

The Marrow Thieves



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF CHERIE DIMALINE

Cherie Dimaline is a member of the Georgian Bay Métis community in Ontario, Canada, an ethnic group whose roots trace back to First Nations Indigenous people as well as European settlers. As a child, she spent summers in the Métis community and so learned the traditional Métis stories, which she's said directly influenced *The Marrow Thieves* in particular. She published her first novel, *Red Rooms*, in 2011, but *The Marrow Thieves* has proved her most popular and well-received book—it won the Governor-General's Award for English language children's literature, the Kirkus Prize, and was a finalist in the Canada Reads competition. In addition to writing novels and short stories, Dimaline was also the founding editor of *Muskrat Magazine* and has been involved in residency programs at the Toronto Public Library. She lives in Toronto with her husband and children.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Though the Canadian residential school program came into its full power in the 1860s and '70s (after the passage of the Indian Act and an amendment that made attendance at residential or day schools mandatory for Indigenous children), efforts to assimilate Indigenous populations into European colonial society had been going on since the French arrived in New France in the 17th century. Historian John S. Milloy has argued that the goal of these schools was to "kill the Indian in the child" by removing children from their families, forbidding them to speak their native languages or practice their religious beliefs, and in theory, preparing them to assimilate into mainstream Canadian society. In practice, the schools were successful in cutting children off from their cultures, if the children survived at all—mortality rates were extremely high due to poor conditions, inadequate medical care, and unwillingness on the part of school officials to quarantine or treat the huge number of students infected with tuberculosis. Many children who died were buried in unmarked graves and have never been identified, while those who survived had neither the cultural knowledge to reintegrate into their families nor the skills to assimilate into white society. Many more were kidnapped and adopted out to white families. The last residential school closed in 1996, and in 2008, Prime Minister Stephen Harper created the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) to investigate the history of the schools. Through interviews with around 7000 survivors of the residential schools, the TRC concluded in 2015 that the schools' actions amounted to cultural genocide.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Much of Cherie Dimaline's work focuses on the Indigenous experience; in addition to *The Marrow Thieves*, she's written two other novels (*The Girl who Grew a Galaxy* and *Red Rooms*) and a collection of short stories titled *A Gentle Habit*. Other Indigenous authors creating novels for young adults include Katherena Vermette, whose graphic novel *A Girl Called Echo* is a sci-fi version of Métis history; Aviaq Johnston (*Those Who Run in the Sky*); and Eden Robinson, the author of the Trickster trilogy in which an Indigenous teen learns he's part Trickster. Other authors have explored the residential school system specifically, such as with Christy Jordan-Fenton's *Fatty Legs*, which tells the story of her Inuit mother-in-law's experience at one of these schools. In 1999, historian John S. Milloy released *A National Crime*, which drew on first-person accounts and primary source documents to expose the corruption and the damage done by the residential school system. This cause was later taken up by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which in 2015 published its findings online and in paperback. The five volumes consist of thousands of pages of testimony and suggested action items to mitigate some of the damage.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Marrow Thieves
- **When Written:** 2015-16
- **Where Written:** Toronto, Canada
- **When Published:** 2017
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Young adult novel, dystopian fiction
- **Setting:** Central Canada, sometime around 2050
- **Climax:** Minerva dies during the attempt to rescue her
- **Antagonist:** The government, the residential schools, and the Recruiters (particularly Travis and Lincoln)
- **Point of View:** First person

EXTRA CREDIT

Linguistically Endangered. The TRC found that of the 90 Indigenous languages still spoken in Canada, most of them are endangered, and in many cases are only spoken by the elderly. Especially for those languages that are primarily oral and don't have a written system, a language going extinct means the death of important stories, customs, legends, and other knowledge that only exists in its original form. One of the biggest culprits of language extinction is the internet, as its ubiquity and majority-English language websites entice people to abandon their localized languages and traditions in favor of

conforming with the globalized mainstream.



PLOT SUMMARY

The novel begins with the “coming-to story” of Frenchie, an eleven-year-old boy growing up in the Métis Indigenous community in Canada. The story delves into how he found Miig, the middle-aged Anishnaabe man who becomes Frenchie’s surrogate father figure. Not long ago, Frenchie’s dad left with the Council to try to convince the Governors to stop the atrocities happening at the **residential schools**. His mom became depressed, and Recruiters got her. Frenchie and his older brother, Mitch, find a bag of Doritos, but the sound attracts Recruiters. Mitch makes Frenchie hide in a tree and sacrifices himself. When the coast is clear, Frenchie starts running north. It’s cold, he’s sick, and the little food he has is spoiled. Miig finds Frenchie, asleep and ready to die.

Frenchie is now sixteen, and he’s been on the run with Miig for the last five years. Frenchie’s family consists of the teens Chi-Boy, Wab, and the twins Tree and Zheegwon; the kids RiRi and Slopper; Miig, and the Elder Minerva. One night, Miig explains that dreams live in their bone marrow and then tells the teens Story, the narrative of how the world got to where it is now. The Indigenous Anishnaabe people were proud and valiant warriors, but newcomers opened residential schools to subjugate them and deprive them of their language. After the end of those original schools, water became scarce. As governments began fighting over water and taking it from Anishnaabe lands, the north started to melt, and natural disasters killed millions of people. Some people stopped dreaming. Miig stops for the night. Per RiRi’s request, Frenchie goes to her tent to tell her stories. She desperately wants to hear Story, but Miig thinks she’s too young. Later that evening, Rose arrives and joins the family. Frenchie loves her immediately.

Miig takes Frenchie and a few others hunting, and Frenchie feels superior for being included. When he returns, he’s distraught to discover that Minerva has been teaching Rose their language. A few days later, Frenchie is again part of the hunting group. On his own in the woods, he wonders if he could torture children for marrow if he stopped dreaming. He comes face to face with a giant moose, but he decides not to shoot it. Later, Wab asks if circumstances make people bad, or if people make bad circumstances. Miig suggests that it’s complicated and that in their case, both they and the Recruiters are motivated by the same thing: survival. Wab admits that she saw two men in the woods last week, one of whom she recognized and who was dishonest.

Miig’s family breaks through a fence to spend a few nights at the closed Four Winds resort. There, Minerva tells the girls the story of the Rogarou, a dog-man shape-shifter that she beat and then became intimate with. The Rogarou will damn

Minerva’s entire family. That night, Rose crawls in bed with Frenchie. She tells him her coming-to story: her grandmother and then her grandmother’s brothers, William and Jonas, raised her. When William and then Jonas died, Rose began heading north. They start to kiss, but RiRi and Slopper interrupt them. Frenchie wakes up in the morning to find his entire family asleep in the room.

After two days, Miig is ready to leave. Frenchie comes across Wab, who’s drunk and talking about how horrible her mother was. She tells the boys, Rose, and Miig her coming-to story: when she was eleven and still in the city, Wab was earning money to eat by running messages across town. One Indian suspiciously paid upfront and when Wab got to the drop-off, she discovered that it was a setup. The man who accepted her letter cut Wab from her forehead to her chest and a group of men raped her for two days. The man she saw in the woods was the man who set up the run. They discover that RiRi has been listening and is hysterical and afraid. Miig says it’s time to tell her Story. Picking up where he left off weeks ago, Miig says that pipelines burst and poisoned the earth, and the sun started to disappear for weeks at a time. People stopped dreaming, and some turned to the Indigenous populations with curiosity—Indigenous people could still dream. The ability to dream was somehow stored in the Indigenous people’s bone marrow, and the government began to construct new residential schools where the marrow was forcibly extracted.

When the group finally leaves, Frenchie is in a state of emotional turmoil. RiRi is anxious, Frenchie wishes he hadn’t heard Wab’s story, and Rose hasn’t spoken to him in days. The group smells smoke and Miig sends Frenchie up a tree to look around. Frenchie sees a plume, trees falling, and something yellow. Miig doesn’t let Frenchie share this with the group and makes Frenchie relay what he saw privately. He then tells Frenchie the heartbreaking coming-to stories of the other children: both RiRi and Slopper lost their parents; Recruiters stole Minerva’s baby grandson and raped her; and he found the twins strung up in a barn, covered in cuts and missing their pinkies. He says that he lost his husband Isaac to the schools and rubs the buffalo tattoo on his hand—his “wedding ring.”

Miig shares his coming-to story. Isaac, who was a poet and fluent in Cree, escaped with Miig to their cabin. After a few months, three suspicious Indigenous people showed up requesting shelter, but Isaac was willing to trust them. The young woman in the group showed Miig her ankle monitor: Recruiters were coming. Isaac didn’t believe the stories and thought they could talk to the Recruiters. Miig tells Frenchie that the government is building new schools, but he wants to keep this quiet to give the other kids hope. That night, Frenchie thinks about Isaac and realizes that losing people is worse than running.

