

Chapter 131

Chapter 131 begins with Saint secluding herself in her apartment for a stretch of two weeks, determined to trace the movements of a mysterious figure she refers to as “the pirate.” Assisted by Himes, she immerses herself in a vast archive of interviews, surveillance tapes, and old answering machine recordings from her grandmother’s collection. With each passing day, she sinks further into this obsession, allowing the voices and places from the past to temporarily replace the weight of her present. The blinds remain drawn, casting the apartment in constant shadow, while the only nourishment she allows herself comes from simple canned meals that require little effort or distraction. This isolation becomes her way of coping, her escape into a maze of voices and mapped memories.

Saint overlays her research with deeply personal recollections, drawing from fragments of her grandmother’s vivid stories and her own faded memories. She marks her large wall map with layers of colored pins and ink, identifying regions that once held emotional weight. The Oklahoma sky over Baldy Point, the wide waters of Lake Altus-Lugert, and the deep historical gravity of Fort Sumter in South Carolina are all represented. With each mark, she isn’t just plotting geography—she’s charting the psychological terrain of a girl’s journey, attempting to inhabit that same perspective. She comes to believe that this pirate, the person she hunts, may be walking through these places not by coincidence, but by intention—experiencing what the girl once did. The weight of these connections propels her forward, even as her physical self becomes drained.

On the fortieth hour, Saint surfaces from her research fog and finds herself standing by her apartment window, looking down at Monta Clare. It’s not just a town anymore; it’s a reference point in a story that spans decades and geography. As snow settles over rooftops, she’s transported back to long-lost moments with Patch, flooded by

emotional echoes tied to mining towns, eastern cities, and western plateaus. Her journey isn't just forensic—it's emotional, bound by old roads that Joseph Macauley once traveled. She traces his routes across a sprawling landscape: from the quiet bends of Cottonwood Falls to the bustle of New York City, and from the coastlines of New England to the quiet isolation of Montana.

Each path brings her closer to the truth she seeks. On the fifth day, after re-listening to one particularly significant tape, her pen draws a thick red circle on the map—bold, deliberate, unmistakable. This place, this convergence, feels right. She sees the pattern now. The pirate hasn't been wandering aimlessly; he's been following a story. A path laid down by a girl whose life left traces—emotionally and geographically. Saint feels the electricity of revelation as the pieces finally align, a culmination of solitude, memory, and obsession.

The clarity she gains shifts something inside her. For the first time in weeks, she picks up her phone and calls Himes. Her voice carries urgency and resolve: "The pirate. He's seeing what the girl saw. I think I know where he's headed next." Himes, startled by the confidence in her tone, offers no interruption. The call ends quickly, but the momentum has returned. Saint begins to gather her things, her map folded under one arm, eyes alight with purpose. She knows this chase isn't just about catching someone—it's about preserving a legacy, reclaiming a lost truth, and perhaps redeeming the pain she's carried for too long.

For readers, this chapter is more than a turning point in the mystery. It reflects the psychology of obsession, the way grief and memory can intertwine and drive someone to extreme focus. Saint's devotion to understanding the girl's journey underscores how trauma echoes across generations, and how healing sometimes begins with putting the pieces of another's life back together. The use of maps, tapes, and layered memories creates an almost archaeological approach to storytelling, reminding us that recovery—whether of justice or self—often begins with patient, meticulous work.