

Character Analysis – Paul D and Mister Rooster

Chapter 1

Paul D arrives to 124 “when the last of the chamomile was gone.” (7) Chamomile is a white and yellow daisy often used as a medicine to reduce stress, and its disappearance indicates Sethe’s loss of hope and happiness when she first encounters Paul D which was “to punish her further for her terrible memory” (7) of slavery. However, since chamomile is a medicine to reduce stress, Paul D’s arrival is a stress reliever for Sethe. “last of the chamomile” (7) and “last of the Sweet Home men” (7) is parallel which compares Paul D to a chamomile. “Although she could never mistake his face for another, she said. “Is that you?” (7) This rhetorical question toward Paul D shows how hard Sethe is trying to forget her past of slavery, but it also shows how the past still lingers in the memory of Sethe and how she will not easily forget it. “What’s left.” (7) Paul D views himself as “what’s left” (7) of a man and how the past has made him forget who he is. Now instead of a heart, Paul D is left only with his “tobacco-tin box.” (138) “How you been, girl, besides barefoot?” (7) Paul D’s question shows how he still cares for Sethe. He also notices that Sethe’s feet are barefoot and how he is always able to tell the journey a person has been on by looking at their feet. Because Paul D knows and understands Sethe, he makes the barefoot joke in the spirit of amiability and affection. Paul D’s love for Sethe suddenly spills out as their casual relationship jumps because of his past infatuations with Sethe. Sethe calls Paul D “chamomile” (7) which solidifies that he is the hope and happiness of her life, but Paul D “made a face as though tasting a teaspoon of something bitter” (7) because he never saw himself as bringing hope and happiness because in the past he couldn’t help others like Halle. “Porch is fine, Sethe. Cool out here.” (8) Paul D made himself feel at home right away because he has never enjoyed the feeling of freedom before meeting up with Sethe. This also sets up a contrast to the ghost and evil that is inside the house. “Eighteen... I been walking every one of em.” (8) The eighteen years is the time it took Paul D to finally reach a place where he can relax through all his pain and suffering. “Began unlacing his shoes” Paul D finally relaxes and takes off his shoes which represents how he is opening himself up to Sethe, but not completely. “Can’t baby feet” (8) is Paul D’s response to Sethe’s question about soaking his feet which shows Paul D’s view about how there is still a long journey ahead and how he is not willing to share his journey with Sethe. “Well, long enough to see Baby Suggs, anyway. Where is she?” (8) Paul D still cares for this family. “That’s some of what I came for. The rest is you.” (8) Paul D’s true intentions are shown about Sethe. “I go anywhere these days. Anywhere they let me sit down.” (8) This signifies Paul D’s desire to find a rest stop on his journey. Although he said he came for Sethe, Paul D’s passion is weakened by the fact that he is “what’s left” (7) of a man. “Devil’s confusion. He lets me look good long as I feel bad.” (8) Paul D is allowed to look as a full man when he is only a shell of a man as if he made a deal with the devil. “He looked at her and the word ‘bad’ took on another meaning.” (8) This shows ‘bad’ as a good but naughty and shows how their sexual desire is elevated. (8) “Except for a heap more hair and some waiting in his eyes, he looked the way he had in Kentucky” refers to Paul D’s hesitation to “rape” (13) Sethe. (9) Paul D