Five days later, Frenchie climbs a tree and sees two men (the same men Wab saw) a few hours away. They don’t look like

Recruiters, but they also don't move like they're being chased. Miig insists they make contact, and the group reaches the men three days later. The men introduce themselves as Travis and Lincoln and speak Cree. Travis recognizes Wab but invites the group to share their food. Miig decides to accept when he learns that Travis has been in Espanola and will have news. Frenchie follows Chi-Boy into the woods to scout around, and a task that makes Frenchie feel very mature. When they return to the clearing, they hear that there's a resistance group near Espanola, and Travis attempts to apologize for setting her up on the run that resulted in her injury and rape. Travis and Lincoln camp with Miig's group, and they end up holding the family at gunpoint in the middle of the night. Lincoln, who looks inebriated, chokes RiRi and races away with her. Frenchie follows Lincoln, Miig, and Rose, and discovers that Lincoln and RiRi fell off the edge of a tall cliff. He runs back to the clearing and shoots Travis. They pack up and run for days to escape the Recruiters, crying and grieving as they go.

As they travel, Miig tells Frenchie that after he escaped from the school, he knew he had to get back to Isaac. He ended up in an Anishnaabe settlement and bartered with Frenchie's dad in exchange for a rifle. Miig returned to the school and held a driver at gunpoint until he told Miig that harvesting marrow kills the victims. Miig discovered that the back of the truck was filled with labeled vials. He took the one containing Isaac's marrow, killed the driver, and "sang home" the other vials. Later, Miig's family reaches a barn and spend the night there. In the middle of the night, Recruiters find and take Minerva. Frenchie declares that they should go south, find the resistance group, and rescue Minerva.

Frenchie feels lost. His family has lost their oldest and their youngest members, and being in charge with Miig and Chi-Boy is a lot of responsibility. They encounter syllabics (the written language) on a tree, and Rose and Frenchie discover a stream of good water and kiss. That night, people in bandanas drag Frenchie and his family out of their tents. Miig recognizes an older man in the group. A young man named Derrick seems jealous that Rose and Frenchie are close. They follow their captors to a cave filled with people that opens onto a secluded valley. People start to emerge from a sweat lodge. The last man out is Dad, who introduces his Council and says they've heard of Minerva. Their spy, Father Carole, said that Minerva began to sing when they hooked her up to the machines. The machines malfunctioned and the school burned down. Rose and Frenchie fall asleep in her tent after Rose expresses anxiety that Frenchie will leave them now that he's found Dad, and Frenchie feels like he's lost his identity. In the middle of the night, he wakes up and sings with Miig.

The next day, Frenchie feels at odds with everything. He's rude to Rose and accuses Dad of not trying to look for him and Mitch. At a social dance, Derrick asks Rose to dance with him and Frenchie leaves. The next morning, Frenchie joins the older

men hunting, and Clarence tells Frenchie that they'll soon be able to heal their lands. Frenchie is rude to Rose when he gets back to camp and miserably seeks out Dad. Dad tells Frenchie how he ended up meeting Mom, but Father Carole arrives and says that they're moving Minerva tomorrow. Frenchie is part of the rescue group, but the van driver shoots Minerva before they can carry out their plan. She dies in Rose, Miig, and Frenchie's arms after telling them to always go home. They bury her, and both Rose and Frenchie cut off their **braids** to bury with her. The group runs for ten days. The Council begins piecing together all the things they know about their language and their stories, and creates a youth council to pass on the knowledge.

Rose decides to leave the group. Frenchie hides so he doesn't have to say goodbye, reasoning that he should be happy with the family he's found with Miig and Dad. Dad, however, gives Frenchie permission to go after Rose and search for his own version of home. Frenchie finds Rose waiting for him. Before Frenchie and Rose can kiss, they are distracted by Derrick running by, and they come across a group of two Guyanese women, one obviously Cree man, and two pale men. One of the pale men is actually Cree—he speaks fluently and even dreams in the language. They join this expedition, and on the way back to the camp, Frenchie sees that the man has a buffalo tattoo on the back of his hand—he's Isaac. Frenchie laughs and cries as Miig and Isaac reunite, and he realizes that they'll do anything for their dreams.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Frenchie – A sixteen-year-old Métis boy and the protagonist of the novel. His given name is Francis, but few people call him that. Frenchie lost Dad, Mom, and his older brother, Mitch, by the time he was eleven. Though he loves the family he's found with Miig and the other children with whom he travels, Frenchie is deeply scarred by his parents' absences, in particular. Like all the children in Miig's group, Frenchie is comfortable hunting with the rifle and is beginning to learn to use a bow and arrow. He takes on the role of a big brother to seven-year-old RiRi, who desperately wants to hear "Story," their community's narrative of how the world came to be in its present state. Frenchie overwhelmingly tries to protect RiRi by not telling her Story until Miig deems her ready, and then by assuring her that things will be okay after she does hear it. Once Rose joins Miig's group, Frenchie begins to join Miig and Chi-Boy in making decisions and guiding the group, though in many ways, Frenchie is still a child. He admires his Elders and does whatever he can to imitate their movements and mannerisms, which allows Frenchie the opportunity to experiment with being an adult in a relatively safe environment. A skilled climber, Frenchie often scales pine trees to get a

better view of his surroundings. After Rose's arrival, Frenchie begins to conceptualize climbing as a way to care for his family and simultaneously impress Rose. Frenchie begins to question his identity and role in the world after he's unable to save RiRi and shoots Travis for betraying them and bringing about RiRi's death. He also fails to recognize Minerva's sacrifice for what it was until it's too late. Frenchie's sense of being unmoored and sometimes longing for death is heightened when he leads his family to an Indigenous resistance group and discovers Dad there. Frenchie ultimately learns to take pride in his identity as a young Indigenous man and in his family, and eventually comes to terms with his failings.

Miig – The father figure of a ragtag group of Indigenous children. He's a middle-aged Anishnaabe man who speaks the Cree language and is skilled at teaching his adopted family of eight children the ways of his hunter-gatherer lifestyle. Miig went on the run after he and his husband, Isaac, were betrayed by Indigenous double agents. Though they were both taken to a residential school, Miig was the only one to escape. He later traded information with Dad in exchange for a gun and discovered the truth about the residential schools: they don't just harvest bone marrow, they actually kill the Indigenous victims. Miig carries a vial of bone marrow that he identified as Isaac's with him and refers to it as his "heart" that he carries outside of his body. Despite Miig's role as a steadfast and knowledgeable Elder (at least in the eyes of his young charges), he's overcome by grief for Isaac. He instills in his group the understanding that no one person is more important than another, and encourages them to learn the skills they need to be independent. While the young children sometimes resent Miig for the choices he makes as a leader, Frenchie recognizes that he is doing whatever he can to protect his family and keeping certain information from them so that they have the strength to go on. Once Miig and his group connect with the resistance group, Miig begins to lose the will to keep fighting. He effectively passes the torch to Frenchie and immerses himself in his grief for Isaac, especially after Minerva dies. Though he speaks Cree, he's unable to read syllabics (the written language). Miig understands that the most important way to stand up to the residential schools is to make sure that every Indigenous child learns the history of the **residential schools** and the origins of why the world is the way it is. For this reason, he tells all or bits of Story to the older children several times per week. At the end of the novel, Frenchie helps Miig reunite with Isaac.

Wab – Wab is an eighteen-year-old woman in Frenchie's family. As the oldest girl, she has the power to choose how, what, and by whom domestic tasks get done, though she often chooses to do things herself. She's quiet and is described as "movie star beautiful," which is marred only by a huge keloid scar that runs from her forehead to her chest and which covers one of her eyes. Though Wab's scar and the history it suggests—and in

some ways, Wab herself—is scary for some of the younger members of the family, they have all had crushes on Wab and gossip about her having been a mercenary. When the truth comes out, it's decidedly less heroic for Wab: after a childhood of poverty and intermittent sexual abuse, Wab turned her love of running into a business and ran notes around her city after other modes of communication were cut. A man put a stop to this business venture by cutting Wab's face and then keeping her locked in a broken walk-in freezer where men raped her for two days. Because of this experience, Wab is suspicious of strangers and slow to trust anyone. She channels her grief and trauma into caring for RiRi and Minerva, and losing both of them makes her even more anxious and unstable. She and Chi-Boy are romantically involved, though it doesn't become clear to everyone that this is the case until right after Minerva's death. When summer arrives, Frenchie realizes that Wab is pregnant.

Minerva – The Elder of Miig's family. She's very small, wears her gray hair in two **braids** with a kerchief tied around her head, and often seems questionably sane. She usually sings or mutters in Cree when she speaks at all, and Frenchie initially thinks that being assigned to stay at camp with her is a waste of time. He begins to reevaluate this when Rose shares that Minerva takes the time to teach those at camp the Cree language. Miig suggests that they all undervalued and underestimated Minerva when she sacrifices herself to Recruiters, especially when they later learn that she burned down the **residential school** by singing when they tried to harvest her marrow. At this point, it becomes clear to Frenchie and others that Minerva, as an Elder fluent in the language, is the key to beating the schools and creating change. She dies, however, in the attempt to rescue her. Frenchie learns that Minerva is so mothering to the children in the family when they get sick because she lost an adopted baby to a cough. Miig also shares that Minerva's baby grandson was taken from her by Recruiters, who raped her and left her to die.

