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### A Life with Three Marriages

In the book *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Hurston, marriage plays a big role in the story. The main character, Janie, get married three times in her lifetime. Janie is a very attractive woman and practically can get who she wants, but she is looking for a special somebody. Most people get married once, but Janie just couldn't find the right person to spend the rest of her life with. Janie uses a peach tree as her symbol for a perfect man. Janie lives a life of uncertainty. She wishes to be married to her peach tree, but she cannot seem to run into him. Janie isn't afraid of waiting for her ideal husband. Janie goes from marriage to marriage trying to find not only the perfect soul mate, but she also wanted to find herself. Janie had a hard time trying to be who she really is when she had her grandmother choosing her husband for her. Janie's mother and grandmother had such a difficult life. Janie has her grandmother to take care of her, but she cannot do that forever. Janie's grandmother pushed Janie to limits because she wanted Janie to have a life that wasn't like her own or her mother's. The theme of this story is love comes with compromise and honesty in a relationship. Marriage promises change, but it will remain loveless without equality and respect.

Janie's first marriage with Logan Killicks fails because Logan and her grandmother neglect to display any respect for what Janie wants out of a marriage.

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Janie's grandmother's selfish act contributed to the marriage because she forces Janie to marry Logan for the sake of her own comforts rather than Janie's. As stated in the book, "So you don't want to marry off decent like, do yuh? You just wants to hug and kiss and feel around with the first one man and then another, huh? You want me to suck the same sorrow yo' mama did, eh? Mah ole head ain't gray enough. Mah back ain't bowed enough to suit yuh!"(13-4). This quote shows how much her grandmother doesn't want her to have the marriage she wants. Janie wants the hugs and the kisses, which is what makes her dream marriage seem so incredible. Janie wants to marry because she loves that person, she doesn't want to marry out of convenience. Janie's grandmother lived in a time where love didn't exist and that is what makes her push Janie to marry Logan. During those times it was hard to find a marriage between African American women that contained love.

Logan further aggravates the marriage because he expects Janie to show her appreciation for what he has done for her. Logan feels that he does Janie a huge favor by marrying her, but in all actuality, Janie is miserable. Logan has no respect for Janie's feelings. Although Logan tries to be polite to her there is no sincerity in what he does because he just doesn't care. Again Logan feels he's doing Janie a favor. As Boston Globe staff member, Renee Graham, writes about an interview by Valerie Boyd, she reveals that Hurston writes from experience, "She often worked as a maid and may have endured an abusive common-law marriage to a man who, Boyd posits, may have provided bitter inspiration for the cruel Logan Killicks in "Their Eyes Were Watching

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God." (Hurstun, who married not wisely but often, officially had three husbands. Writes Boyd, "Zora was afraid that matrimony would only widen her hips and narrow her life.").

In the beginning of their marriage Logan tried being nice to her, but Janie acted ungrateful. As Logan tells Janie, "Ah thought you would 'preciate good treatment. Thought Ah'd take and make somethin' outta yuh. You think youse white folk be de way you act"(30). When Logan realizes the way that she is acting he doesn't tolerate her behavior. Logan threatens to Janie as stated in the book, " Ah'll take holt uh dat axe and come in dere and kill yuh!"(30). At this time Janie cannot longer stand her marriage with Logan. Even after seeking advice from her grandmother, nothing can stop Janie from running out the door and into a new marriage.

Janie's second marriage to Joe Starks lacks respect and equality. Janie leaves Logan Killicks for Joe Starks. Janie feels that Joe may be her real peach tree, but after many years of being married to Joe, she soon realizes she is no more than a trophy wife to him. Janie is by Joe's side mainly for the purpose to improve his image in Eatonville. Joe puts Janie on a pedestal and that is not what she wants. Janie wants to be equal Joe, but he doesn't see that the major of Eatonville's wife should be the same as everyone else. Joe also feels that way with himself. He feels he has full control over Janie's life and can tell her what to do whenever and wherever he pleases. Joe lacks respect for Janie because he does not allow her to be an individual, but rather treats Janie as someone with not thoughts and ideas. As stated in the book, "Aw naw they don't. They just think they's thinkin'. When Ah see one thing Ah understand ten. You see ten things and don't

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understand one”(71). In this quote Joe makes Janie feel so stupid. Joe just like Logan doesn't care for Janie's feelings. Janie one again realizes what a big mess she has gotten into.

As Joe talks down to Janie she still keeps her mouth shut, but from that moment on their marriage will be loveless. As stated in the foreword, “While the rest of us in the room struggled to find our voices, Alice Walker rose and claimed hers, insisting passionately that woman did not have to speak when men thought they should, that they would choose when and where they wish to speak because while women had found their own voices, they also knew when it was better not to use it”(xiv). This quoted shows how Janie learned to keep her mouth shut because if she didn't her knew she will be beaten. The bedroom where they both would spend wonderful night together ended after Joe degrades Janie, but Janie also finds herself in another violent relationship. As articulated in the book, “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”(71). Joe pushes her to be someone she isn't, just like Janie's grandmother pushed into a marriage she didn't want to be in.

Joe also humiliates Janie in front of the whole town by not allowing her to say what she feels. When Joe arrives to the town soon to be called Eatonville, he is immediately elected major. Joe was the only one to show any belief to see that town become something. When everyone in Eatonville cheers for the election of Joe Starks as their mayor, they ask to hear from the mayor's wife, but unfortunately Joe spoke against Janie speaking to the crowd. As pronounced in the book, “Thank yuh fuh yo’

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compliments, but mah wife don't know nothin' 'bout speech-makin'. Ah never married her for nothin' lak dat. She's uh woman and her place is in de home"(43). Joe humiliates Janie and does not care about how she feels. Joe wants to contain Janie in a box to prevent Janie from socializing. Joe feels that she doesn't need to talk to the people in the town. He thinks that she is better than that, yet he wont even let her speak her mind in her own home.

Janie's third marriage to Tea Cake is in contrast with the other two marriages because she felt a sense of equality. Janie finally reaches her goal to obtain a marriage filled with love and respect, but this marriage too doesn't last long. Janie has more freedom to speak her mind to Tea Cake in their marriage. As articulated in the book, "Looka heah, Tea Cake, if you ever go off on me and have a good time lak dat and then come back tellin' me how nice Ah is, Ah specks tuh kill you dead. You heah me?"(124). Janie has more power in her marriage to Tea Cake then she did with Logan and Joe. When Janie starts to feel a sense of achievement, she almost believes that she has found her peach tree. There is one scene that illustrates the equality in Janie and Tea Cake marriage and that is when the play checkers together. As shown in the book, "He set it up and began to show her and she found herself glowing inside. Somebody wanted her to play somebody thought it was natural for her to play. That was even nice."(95-6). Although Janie still had her doubt about her marriage, it is evident that their marriage is based on equality.

A marriage has no real foundation without equality and respect. Janie tried trying gaining the equality and respect out of three marriages and only one seemed to show any

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of those aspects. Janie tired searching for her peach tree, but all she was left with was very little self-motivation and many years feeling lonely. Janie avoided from following the same footsteps as her mother and grandmother. Janie wants to find her perfect husband has she had the patience to go through three marriages to get it. In the process of finding her ideal husband Janie found herself. She feels she has more control over what she wants in her life. While arguing with her grandmother, Logan, Joe, and Tea Cake, Janie still prevails as a stronger and wiser person. Janie wants love in a relationship and she had to compromise by going through three marriages and by being honest with herself to know when that person isn't her peach tree.

Work Cited

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