still looks the same as he did before; he has “peachstone skin and is straight-backed.” (9) He may not have changed on the outside, but “With less than a blink, his face seemed to change – underneath it lay the activity” indicates that he is slowly changing on the inside. (9) “Except for the churn, he thought, and you don’t need to know that” shows that Paul D is hiding something about the past from Sethe. This foreshadows that Paul D will eventually reveal something about the past. (9) Paul D refers to Baby Suggs as the moral center when he asks “What did Baby Suggs think?” (9) He has mixed feelings when Sethe discusses the fact that she gave birth to Denver without the help of Halle or Paul D. Paul D is proud of her because he acknowledges that Sethe is strong, but is annoyed because he feels useless for not being at her side during that time. (9) Sethe offers her hospitality to Paul D (“You could stay the night, Paul D”), yet Paul D is hesitant to accept (“You don’t sound too steady in the offer”) because he is not willing to open up the past. (10) “Paul D tied his shoes together, hung them over his shoulder and followed her through the door...” He is hanging onto the past, but he’s also putting it aside for the time being. The “red and undulating light that locked him where he stood” refers to the passion Paul D has toward Sethe. (10) “He looked at her...wet and shining legs,, holding her shoes and stockings up in one hand” Paul D notices the similarity between him and Sethe. (11) He helps Sethe confront the past by bringing up the death of her oldest daughter. (11) “Paul D looked at the spot where the grief had soaked him. The red was gone but a kind of weeping clung to the air where it had been” The grief refers to Sethe’s crying, and the red refers to the ghost. (11) “If a Negro got legs he ought to use them.” Paul D believes that people should move on rather than staying in one moment of their lives, because if they don’t move on, “somebody will figure out a way to tie them up,” or in other words, someone or something (Beloved in this case) will make them suffer for not moving on. “Paul D smiled then, remembering the bedding dress.” (12) Paul D is remembered about the past when he sees Sethe’s wedding dress that she made out of the bed sheets. He also remembers “fucking cows, dreaming of rape, thrashing on pallets, rubbing their thighs, and waiting for the new girl.” (13) “My niggers is men every one of em.” (12) So Mr. Garner thought that his slaves were men, just like what Paul D thought of himself, but others viewed as just a slave. “Ain’t no nigger men.” (12) Paul D notices “blue-and-white wallpaper”, “yellow sprinkled”, and the “white of the railing” (13) which is used to describe Denver’s pure, peaceful, and happy personality. “Got her daddy’s sweet face.” (15) Paul D is trying to start a new friendship with Denver and a whole new start. “Reminds me of that headless bride back behind Sweet Home.” (16) Paul D always makes references to the past and Sweet Home and shows how he is still trapped by the past. “Used to roam them woods regular.” (16) Paul D picks out memories that only deal with him and Sethe so that he is able to make a closer connection with her. “Don’t go to any trouble on my account.” Paul D is still not part of the family. “Why don’ you spend the night, Mr. Garner? You and Ma’am can talk about Sweet Home all night long.” (16) Denver calls Paul D ‘Mr. Garner’ to show how he overlooks his identity as Paul D and sees him as another person in the house. “I’m a grown man with nothing new left to see or do and I’m telling you it ain’t easy. Maybe you all ought to move.” (17) Paul D’s solution to problems is by running away and not confronting them and he tries to convince Sethe to moving, but it does not work. “Paul D fished in his vest for a little pouch of tobacco.” (18) This is an early

reference to the "tobacco-tin box" (138) that Paul D has instead of a heart. It also implies that Paul D is opening up the box. "What tree on your back?" (18) Paul D is unknowingly helping Sethe confront the past which leads Sethe to talk about how her milk got stolen. "Tucking his pouch back into his vest pocket." (19) Paul D is once again closing up the box and hiding his heart away from the family. "They beat you and you was pregnant?" (20) Paul D is worried about the pain that Sethe went through the rape of her while Sethe only worries about the motherly part. There are not on the same topic now. "He had become the kind of man who could walk into a house and make the women cry." (20) This shows that Paul D has the quality to relieve stress in people's lives without knowing. "He held her breasts in the palms of his hands." (20) Paul D is lifting up the weight of the past and helping Sethe deal with it which is symbolically shown sexually. "He would tolerate no peace until he had touched every ridge and leaf of it with his mouth." (21) This shows the mutual grief that Paul D and Sethe go through with the past. "God damn it! Hush up!" This shows how Paul D was taking the initiative and scared away the ghost. After beating away this foe that was against his freedom, to have sex with Sethe, the passion resumes, breathing "to the same beat, like one tired person. Another breathing was just as tired."(22) Paul D's hands have healing qualities, similar to those of Baby Suggs when Sethe arrived at 124; Baby Suggs healed Sethe's physical wounds, while Paul D healed Sethe's emotional scars. (Ch. 9)

Chapter 2

"Paul D dropped twenty-five years from his recent memory." (24) Paul D is trying to forget all the time between Sethe choosing Halle and now. He wants it to seem as if he was chosen by Sethe after "giving her his sex" (24) "She led him up the 'white stairs', where light came straight from the sky" This shows a happy reunion between Sethe and Paul D and remnants of Paul D's jealousy toward Halle. "His dreaming of her had been too long and too long ago."(25) Paul D had been thinking a long time about Sethe and he realized that what he was waiting for was not that great which made them "sorry and too shy to make talk." (25) "Paul D saw the float of her breasts and disliked it, the spread-away, flat roundness of them that he could definitely live without." (25) Paul D's expectations were not met by the body of Sethe and now view her body in disgust. This drastically contrasts what had happened before they had sex. This realization snaps Paul D out of his wild fantasies into reality. "Wrought-iron maze he had explored in the kitchen like a gold miner pawing through pay dirt was in act" (25) Paul D is now reminded of slavery and instead of a tree it is "a revolting clump of scars." (25) Sethe's back was not beautiful anymore and now Paul D was revolted by it; the tree ironically reminds him of the depraved conditions of slavery, which is the reason why Paul D view Sethe's back as twisted metal (related to Paul D's iron bit) rather than a chokecherry tree that he thought should be "inviting". Even though indentured servants did not live in favorable conditions, Amy and those like her never suffered as much as the slaves. "Nothing like any tree he knew because trees were inviting."(25) "Trees, and in particular sacred groves, play a crucial role in African religion, where they are considered as intermediaries between god and man- they are even worshiped by