RiRi – A seven-year-old girl in Frenchie and Miig's family. Miig explains to Frenchie that RiRi came to the group as a baby with her mother, but Recruiters took her mother not long after. RiRi is generally happy, endearing, and sassy. She begins to crave more independence in the weeks before the main story begins, so she starts sleeping in her own tent (rather than with Minerva) and pesters Frenchie to tell her Story. RiRi finally gets to hear Story after Miig notices that she heard Wab's coming-to-story, which was extremely violent, and hearing Story shakes RiRi and starts to expose a dark streak in her personality. Frenchie notices that after hearing Story, RiRi becomes more afraid of strangers and more apt to come up with scary or heartbreaking explanations for such things as the pink rubber boots she finds at the Four Winds resort. RiRi dies tragically a week after hearing Story when two Indigenous double agents, Travis and Lincoln, try to expose the group to Recruiters.

Lincoln, inebriated, falls off a cliff with RiRi to both of their deaths. Her death is one of several things that motivate Frenchie to lead the group south to the resistance fighters.

Rose – A teenager about Frenchie's age who joins Miig's group at the beginning of the novel. She's extremely beautiful, with curly brown hair, big eyes, and a big smile—when she's not angry and defensive. Frenchie develops a crush on her immediately, which she reciprocates. Rose was raised by her grandmother, and then her grandmother's brothers, before finding her way to Miig. She's a competent hunter and doesn't underestimate or look down on Minerva, which means that Minerva is willing to teach Rose words in the Cree language while they're at camp together. Rose awakens Frenchie's desire to protect and defend his family, something that grates on her at times. Things become especially tense after the family joins with the resistance group, as another young man, Derrick, takes a liking to Rose and makes a point of being rude to Frenchie in order to impress her. Though Rose accepts some of Derrick's advances, she remains loyal to Frenchie and demands better treatment from him when he is mean to her out of jealousy. Though she initially vows to run away because of Frenchie's behavior, she allows Frenchie to run after her and ultimately agrees to stay.

Dad – Frenchie's biological dad. Frenchie spends much of the novel believing that Dad died in the **residential schools**. Dad left Mom and his sons with his Council to speak to the Canadian government about the necessity of shutting down the residential schools, which Miig—who showed Dad the way—sees as proof that Dad foolishly believed in the ability to create a dialogue, foster understanding, and demand respect. He and Frenchie reunite in the resistance group, and Dad explains that while his heart stayed with his biological family, he also recognized the importance of being a true part of the community formed by the resistance group. Though Frenchie is a teen, Dad is still able to make him feel safe and secure like he was able to when Frenchie was a child. Dad ultimately gives Frenchie permission to chase after Rose. He shapes Frenchie's definition of family by making it clear that, while he'll always be around for Frenchie, Frenchie needs to forge his own path.

Travis – Travis is a short Indigenous man who travels with Lincoln. Wab remembers him when she sees him the first time: he was the man who set up her bogus run that resulted in being gang-raped and cut open from forehead to chest. Wab says that at that point, Travis was addicted to drugs. In the present, Travis tries to make the case that he's changed and that he never wanted Wab to get hurt. He generously invites Miig's group to join him and Lincoln for dinner and he insists that the city brings out the worst in people. This all turns out to be a trap: Travis is working with Recruiters to trick Indigenous people and bring them to the **residential schools**. Frenchie shoots Travis in a fit of rage after Lincoln kills RiRi.

Isaac – Miig's husband. He's of mixed European and

Anishnaabe descent and looks more European than Indigenous in appearance, with green eyes and light skin. He was a poet and somewhat of a linguist, and is fluent in the Cree language. Miig, who spends the majority of the novel believing that Isaac died in the **residential schools**, notes that Isaac's trusting nature was his downfall: he trusted three Indigenous guests who turned out to be agents for the schools. After Isaac's supposed death, Miig carries a glass vial containing Isaac's bone marrow with him. Later, Frenchie recognizes Isaac for who he is, thanks to the buffalo tattoo on the back of his left hand—his and Miig's "wedding ring." Frenchie discovers that, because Isaac dreams in the Cree language, he can be the key to destroying the residential schools.

Chi-Boy – The oldest boy in Frenchie's family. He's in his late teens, is extremely tall, and seldom speaks. Chi-Boy often runs patrols—he's skilled at moving silently through the forest and at leaving false trails for Recruiters. Chi-Boy is also in love with Wab and is fastidious about protecting her. To spend time together, he and Wab practice hunting with bows and arrows. Frenchie admires and strives to emulate Chi-Boy's skills and calm, imposing, mature demeanor. Chi-Boy and Wab begin to live together in the weeks after Minerva's death, and are expecting a baby in the months after the novel ends.

Tree – One of the twelve-year-old twins in Miig and Frenchie's family. He and his twin Zheegwon are extremely close, to the point that they're essentially the same person in terms of behavior and speech. Tree is a quiet and levelheaded boy. He and Zheegwon were captured and tortured by people who wanted to extract their marrow but didn't have the tools or skills to do so. Both boys are covered in scars and are missing their pinky fingers. They comfort each other by passing a single baseball cap back and forth, touching each other, and reassuring each other that things will be okay.

Zheegwon – One of the twelve-year-old twins in Miig and Frenchie's family. He and his twin Tree are extremely close, to the point that they're essentially the same person in terms of behavior and speech. Zheegwon is quiet and levelheaded. He and Tree were captured and tortured by people who wanted to extract their marrow but didn't have the tools or skills to do so. Both boys are covered in scars and are missing their pinky fingers. They comfort each other by passing a single baseball cap back and forth, touching each other, and reassuring each other that things will be okay.

Slopper – An overweight nine-year-old boy in Frenchie's family. Slopper exists in a space between child and adult—he heard Story at age seven and is therefore aware of the danger in the world, but he still clearly wants to remain a child. He's happy to play with RiRi and excuse himself from hearing Story, and he's not yet allowed to hunt with the rifle. He thrives on small comforts and loves food. Slopper begins to come into himself after Minerva's death, when the Council puts him in charge of forming a youth council to passing along all the cultural

knowledge that the resistance group collectively possesses.

Clarence – A member of the resistance group's Council. He's Anishnaabe and is very kind to Frenchie, though Frenchie has to contend with the fact that Clarence is also Derrick's uncle. Clarence shows that he doesn't play favorites, however, and reprimands Derrick for not waking himself up to go on the hunt. He also tells Frenchie that, as Indigenous people, they have the skills and knowledge to heal their lands. He believes that they'll be able to return one day and save the planet.

Derrick – An indigenous teen who's about Frenchie's age. He's handsome, strong, full of himself, and he takes an instant interest in Rose. Frenchie is intensely jealous of Derrick for this reason, though he comforts himself by noting that Derrick's **braid** isn't as long as his and by watching older Council members reprimand Derrick for not waking up in time to join the hunt.

Wab's Mother – Wab's mother was an alcoholic who, when alcohol became scarce in the city, turned to cocaine. She traded sexual favors for drugs, which often put young Wab at risk of sexual abuse, too. Wab's mother was generally uninvolved in raising her, and was too intoxicated to care when Wab came home with her major injury after being gang-raped. Even in the present, almost a decade after this incident, Wab feels abandoned by her mother.

Lincoln – A tall, hulking Indigenous man who travels with Travis. Frenchie observes that the two men move suspiciously—they leave obvious garbage, stay in one place for several days, and don't seem like they're on the run. But up close, Lincoln makes Frenchie feel uncomfortable for a reason Frenchie can't place. It turns out that Lincoln and Travis are working for the Recruiters, but Lincoln botches the job by taking drugs and killing himself and RiRi.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Mom – Frenchie and Mitch's mom. She was taken by Recruiters about five years before the novel's main story begins. Frenchie implies that Mom was severely depressed after Dad left and didn't come back, and that she knowingly put herself in a position that made her vulnerable to Recruiters.

Mitch – Frenchie's older brother. He cares deeply for Frenchie and takes his responsibility as Frenchie's sole caregiver seriously once they lose both Dad and Mom. When Frenchie is eleven, Mitch sacrifices himself to the Recruiters in order to protect his younger brother.

Freddie – A mute Malaysian man who lived with Wab and Wab's mother in a dumpster. His wife was Taiwanese and was taken to the **residential schools**.

Father Carole – A Catholic man who works for the **residential schools**, but who also passes information to the Indigenous resistance group.

William – One of Rose's grandmother's brothers. He died after six years of being on the run with Rose and his brother Jonas.

Jonas – One of Rose's grandmother's brothers. He died a few months before Rose found Miig's group, and taught Rose how to hunt and how to head north.

Uncle – Frenchie's uncle. When Frenchie was a young child, Uncle introduced him to the band Pearl Jam.

Bullet – An older Indigenous woman and a member of the resistance group's Council.

General – A middle-aged Indigenous man. He's a member of the Council.

Talia – A Guyanese nurse who helps smuggle people out of the **residential schools**.

