**Chapter II**

A sobbing sigh burst out of Janie. The old woman answered her with little soothing pats of the hand.

“You know, honey, us colored folks is branches without roots and that makes things come round in queer ways. You in particular. Ah was born back due in slavery so it wasn’t for me to fulfill my dreams of what a woman oughta be and to do. Dat’s one of de hold-backs of slavery. But nothing can’t stop you from wishin’. You can’t beat nobody down so low till you can rob ‘em of they will. Ah didn’t want to be used for a work-ox and a brood-sow and Ah didn’t want mah daughter used dat way neither. It sho wasn’t mah will for things to happen lak they did. Ah even hated de way you was born. But, all de same Ah said thank God, Ah got another chance. Ah wanted to preach a great sermon about colored women sittin’ on high, but they wasn’t no pulpit for me. Freedom found me wid a baby daughter in mah arms, so Ah said Ah’d take a broom and a cook-pot and throw up a highway through de wilderness for her. She would expound what Ah felt. But somehow she got lost offa de highway and next thing Ah knowed here you was in de world. So whilst Ah was tendin’you of nights Ah said Ah’d save de text for you. Ah been waitin’ a long time, Janie, but nothin’ Ah been through ain’t too much if you just take a stand on high ground lak Ah dreamed.”

Old Nanny sat there rocking Janie like an infant and thinking back and back. Mind-pictures brought feelings, and feelings dragged out dramas from the hollows of her heart.

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**Chapter IV**

When Janie had finished indoors she sat down in the barn with the potatoes. But springtime reached her in there so she moved everything to a place in the yard where she could see the road. The noon sun filtered through the leaves of the fine oak tree where she sat and made lacy patterns on the ground. She had been there a long time when she heard whistling coming down the road.

It was a citified, stylish dressed man with his hat set at an angle that didn’t belong in these parts. His coat was over his arm, but he didn’t need it to represent his clothes. The shirt with the silk sleeveholders was dazzling enough for the world. He whistled, mopped his face and walked like he knew where he was going. He was a seal-brown color but he acted like Mr. Washburn or somebody like that to Janie. Where would such a man be coming from and where was he going? He didn’t look her way nor no other way except straight ahead, so Janie ran to the pump and jerked the handle hard while she pumped. It made a loud noise and also made her heavy hair fall down. So he stopped and looked hard, and then he asked her for a cool drink of water.

Janie pumped it off until she got a good look at the man. He talked friendly while he drank.

Joe Starks was the name, yeah Joe Starks from in and through Georgy. Been workin’ for white folks all his life. Saved up some money—round three hundred dollars, yes indeed, right here in his pocket. Kept hearin’ ’bout them buildin’ a new state down heah in Floridy and sort of wanted to come. But he was makin’ money where he was. But when he heard all about ‘em makin’ a town all outa colored folks, he knowed dat was de place he wanted to be. He had always wanted to be a big voice, but de white folks had all de sayso where he come from and everywhere else, exceptin’ dis place dat colored folks was buildin’ theirselves. Dat was right too. De man dat built things oughta boss it. Let colored folks build
things too if dey wants to crow over somethin’. He was glad he had his money all saved up. He meant to git dere whilst de town wuz yet a baby. He meant to buy in big. It had always been his wish and desire to be a big voice and he had to live nearly thirty years to find a chance. Where was Janie’s papa and mama?

“Dey dead, Ah reckon. Ah wouldn’t know ’bout ’em ’cause mah Grandmas raised me. She dead too.”

“She dead too! Well, who’s lookin’ after a lil girl-chile lak you?”

“Ah’m married.”

“You married? You ain’t hardly old enough to be weaned. Ah betcha you still craves sugar-tits, doncher?”

“Yeah, and Ah makes and sucks ’em when de notion strikes me. Drinks sweeten’ water too.”

“Ah loves dat mahself. Never specks to get too old to enjoy syrup sweeten’ water when it’s cools and nice.”

“Us got plenty syrup in de barn. Ribbon-cane syrup. If you so desires —”

“Where yo’ husband at, Mis’ er-er.”

“Mah name is Janie Mae Killicks since Ah got married. Useter be name Janie Mae Crawford. Mah husband is gone tuh buy a mule fuh me tuh plow. He left me cuttin’ up seed p’taters.”

“You behind a plow! You ain’t got no mo’ business wid uh plow than uh hog is got wid uh holiday! You ain’t got no business cuttin’ up no seed p’taters neither. A pretty doll-baby lak you is made to sit on de front porch and rock and fan yo’ self and eat p’taters dat other folks plant just special for you.”

Janie laughed and drew two quarts of syrup from the barrel and Joe Starks pumped the water bucket full of cool water. They sat under the tree and talked. He was going on down to the new part of Florida, but no harm to stop and chat. He later decided he needed a rest anyway. It would do him good to rest a week or two.

Every day after that they managed to meet in the scrub oaks across the road and talk about when he would be a big ruler of things with her reaping the benefits. Janie pulled back a long time because he did not represent sun-up and pollen and blooming trees, but he spoke for far horizon. He spoke for change and chance. Still she hung back. The memory of Nanny was still powerful and strong.

