

Chapter 187

Chapter 187 of *All the Colors of the Dark* presents Patch's introspective moments as he looks through a narrow, tall window in the prison. This view, which resembles a flipped letterbox, offers only a limited perspective, revealing stretches of the prison yard and a distant water tower. The sight triggers memories of the world beyond the prison, where life continues to unfold in its usual chaotic way. He imagines people discussing the Monica Lewinsky scandal, Hillary Clinton's challenges, economic shifts surrounding the Dow, and tragic school shootings, all events he is removed from but feels deeply. The stark contrast between the vibrant world outside and the silence within the prison walls highlights his sense of isolation.

The prison itself, one of the oldest in America, holds a deep history within its worn walls and dusty corridors. From his vantage point, Patch can see the contrast between the old structure and the new prison construction happening nearby. The laborers, who work on the emerging structures, leave each day, returning to their homes, a stark reminder of the life and freedom that Patch is denied. For him, the daily act of washing off the construction dust symbolizes a kind of cleansing that he can never experience. The weight of this difference in their lives is not lost on him, making every small detail about their freedom feel even more significant.

Despite the passage of time, Patch's life in prison has remained largely unchanged. He follows the same routine, starting each day early to carry out his tasks, with a particular focus on managing the prison library. The library serves as his intellectual escape, where he has dedicated himself to building an art reference section and providing self-help and therapy materials for fellow inmates. With over four thousand books and a strict operational structure, the library stands as a brief respite from the harsh realities of prison life, offering Patch and others a fleeting moment of normalcy. In these quiet hours spent surrounded by books, he finds solace, even if it is only

temporary.

Cooper, a librarian who shares the space with Patch, brings some levity into the otherwise sterile environment. They engage in light-hearted banter, with Cooper joking about the persistent construction dust that finds its way into the library each day. This camaraderie, however small, provides a rare moment of connection in the otherwise isolating environment of the prison. Over time, Patch's relationship with Cooper deepens, and he eventually writes a letter to Warden Riley, advocating for change after spending 513 days in confinement. This letter, though simple, marks a pivotal moment in Patch's long-standing quest for a sense of agency and influence over his circumstances.

One afternoon, after lunch, Patch is called from his cell by Blackjack, a towering and intimidating guard known for his stern demeanor. In their brief conversation, Patch and Blackjack share a moment of unexpected humanity, with Blackjack asking about Patch's daughter's school project. Despite the light-hearted nature of their exchange, the guard's underlying confusion about Patch's past reflects the ongoing complexities of the relationships that form in such a confined, controlled space. This interaction, although brief, reveals a side of Blackjack that is less hardened and more human, offering Patch a rare moment of connection amidst the otherwise grim atmosphere of the prison.

In this chapter, the story delves into Patch's internal struggles and observations as he contemplates his life in prison. The contrast between the outside world, filled with vibrant activity and events, and the still, isolated existence within the prison walls highlights the emotional toll of confinement. His daily routines, interactions with fellow inmates, and the ongoing longing for a sense of connection illustrate the complexities of life behind bars. Through his reflections and the relationships he forms with others, the chapter explores themes of isolation, longing, and the human desire for connection and meaning even in the harshest of environments.