

# Chapter 204

Chapter 204 of *All the Colors of the Dark* takes place in the quiet town of Monta Clare, where the community gathers to mourn the loss of one of their own, Norma. As Saint walks down Main Street, she is struck by the collective sadness that hangs in the air, seeing store owners standing solemnly at their doorways, offering a quiet tribute to the town's shared grief. The mood is somber, especially at St. Raphael's church, where the service is held not just to honor Norma's memory but to help the town find a sense of unity in the face of such loss. Saint, who has been entrusted with playing the organ for the ceremony, pours her emotions into the music. As she plays Chopin, the sounds of the piano fill the church, reverberating through the congregation, and Saint feels herself pulled into the gravity of the moment. The music, beautiful yet heavy, underscores the emotion in the room as everyone reflects on Norma's life, which, despite its simplicity, had been full of strength, resilience, and enduring love. The ceremony provides a rare moment of collective solace, as the townspeople come together to pay their respects and remember the woman who had been so integral to their lives.

After the service, Saint navigates her way through the crowd, her eyes scanning familiar faces—some of them local residents and others who have traveled from far away to honor Norma's memory. As she makes her way toward the back of the church, she spots Nix, who gives her a bittersweet smile, his eyes reflecting a sorrow that echoes the collective mourning of the community. Sammy is also present, dressed in a sharp pinstriped suit and a pink cravat, his cane resting against the stone next to him. His presence, although dignified, speaks to the emotional weight he too carries. Saint can't help but reflect on the fragility of life and the ways in which people cope with grief. Her thoughts briefly wander to Joseph Macauley, who despite being absent, had sent her a simple yet meaningful winter scene card. The card, though modest, holds

more significance than the simplicity of its image—reminding Saint of the shared past and the complex, unresolved emotions that linger between them. As the burial ceremony proceeds, the sun shines down on the gathering, and Norma is laid to rest in a final resting place close to the house filled with cherished memories, rather than being returned to the city where her husband and daughter now rest. The town honors Norma's final request, and in doing so, they also acknowledge the deep sense of belonging and connection she had within this community, one that continues to endure in her absence.

Following the burial, the townspeople gather for a modest reception on a small lawn, with Mrs. Meyer organizing the event. Lacey provides sandwiches, and Charlotte offers a selection of cakes, creating a warm, communal atmosphere despite the grief that lingers in the air. Saint moves through the crowd, exchanging pleasantries with the townsfolk but inwardly struggling with the emotional heaviness of the day. She finds herself avoiding the inevitable hugs and attempts at comfort, seeking some semblance of solace in familiar faces. She finally spots Sammy once again and hesitates before accepting a drink from his flask. The warmth of the alcohol provides a brief escape, but Saint quickly regrets her decision, feeling the weight of the day intensify with every passing moment. As the afternoon begins to wind down, Charlotte retreats to the porch, immersing herself in a book, while the quiet peace of the afternoon is disrupted by the sudden ringing of the phone in the kitchen. Saint, standing alone in the kitchen, answers the call, and her world shifts with the unsettling news that Eli Aaron has just visited the area. Sister Cecile's voice, delivering this unexpected information, serves as a sharp contrast to the peaceful atmosphere Saint had been attempting to create. The realization that Eli Aaron is involved in the unfolding events drags Saint back into the complexities of life beyond the grieving process. The chapter closes with this sudden interruption, marking a turning point in the narrative where the soothing rhythms of mourning are replaced by the harsh reality of unresolved tensions and imminent challenges. This moment serves as a powerful segue, suggesting that while the community has come together to mourn, there are deeper, more personal battles awaiting Saint that will demand her attention in the days to come.