

Chapter 33

Chapter 33 of *All the Colors of the Dark* presents a chilling encounter between Saint and Eli Aaron, a large, imposing man whose appearance perfectly matches his secluded life in the woods. Clad in a plaid shirt, rugged boots, and torn jeans, Eli carries himself with an air of someone well-acquainted with solitude and survival. Saint, though intrigued, feels a growing sense of caution as she nervously asks him if he can make her a model. Eli, however, doesn't respond as she expects, instead questioning her about walking alone in the woods, while casually warning her of the presence of wild snakes. As their conversation continues, a palpable sense of unease hangs in the air, as Saint feels that something about Eli's demeanor is far from ordinary. Her instinctual response mirrors what New York Detective Roger Gable often described as "the feel"—an unsettling sensation of hidden danger beneath a seemingly harmless exterior.

Eli's response to her innocent question about being a model is filled with subtle jealousy as he studies the poster she holds, his gaze lingering longer than necessary. Throughout their interaction, Saint carefully conceals her true intentions, sensing that she is in a dangerous environment but unsure how much she can trust Eli. In a bid to mask her growing discomfort, she listens as Eli reveals fragments of his life—stories of his grandmother, his thoughts on the economic strain caused by rising gas prices, and his grievances about global issues like embargoes and the Israel conflict. Yet despite his attempts to seem open and casual, Saint remains wary. His remarks, while offering insight into his character, do little to put her at ease. Instead, his words leave her with a growing awareness that there is more to him than meets the eye, and not all of it feels safe.

As Saint is led deeper into Eli's home, the atmosphere becomes even more unsettling. She notices the walls, lined with dark-framed photographs that depict haunting, desolate scenes, each image exuding a somber beauty that feels out of place. The presence of a large crucifix on the wall only adds to the heavy air of isolation that seems to permeate every corner of the room. Saint, instinctively distancing herself from him, begins to process the disarray surrounding her. The cluttered room, filled with old books, dirty dishes, and a grimy mattress, paints a portrait of someone entrenched in loneliness and turmoil. Despite her growing sense of discomfort, she remains cautious, learning that Eli is familiar with Misty Meyer, a girl from her school. This revelation leads Saint to steer the conversation toward Misty's fate, hoping for some clarity. Eli, however, responds with a disquieting memory of observing bears

during the salmon season, a seemingly harmless topic that does little to ease Saint's apprehension.

Although the conversation flows without direct confrontation, the underlying tension continues to build within Saint. She begins to feel the weight of her decision to come here, her instincts urging her to leave but her curiosity forcing her to stay. Eli eventually leads her to his darkroom, a space that only intensifies her fears. Inside, the cluttered machinery and ominous red lighting cast an eerie glow over the room, making it feel suffocating and disorienting. The constant hum of the generator, combined with the dark, shadowed corners, creates an atmosphere of dread that Saint cannot ignore. With every passing moment, her anxiety escalates as she feels more and more trapped in Eli's world—a world where nothing is quite as it seems.

By the end of the chapter, Saint's realization of the danger she's in becomes unavoidable. What initially appeared to be an innocent meeting with a curious stranger turns into a deeply unsettling encounter that reveals a darker reality. The sense of unease that has been growing throughout their exchange solidifies into a terrifying awareness: she has entered a situation that is far more perilous than she could have ever anticipated. What had started as a simple exploration of the woods has now transformed into a life-threatening predicament, as Saint comes to understand that the danger surrounding her is real and imminent. In that moment, she fully grasps that she has entered a world of violence, deceit, and fear—a world from which escape may be far harder than she imagined.