**Zora Neale Hurston**

Zora Neale Hurston was born in Notasulga, Alabama, in 1891, and other than during her college years (at Howard University in Washington, D.C., and then Barnard College in New York City), she lived her life in the South. While she was inspired by the literary and artistic forces of the Harlem Renaissance, Hurston wrote primarily about her own experiences as a southern African American and represented those who did not choose to migrate north. Hurston’s writing gained little attention during her lifetime due to various controversies over her style and choice of subject matter. Her most famous work, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, was criticized for Hurston’s faithful use of African American dialect, a style many critics felt caricatured the work’s protagonists. After her death, her work was rediscovered and revived; she is now widely regarded as one of the most important American folklorists and writers of the twentieth century.
Chapter XIV

To Janie’s strange eyes, everything in the Everglades was big and new. Big Lake Okeechobee, big beans, big cane, big weeds, big everything. Weeds that did well to grow waist high up the state were eight and often ten feet tall down there. Ground so rich that everything went wild. Volunteer cane just taking the place. Dirt roads so rich and black that a half mile of it would have fertilized a Kansas wheat field. Wild cane on either side of the road hiding the rest of the world. People wild too.

“Season don’t open up till last of September, but we had tuh git ahead uh time tuh git us uh room,” Tea Cake explained. “Two weeks from now, it’ll be so many folks heah dey won’t be lookin’ fuh rooms, dey’ll be jus’ looking fuh somewhere tuh sleep. Now we got uh chance tuh git uh room at de hotel, where dey got uh bath tub. Yuh can’t live on de muck ‘thout yuh take uh bath every day. Do dat muck’ll itch yuh take uh bath every day. Do dat man ain’t got no business at de show.”

“Whut we gointuh do round heah?”

“All day Ah’m pickin’ beans. All night Ah’m pickin’ mah box and rollin’ dice. Between de beans and de dice Ah can’t lose. Ah’m gone right now tuh pick me uh job uh work wid de best man on de muck. Before de rest of ’em gits heah. You can always git jobs round heah in de season, but not wid de right folks.”

“When do de job open up, Tea Cake? Everybody round here look lak dey waitin’ too.”

“Dat’s right. De big men haves uh certain time tuh open de season jus’ lak in everything else. Mah boss-man didn’t get sufficient seed. He’s out hunting’ up uh few mo’ bushels. Den we’s gointuh plantin’.”

“Bushels?”

“Yeah, bushels. Dis ain’t no game fuh pennies. Po’ man ain’t got no business at de show.”

Day by day now, the hordes of workers poured in. Some limping in with their shoes and sore feet from walking. It’s hard trying to follow your shoe instead of your shoe following you. They came in wagons from way up in Georgia and they came in truck loads from east, west, north and south. Permanent transients with no attachments and tired looking men with their families and dogs in flivvers. All night, all day, hurrying in to pick beans. Skillets, beds, patched up spare inner tubes all hanging and dangling from the ancient cars on the outside and hopeful humanity, herded and hovered on the inside, chugging on to the muck. People ugly from ignorance and broken from being poor.

All night now the jooks clanged and clamored. Pianos living three lifetimes in one. Blues made and used right on the spot. Dancing, fighting, singing, crying, laughing, winning and losing love every hour. Work all day for money, fight all night for love. The rich black earth clinging to bodies and biting the skin like ants.

Finally no more sleeping places. Men made big fires and fifty or sixty men slept around each fire. But they had to pay the man whose land they slept on. He ran the fire just like his boarding place—for pay. But nobody cared. They made good money, even to the children. So they spent good money. Next month and next year were other times. No need to mix them up with the present.
Primary Source 20
While reading excerpts from *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, note its lyrical, almost mythological elements throughout the story of one African American woman’s struggle to find independence and love. With a powerful range of tones and voices, Hurston’s story of Janie and Tea Cake offers the reader a vision of the South during the early twentieth century, before, during, and after the Great Migration, and also focuses on the universal themes of work, love, and struggle in life.

Teaching Tips

**Language Arts/Visual Arts:** After reading excerpts from *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, locate passages in which Hurston describes scenes and images of life in the South. Compare these written descriptions to Lawrence’s *The Migration Series*. Are there panels that illustrate scenes similar to those Hurston describes? Look for images of fields as well as building interiors and exteriors.

**LA 1, 2, 6, 11 VA 3, 4, 6**

**Language Arts:** As you read about Janie’s move to the Everglades in the excerpt from Chapter XIV, note the description of this new world. How does Janie feel as she looks around her? Excited? Nervous? Overwhelmed? What words or passages reflect this? What adjectives does Hurston repeat to suggest Janie’s feelings?

**LA 1, 2, 5**

**Language Arts/Visual Arts:** Look at Panel Nos. 33 and 57 in *The Migration Series*. These are images of African Americans who had yet to migrate to the North or who chose to remain in the South. While reading the excerpt from Chapter IV of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, consider Janie’s reaction to Joe Starks’s invitation to take her from her home. Does she immediately want to leave when Joe tells her about a new life, or does she hesitate? What might make her want to stay? Despite the harsh realities of life in the South, what factors might make someone hesitant to leave his or her home?

**LA 1, 2, 4 VA 3, 4, 6**