

Chapter 21

Chapter 21 of *All the Colors of the Dark* captures a somber atmosphere as Saint sits at the piano, playing Chopin, with her grandmother, Norma, quietly watching from her rocking chair. The loss of Joseph Macauley continues to affect Saint deeply, as she struggles with grief that manifests in disrupted eating and sleeping patterns at school. She finds herself often staring at the empty chair where Joseph used to sit, unable to escape the weight of his absence. This emotional burden fills Saint's every moment, from her isolated musings at the piano to her behavior at school, underscoring how loss can dominate one's thoughts and actions. Norma, ever present, tries to provide comfort, but the grief remains a heavy, constant presence in their lives.

The narrative shifts when Saint, overwhelmed by the sadness and confusion of her emotions, locks herself in the kitchen to brood over her thoughts about Joseph. Norma, worried about her, seeks help from Chief Nix, who brings in Doctor Tooms, the family physician, to discuss the troubling situation. Although Doctor Tooms offers a sympathetic smile, it becomes clear that the weight of the case and the unresolved questions surrounding Joseph's disappearance create a tense environment. This tension is compounded when Saint, unable to let go, becomes fixated on watching the Tooms family property with a spy telescope, a sign of her need to regain control over a situation that feels out of her hands. Her obsession with observing the house highlights the way grief can sometimes drive individuals to irrational actions, further complicating her emotional turmoil.

As time goes on, the reward for information about Joseph's disappearance grows to two thousand dollars, but the media's interest in the case begins to wane. In the midst of this, Saint becomes more aware of larger societal issues, particularly after reading about alarming incidents such as violence against women. These new realizations spark conversations with Norma about women's rights, autonomy, and societal control

over women's bodies, exposing the generational divide between them. Norma's views on these topics differ from Saint's growing awareness of these issues, illustrating the clash between older, more traditional perspectives and the evolving views of the younger generation. Through these discussions, Saint begins to understand the broader societal forces that shape her world, yet she feels distanced from the conventional views her grandmother holds, creating an internal conflict that grows throughout the chapter.

As summer fades into fall, Saint finds herself wandering the woods, lost in a restless state that seems to invite danger. Norma, concerned for her well-being, suggests that Saint consider counseling, but Saint dismisses the idea, feeling disconnected from conventional solutions to her pain. She struggles with her identity and physical appearance, unsure of how to reconcile her inner turmoil with the outside world. Despite Norma's attempts to guide her, Saint feels adrift, unsure of where to turn as she tries to navigate the complex emotions of grief, loss, and self-discovery. Her behavior in the woods reflects a search for something—perhaps clarity, or simply an escape from the overwhelming weight of her thoughts. Yet, in rejecting conventional methods of coping, Saint is left to confront her challenges alone, her isolation deepening.

The chapter also touches on the shifting dynamics within the community, particularly with Ivy Macauley, Joseph's mother, visibly shattered by her own grief. The impact of public events, like Ronald Reagan's presidential campaign, also colors Saint's perspective, adding another layer of complexity to her world. These external events serve as a backdrop to Saint's personal struggles, highlighting how the world around her continues to move forward, even as she remains stuck in a place of emotional paralysis. The contrast between the broader societal changes and Saint's internal conflict paints a vivid picture of the turmoil she feels. As the chapter concludes, Saint's feelings of existential uncertainty intensify, leaving her at a crossroads where the world around her shifts, but she remains caught between the past and the uncertain future that lies ahead. The weight of these experiences leaves her questioning not only the meaning of her grief but also her place in a world that seems increasingly difficult

to navigate.



Summaryer