

Chapter XII

In Chapter XII, the narrator finds herself overwhelmed by the chaos erupting around her and the noise of conflicting voices in her head. She begins by fleeing from Will Junior and the dilapidated house, rushing past her friend Lester Swan and Bobbi. After ignoring the discomfort of seated kids, she hides beneath a cot in the back of the bus alongside Samson, trying to block out the turmoil by plugging her ears and humming. Unfortunately, the incessant chatter persists, along with a new voice belonging to Will Junior, who entices her with secrets.

In a moment of desperation, she yells at Will, insisting he needs to wash his hand, appealing to him while feeling the weight of secrets she is reluctant to share. As confusion mounts, Fish, her brother, reacts to her distress without asking for context. He engages Will Junior, whom he perceives as a threat, leading to a physical altercation. Amid the brawl, the narrator screams for Will Junior to wash his hand, heightening the tension. The consequences of Fish's escalating emotions manifest through climate change—the bus windows start to shatter as his power surges.

Once outside, she witnesses Fish's confrontation with Will Junior, whose ink-doodled palm starts to symbolize deeper issues as storm clouds form overhead. In a climactic moment, acknowledging her distress, Fish spits into Will Junior's hand to smear away the ink drawing—a messy yet profound act of solidarity and protection. With this act, Will's secret vanishes, leaving only the echoes of the narrator's own conflicting versions of reality.

As order is restored, Will Junior, visibly flawed with a blackened eye from Fish's earlier punch and spitting incident, wipes off the ink while the narrator reflects on the burdens of adolescence. Finally, overwhelmed and weary, she slips her thoughts away, wishing for reprieve from her troublesome teenage existence as support from her brother allows her to relax for the first time. Carlene and Rhonda, voices in her mind, quip about the usual trouble that seems to follow everyone involved.