Helene – A Guyanese nurse who helps smuggle people out of the **residential schools**.

Mint – A member of the Council.

TERMS

Anishnaabe – A group of culturally and linguistically-related Indigenous peoples whose ancestral lands are centered around the Great Lakes in contemporary Canada and the United States. Though they speak a variety of dialects, many of the dialects are related enough that speakers from different areas can understand each other.

Métis – An Indigenous ethnic group that is native to Canada and some of the United States. The Métis are descended from Indigenous peoples and European settlers, especially French trappers, and have been recognized as a distinct group since 1982.



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



CYCLICAL HISTORIES, LANGUAGE, AND INDIGENOUS OPPRESSION

The Marrow Thieves introduces the reader to a horrific post-apocalyptic world in which the majority of the population has lost the ability to dream—everyone, that is, except Indigenous populations, which are being targeted, kidnapped, and taken to **residential schools** where their bone marrow (which holds the ability to dream) is harvested. The novel follows Frenchie, a sixteen-year-old Métis boy, as he travels north with other Indigenous

children, as well as middle-aged Miig and elderly Minerva. While the novel is a work of speculative fiction, the dystopian future that Dimaline presents isn't complete fantasy. She draws heavily on the history of Canadian residential schools, which operated in Canada in various forms for centuries, and goes to great lengths to show how this history would be shockingly easy to recreate under certain circumstances. With this, Dimaline pays particular attention to the specific ways in which white Canadians have historically targeted Indigenous people, and how, even decades after the official end of the residential schools, those same methods can prove to be just as effective and dangerous. In the face of this bleak reality, *The Marrow Thieves* becomes Dimaline's call to action for all Canadians, encouraging them to support Indigenous populations in keeping their culture alive by sharing their stories and native languages.

The very fact that the facilities where the government harvests Indigenous bone marrow are called "residential schools" in the novel's present makes it clear that the reality presented in the novel (which takes place sometime after 2050) is simply the current iteration of a dark and complex history of oppression, rather than a radically new idea. Canada's residential schools came into their power in 1876 with the specific goal of separating Indigenous children from their families and their cultures, and in doing so, "civilizing" children and assimilating them into mainstream Canadian culture. Students were banned from speaking their languages and practicing their spiritual beliefs to the point that many students forgot their native languages. This meant that when students did manage to visit their families, they couldn't communicate with them—and by severing this connection between the young and old, colonial powers were able to divorce children from their history and replace it with a story in which children were "saved" and were the recipients of huge favors from the Canadian government. This state of affairs is, importantly, not all that different from the way that the residential schools in the novel operate: Indigenous people who end up in the schools overwhelmingly don't come back out again, and when those people die, their language dies with them. The history of these schools is also something that the characters in *The Marrow Thieves* haven't forgotten: there are still Elders among them who were victims of the historical residential schools.

Through his actions, Miig suggests that one of the few avenues available to on-the-run Indigenous people to stand up to the government and to these false narratives is through storytelling and language. In particular, Miig advocates for the regular recitation of "Story," or the tale of how the world got to the place it is in the novel's present. As with the historical account of the residential schools, Story tells of how the government abused Indigenous people (adults and children alike) and treated them as disposable and a nuisance—that is, until it turned out that their bone marrow was a valuable

natural resource. By regularly reciting Story for Frenchie and the other older children in the group, Miig does one of the few things he can to ensure that his adoptive children don't fall prey to whatever narrative the government is currently spinning about the atrocities taking place.

At the same time, the Elder Minerva regularly bestows "gifts," in the form of words in the Cree language, upon the children in the group. Like Miig's storytelling, Minerva uses language to help the children connect with their more distant past and in doing so, with their cultural history—in a way that specifically counteracts the aims of the original residential schools and therefore, gives the Indigenous communities a way to begin to heal from some of these abuses. Throughout the novel, Dimaline suggests that Indigenous language is one of the most effective ways to maintain ties with one's culture and to counteract the residential schools. At one point in the novel, Miig and his group hear that when Recruiters captured Minerva and tried to harvest her bone marrow, she broke the extraction machines and the school burned down—all because she began singing traditional songs in the native language. With this, the novel makes the case that one of the most effective ways to stand up to and counteract the oppression of Indigenous people is by keeping Indigenous language and stories alive by passing them on to future generations. Doing so ensures that the history of Indigenous oppression isn't forgotten, minimized, or rationalized.



FAMILY AND COMING OF AGE

It's telling that Miig introduces the eight children and young adults with whom he travels as his family—given the trauma they've all experienced and the fact that many of their blood-related families have been broken up, a makeshift chosen family is the only kind of family that most of the novel's characters will ever have. However, this is a difficult proposition, especially for Frenchie: he often dreams of his brother, Mitch, who sacrificed himself to save Frenchie. In the midst of this overwhelming grief and the destruction of his biological family, Frenchie must learn to value what semblance of family he does have: his chosen family of Miig and the others in the group. Accepting his situation for what it is and coming to terms with his identity in relation to his family are crucial elements of Frenchie's maturation throughout the story. As he develops and begins to come of age, the novel suggests that a young person makes the final leaps toward adulthood as they begin to value and fit themselves in with their family—chosen or otherwise.

One of the clearest effects of the novel's **residential schools** and other policies concerning Indigenous people is that blood-related Indigenous families are broken up. In addition to this, Wab and Frenchie's stories suggest that the danger and the fear surrounding simply existing as an Indigenous person can, in some case, turn parents who are physically present into

inadequate advocates and protectors for their children: Wab feels abandoned by her mother, who was addicted to alcohol and then cocaine, while Frenchie and Mitch's mom fell into a depression after Dad disappeared, and may have purposefully put herself in a situation where Recruiters could take her. In this kind of environment, Frenchie recognizes the importance of clinging to people who will protect him and remain loyal, no matter what—something that he did have with Mitch, but that only becomes truly real for him once he joins Miig's group. With this, the novel elevates the importance of chosen family: they are, in Frenchie's experience, not the only ones *ever* willing to defend him, but they are the only ones at this time who are present and able to do so.

Frenchie begins to take concrete steps toward adulthood as he grapples with new mature feelings and emotions in the form of his crush on Rose (another member of Miig's group), and as he uses those emotions to catapult himself into a protective role for all his family members. Though it's worth noting that Rose is perfectly self-sufficient and is as competent at hunting and self-defense as any of the other teens in Miig's family, Frenchie's crush on her stirs up his desire to protect her, prove himself, and act like an adult more than anything else. Some of this leads to action that Frenchie fully admits is intended to impress Rose. However, Frenchie's crush on Rose also spurs him to act in service of others—and it's these other, often unplanned actions that end up thrusting Frenchie most uncomfortably into adulthood. For instance, Frenchie's anger over seeing seven-year-old RiRi brutally and senselessly murdered leads him to shoot her killer's co-conspirator, Travis, in a fit of rage. A week later, after Recruiters take Minerva, Frenchie insists that he has a responsibility to go after her and save her from the residential school. For Frenchie—and indeed, for the rest of his chosen family—the decision to head south to find an Indigenous resistance group that can help them is motivated by the fact that in losing RiRi and Minerva, the makeshift family lost their Elder (their connection to their heritage and their past) and their youngest (a representative of the future, and a reason to make the world a better place). With this, the novel suggests that family isn't just a collection of people who care for each other. Rather, family can be a much larger community that provides people with a firm sense of identity and a tangible connection to their past and future lineage.

As Frenchie is making sense of his burgeoning adult identity in relation to his present chosen family, his experience in the resistance group also forces him to integrate his past and future into his self-concept. Here, Frenchie discovers even more than he initially bargained for: his dad is there, alive and well. This turn of events, in which Frenchie suddenly has the chosen family led by Miig, Dad, and the hope of a real adult relationship with Rose, is overwhelming for Frenchie: the convergence of these three different types of family makes Frenchie question which type of family makes him feel most

himself, and which family will allow him to be the most successful in his new role as a protector. As he vacillates between happiness at what seems like impossibly good fortune and intense grief (especially after Minerva's rescue results in Minerva's death), Frenchie's generally good behavior and kind nature begin to slip, resulting in Rose choosing to leave the group and striking out on her own. Losing this aspect of Frenchie's family that, even more than the others, represents the future (Miig gently brings up the responsibility of having children to Frenchie, who understands the imperative to someday do so) leads Frenchie to the understanding that ultimately, making the choice to chase Rose is the best way for Frenchie to fight for his family and for the future of all Indigenous people. Frenchie is able to make this choice because he feels safe enough in his relationships with his father figures (Miig and Dad) to leave, and this choice to venture out on his own—even though he and Rose return to the group—represent Frenchie's final coming-of-age moment. Returning to the community with Rose allows Frenchie to see that his relationships with his family members, both chosen and biological, are all crucial players in Frenchie's understanding of the family lineage, community, and culture that inform his sense of self as he matures into an adult.



