

Chapter 83

Chapter 83 of *All the Colors of the Dark* presents a scene filled with tension and self-reflection as Saint spends an anxious hour in Miss Kline's store on Main Street. The store, typically closed at this time, remains open thanks to Miss Kline, who recognizes the silent plea in Norma's eyes. As Saint steps into the fitting room with a cream corduroy midi dress, the atmosphere becomes charged with uncertainty. From behind the curtain, Saint vocalizes her dissatisfaction, feeling self-conscious and unattractive, exclaiming, "I look like a tartlet." This moment highlights Saint's deep insecurities and frustration with her appearance, which only intensifies as she tries on different outfits. Miss Kline, ever the accommodating figure, suggests a watercolor house dress as an alternative, but Saint dismisses it, wishing she could present herself with the grace and poise of the "birthday girl's mother." The scene captures Saint's inner turmoil as she struggles to meet the external expectations placed upon her while grappling with her own sense of inadequacy. After trying on several options, including an abstract red psychedelic print and a red and blue maxi that doesn't flatter her figure, they eventually settle on a black floral dress with a white collar, which, although a compromise, does little to ease Saint's discomfort.

As Saint continues her preparations, she tries on the black floral dress and is met with her grandmother's comments on its length. Saint, in her usual self-deprecating manner, responds with a quip about her own height, which reflects her ongoing battle with her self-image. This interaction highlights the tension between Saint's desire for approval and her constant self-criticism. Her discomfort deepens when she inspects her grandmother's outdated makeup box, filled with products that seem too old and unsuitable for the moment. Specifically, she grimaces at the foundation dating back to 1955, its age a stark contrast to the contemporary event she is preparing for. The makeup, once a tool for self-enhancement, now feels like a reminder of the gap

between the past and the present, adding to Saint's growing sense of disconnection. When Norma steps out to fetch Mrs. Harris, a neighbor who works at the Monta Clare Funeral Parlor, Saint's unease only increases. The mention of Mrs. Harris's association with the funeral home heightens Saint's anxiety, creating an undercurrent of discomfort as she wonders how Mrs. Harris might affect the final outcome of her preparations. The setting, with its old-fashioned makeup and the looming presence of Mrs. Harris, seems to amplify Saint's internal struggle with the pressures of appearances and her own insecurities.

Upon Mrs. Harris's arrival, she attempts to reassure Saint by explaining her experience handling difficult situations due to her work with corpses, an attempt to calm the nerves of the young woman. Despite Saint's sarcastic remark, calling the situation a "freak show," Mrs. Harris proceeds to offer her help with styling Saint's hair. The tension between them rises as Saint resists, firmly requesting that her braid remain untouched, a simple yet significant act of asserting control over her appearance. The twenty minutes spent on styling are filled with both frustration and reluctance, as Saint feels the weight of each passing moment, growing more anxious about the upcoming event. Despite her reservations, she finally descends the stairs, where her grandmother, eager to capture every moment, awaits with a camera. The incessant clicking of the camera only intensifies Saint's discomfort, making her feel even more like a spectacle than a participant in the moment. Her frustration with the constant photographing becomes a focal point, representing her struggle to assert her identity in the face of external expectations. The chapter not only showcases Saint's external discomfort but also underscores her internal conflict—her desire to fit in and be seen for who she truly is versus the overwhelming pressure to conform to the roles that others assign to her. As Saint faces the complexities of her own self-image, the narrative delves into the emotional strain that comes with growing up in a world filled with both visible and invisible pressures, where one's appearance often dictates how they are perceived and valued.