

Fifteen: Ruthie

In the chapter titled "Ruthie," the narrative opens in a small, musty room that embodies a sense of history, filled with family memories of joy and sorrow. Ruthie, experiencing a tumult of emotions, steps into this intimate space, confronting the reality of her brother Joe's terminal illness. As she attempts to connect with Joe, she grapples with feelings of anticipation and dread, never having been so close to death or to a brother before. Their reunion is marked by Joe expressing a desire to be left alone, yet he welcomes her company when he admits the discomforts of his illness are simply his new reality.

The conversation unfolds, revealing Ruthie's struggle with her identity as she adjusts to being called Ruthie again, a name she had long lost touch with during her previous life as Norma. Encouraged by family members Mae and Ben, her disquiet slowly transforms into happiness at the prospect of belonging to this family she barely knew. In an act of shared history, Joe presents her with the old boots and a sock doll—a poignant connection to her past and a reminder of a childhood left behind.

As the family comes together for breakfast, Ruthie's mother expresses her long-held hope that Ruthie would return, reinforcing the deep bond of love that exists despite the years of separation. Their conversation reveals shared memories, including the unveiling of Ruthie's true heritage as Mi'kmaw and her experiences growing up in a different family. The warmth of familial love envelops Ruthie, yet she wrestles with guilt and historical trauma stemming from her childhood decisions.

On an outing, they visit the ruins of a family home, where shared laughter brings fleeting moments of reprieve, even as Joe, while nearing the end of his life, insists on enjoying what little time is left. The day closes in a starry field, a serene acknowledgment of connection and belonging amid the pain of loss, evoking deep feelings of nostalgia and the joy of rediscovered family ties .