HUMANS AND NATURE

While the immediate conflict of *The Marrow Thieves* is Frenchie and his friends' attempts to evade Recruiters and protect themselves from human antagonists, it's important to keep in mind that this conflict arose in the first place because of the devastating effects of climate change. In the novel's present, sea levels have risen and transformed the coastlines, oil pipelines have poisoned many freshwater sources, and warmer temperatures combined with earthquakes have fundamentally changed the landscape and the weather of the world—and together, these changes have somehow made it so that people who aren't Indigenous are losing their ability to dream. After decimating the environment, non-Indigenous people begin harvesting the bone marrow of the Indigenous population because it enables them to dream again. Just as they decimated the environment, they now exploit the Indigenous population as another expendable resource they can consume. These dire consequences suggest that humankind's flippant destruction of nature is ultimately self-destructive and symptomatic of a deeply corrupted society. Dimaline makes it clear that all humans are intrinsically connected to the natural world and argues that those who respect, embrace, and care for the land—as the Indigenous characters do—are the best prepared to face a changing natural world.

The Marrow Thieves goes to great lengths to illustrate the various ways that climate change has radically altered the lives of all humans, Indigenous and other groups alike. In addition to

affecting people's capacity to dream, the changes have turned cities into dangerous concentrations of impoverished, ill, and desperate people, while Miig also notes in *Story* that many people have to turn to medical intervention in order to conceive and bear children. This has the important effect of making it clear to the reader that while the Indigenous characters are the ones who are being forced to pay for these changes with their bodies and their lives, the damage wrought by climate change is damage that affects everyone who inhabits the planet. Eighteen-year-old Wab's story adds even more nuance to the question of who ends up suffering in this world. She grew up in a city apartment block where people began to take up residence in the hallways—as well as in the streets—as the government slowly began cutting utilities, cell service, and food stores. The visceral images she creates paint a picture of an unhealthy, dangerous urban landscape that specifically subjugates poor people of all ethnicities.

Despite this recognition that everyone suffers the consequences of climate change, Dimaline also believes that not everyone is at fault when it comes to what caused the changes in the first place. Instead, Miig offers, in broad strokes, a history that makes it clear that wealthy and uncompassionate non-Indigenous people—and specifically, the Canadian government—are to blame. He notes that their government policies of removing Indigenous people from their ancestral lands and onto reservations, laying oil pipelines with no thought for the potential consequences to the natural world, and then removing Indigenous people from the reservations—the only places, per *Story*, where there was still potable water—is what ultimately led to the crisis. With this, the novel draws out a connection between abusing the natural world and the original stewards of nature (the Indigenous populations), and challenges the notion that one can rise above any consequences that may come from this abuse. Put another way, the people and systems that Miig implicates through *Story* are people who shirked responsibility for their destructive actions, and are now facing the fact that they can't just buy or legislate their way out of the world they created.

Though the novel doesn't fully flesh out how exactly this environmental tragedy can be remedied, it does make it very clear that for a variety of reasons, humanitarian and otherwise, the goal shouldn't be to find a quick fix solution like harvesting Indigenous bone marrow to enable people to dream again—something that helps a few people, but destroys many others and doesn't get to the root of the problem. Instead, an Indigenous man named Clarence tells Frenchie that if the Indigenous populations can achieve a sense of safety, they can "start the process of healing" and return home to their ancestral lands. Clarence specifies that Indigenous people already have the knowledge they need to "heal the land," despite efforts to destroy that knowledge through the historical and present **residential schools**. He says that "when

we heal our land, we are healed also"—suggesting that the only way to recover from this crisis is to prioritize the knowledge of those who know best, even when those people may be more valuable for other things in the short term. The knowledge of how to heal the land (unlike harvesting bone marrow and the ability to dream) lies solely with the people who are most negatively affected by environmental destruction and is the only solution that will actually benefit everyone and everything.



TRAUMA, IDENTITY, AND PRIDE

The world presented in *The Marrow Thieves* is one in which Indigenous people have been reduced and flattened—in the eyes of the white government—to be nothing other than a commodity. Those who are on the run must contend with the horrific, dehumanizing fact that to many, they're something less than human. As the novel unfolds, Dimaline highlights the many forms of trauma that the Indigenous community is forced to shoulder, from physical violence to emotional pain. Despite this bleak picture of life for the Indigenous community, Dimaline ultimately argues that Indigenous identity deserves to be celebrated, and that having pride in one's identity as an Indigenous person can be a powerful thing.

Frenchie and his friends are reminded in a variety of ways and instances that their bodies are both extremely valuable and constantly at risk. This creates an environment in which Indigenous people must consistently protect their bodies and their minds from trauma of all sorts, and the effects of the traumatic experiences that they're unable to prevent ripple outwards through the community. For some, the trauma is mostly emotional. Miig and his husband, Isaac, were tricked by other Indigenous people who were in cahoots with the government—and for most of the novel, Miig believes that he lost Isaac to the **residential schools**. In this situation, Miig must reckon with two types of emotional trauma: first, the trauma and the sense of a fractured community that came from being betrayed by people who by all accounts should have been his allies; then, he carries the pain of having lost his only family member, a specific experience that many of the children in his group share.

Others, Wab in particular, have experienced intense physical trauma on top of their emotional strife. Wab grew up in a situation in which it was almost impossible to avoid sexual abuse and was ultimately tricked, gang raped, and suffered horrendous physical violence that left her with a huge scar across her face and neck and only one eye. For Wab, her scar is a constant reminder of the violence and trauma that she experienced because of who she is as an Indigenous person. Her identity and sense of pride as an Indigenous person is taken away from her and perverted into the very thing that is used to target and oppress her. This also isn't an experience unique to Wab—Miig explains to Frenchie that the twins,

Zheegwon, and Tree, were strung up and cut into by people desperate to extract their marrow, but with no knowledge of how to effectively do so. In this way, the physical scars that many of Frenchie's family bear make it impossible to ignore or forget that within the world of the novel, Indigenous bodies and the scars they bear are the sites of intense trauma, as well as reflections of the destruction being wrought on the world at large.

The way that Miig rations out Story and controls who hears it suggests that he understands that one doesn't need to directly suffer violence or betrayal to experience trauma: simply being told that, in the eyes of others, a person is belittled to the status of an inanimate, harvestable resource is earth-shattering and traumatic enough. Dimaline illustrates this by allowing the reader to follow seven-year-old RiRi's journey as she transforms from innocence, to being forced to grow up before she's ready because of this information, to her brutal death as she sees Story come to life in front of her eyes. Prior to hearing Story for the first time, RiRi is a generally happy kid: she knows her life is in danger, but she's blissfully unaware of why exactly this is the case. Miig chooses to tell Story to RiRi after RiRi secretly listens in on Wab's traumatic "coming-to story," the story of how Wab left the city because of violence and ultimately found Miig. Put another way, Miig believes that once RiRi becomes aware of the violence in the world and the ways in which she's susceptible to it, she must know the whole truth. Being Indigenous is, in this sense, inherently traumatizing—Riri's initiation into the narrative of her own culture is unavoidably painful. Hearing Story and learning that others want to harm her and profit off of her body visibly shakes RiRi, and she's murdered less than a week later. RiRi's death, which is senseless and benefits nobody, not even the Indigenous double agents who killed her, drives home the precarious state in which the novel's Indigenous characters find themselves: even among people like them, there's always a chance that they'll be viewed as commodities, not members of a community with a shared history of trauma.

Despite all the ways in which the novel shows the dangers of being Indigenous and the ways that Indigenous bodies bear the scars of trauma, Dimaline also suggests that Indigenous identity can—and should—be a source of pride and an antidote to the dehumanization of Indigenous people in general. Frenchie pays particular attention to the ways in which traditional Indigenous hairstyles, such as his long **braid** and Miig's Mohawk, make him feel proud to be Métis and, as he suggests of his braid, make him "a better Indian." He also fixates on the buffalo tattoo on the back of Miig's hand (his "wedding ring" with Isaac) and sees the tattoo as a reminder not just of Miig's grief, but of the happiness, love, and culture that he and Isaac shared. Similarly, Minerva's ability to destroy a residential school merely by singing traditional songs shows how Minerva's pride in her identity and in her language, as

represented by the Cree song she sings, has the power to completely decimate oppressors.

This sense of pride in one's identity as an Indigenous person is what the novel suggests will ultimately provide the tools and the knowledge necessary to effectively stand up to the government and to the Recruiters, and to stop the harvest of Indigenous bone marrow altogether. In this way, the novel itself stands as a mirror through which Indigenous readers can see themselves, their past trauma, and their resilience reflected back to them—they are encouraged to feel empowered by their cultural identity and its associated struggles, rather than defeated by it. For non-Indigenous readers, the novel creates the space to feel empathy and compassion, and to recognize the importance of not replicating this dehumanizing trauma in the future.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



BRAIDS

For Frenchie, his long braid is a source of pride. As far as he's concerned, it signifies his identity as an Indigenous person and within the safety of his family with Miig. The braid allows him to show off this pride and use his pride to connect with others, as when Rose fixes Frenchie's braid. Though Frenchie's thoughts are the only ones that reach the reader, he suggests that this way of thinking about hairstyles is something that extends to all of the novel's Indigenous characters. Braids are so culturally significant to the entire group that Frenchie and Rose cut off their braids and bury them with Minerva after she is killed. Despite being a point of pride, the novel also suggests that braids can open people up to danger—Travis recalls that, when Recruiters first began kidnapping Indigenous people, anyone who wore their hair in a braid (no matter how fair-haired and obviously not Indigenous they looked) was at risk of being kidnapped. This speaks to the tenuousness and the danger of being Indigenous in the novel: the very elements of Indigenous identity that should be a point of pride, from braids to language, can also make life extremely dangerous.



RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS

Canadian residential schools were 19th and 20th century government institutions designed to forcibly assimilate Indigenous children into the mainstream culture of European settlers. The residential schools, both the of the novel's present and of the historical past, are a concise representation of the way in which the Canadian government

has abused Indigenous people over the centuries. While they represent the only way forward in the eyes of those who run them, Indigenous characters see the schools as symbols of the government's unwillingness to look at the whole problem and its tendency to instead find a quick fix at the expense of vulnerable populations.



QUOTES



Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Dancing Cat Books edition of *The Marrow Thieves* published in 2017.

Frenchie's Coming-To Story Quotes

☞ "We're all dead anyway. I should make a shish kebab of your kids."

I didn't mean it. I looked at their round eyes, wet and watching but not nervous enough for the threat of a human. Their dad was there, after all, and they knew they were safe. I felt tears collecting behind my own eyes like sand in a windstorm. I opened my mouth...to say what? To apologize to a group of wild guinea pigs? To explain that I hadn't meant what I'd said? To let them know I just missed my family?

Related Characters: Frenchie (speaker), Mitch, Dad, Mom

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 8

Explanation and Analysis

In his first few days alone after Mitch sacrifices himself to the Recruiters to save Frenchie, Frenchie attempts to intimidate a feral guinea pig family and regrets it immediately. The guinea pig family, which includes parents and a bunch of babies, shows Frenchie that in his world, it's easier for animal families to stay intact than it is for humans ones to do so. This emphasizes the fact that Frenchie is only eleven years old and entirely on his own, whereas even animals like the guinea pigs are able to rely upon the comfort of family. Frenchie's regret stems from the fact that, deep inside, he understands that everyone is deserving of a family—even if he doesn't have one right now.

The Fire Quotes

☞ I was nicknamed Frenchie as much for my name as for my people—the Metis. I came from a long line of hunters, trappers, and voyageurs. But now, with most of the rivers cut into pieces and lakes left as grey sludge puckers on the landscape, my own history seemed like a myth along the lines of dragons.

Related Characters: Frenchie (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 21

Explanation and Analysis

Frenchie tells the reader how he got his nickname and notes that his cultural history seems like more of a myth than actual fact. It's particularly telling that he suggests that his history seems this way to him because of the trauma that's happening to the natural world. This suggests that Frenchie's history, and Indigenous history in general, is closely tied up in the land and in keeping the land healthy. This will support an idea put forward much later in the novel that the Indigenous people have the cultural knowledge to heal the land if they ever get the chance to return to their ancestral lands, as it forms the basis for showing how Indigenous culture is actually stored in the land. The destruction of the natural world, meanwhile, directly mirrors the destruction of Indigenous culture at this point in the future.

☞ [...] I did have the longest hair of any of the boys, almost to my waist, burnt ombré at the untrimmed edges. I braided it myself each morning, to keep it out of the way and to remind myself of things I couldn't quite remember but that, nevertheless, I knew to be true.

Related Characters: Frenchie (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 21

Explanation and Analysis



Frenchie tells the reader how proud he is to wear his hair in a long braid, and how wearing his hair this way allows him to connect with his history and his roots. This offers the kids in Miig's family one relatively safe way to connect to their history and to feel pride in their identities as Indigenous


people. For Frenchie, braiding his hair reminds him that he should be proud of who he is and that he should remain loyal to his family, even if he can't remember it now—these are some of the lessons he learns later, although he learns several of these things after cutting off his braid. The way that Frenchie speaks about not quite being able to remember his cultural roots at this point speaks to the fact that Frenchie is mostly disconnected from a community who would help him be able to remember these things.

Story: Part 1 Quotes

☞ "But we sang our songs and brought them to the streets and into the classrooms—classrooms we built on our own lands and filled with our own words and books. And once we remembered that we were warriors, once we honored the pain and left it on the side of the road, we moved ahead. We were back."

Related Characters: Miig (speaker), Frenchie

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 24



Explanation and Analysis


While telling Story, the story of how the world ended up the way it is in the novel's present, Miig explains how after the first residential schools closed, Indigenous people began to heal and regain their pride and their power. The way he describes this happening shows some of the most important ways to keep Indigenous culture alive—namely, through making sure that traditional languages also stay alive. Allowing Indigenous people to teach their children the languages and their history means that those children won't forget the history and will go on to share it with their own children. In this way, they never forget the horrible things that happened in the past and the trauma is able to become part of who they are, even in good times. This part of Story, then, offers some hope for how Indigenous populations will be able to move on and recover from the horrific things that they're experiencing in the novel's present.

Magic Words Quotes

☞ "How do you have language?" My voice broke on the last syllable. My chest tightened. How could she have the language? She was the same age as me, and I deserved it more. I don't know why, but I felt certain that I did. I yanked my braid out of the back of my shirt and let it fall over my shoulder. Some kind of proof, I suppose.

Related Characters: Frenchie (speaker), Rose, Minerva

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 38

Explanation and Analysis



When Rose shares that she spent the day learning the Cree language from Minerva, Frenchie is distraught. Frenchie's emotion here likely has more to do with the fact that he's lived with Minerva for five years now and has barely picked her brain in regards to the language, while Rose has only been with the family for a few weeks at this point. Frenchie may feel ashamed that he never thought to actually engage with Minerva before, and rather than accept that he made a mistake and should take Minerva seriously going forward, his youth and immature emotional state means that he's angry and jealous of Rose and instead.

It's worth noting that Frenchie says several times that Rose also wears her hair in a long braid; while both braids may help the teens connect to their identity, simply having one doesn't make one of them more worthy of learning about their language and their culture. In fact, it's possible to gather that Rose is actually the one who's more deserving, as she's the one who treats Minerva like a full human worthy of respect and interest.

Haunted in the Bush Quotes

☞ It was painful, but I didn't really mind. The more I described my brother, my parents, our makeshift community before Dad left with the Council, the more I remembered, like the way my uncle jiggled to heavy metal. Instead of dreaming their tragic forms, I recreated them as living, laughing people in the cool red confines of RiRi's tent as she drifted off.

Related Characters: Frenchie (speaker), Mitch, Dad, Mom, RiRi

Related Themes:  



Page Number: 43

Explanation and Analysis

Frenchie tells RiRi about his parents and Mitch as she falls asleep every night, and he begins to see that talking about them like this is more comfortable for him than just having nightmares about them that he can't control. In this situation, Frenchie begins to truly come to terms with the power of storytelling. He starts to learn that by choosing how he remembers his family, he's able to actually improve his memories of his family and start to edge out the nightmares in which he sees them suffering at the hands of Recruiters, or otherwise damaged. More broadly, this shows how powerful storytelling is as a tool for memory. Additionally, on a wider cultural scale, it demonstrates how sharing stories of how the Indigenous people ended up where they are now will help them not just remember, but begin to heal from the trauma that they (like Frenchie's family) have suffered.

☝ From where we were now, running, looking at reality from this one point in time, it seemed as though the world had suddenly gone mad. Poisoning your own drinking water, changing the air so much the earth shook and melted and crumbled, harvesting a race for medicine. How? How could this happen? Were they that much different from us? Would we be like them if we'd had a choice? Were they like us enough to let us live?

Related Characters: Frenchie (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 47-48

Explanation and Analysis

As Frenchie sits in the woods, waiting for game, he muses about the state of the world and wonders what he'd do if the Indigenous and white populations were switched. In doing this, Frenchie shows that he doesn't really believe that those who are destroying the land and hunting him are actually that much different in many ways. Where they differ is in their lack of regard for the natural world, first of all, given that they're the ones who created the environmental crisis that led to the dreamlessness in the first place. With this, Frenchie is able to humanize the people after him and also understand that though he's a victim of this system and the hero of the novel, he's not

infallible. He, like all humans, is capable of making cruel decisions that may appear to be in his own best interest if the situation were to arise.

A Plague of Madness Quotes


☝ "Like how we are motivated to run because of the Recruiters?" Rose jumped in. "And the Recruiters are motivated to run after us because of the schools?"


"Almost," he answered. "We are actually both motivated by the same thing: survival."

"But isn't it just us that's trying to survive? No one's trying to kill those jerk-offs."

"But, nevertheless, they are dying. Mostly killing themselves, mind you. And so they are motivated by the need to be able to survive. And they see that solution in us."

