

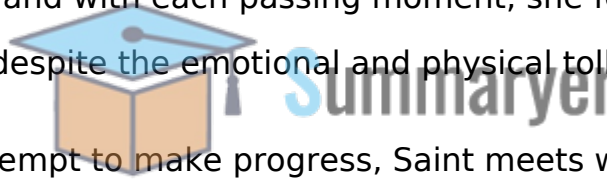
Chapter 15

Chapter 15 opens with Saint engulfed in emotional turmoil, her days consumed by the aftermath of a life-altering event. Four days have passed since the incident, and during this time, she has been unable to sleep or eat, leaving her drained and restless. She spends the majority of her time wandering aimlessly through the woods, the silence offering no solace, and standing outside the local police station in hopes of getting answers about the case that has taken over her life. Her repeated visits, however, have begun to wear thin with the officers inside, and her presence is no longer seen as a concerned citizen but as an irritating inconvenience to their routine. As she waits outside, she struggles to suppress the growing sense of helplessness that has gripped her, knowing that time is slipping away with every unanswered question.

The narrative shifts focus to a meeting between Officers Cortez and Harkness, who are casually discussing the case. As they flip through files, they speculate on the motivations of the boy involved in the incident Saint is investigating. Cortez suggests that the boy may have stolen out of necessity, while Harkness talks about the boy's background, hinting at his impoverished circumstances and difficult upbringing. The contrast between the officers' laid-back conversation and Saint's intense emotional state is jarring. As Saint listens from the waiting area, her frustration mounts as the officers engage in trivial discussions about coffee, pastries, and even football, completely oblivious to the weight of the situation that has been consuming her every thought. Their lack of urgency only serves to deepen Saint's sense of isolation, as she watches them casually go about their business while she is trapped in a world of unanswered questions and mounting dread.

While eavesdropping on the officers' conversation, Saint hears a name that resonates with her—John Stokes. She recognizes this name instantly, having heard it tied to troubling events within the community. The officers briefly mention Stokes' troubled

past, including his family's chaotic home life and the lack of proper documentation, further complicating the boy's case. The discussion paints a grim picture of the environment the boy is coming from, yet the officers continue to speak of it with such detachment, as if it were just another case to be solved rather than a life hanging in the balance. Saint, in contrast, is deeply affected by this new information, her mind racing as she tries to piece together the significance of these details. It becomes clear to her that the boy's life, his future, and the truth of what has happened are all inextricably linked, and with each passing moment, she feels more determined to uncover the truth, despite the emotional and physical toll it is taking on her.



On Friday, in an attempt to make progress, Saint meets with Daisy Creason, a reporter from The Tribune, in hopes of gaining more public exposure for the case. Daisy listens attentively to Saint's story, showing genuine interest and compassion for the boy's situation. This meeting becomes a pivotal moment for Saint, as she begins to see the possibility of the story reaching a larger audience. Daisy promises to write an article and help organize a reward fund, an idea that gives Saint a renewed sense of hope. The idea of involving the community, of getting others to care about the boy's plight, feels like a breakthrough, and for the first time in days, Saint allows herself to feel a glimmer of optimism. Yet, despite this newfound sense of purpose, Saint can't shake the overwhelming sense of time slipping away. The four days that have already passed seem like an eternity, and though her actions are starting to make progress, the weight of the waiting game continues to bear heavily on her. She feels that she is losing precious time, unable to move forward fast enough to ensure that the boy will be found and that the truth will come to light.