

# Chapter 8

Chapter 8 opens with a heavy atmosphere hanging over the town, as an unsettling tragedy casts its long shadow across the streets. The usual sounds of the day are absent, replaced by an eerie quiet that hangs in the air, amplifying the sense of loss. Children continue to play, but their laughter rings hollow against the backdrop of grief. At the heart of the scene is Saint, who watches Chief Nix, the town's reliable authority figure, now burdened by a grim responsibility. His usual approachable smile is absent, replaced by a stoic expression that marks the seriousness of the event unfolding before him.

As Saint observes Nix's actions, her thoughts drift back to the time spent with Patch in the woods, the carefree days that are now irrevocably changed. Her body feels the weight of the past, with each memory of Patch making her heart tighten. The warmth of their shared adventures, such as playing games with makeshift stick guns, now brings a bittersweet ache. These nostalgic moments, once filled with lighthearted joy, are now tinged with sorrow, and Saint feels the rawness of Patch's absence in every corner of her life.

Despite her personal turmoil, Saint watches Chief Nix as he handles the situation with authority, making sure that everything is in order. He outlines the lockdown procedures for the town, ensuring that the search efforts are methodically conducted. The restrictions are tight, and the town's movement is carefully monitored to avoid chaos while the investigation continues. Saint finds herself silently acknowledging Nix's leadership, though her mind lingers on Patch, wishing she could speak out about his bravery and the goodness she saw in him. The thought of not being able to properly honor him fills her with frustration, as she feels an internal battle between wanting to speak her truth and feeling overwhelmed by the magnitude of the loss.

The chapter shifts to a disturbing moment when a group of dogs is released from a vehicle, signaling that the search for Patch has entered a new phase. Ivy Macauley, another local resident, reacts violently when she encounters the remnants of what is left of Patch's fate. Her scream rings out, a sharp cry that reverberates through the air, symbolizing the communal grief that sweeps over everyone. The shock of Ivy's reaction, so different from her usually controlled demeanor, serves as a reminder of how deep the pain runs, even in those who try to mask it. As Ivy's emotions spill over, she comes face to face with the horrific reality of the situation—a bloodied shirt that now represents everything they've lost.

In the midst of this, Pattie Rayburn, a local woman who had been in the area, offers crucial information about the last time Patch was seen. Her words confirm what everyone feared—that Patch is indeed gone. The town, once filled with everyday routines, now carries a collective weight of sorrow that will not easily dissipate. Saint feels the gravity of it deeply, her heart heavy with the realization that their world has changed irreparably. The loss of Patch is felt not only by Saint but by the entire town, as they all grapple with the void left by his absence.

This chapter ends on a note of profound sadness, as the search for Patch continues but with little hope of finding him alive. Saint, along with the rest of the town, must now process the harsh reality of what has happened. The loss is not just personal for Saint but for everyone who knew Patch and loved him. This chapter underscores the deep emotional impact of the tragedy and highlights the inner turmoil that Saint must navigate as she moves forward. It marks a significant turning point in her journey, as she must come to terms with the grief that surrounds her and seek a way to carry on, even as the world she knew seems to crumble around her.