

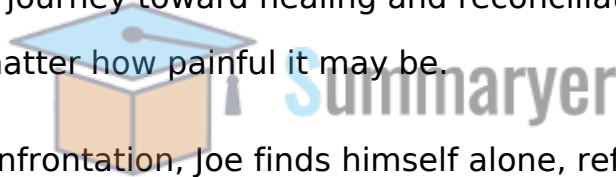
# Chapter 9: Joe

Chapter 9: Joe's journey through recovery following the accident is a constant battle against pain, both physical and emotional. From the moment he wakes until he finally tries to sleep, the lingering pain consumes him. It is a constant reminder of the accident and the anger that seems inseparable from his experience. His dreams are plagued by the sounds of sirens and hospital machines, bringing the trauma of that night back to the forefront every time he closes his eyes. Despite relying on the medication his aunt provides and using alcohol to numb his feelings, Joe feels trapped in a cycle of suffering. No matter how much he drinks or how many pills he takes, the grief and rage remain. His family's efforts to help him seem futile, and Joe's own sense of helplessness grows stronger. He becomes increasingly resolute in believing that the pain and anger will be a permanent part of his life, marking him with the same scars that he carries physically and emotionally.

While recovering in a tiny room at a rehab center in Halifax, Joe's fixation on blaming Mr. Richardson, the driver involved in the accident, grows. His mother tries to reason with him, asking how anyone could have noticed the shadow in the road on a dimly lit Sunday night. Yet, Joe refuses to let go of his anger and resentment, choosing to hold Mr. Richardson entirely responsible for his current state. The weather outside, often dreary and matching his mood, becomes another trigger, pushing Joe further into bitterness. As months pass, the weight of his feelings becomes unbearable, and he cannot see beyond the immediate pain he is experiencing. This refusal to let go of his negative emotions traps Joe in a cycle of suffering, keeping him from finding peace with the situation or his past.

During his six-month stay in rehab, Joe misses out on family traditions, something that exacerbates his sense of alienation and deepens his despair. As spring approaches, he attempts to adjust to his new life, trying to get around with the aid of a cane, but his

reliance on alcohol to cope with pain only complicates his recovery. Mae, who cannot watch her brother's destructive spiral any longer, confronts Joe, pushing him to acknowledge how his self-indulgence is damaging not only himself but their mother as well. She makes it clear that he needs to take responsibility for his actions, particularly regarding Ruthie's death, and stop using his pain as an excuse for his behavior. Joe, feeling cornered, lashes out at Mae, but her blunt words cut through his anger, forcing him to confront uncomfortable truths about his misplaced guilt. Her tough love helps him realize that his journey toward healing and reconciliation must begin with taking responsibility, no matter how painful it may be.



Weeks after this confrontation, Joe finds himself alone, reflecting on Mae's words, and a turning point comes when he privately apologizes to her. This small but significant act of humility marks a shift in his perspective, pushing him to begin actively engaging with his family and taking on responsibilities once again. Returning to work allows Joe to reconnect with the world he once knew, and the memories of the garage reinvigorate his sense of purpose. At the same time, he begins to form a bond with Cora, a waitress from a local diner. Their relationship offers him a sense of normalcy amidst the chaos of his emotional world. Cora's kindness becomes a contrast to Joe's turbulent inner life, and despite his mounting guilt and growing alcohol dependency, he finds solace in her company. However, this new connection only intensifies Joe's internal battle as he struggles to manage his demons. Eventually, the combination of his drinking and unresolved anger leads to a horrific act of violence, shattering his relationship with Cora and forcing him to confront the full extent of his destructive tendencies. This event becomes a wake-up call for Joe, and in the aftermath, he is overwhelmed by guilt and despair. His only choice seems to be to flee from the destruction he caused, abandoning the life he had started to rebuild in the process. This chaotic descent into regret marks the next chapter of Joe's tumultuous journey, filled with both reflection and sorrow.