

Seventeen: Ruthie

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Joe passed away on a Sunday morning, departing quietly and peacefully, surrounded by the love of his family. Though he had spent much of his life in solitude, he was tenderly cradled in the affection of those who remained. Leah was heartbroken, mourning him with tears, holding his hand, and planting kisses upon it. In contrast, Mae and the narrator maintained their composure, embodying the strength of women accustomed to sorrow. Ben stood nearby, poised to guide Joe's spirit away, while their mother preferred to distance herself from the scene, watching the finches from the living room and sobbing softly.

Respecting Joe's final wishes, his body was cremated. His ashes were divided, with one half laid to rest in Nova Scotia next to Charlie and the other half destined for Maine. Following a funeral service and a period of ten days, Leah joined the narrator in returning to the berry fields, with the ashes secured in the back seat.

Upon arriving at the cabin, which retained its charm with paint that sparkled in the fading evening light, Leah admired the delicate craftsmanship of her father. She delicately traced the outlines of flowers, clouds, and the shimmering blue waves, reflecting on the beauty he had created.

Together, they laid Joe's ashes to rest beside the steps he had constructed. Hand in hand with Leah, her resemblance to the narrator was striking, and in that moment, the narrator began to release the burdens of her past, allowing a sense of closure to wash over her. The ritual of burying Joe's ashes in such a cherished location signified not just an act of remembrance, but also a poignant farewell, marking a significant transition in their lives as they navigated the landscape of loss.