

Chapter 177

Chapter 177 begins with Patch lingering outside a red-brick gallery on Wooster Street, where a large crowd has gathered for an exhibition showcasing his artwork. The setting pulses with energy as visitors mingle under warm evening lights, sipping drinks and discussing the bold visuals inside. Though Patch is the artist behind the show, he feels like an outsider among the well-dressed attendees—many of whom he doesn't recognize but who seem to know his name. Within the gallery walls, Charlotte and Sammy have arranged early sketches he never intended to share publicly. These pieces, once raw experiments, are now exhibited with care and intention, each one named after a missing girl. Instead of offering full biographies, the curators provide a single note beneath each frame—a small truth or haunting clue about a girl's life, turning the art into silent tributes. These fragments of identity serve as emotional landmarks, guiding viewers through an unspoken story of loss and remembrance.

The emotional weight of the gallery intensifies when a woman from Sacramento purchases one of Patch's more desperate pieces—something he'd drawn during a long, sleepless night. When she tells him the image holds pain and beauty in equal measure, Patch nods but internally resists the idea that art can redeem the trauma it reflects. He walks away quietly, uneasy with the idea that suffering can be admired when framed and hung in a room. Outside, he catches a glimpse of Saint, his daughter, dressed in a soft pink gown that echoes the memory of her late mother, Misty. The resemblance is so striking it freezes Patch in place, overwhelming him with sorrow and gratitude in equal parts. Time seems to collapse as the present merges with his past, and for a fleeting moment, he's back in a life he can't return to. That collision of then and now makes him realize how much still remains unresolved.

Saint joins him with a warm smile, sensing his emotional retreat before he can explain it. She gently teases him about avoiding the crowd, guessing that he's uncomfortable

playing the role of the celebrated artist. Their exchange moves quickly from casual humor to deeper introspection, revealing how much Patch struggles with the expectations placed upon him. He admits to feeling like he's faking his way through life, wearing a mask even in front of those he loves. Saint listens patiently, her presence grounding him in the moment. When he talks about dreams of escape—of finding peace by the sea or disappearing onto a boat—she doesn't laugh but nods with quiet understanding. Her ability to hold space for his sadness reflects her maturity and empathy, traits that mirror Misty's quiet strength.

The focus shifts when Patch brings up "Grace Number One," a painting he refuses to sell despite multiple offers. He describes it not as a masterpiece, but as a tether to something real—something sacred. To part with it would feel like abandoning Grace, a figure deeply woven into his emotional past. Saint doesn't press him to explain further but simply places a reassuring hand on his arm. The silence that follows feels more powerful than words, a mutual recognition of grief shared and endured. Patch then asks if she still plays piano, to which she responds with a soft smile and a "yes." The simplicity of that affirmation carries hope, a sign that continuity still exists even when so much has been lost.

The chapter ends with an embrace between father and daughter, the kind that speaks of survival and shared history rather than perfection. Around them, the city buzzes with its usual rhythm, but for a few precious moments, time slows. Patch may not have all the answers, but in Saint's arms, he feels a flicker of meaning—a reason to keep going, to keep creating, and to keep believing that love, even when fractured, can still heal in unexpected ways. Through these final quiet moments, the story reaffirms that while pain may leave its mark, connection remains one of the few things strong enough to carry us forward.