

Faith Danielson

22 March 2015

Their Eyes Were Watching God (71-72)

“She wasn’t **petal-open** anymore with him. She was twenty-four and seven years married when she knew. She found that out one day when he slapped her face in the kitchen. It happened over one of those dinners that chasten all women sometimes. They plan and they fix and they do, and then **some kitchen-dwelling fiend** slips a scorchy, soggy, tasteless mess into their pots and pans. Janie was a good cook, and Joe had looked forward to **his dinner as a refuge from other things**. So when the bread didn’t rise, and the fish wasn’t quite done at the bone, and the rice was scorched, **he slapped Janie until she had a ringing sound in her ears and told her about her brains** before he stalked back to the store.

Janie stood where he left her for unmeasured time and thought. **She stood there until something fell off the shelf inside her. Then she went inside there to see what it was. It was her image of Jody tumbled down and shattered. But looking at it she saw that it never was the flesh and blood figure of her dreams. Just something she had grabbed up to drape her dreams over. In a way, she turned her back upon the image where it lay and looked further. She had no more blossomy openings dusting pollen over her man, neither any glistening young fruit where the petals used to be. She found that she had a host of thoughts she had never expressed to him, and numerous emotions she had never let Jody know about. Things packed up and put away in parts of her heart where he could never find them. She was saving up feelings for some man she had never seen. She had an inside and an outside now and suddenly she knew how not to mix them.”**

(71-72)

Admin Danielson 3/22/2015 3:12 PM

Comment [1]: Petal-open as equivalent to emotionally vulnerable/emotionally invested in him?

Nature and flowers are positive for Janie, if the petals are closed that means something bad has happened.

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Comment [2]: Bad food just happens sometimes, even when people do things the same way.

Admin Danielson 3/22/2015 3:15 PM

Comment [3]: What things? Stress from running the town? Why did he look for her cooking as refuge and not Janie herself?

Admin Danielson 3/22/2015 3:16 PM

Comment [4]: His own discontentment and insecurity coming out in the shape of physical abuse?

Admin Danielson 3/22/2015 3:17 PM

Comment [5]: Self-knowledge? Janie is able to slow down and actually examine herself in a way the Joe can’t or doesn’t.

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Comment [6]: If nature and living things are positive for Janie, then something that is empty is really bad/unhealthy.

Admin Danielson 3/22/2015 3:19 PM

Comment [7]: Even deeper self-knowledge? Past what Jody was to her ... [1]

Admin Danielson 3/22/2015 3:21 PM

Comment [8]: “Blossomy openings” and “dusting pollen” as generous thoughts and hope about his potential as a husband ... [2]

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Comment [9]: He isn’t what she made him up to be in her head, or what he promised to be when they first met. This isn’t going ... [3]

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Comment [10]: She really can rummage around in her heart and mind and emotions and bring things forward that she had ... [4]

Admin Danielson 3/22/2015 3:43 PM

Comment [11]: Ties back to not being “petal-open” with him? She’d been protecting herself for a while?

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Comment [12]: Still hope for a good relationship with someone other than Jody, potentially, if she keeps them safe ins ... [5]

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Comment [13]: Self-knowledge leading to a distancing from sympathy and expression of emotion towards Jody? Is it a bad t’ ... [6]

Passage Explication for pages 71-72 of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

In this passage, Hurston delves into Janie's self-awareness and how a willingness to look within gives her strength. At the beginning of this passage, her husband Jody is described as viewing "his dinner as a refuge from other things" (71), which reveals his insecurity in himself and his relationship with his wife. If he were stable, one bad meal would not make him violent and hit "Janie until she had a ringing sound in her ears" (72) and then proceed to deprecate her intelligence. However, this hit did force Janie to realize she "wasn't petal-open anymore" (71). Janie associates nature and flowers with growth, health, love, and good feelings; so by this she means she is not emotionally vulnerable with him, not willing to show him her heart or most tender thoughts. Flowers are petal-closed during winter and nighttime, when their environment is threatening, or simply lacking in life-bringing light. Therefore, Janie is closed because she finds no light or warmth in Jody.

While she may be closed to her husband, Janie is strong enough to be open with herself in this passage. Instead of reacting to his violence rashly, "[s]he stood there until something fell off the shelf inside her. Then she went inside there to see what it was" (72). She is patient and calm. She is deliberate about her thoughts and actions, and this is mirrored in the straightforward sentence structure in the passage: she stops, she waits, she hears, she goes to look, and so on. Her external life is not good, and to figure out why, she looks inside herself. This shows significant character. Instead of quickly looking to place blame on Jody, she checks herself first. When she looks, she discovers much of her unhappiness stems from making an idol out of someone instead of actually seeing "the flesh and blood" (72) reality. For a long time she had allowed her own "blossomy openings" to "dust... pollen over her man" (72). This means she poured out her own benevolence and kind thoughts on him in an attempt to cover or ignore what he really was, a bad

husband, but now there is no “glistening fruit where the petals used to be” (72). Her attempts had failed to bear good fruit. Thankfully her vain attempts had not made her barren or empty, for, perhaps unbeknownst to her, she had been protecting herself. For she had “[t]hings packed up and put away in parts of her heart where [Jody] could never find them. She was saving up feelings for some man she had never seen” (72). She has the hope of loving someone again despite her current situation and its absence of reciprocated love. She finds this strength and love in herself, which is difficult to do when someone has just been slapped and told she is stupid and thoughtless for making one meal that was not quite up to par, and she holds on to it.

Janie has an incredible resolve. When she is treated disrespectfully and abusively by her husband, she takes her time to think and figure out how to proceed. Her great epiphany is, “[s]he ha[s] an inside and an outside now and suddenly she knew how not to mix them” (72). This disassociation is good for Janie, though it may seem callous, because in effect her distancing enables her to retain the goodness within her. She is not going to waste it any more on someone who will not be transformed by her love. She is going to wait, and when the time comes, she will pour out her genuine love on someone who actually fulfills her dreams for a husband. She is not giving up all hope, just her hope in Jody, and that is an acceptable thing to do. It is the best way to protect and preserve herself.