

Thirteen: Joe

In this chapter, Joe grapples with the impending reality of his situation as he contemplates his life from a hospital bed, filled with regret and longing. He reflects on his connections, particularly his daughter, Leah, whom he feels estranged from due to past transgressions. His mind wanders back to memories of hiking, nostalgia for lost family, and a desire to reclaim his role in Leah's life—something he feels unable to do due to his deteriorating health.

A significant moment occurs during a hike when Joe injures his ankle after discovering a plastic doll, symbolizing his lost connections to childhood and innocence. Forced to camp out overnight due to his injury, he converses with the doll, revealing his yearning for the family he has distanced himself from. This interaction highlights his internal struggles and the emotional weight of his past actions.

Upon returning to society, Joe's reflections lead him back to a familiar area where he once picked berries. He encounters Ellis, who offers him a job. The work provides Joe a routine and purpose as he begins reconnecting with the past he had left behind. Despite the bittersweet memories tied to the long-abandoned cabin, he embarks on a personal restoration project, transforming the decrepit building into a semblance of a home where he indulges in manual labor. His journey evokes strong memories of childhood summers, interwoven with reflections on lost siblings and guilt over familial responsibilities.

As the complexity of his emotions ties back to family dynamics, particularly concerning Leah and the haunting figures from his past, Joe finds solace in the physical repairs he makes. The chapter culminates in an encounter with Frankie, a figure from Joe's past, eliciting mixed feelings—trauma, regret, and unresolved pain. A confrontation ensues, propelling him further into his past and forcing him to confront long-buried anger and grief, notably over his brother Charlie's death.

Ultimately, Joe's journey illustrates his struggle between regret and a yearning for connection, representing a man on the cusp of redemption while wrestling with the emotional burdens of his history. The chapter ends with Joe contemplating his decisions and the unfolding reality of returning home, suggesting his willingness to confront past wounds and relationships with the hope of healing.