Related Characters: Miig, Rose (speaker), Frenchie, Wab

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 54

Explanation and Analysis

Around the fire one night, Wab begins a discussion about the nature of evil and the group discusses that though they may differ significantly with the Recruiters on who's in the right, they're all doing what they think they need to do to survive. Miig leads this conversation in a way that encourages the children to humanize the Recruiters and understand that while they may be wrong. And they are—they're doing horrible things to Indigenous people, and even Miig suggests that there's no excuse for this even though they think they're doing the right thing. Through this, Miig suggests that something that all humans share is the desire to live, which is why they're running away from the Recruiters who wish to kill them and why the Recruiters are pursuing bone marrow. This also makes the children realize that, though the Recruiters are enemies, they're all in this together. In a broader sense, they're all at the mercy of the changing world, and they'll all suffer if the Indigenous people with the knowledge to fix it aren't allowed to do so without fear of persecution and death.

Story: Part 2 Quotes

☞ "And all those pipelines in the ground? They snapped like icicles and spewed bile over forests, into lakes, drowning whole reserves and towns. So much laid to waste from the miscalculation of infallibility in the face of a planet's revolt."

Related Characters: Miig (speaker), RiRi

Related Themes: 


Page Number: 87


Explanation and Analysis

When Miig tells RiRi Story for the first time, he begins with the massive environmental changes that took place and specifically mentions that oil pipelines poisoned the natural world. Notice how Miig suggests that the people who laid the pipelines—who were, presumably, white government officials—went into this disaster and into the time preceding it believing that they'd be able to somehow control the natural world and save their society. This reminds the reader that while the Indigenous people are the ones who are paying for this tragedy with their lives, all poor people are also suffering—they can't buy their way out of what's happening and are at the mercy of their governments, even if they're not being hunted. Miig also notes through his tone that, in general, the governments suffered when they chose to not respect the natural world. With this, Miig indicates that the natural world is infinitely more powerful than any humans, and that it deserves respect and the care if it's expected to become inhabitable for humans again.

☞ "Soon, they needed too many bodies, and they turned to history to show them how to best keep us warehoused, how to best position the culling. That's when the new residential schools started growing up from the dirt like poisonous brick mushrooms."

Related Characters: Miig (speaker), RiRi

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 89

Explanation and Analysis


Miig ends Story for RiRi by explaining how the Recruiters pulled directly from the historical model of residential schools to inform how they set up the system to steal


Indigenous bone marrow. Again, the fact that the government calls these facilities "residential schools" shows that this is a continuation of something that's been going on for a long time, rather than something that's new and without historical context. This shows just how cyclical history can be, and specifically, how oppression can be cyclical: as times changed and it became "necessary" to once again subjugate Indigenous people, the powers that be turned to how they've previously accomplished this goal and can simply replicate it. On the other hand, the novel itself seeks to expose how cyclical history is, and in doing so, it encourages the reader to be on the lookout for this sort of thing in their own lives. Dimaline suggests, through the novel, that the atrocities of the past can and will happen again if people don't make sure that they remember what happened and take measures to not repeat them.

Miigwans' Coming-To Story Quotes

☞ Isaac didn't have grandparents who'd told residential school stories like campfire tales to scare you into acting right, stories about men and women who promised themselves to God only and then took whatever they wanted from the children, especially at night. Stories about a book that was like a vacuum, used to suck the language right out of your lungs. And I didn't have time to share them, not now.

Related Characters: Miig (speaker), Frenchie, Isaac

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 106-107



Explanation and Analysis


In the moments before Miig and Isaac are captured by Recruiters, Miig thinks that Isaac is so unconcerned because he hasn't been raised with the fear of the residential schools like Miig was. This shows both how knowing one's history can help (as Miig clearly understands the danger that they're in and knows that they need to escape now), as well as the consequences of not being fully aware of the history, given that Isaac isn't afraid of what's happening. In this situation, Isaac becomes a warning to Frenchie (who's hearing this story from Miig) and to the reader to make an effort to learn history, as not knowing what's happened in the past means that it's harder to take things that seem fantastical seriously, even when the proof is right there.

Finding Direction Quotes

☝ He'd lost someone he'd built a life with right in the middle of that life. Suddenly, I realized that there was something worse than running, worse even than the schools. There was loss.

Related Characters: Frenchie (speaker), Miig, Isaac

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 110

Explanation and Analysis


After hearing Miig's coming-to story, Frenchie realizes that the worst part of the residential schools and the life he's currently living is the way that this lifestyle and the schools put an end to families and break them up. Frenchie learns at this point just how heartbroken Miig still is about losing Isaac, even though Isaac has been gone now for more than five years. Frenchie begins to see that losing someone that he loves has the power to haunt him for years to come, all thanks to the brutality and the setup of the residential schools.

In addition to losing the people themselves, fracturing families like this also means that it's more difficult to pass along information about their culture, and specifically, their language. Isaac was fluent in Cree, and without him, the culture lost one of their best speakers who had the power to teach the language to many others.

The Other Indians Quotes

☝ I nodded back, copying the way he held his mouth. Yes, we would definitely do so. Us men. We'd be vigilant. Chi-Boy turned and started making his way through the trees. I watched him for a minute, and tried to listen. There was nothing—the absence of sound was the only thing the ear picked up. There was no doubt Chi-Boy was the best scout we had, probably the best scout anyone had. I followed close behind, imitating his movements.

Related Characters: Frenchie (speaker), Lincoln, Travis, Wab, Rose, Chi-Boy

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 124

Explanation and Analysis

During a scouting expedition while the rest of the group sits


with Travis and Lincoln, Chi-Boy lets Frenchie in on his suspicions and his belief that they need to protect the girls in their family in particular. Letting Frenchie in on this concern allows Frenchie to feel extremely adult and as though it's his job to protect the group, as Chi-Boy does. By imitating Chi-Boy's method of moving through the forest on the way back to the clearing, Frenchie is also able to learn how to be a better and more skilled Indigenous person, part of which includes moving silently through the forest. Through this, the novel shows how giving Frenchie responsibility and role models helps lead him toward a more adult identity.

Rogarou Comes Hunting Quotes

☝ The schools were an ever-spreading network from the south stretching northward, on our heels like a bushfire. Always north. To what end? Now we'd lost RiRi. Now I'd shot a man. Would I even be welcome in the North? I couldn't even protect a little girl.

Related Characters: Frenchie (speaker), Chi-Boy, Miig, Travis, RiRi

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 147

Explanation and Analysis

While up in a tree to scout, Frenchie wonders if it's pointless to keep trying after everything that's happened and with the schools spreading in that direction. Importantly, this sense of hopelessness comes on the heels of killing Travis, something that shakes Frenchie to the core and makes him question who he is and if he's still a good person. Losing RiRi and not being able to protect her also makes Frenchie question if he's on the right path to adulthood, given that his failure resulted in a child's death. This all shows how at this point, Frenchie is turning inward and trying to make sense of who he is and where he's going by himself. He's not looking to Chi-Boy or Miig right now to help him figure out how to move on. But as Frenchie moves on with his journey, he will return to drawing on adult figures to help him come to an understanding of who he is and how he should act. This alienation is a symptom of his grief.

☝ "But why? Aren't these supposed to make noise?" Slopper was confused. We'd been told over and over that silence was the only way to move out here, the only way to stay alive. It was Chi-Boy who answered, out of character. "Sometimes you risk everything for a life worth living, even if you're not the one that'll be alive to live it."

Related Characters: Chi-Boy, Slopper (speaker), Frenchie, Minerva

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 153



Explanation and Analysis

As the group packs up Minerva's things after the Recruiters take her, Slopper discovers jingles (noisy adornment that's traditionally put on clothes) and is confused, since he knows they're supposed to make noise. Chi-Boy's response is a crucial moment for Frenchie, as it's one that shows him the importance of taking pride in who he is and accepting that, at times, doing so comes with a risk. The jingles represent Minerva's pride in her identity as an Indigenous woman, as well as hope for a future in which she might be able to wear them or give them to someone else. With this, Frenchie discovers that Minerva wasn't just a crazy old lady—she was consciously looking forward to the future by looking to the past for ways to celebrate her identity and turn her culture into concrete symbols.

On the Road Quotes

☝ Everything was different. We were faster without our youngest and oldest, but now we were without deep roots, without the acute need to protect and make better. And I had taken up a spot that'd opened up in the middle of it all, somewhere between desperation and resolve.

Related Characters: Frenchie (speaker), Minerva, RiRi

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 154

Explanation and Analysis

After Frenchie decides that they should go south, find the resistance, and rescue Minerva, he muses about how the group has changed after losing RiRi and Minerva. It's telling that he now conceptualizes Minerva as the family's "roots" and RiRi as the future, deserving of protection. This suggests that Frenchie is beginning to see the necessity of

being a part of a family or a community that's made up of people of a variety of ages, as this is the only way to ensure the flow of ideas and culture—and consequently, the survival of the culture itself. Frenchie's belief that he's inhabiting a new place also speaks to the emotional changes he's experienced since killing Travis. He now feels as though he is more of an adult and has more responsibility to care for his family and ensure their safety.

