

Chapter 17: Ruthie

Chapter 17: Ruthie begins with the serene passing of Joe on a Sunday morning, his final moments marked by peace and quietude. Surrounded by the love of his family, Joe's departure, though heavy with sorrow, was filled with the warmth of those he held dear. Leah, struck by the profound sense of loss, clung to Joe's hand, tears streaming down her face as she kissed his hand, mourning the brother she would never again share her life with. Mae and the narrator, well-versed in the hardships of life and death, kept their composure. They stood firm, embodying the strength of women who had faced sorrow before, offering support without breaking down. Ben, standing nearby, was prepared to guide Joe's spirit away, a silent witness to the transition. Meanwhile, their mother distanced herself from the emotional scene, retreating to the living room to quietly watch the finches, her gentle sobs filling the silence as she found her own way of grieving.

After Joe's passing, his wishes were honored, and his body was cremated. His ashes were carefully divided, one portion laid to rest in Nova Scotia beside Charlie, his brother, and the other sent to Maine, a place that had deep significance in their family's history. A funeral service took place, followed by a quiet ten-day period in which Leah and the narrator found solace in their shared grief. They then set off together to the berry fields, with Joe's ashes securely placed in the back seat, their journey a symbolic return to the roots of their shared history. This return, though bittersweet, represented an act of honoring Joe's life and legacy, and the journey back to the berry fields symbolized the process of both remembrance and healing, as they sought to find peace in the familiar landscape.

As they arrived at the cabin, Leah marveled at the way the fading evening light caught the cabin's sparkling paint, a testament to Joe's craftsmanship. The intricate details of the flowers, clouds, and shimmering blue waves that adorned the cabin brought forth a

flood of memories. These markings were not just decorative but reflective of the time and love Joe had poured into the space he had built with his own hands. Leah ran her fingers gently along the patterns, feeling a connection to her father in the process. The cabin stood as a silent witness to Joe's dedication and artistry, and in that moment, Leah, along with the narrator, was reminded of the beauty he had created, which would forever be a part of their lives.

When they laid Joe's ashes beside the steps he had once constructed, the act was laden with deep personal meaning. The narrator, holding Leah's hand tightly, couldn't help but notice how much Leah resembled her, a poignant reminder of their shared past and the family that had shaped them both. As the ashes were laid to rest in such a sacred place, the narrator began to feel a profound sense of peace slowly washing over her. The heaviness of the past, the pain of loss, and the weight of unresolved emotions began to lighten, giving way to a bittersweet closure. The act of burying Joe's ashes, in a place so connected to their family history, symbolized the end of an era and the painful yet necessary transition into a life where Joe would no longer be physically present. Yet, the memories, the love, and the bond they had shared would live on in this sacred space, where his presence would be forever felt. This ritual was not merely a farewell but a profound acknowledgment of the enduring impact Joe had on their lives, a final act of love and remembrance as they navigated the difficult path of loss and healing.