

# Seven: Joe

In this chapter of *\*The Berry Pickers\**, we witness Ben, a protagonist confined to his bed and grappling with pain and mortality. Each day is marked off on a small calendar, indicating how few days he has left. His body is weakened by illness, though the presence of family members like his brother Ben and daughter Leah provides some comfort. Leah arrives every Tuesday, bringing light into Ben's otherwise shadowed life. Despite her warmth, there is an emotional distance between them; Leah has never referred to him as "Dad," a point that weighs heavily on Ben.

As Leah chats with Ben, memories flood back. He reflects on his past, including his sister Ruthie, who disappeared when he was a child. Leah's casual mention of Ruthie's disappearance feels haunting, indicating a significant emotional burden carried by the family. This memory triggers a poignant discussion about hope and loss, showcasing Leah's innocence as she processes information about a sibling she never met.

Ben's reflections turn darker as he recalls life after losing both Ruthie and his brother Charlie. The family tries to move forward, with Ben working several jobs and Mae pursuing independence, struggling to find love in a world that seems indifferent to their sufferings. Meanwhile, Ben's earlier political activism against injustices becomes a subplot, hinting at the passion that drives some to fight against the odds.

The narrative shifts dramatically when Ben's brother returns from Boston with a shocking revelation: he claims to have seen Ruthie alive in the city. This fuels a clash of emotions among the family members, marked by a mixture of hope and scepticism. The anticipation of potentially reuniting with Ruthie brings new tension into the home.

The chapter concludes with the frail Ben navigating memories of his past and the weight of expectations as he considers the possibility of finding Ruthie, a journey that seems to encapsulate both despair and the flicker of hope for closure. The emotional peaks and valleys illustrated in this chapter convey the universal struggle with loss, longing, and the complexity of familial love.