

Chapter 96

Chapter 96 of *All the Colors of the Dark* begins with Nix supporting an emotionally overwhelmed Saint following a traumatic event. Saint, wearing a torn dress, frantically searches through the house, her movements driven by haunting memories of her friend, Jimmy Walters. The emotional weight of the situation is palpable as she desperately tries to find something that will give her closure. The house, filled with shadows of the past, becomes a physical representation of her grief and frustration. As she moves from room to room, the air is thick with the anguish of unresolved pain, and Saint's actions become increasingly erratic. Her heartache, over the loss of a friend and the deep loneliness she feels, is evident as she searches tirelessly, hoping to uncover some form of resolution that has eluded her for so long.

Nix, understanding the intensity of Saint's emotions, attempts to physically restrain her while offering emotional support. Despite Saint's protests and her attempts to continue her frantic search, Nix remains calm, providing a sense of stability that Saint desperately needs in her fragile state. The contrast between Saint's emotional chaos and Nix's composed demeanor highlights the tension in their relationship. As Saint's tears flow, revealing years of hidden pain, Nix's silence becomes a powerful form of comfort. He doesn't offer solutions or empty reassurances, but simply remains there, sharing in her grief without judgment. This moment of vulnerability showcases the depth of their connection, as Saint allows herself to lean on Nix, even though her emotional turmoil remains largely unspoken.

Their conversation then delves into deeper territory as they reflect on faith and promises made. Saint recalls a vow she made to God, promising to lead a righteous life if only her friend, Patch, would return to her. The weight of this promise hangs heavily over her, reflecting her desperate desire for resolution and the inner conflict she feels about the choices she has made. Nix, ever empathetic, listens without mocking her

beliefs, offering quiet reassurance that despite the difficult road ahead, there is hope. He speaks of the future, reminding Saint that she has possibilities, such as attending Dartmouth, even if that future seems distant amidst her current pain. Nix's ability to acknowledge Saint's feelings without belittling them offers her a rare moment of comfort, showing that she is not alone in her struggle.

The tension in the scene intensifies with the arrival of Deputy Harkness, who enters with a sense of duty but also compassion. Saint, desperate for answers and driven by a need for justice for those who have gone missing, urges Harkness to consider the possibility that another girl is out there, lost like the others. Her plea emphasizes her deep commitment to finding the truth, even as the search seems to be slipping further away. Nix and Harkness briefly discuss a shared childhood memory of a hidden storage cellar, adding a layer of personal connection and history to the investigation. Their mutual knowledge of the land serves as a subtle reminder of the ties that bind them to the place and the past they are trying to understand. As the conversation shifts, the three of them begin to work together, searching through piles of wood for any evidence that might provide a clue.

Despite the lack of a formal warrant, Harkness is moved by his empathy for Saint's cause and agrees to assist in the search. Frustration builds among the group as they sift through the debris, but Saint's determination never wavers. Time seems to be running out, and she pulls away at the rotten timber with an urgency born of her need to uncover the truth. As the wood is cleared, a set of steps is revealed, leading down into the darkness, an ominous discovery that sends a chill through the group. The tension that has been building throughout the chapter reaches a boiling point as the prospect of uncovering something significant looms larger than ever.

The chapter reaches its peak as Saint, driven by a mix of dread and resolve, steps down the creaky wooden steps. The air is thick with the weight of their collective fear as they follow her lead into the darkened depths. Harkness shines his flashlight, illuminating a grim and horrifying discovery: a single mattress soaked in blood, a scene that evokes both horror and despair. The sight marks a significant turning point

in their investigation, solidifying the frightening reality of what they have been searching for. This discovery is not just a physical find but also a metaphor for the darkness that has been lurking just beneath the surface of their quest for answers. The unsettling nature of what they've uncovered leaves them with more questions than answers, propelling the story forward into a more chilling and complex chapter of their journey.

