter 170

Chapter 170 opens with Patch sorting through a stack of mail, his thoughts interrupted by his daughter Charlotte's discomfort with her sneakers. He notices an envelope that stands out from the rest, catching his attention, but before he can delve into its contents, the day takes on a new course. By midday, Patch has made the decision to take Charlotte out of school, their destination unknown, as they begin their journey along Route 63. The office staff, witnessing their departure, watches with concern, unsure of the reasons behind this abrupt decision. As Charlotte gazes out of the car window, the landscape gradually shifts from the urban sprawl to the peaceful calm of the countryside, crossing over the Missouri River and passing through Jefferson City, symbolic of their emotional transition, leaving the chaos of the daily routine behind.

Their journey continues with a stop in Columbia for lunch, where Charlotte opens up about her dreams and ambitions. She tells Patch of her desire to be a writer and attend Harvard, aspirations that seem deeply rooted in her connection to her late mother. Their conversation reveals the complexity of Charlotte's emotions, particularly her thoughts on her unplanned existence. While Charlotte embraces these ambitious goals, there's an underlying current of uncertainty, as she admits her life feels like it's been lived out of someone else's design. As the conversation unfolds, they both reflect on what could have been, but also on the beauty of pursuing dreams, however uncertain. As their journey progresses, Charlotte experiences a wave of nausea, which offers a brief, humorous moment to break the tension, but also illustrates the physical toll that the trip is taking on her. By the time they reach Minneapolis, they find themselves searching for a house that appears abandoned, adding to the sense of unease and the strange energy of the whole journey.

Later that evening, in the quiet of their room, Patch takes a moment to call Saint, seeking reassurance about their emotional journey. From the bathroom, he shares his growing doubts about the mission and the emotional weight it carries, particularly the strain it is placing on Charlotte. He tells Saint about a letter he found that mentions another missing girl, Rosie, but the conversation soon turns serious, as Saint expresses her concern over Charlotte's absence from school and the toll it could take on her. Their exchange delves deeper, with Patch admitting his feelings of guilt and the impact of those feelings on his choices. Saint, while supportive, challenges Patch's motivations, questioning whether his relentless search for missing girls and redemption is the right path, especially at the expense of Charlotte's emotional well-being. The complexity of Patch's emotions comes to the forefront, highlighting his

struggle with survivor's guilt and the haunting need for answers. The underlying tension builds as Saint presses Patch on his choices, making him reflect on his actions in a way that he had not yet done before.

As the chapter concludes, Patch sits in reflective silence, contemplating the distance between himself and Saint, both physically and emotionally. His mind drifts to the question of why Saint never painted him, a question that haunts him and lingers in the air, unresolved. In the stillness of the moment, Patch feels the weight of their shared history and the unspoken emotions that have yet to be addressed. The chapter closes on this unresolved note, as Patch contemplates his place in Charlotte's life and the complex, often painful, relationships that have shaped his journey. As he gazes at his daughter under the moonlight, the sense of isolation he feels from the people around him is palpable, yet so too is the quiet hope that lingers, despite the turbulent past.