

Chapter 15: Ruthie

In *Chapter 15: Ruthie*, the narrative begins with Ruthie stepping into a small, musty room that seems to hold the echoes of both joy and sorrow. This room, filled with family memories, acts as a backdrop for Ruthie's emotional turmoil as she faces her brother Joe's terminal illness. Ruthie, unfamiliar with the reality of death and the emotional complexity of such an intimate relationship, enters with a sense of both dread and anticipation. She has never experienced anything like this before, especially when it comes to a loved one. The reunion, though tense at first, evolves as Joe reluctantly opens up to her. Although he initially expresses a desire to be left alone, he eventually accepts her presence, acknowledging the physical discomforts that have become his new reality due to his illness.

As Ruthie and Joe begin their conversation, Ruthie confronts the emotional weight of reconnecting with her past identity. For years, she had been known as Norma, a name that she had abandoned in order to live a different life. Now, as she is once again referred to as Ruthie, she is forced to come to terms with a past she had long since distanced herself from. This name, once a part of her, now feels foreign and uncomfortable, yet it also serves as a reminder of the family and history she has tried to leave behind. However, with encouragement from Mae and Ben, family members who offer emotional support, Ruthie starts to shed her discomfort and slowly begins to accept her place within this family. In a symbolic act of reconnection, Joe gives Ruthie old boots and a sock doll, meaningful objects that connect her to her childhood and her family's past. These items, once simple and insignificant, now take on a greater significance, serving as tangible links to a life that Ruthie had abandoned.

As Ruthie continues to reconcile her past with her present, her mother's expression of hope and longing for Ruthie's return serves as a powerful reminder of the love that has endured despite years of separation. This heartfelt moment highlights the depth of

familial bonds, which, no matter how fractured, remain steadfast. In this conversation, Ruthie's true heritage is also revealed: she is Mi'kmaw, a revelation that complicates her sense of self as she tries to understand her place in the family and her connection to her roots. While Ruthie feels the warmth of love from her family, she also grapples with feelings of guilt and unresolved trauma stemming from decisions she made in her younger years. These feelings of guilt are rooted in her past choices, which led her to sever ties with her family. The internal conflict Ruthie faces is palpable, as she struggles to fully accept her place in this family and navigate the complexity of reconnecting with people and memories she had tried to forget.

Later in the chapter, the family embarks on an outing to visit the ruins of their old home, a place where shared laughter briefly provides relief from the underlying tension. Despite Joe's declining health, he insists on enjoying the little time he has left, demonstrating his determination to cherish moments of joy, even in the face of death. This day spent together, though filled with sorrow, also highlights the beauty of being present in the moment and creating new memories with loved ones. As the family gathers beneath a starry sky at the end of the day, Ruthie finds herself reflecting on the connection she has rediscovered with her family. This serene moment, despite the surrounding pain of loss, reinforces the importance of family bonds and the healing power of shared experiences. The chapter closes with a bittersweet acknowledgment of Ruthie's journey toward healing and acceptance, illustrating the emotional depth of reconnecting with one's roots and the complex nature of familial love.