

Essay on janie mae crawford and logan killicks marriage

[Family](#), [Parents](#)



Janie Mae Crawford and Logan Killicks – why does their marriage not work?

It is interesting that in a novel that is about a woman finding both true love and her own identity that by the end of the first chapter of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* we know only the central character's first name and hardly anything about her past. The rest of the novel is an extended flashback really, in which we get to know the life story of Jamie Mae Crawford and what motivates her.

Janie's grandmother's expectations of marriage are conditioned by her own experiences and those of her daughter. Nanny gave birth to Janie's mother during the Civil War: Nanny bore the child of her slave owner and faced physical punishment when the slave owner's wife realized that the baby (Janie's mother) had "gray eyes" and "yaller hair" (Hurstons p. 16). The slave owner's wife sentences her to "one hundred lashes" at the "whipping post". (Hurstons p. 17) For Nanny love is not associated with marriage. The experience of Janie's mother was also traumatic, as she was raped at the age of seventeen by her schoolmaster. Since Janie's birth, her mother has left the area and her life has been ravaged by drink. Therefore, it is not surprising that Janie's grandmother does not associate passion with marriage: she associates it with pain and suffering. For Nanny, Logan Killicks represents financial security and safety, which is all she thinks marriage should provide. When Janie continues to tell Nanny about her lack of love for Logan in Chapter Three, Nanny can only reply that he is the richest black man in the area and owns sixty acres. At the start of the chapter when Janie

first says she is unhappy, Nanny is worried that Logan is physically abusing her, but once it is clear that he is not, then Nanny cannot see the problem: Janie should be happy that her husband is rich enough to provide for her and give her a home. She explains her reasons to Janie and says, thinking of Janie's mother, that she does not want to "see it all over again" and "don't want your feathers crumpled by folks throwing things up in yo' face".

(Hurston p. 15) Nanny can only see women as victims and that is why she is so keen for Janie to make a respectable marriage to Logan. She is scared that some man will take sexual advantage of Janie and ruin her life.

On page 10 Janie has a sexual awakening beneath the pear tree. It is after this episode that Nanny catches her kissing Johnny Taylor and decides she must marry Logan Killicks as quickly as possible before another man takes advantage of her. Janie spends most of the afternoon beneath blossoming pear tree and has a moment of sexual epiphany:

She saw a dust-bearing bee sink into the sanctum of a bloom; the thousand sister calyxes arch to meet the love embrace and the ecstatic shiver of the tree from root to tiniest branch creaming in every blossom and frothing with delight. So this was a marriage! (Hurston p. 10)

This is written as if it were an erotic daydream: it oozes a sense of sexual pleasure and Janie, as we shall see, feels no sexual desire for Logan Killicks.

Logan expects his wife to help him wholeheartedly in running his farm. For the first year of marriage he treats her reasonably well, but she is physically repulsed by him and his appearance, and feels no sexual attraction for him.

For his part, Logan thinks is he treating her well by chopping up wood for her; in return he expects her to work hard on the farm and obey his orders.

On page 14 Nanny had said to Janie – “ De nigger woman is de mule uh de whole world so fur as Ah can see.” This is a key quotation in the novel.

Nanny has explained that black men are treated with racism by white people; her words here suggest that black men, themselves brutalized by the past of slavery and by the ‘ Jim Crow’ laws of the southern states, take their revenge on their own women and treat them as they are treated by white people. Nanny’s statement is prophetic because Janie will leave Logan partly over a mule.

Logan tolerates what he sees as Janie’s laziness, but he shows her less attention as time goes by: “ Long before the year was up, Janie noticed that her husband had stopped talking in rhymes to her. He had ceased to wonder at her long black hair and finger it.” (Hurstons p. 26) Hurston is clearly suggesting that Janie does not get sexual satisfaction from her husband. This had been clear in Chapter Two when Hurston tells us “ the vision of Logan Killicks was desecrating the pear tree” (p. 13) The state of the marriage rapidly deteriorates after Nanny’s death. Janie has only married Logan to keep her grandmother happy, so now there is little to keep her with him. At the end of Chapter Three Hurston tells us “ She knew now that marriage did not make love. Janie’s first dream was dead, so she became a woman.” (Hurstons p. 23) Chapter Four begins ominously: Janie is given the job of cutting up seed potatoes, because Logan says he is going to enquire about getting another mule. He tells Janie, “ Dis man Ah’m talking bout is got uh

mule all gentled up so even a woman can handle him.” (Hurstons p. 21) He obviously expects Janie to help him with the plowing.

At this point in the novel Joe Stark, well-dressed, young and with a clear vision of a better life, comes walking down the road and is immediately complimentary to Janie:

You behind a plow! You ain't got no business wid a plow than a hog got wid a holiday!.... A pretty doll baby lak you is made to sit on the front porch an rock an fan yo'self and eat p'taters dat other folks plant just special for you.” (Hurstons p. 22)

Joe hangs around for a week spending a lot of time with Janie before asking her to leave with him and become his wife. That night in bed Janie tries to discuss their marriage with Logan, and, at this point, if he had shown some tenderness or affection towards her, she might have stayed, but he is defensive and scornful, and merely tries to belittle her:

Ah thought you would 'preciate good treatment. Thought Ah'd take and make something outa yuh. You think youse white folks by the way you act.” (Hurstons p. 23)

The next morning things get worse. Logan orders Janie to come and help him shovel manure, saying “ You ain't got no particular place. It's wherever Ah need you.” (Hurstons p. 24) Janie says something critical in return and Logan threatens to kill her with the ax and insults her again: “ Ah'm too honest and hard-workin' for anybody in yo' family, dat's de reason you don't want me!...

Ah guess some low-lifted nigger is grinnin' in yo' face and lyin' tuh yuh. God damn yo' hide!" (Hurstons p. 25)

At this Janie takes off her apron and walks out – " A feeling of sudden newness and change came over her." (Hurstons p. 25) It is important to note that she is not leaving Logan Killick for Joe: " Even if Joe was not there waiting for her, the change was bound to do her good." (Hurstons p. 25)

Logan and Janie's marriage does not work because they expect different things from marriage and they are not sexually compatible. Nanny thought she was acting in Janie's best interests, but she was mistaken, because of her own expectations of marriage. Logan does order Janie around and expect her to work hard, but if there had been some sexual spark between them she might have stayed. In the end. she rebels against his unkindness and growing tyranny.

Work Cited

Hurstons, Zora Neale (1986). *Their Eyes were Watching God*. Virago Press: London.