

Chapter 81

Chapter 81 of *All the Colors of the Dark* unfolds as Saint and her grandmother, Norma, spend time at the Castor River Shut-Ins, a peaceful area where nature offers a rare moment of solace. The stunning pink granite formations provide a beautiful backdrop as Saint, with her Nikon camera, captures the breathtaking scenery. She also takes a photograph of a Saint Bernard happily playing in the plunge pools, a symbol of carefree joy amidst the surrounding serenity. The tranquility of the environment contrasts sharply with the deep emotional struggles both women face. As they continue their walk through the Amidon Memorial Conservation Area, the mood shifts when Norma, concerned about Saint's emotional state, brings up the topic of Joseph. The conversation reveals the strain that's been building up within Saint, as Norma's protective nature manifests in her worry about how much this turmoil is affecting her granddaughter. Saint's response, however, is more focused on her own feelings of confusion, as she finds herself caught between supporting Joseph and understanding the emotional toll it's taking on her.

Norma's concern grows as she asks how much Saint is truly affected by Joseph's cryptic and disturbing messages. These messages, filled with rambling thoughts about dreams and a mysterious girl, have clearly been on Joseph's mind for some time. Despite how troubling these messages are, Saint remains steadfast in her determination to help him, believing that her involvement could offer him the clarity he needs. Norma, however, is less sure about this approach. She worries that Saint's fixation on Joseph's situation could cause her emotional harm, and she voices her concerns about Joseph's obsessive thoughts and how they might be affecting Saint's well-being. Their conversation becomes a tug-of-war between two distinct emotional perspectives: Norma's protective instincts, which urge Saint to let go of Joseph, and Saint's own deep-seated need to be there for him, despite the uncertainty surrounding his mental state. This emotional divide speaks to the broader theme of loyalty and self-preservation, as Saint wrestles with the desire to be supportive while recognizing the need to prioritize her own emotional health.

When they return home, a new complication arises in the form of an invitation to Misty Meyer's sixteenth birthday party, an event that initially seems unrelated to Saint's emotional turmoil. Saint, still preoccupied with Joseph's situation and the mystery of the girl from his dreams, struggles to understand the significance of attending a party in the midst of her emotional chaos. Her focus is entirely on Joseph, and she feels disconnected from the celebratory nature of the occasion. However, Norma encourages her to attend the party, suggesting that it might be a good way to distract

herself and, more importantly, that Joseph will be there. This brings Saint into a new internal conflict: she feels obligated to attend because of Joseph's presence, yet her mind remains clouded with worries about him. She's torn between the need to experience normal social interactions, like attending Misty's party, and her obsessive fixation on Joseph's troubles. Norma, sensing the struggle, reminds Saint that Joseph has not lost everything, which adds another layer of complexity to Saint's already difficult emotional state. The party invitation, once a simple social obligation, now carries much more weight for Saint. It becomes a symbol of the divide between the life she feels she should lead—one filled with connection, community, and celebration—and the life she feels consumed by, which is tied to Joseph's painful uncertainty. The chapter closes with Saint left in a state of indecision, questioning what she truly needs and how she can balance the competing demands of love, loyalty, and personal growth.