

Chapter 16

Chapter 16 opens with Saint, who is dressed in navy overalls and a white blouse, walking into the room where her grandmother, Norma, is sitting at the table, reading *The Tribune*. Norma looks up, and in a concerned tone, remarks that Saint appears too thin, to which Saint quickly dismisses her worries, stating that she is perfectly fine, despite always having dirt under her nails. Norma, ever the caretaker, suggests that Saint wear her wedge sandals to church, which she reluctantly agrees to do. As they head to church, Saint can't help but feel increasingly distant from the people around her. Beneath the brightly colored stained-glass windows, she stands, feeling emotionally detached from the priest's sermon about forgiveness and God's love, especially when that message clashes with the internal conflict she feels.

During a prayer for a missing child, the silence in the church grows heavier when Ivy Macauley, a local woman, enters alone. Her presence in the church is somber, her eyes heavy with grief. Saint notices the atmosphere shift but is momentarily distracted by Jimmy Walters, a classmate who attempts to catch her attention, but she purposely ignores him, aware of how much he likes to seek her out. Norma, observing the exchange, comments on the boy's possible affection, but Saint quickly dismisses it, sarcastically commenting on Jimmy's obliviousness. As the priest invites everyone to pray, Saint kneels with a deep sense of unease, her hands clasped tightly as she hopes for the safety of her missing friend, praying silently for some sign of relief amidst the growing sense of dread.

After the service, Saint has a conversation with Misty Meyer, who shares her thoughts on Monta Clare. Misty acknowledges the town's beauty but points out the hidden dangers, such as crime and fear that no one talks about openly. Saint, who admires Misty's calm demeanor, listens to her, but Misty's admission about being frightened of the "pirate kid" suggests the fear that has gripped the town. Misty expresses her

regret about not going straight to school on a particular day, indicating that she feels responsible for something that happened, though the details remain vague. Their exchange brings a sense of shared understanding as both girls navigate the complicated world they live in, dealing with their own fears and a reality far different from their childhood idealization.

As their conversation shifts, the two girls talk about the complex pressures of living in a small town. Saint brings up her grandmother's view that certain people, like a local bus driver, make others work harder, which feels like a heavy truth to both of them. Misty, known for her wit, humorously suggests that the bus driver's health risks, including his smoking habit, could be another contributing factor to the stress in their lives. The conversation grows awkward, yet it's a thoughtful exchange about the burdens they bear and the challenge of expressing themselves in a world that pressures them to be something they're not. They each face their own set of expectations placed on them by the people around them, making it difficult to simply be themselves in the midst of a society that values conformity.

As they continue to chat, Misty shares more about the societal expectations that weigh heavily on her, especially the unspoken rules about how girls should behave around boys. Saint listens attentively, recognizing the complexities of those expectations and the ways in which they shape both her and Misty's actions. There's a palpable shift in their conversation, as Misty reveals her struggle to navigate these pressures, and Saint contemplates how to deal with the growing pains of adolescence. But before they can continue, Misty makes an unexpected revelation—she saw Dr. Tooms, a figure tied to the unsettling mysteries in their town. This shocking admission leads to more questions than answers, deepening the sense of fear and unease that both girls have been trying to shake. The chapter closes on this revelation, leaving Saint and Misty in a state of heightened awareness, uncertain of what lies ahead.