

Chapter 13: Joe

Chapter 13: Joe finds himself at a crossroads as he lies in a hospital bed, contemplating the reality of his declining health and reflecting on the choices that have led him here. Regret and longing fill his thoughts, especially when he thinks about his daughter, Leah, with whom he feels an overwhelming sense of estrangement. His mind drifts back to memories of past hiking trips, where the beauty of nature offered fleeting moments of peace, and he is left yearning to reconnect with a family he has distanced himself from. The inability to restore his place in Leah's life, compounded by his deteriorating condition, stirs deep feelings of sorrow and missed opportunities. Joe's reflections are clouded by the pain of lost time and the fractured relationships that continue to haunt him as he confronts the inevitable end of his life.

A pivotal moment in the chapter occurs when Joe, while hiking, injures his ankle after discovering a plastic doll hidden in the underbrush. The doll, once a symbol of innocence and childhood, becomes a painful reminder of the connections Joe has lost over the years. Trapped in the wilderness overnight due to his injury, Joe engages in a one-sided conversation with the doll, expressing his desire for a simpler time when family meant more, and life was less complicated. This interaction becomes an introspective exploration of his emotional state, revealing his longing for the family he once had and the deep regret that continues to weigh on him. The solitude of his situation magnifies these feelings, as Joe is forced to confront his own isolation and the consequences of his past actions. This moment captures the emotional struggle of a man who is trying to come to terms with the lost opportunities and relationships that have shaped his life.

Upon returning to civilization, Joe's reflections lead him back to a familiar area, where he spent his earlier years picking berries. It is here that he crosses paths with Ellis, who offers him a job that, though humble, provides Joe with a sense of routine and

purpose. As he begins to reconnect with his past through this work, the act of restoring a long-abandoned cabin gives him something tangible to focus on. The physical labor becomes a metaphor for his emotional repair, as Joe works to transform the decaying structure into a semblance of home. The memories of childhood summers spent in the area flood back, and Joe reflects on the relationships he lost—particularly with his siblings—feeling a heavy guilt for the familial responsibilities he neglected. His physical effort to restore the cabin symbolizes his internal desire to rebuild what was once broken, but he is burdened by the emotional weight of what has been lost.

As Joe continues his journey of physical and emotional restoration, his efforts to repair the cabin become a form of catharsis. The work brings him a sense of solace, but it is clear that the pain of his past is never far from his thoughts. His interactions with the cabin and the landscape around him serve as a mirror for his internal struggles, particularly as he reflects on the lost opportunities with his daughter and the unresolved issues surrounding his brother's death. The complexity of his emotions deepens when he encounters Frankie, a figure from his past, which stirs up old trauma and unresolved pain. A confrontation ensues, forcing Joe to face the anger and grief that have been buried for so long. This encounter propels him back into the darker corners of his history, forcing him to reckon with the deep emotional scars left by his relationships, particularly with his brother Charlie.

Ultimately, Joe's journey is one of redemption and self-awareness, a man trying to find peace while grappling with the weight of his past. His internal struggle between regret and the desire for reconnection underscores the complex nature of his character. The chapter ends with Joe contemplating his decisions and the reality of returning home, signaling a potential shift in his willingness to confront past wounds. It is clear that he is on the edge of healing, uncertain of what the future holds but ready to face the past with the hope of finding some form of resolution.