

Five: Joe

In the chapter titled "Joe," the narrative opens with Joe's mother, who dismisses the search for Joe's missing sister, Ruthie, urging them to accept she's gone. Despite her sadness, she tries to find solace in the belief that Ruthie is out there living her life. Joe, now the youngest child since Ruthie went missing, feels the weight of this responsibility, supporting his mother through her grief by simply being present and attentive.

The family's circumstances have changed significantly, with fewer berry pickers and a diminishing community at their camp. Joe reflects on the summer he turned fifteen, nostalgic for the joyous moments overshadowed by Ruthie's disappearance. He recalls the anticipation for a local carnival, an escape from the enveloping sadness, and the chance to interact with a girl named Susan.

While picking berries, excitement builds in Joe as the carnival's trucks rumble past, indicating the approaching festivities. However, his joy is short-lived as he witnesses a violent altercation involving his brother, Charlie, and a local bully, Archie Johnson. The violence unfolds quickly; despite Joe's pleas for Charlie to back down, Archie attacks him, leading to a brutal confrontation where Charlie defends the drunken Frankie, who is initially the target of Archie's rage.

As the situation escalates, Joe flees to find help from his siblings, the glitter of the carnival contrasting sharply with the brutality happening just behind the tents. Charlie, injured severely, needs assistance, but by the time Joe and Ben arrive, it's too late. The episode showcases the fragile nature of their familial bonds in the face of violence and loss.

Joe grapples with immense guilt and anger when, ultimately, Charlie dies from the injuries sustained in the attack. The chapter concludes with the family's painful departure from Maine, burdened by grief and unresolved issues from the night's event. The mother's anguish and Joe's regret amplify the chapter's themes of loss, the inescapability of violence, and the deep emotional scars that linger long after the physical ones heal.