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Can't Buy Her Love

By Justin Phillips

Love is a very powerful emotion that can be felt towards numerous people, including family, friends, and a significant other. When love is felt towards a significant other, it usually includes strong affection for, physical attraction to, and attachment to that person. In Zora Neale Hurston's novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Janie Crawford is on a search for love in her life. She finds it in her third husband, Tea Cake, even though she is of a different social class than he is. Tea Cake, to others, encapsulated everything that Janie should not look for in a husband, but to Janie, he was everything that she loved and made her happy.

Before Janie met Tea Cake, she was married to two other men. Her first husband, Logan Killicks, was a man that gave Janie economic stability, something that Janie's grandmother looked for in a marriage. Logan loved Janie, but those feelings were not mutual. At the beginning of their marriage, Logan did many things for Janie that he thought would show his affection towards her, such as chopping wood throughout the year to keep her and their house warm, but he eventually tried forcing her into helping him with outside farm work when she wanted to work inside the home. Janie gradually grew tired of him and wanted a change in her life, a change that included love. She told him "S'posin' Ah wuz to run off and leave yuh sometime" (p. 30), to which Logan felt a deep sorrow after hearing those words. He felt affection towards Janie, but he never had the courage to show it. He kept his thoughts to himself, so Janie left. The change Janie wanted came in the form of another man, Joe Starks.

Joe Starks was a man with the potential and drive to be the "big voice," or mayor, of a town, which his domineering personality helped him achieve. He was handsome and dressed well, wearing fashionable suits and clothes, and had money in his pocket. Joe met Janie one day as he was riding through town on his way to the where he heard an all-black community was. As he passed Janie's house, she ran to the well to fetch him some water. After about two weeks of talking and somewhat getting to know each other, Joe told Janie that he intended to marry her and take her with him to this community, where he had high aspirations to make a name for himself and Janie. Janie decides Joe is the change she wants, so she ups and leaves Logan and runs off with Joe.

Joe and Janie are quickly married and leave for the all-black community, known as Eatonville. The townspeople, as Joe quickly sees, lack any ambition for making the town better. Joe buys land with money out of his own pocket for the town, builds and runs a store, and is

unanimously elected mayor of Eatonville, all soon after he arrives. His dream of being mayor came true, and his desire for the beautiful Janie to be his trophy wife, obeying all of his commands, quickly becomes evident. Joe spends time making the town better and keeping his image with the townspeople up, all the while neglecting Janie and her desire to be in love and be loved in return. Joe shows almost zero affection for Janie. He beats her at home, verbally abuses her in front of other townspeople, and simply bosses her around and expects her to do his bidding without question or comment. He even forbids her from socializing with the other townspeople on the porch of their store. When Janie walks by the porch, Joe says, "Why don't you go on and see whut Mrs. Bogle want? Whut you waitin' on?" (p. 70). Joe rules Janie with an iron grip, one that does not allow Janie to be happy or feel love in her marriage, two things that she believes go hand-in-hand despite what her grandmother thought marriage should consist of.

Janie felt no love towards Joe. When she first met him, she felt more lust than love. She saw his handsome features and well-dressed, mannered appearance and misinterpreted that as love. Janie only wanted a change from the normal boring relationship with Logan that also gave her no love. In Eatonville, Janie wanted to love Joe, but Joe only wanted to keep being the "big voice" in town, telling Janie that "Ah told you in de very first beginnin' dat Ah aimed tuh be uh big voice. You oughta be glad, 'cause dat makes uh big woman outa you" (p. 46). He only cared about leading the town and the reputation that brought him. Joe was not concerned about loving Janie. He thought that her being the wife of a mayor would be good enough for any woman. He did not need to love Janie if he was already giving her everything he thought she wanted in being the wife of the mayor.

When Joe died, Janie was finally free to do as she pleased. Joe left her money, so she was financially well-off. She was also still one of the prettiest women in town, so she could have found another husband, one with a prestigious career, if she wanted to. However, like in her previous two marriages, another husband found her. Vergible Woods, known as Tea Cake, strolled into the store one day while the majority of the rest of the town was at a baseball game. He talked to Janie for a while and eventually asked her if she wanted to play checkers. Before Tea Cake, no one had ever asked or allowed Janie to play checkers with them. Joe had never allowed Janie to play checkers or even watch the townspeople play checkers on the store's porch. He said it was not a place for the mayor's wife to be and told her she would not have fun. Janie took the opportunity Tea Cake offered her to learn to play, and for once, someone treated her like an equal, not like a disobedient and naughty animal that was not allowed to have fun and be happy.

Janie quickly became very fond of Tea Cake and eventually decided to marry him. Throughout their relationship, Tea Cake was always the one that made her happy, even through the rough times. Janie and Tea Cake moved to the Everglades because Tea Cake wanted to find work there. They found a place to stay, and during the day, Tea Cake would work while Janie would keep the house and make meals for the both of them. Janie loved Tea Cake, and Tea Cake loved Janie. He left work on some days because he did not want to be away from her and was

worried about her. Janie came to work with him, doing manual labor in the muck, so that she could be with him all day. They felt great affection towards each other and were happy to be together.

Like all marriages, though, there were some rough times that Janie and Tea Cake went through together. Tea Cake took Janie's money one day to have some fun in the town. He spent almost two hundred dollars on a dinner for the people without asking Janie if he could use her money. Tea Cake told Janie he would win her money back, being one of the best gamblers around. He did win her money back and more, but he was involved in a knife fight with another gambler, coming home to Janie with wounds on his body and money in his coat pocket. Janie, with tears running down her cheeks, had to care for Tea Cake until his wounds healed.

Another incident that showed their love for each other was when Janie spotted Tea Cake "wrestling" with a younger woman in the fields in the Everglades. Tea Cake swore that nothing happened and that Janie was the only one for him, saying, "You'se something tuh make uh man forgit tuh git old and forgit tuh die" (p. 138). Janie was jealous of that other woman, a feeling that commonly joins love, because she took Tea Cake away from him for a short amount of time. Tea Cake felt jealousy when Janie visited another woman in town who wanted her to leave Tea Cake, a man she greatly disliked, and marry her son. Janie of course refused out of her love for Tea Cake. She told him she was not going to leave him just because another person did not like him and wanted her to marry someone else.

Overall, Janie and Tea Cake were very happy together. Tea Cake was a man that more often than not treated Janie how a wife should be treated. He, unlike Logan and Joe, wanted to spend time with her and truly loved her. The key for Janie and Tea Cake's successful marriage was happiness. The couple spent more time together doing things they loved, like fishing or shooting or playing checkers, than her other two marriages probably did combined. Janie and Tea Cake felt a deep devotion towards each other and stuck together through thick and thin. Janie, with Logan or Joe, was not happy where she was at with her marriages. Tea Cake showed himself to her, and they loved each other and were happy to just be together.

Work Cited

Hurston, Zora Neale. *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. New York: HarperCollins, 2006.