☝ How could anything be as bad as it was when this moment existed in the span of eternity? How could I have fear when this girl would allow me this close? How could anything matter but this small miracle of having someone I could love?

Related Characters: Frenchie (speaker), Rose

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 160



Explanation and Analysis

Frenchie collapses by a fresh brook with Rose, cries, and feels that the moment is perfect enough to drown out all the bad things that are happening to him and his family. This begins to introduce Frenchie firsthand to the power of love. Though he recognizes that Miig is driven by both love and grief for Isaac, seeing how it affects him personally when it comes to Rose allows Frenchie to empathize further with his mentor and father figure. This also offers him a look into how love can prepare him for the future by giving him a reason to look there in the first place. Rose's existence makes Frenchie feel as though there's hope for the future and gives him a glimpse of the family he could create with her one day, which suggests to Frenchie that leaning on love will pave his way forward.

Loss Quotes

☝ In them, there is always this feeling, an understanding more than an emotion, of protection. It didn't matter what was happening in the world, my job was to be Francis. That was all. Just remain myself. And now? Well, now I had a different family to take care of. My job was to hunt, and scout, and build camp, and break camp, to protect the others. I winced even thinking about it. My failure. I'd failed at protecting, and now, as a result, I failed at remaining myself.

Related Characters: Frenchie (speaker), Rose, Minerva, RiRi, Mitch, Dad, Mom

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 179-80



Explanation and Analysis

Frenchie thinks back on his mindset as a kid and his mindset in Miig's family, and feels as though he's failing at being himself. For Frenchie, his identity has been tightly tied up in who is to other people, especially since joining Miig's group—with Mom and Dad, Frenchie's job was to be himself, their son. It's also worth keeping in mind that the things that Frenchie must do for his family with Miig would take a toll on anyone, whether they're sixteen or not. The weight and the difficulty of existing in his difficult circumstances means that, at some point, Frenchie was bound to make a mistake—the one he ended up making just had especially dire consequences. However, because Frenchie conceptualizes his role in the family as a protector first and foremost, and believes that he failed in this endeavor, he's unable to also understand all of the other positive things that he brings to the family. This suggests that part of Frenchie's angst at this point is mostly attributable to his grief, and as he begins to recover from that, he'll also begin to feel more comfortable with who he is, failings and all.

The Circle Quotes

☞ There were about fifty people in total, a big enough group that invisibility the way we enjoyed it was out of the question. So they had to live differently, carving out communities in the spaces they felt they could defend.

Related Characters: Frenchie (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 190

Explanation and Analysis

On the night of the social, Frenchie observes the large group and the ways in which they live differently than he did with Miig and their comparatively small family. Though Frenchie understands that there's a certain amount of risk that comes with living in such a large group, the social event itself shows that the risk comes with massive upsides: the members of the community are able to connect with their roots and their culture in a way that in a small group, Frenchie wasn't able to. Invisibility from Recruiters, in other words, also means invisibility in terms of a group identity and a wider cultural one as well.

Word Arrives in Black Quotes

☞ "I mean we can start healing the land. We have the knowledge, kept through the first round of these blasted schools, from before that, when these visitors first made their way over here like angry children throwing tantrums. When we heal our land, we are healed also." Then he added, "We'll get there. Maybe not soon, but eventually."

Related Characters: Clarence (speaker), General, Miig, Frenchie

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 193

Explanation and Analysis

While out hunting with some of the older men, Clarence explains to Frenchie that once it's safe to return to their ancestral lands, they'll be able to heal the land and themselves. This is a shocking revelation for Frenchie, who's spent much of his life on the run and has probably never actually lived on his ancestral lands. He's grown up believing that they're gone forever and will forever be unsafe, which Clarence suggests isn't actually the case. Clarence makes the case that the Indigenous populations, the original stewards of the land, have the skills and the knowledge to fix some of the damage done by the white governments. His suggestion that they'll heal themselves and the land reinforces the novel's assertion that the Indigenous characters and the land are intrinsically linked, and the damage and trauma wrought on one is reflected in the other—the same holds true for healing and improvement.

Kiiwen Quotes

☞ We were desperate to craft more keys, to give shape to the kind of Indians who could not be robbed. It was hard, desperate work. We had to be careful we weren't making things up, half remembered, half dreamed. We felt inadequate. We felt hollow in places and at certain hours we didn't have names for in our languages.

Related Characters: Frenchie (speaker), Bullet, Slopper

Related Themes:   


Page Number: 214

Explanation and Analysis

After Minerva's death, Slopper begins working with the Council to create a youth council with the express goal of spreading the cultural knowledge the resistance group has to the youth. After learning what Minerva was able to do to the residential school by singing, they now understand the importance of holding onto their language in particular and passing it on to future generations: it's the one thing that gives them the ability to destroy the schools. This shows that by placing themselves in a long tradition of Indigenous culture, the resistance group can begin to foster a sense of community and pride in their culture, something that directly counteracts the goals of the schools (the historical schools specifically took aim at Indigenous languages and created environments where children forgot their languages). This, again, reminds the reader that what's happening in the novel is rooted in history, and just as the Recruiters can draw on history to resurrect the schools, the Indigenous victims can draw on their cultural pride, champion their language, and fight for their rights to survive and flourish.

●● I took off running, away from camp, the Council, my family: running toward Rose, who was somewhere beyond the birch-beaded edge of the woods, running towards an idea of home that I wasn't willing to lose, not even if it meant running away from the family I had already found.

Related Characters: Frenchie (speaker), Miig, Dad, Rose

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 217

Explanation and Analysis

Frenchie decides to run after Rose after receiving unspoken permission from Dad to do so. In this moment, Frenchie chooses to elevate one kind of family—chosen, romantic family—over both the biological family that he has with Dad and the chosen family he has with Miig and the other kids in the group. Frenchie chooses to make this choice because he remembers what Miig has said about his love for Isaac being

a motivating factor in getting out of the residential school and eventually returning there with the hope of rescuing Isaac. For Frenchie, chasing after Rose means that he's chasing after the most adult version of family, and the one that (drawing on what Miig has said) will give him the best chance at having the emotional strength to stand up to the Recruiters, defend himself and those he loves, and destroy the schools.

Locks Mean Nothing to Ghosts Quotes

●● I heard it in his voice as Miigwans began to weep. I watched it in the steps that pulled Isaac, the man who dreamed in Cree, home to his love. The love who'd carried him against the rib and breath and hurt of his chest as ceremony in a glass vial. And I understood that as long as there are dreamers left, there will never be want for a dream. And I understood just what we would do for each other, just what we would do for the ebb and pull of the dream, the bigger dream that held us all. Anything. Everything.

Related Characters: Frenchie (speaker), Isaac, Miig

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 231

Explanation and Analysis

Frenchie watches Miig and Isaac reunite after years apart and thinking the other was dead, and he understands the power of love to propel his Indigenous community to continue fighting for their lives and their loves. Frenchie now understands that as long as there are Indigenous people around, their culture will never truly die—their love for their culture and their pride in it (as represented by Isaac's fluency in Cree) will continue to hold the community up. Love, meanwhile, means that people will do "anything" and "everything" to fight for their rights to pass the culture and the language on to the next generation, who will continue to pass on this cultural knowledge. Through family and through love, as well as by continuing to pass along the stories of the past, Indigenous culture will never die.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

FRENCHIE'S COMING-TO STORY

Mitch shows Frenchie his find: a big bag of Doritos. He explains that he found it in a nearby house hidden on top of a cabinet, like Mom used to hide things. He opens the bag to distract them from their sadness—they lost Mom a few months ago. Mitch and Frenchie are hiding out in a forgotten tree house a few hours from Southern Metropolitan City (formerly Toronto) and though Dad told them that they needed to keep moving to stay safe, the tree house feels safe to them. Minutes after Mitch pops the bag open, Recruiters (truancy officers) come around the corner. Mitch tells Frenchie to climb out the window and up a nearby pine tree. Mitch says that the Recruiters know there's someone in the tree house, but they don't know how many.

Mitch looks almost angry as he scolds Frenchie. Frenchie does as he's told and watches the Recruiter blow his whistle. Mitch starts yelling for the Recruiters to come and get him. He continues yelling as they drag him out of the tree house, breaking one of his arms in the process, and drag him into the van. Frenchie holds tightly to the tree and considers letting himself fall. He wonders if he'll be taken to the **school** with Mitch and might be reunited with Mom and Dad too, but he knows this is impossible.

About a year before, Dad met a man named Miig who escaped from the **residential schools** and who shared what the government is doing to the Indigenous people. Miig explained that the current schools are based off of the historical ones. Mom shooed Mitch and Frenchie off to bed and the next day, the family packed up to head north. Dad insisted that they'd find home there. Frenchie was tired and cold, but he tried not to complain. This is the second time they've moved in a year; the year before, they moved to this settlement after things became dangerous and the electricity was cut off. Before they left, however, Dad and the Council went to try to speak to the Governors at the capital. They never returned. Frenchie says that he felt special then, but he didn't know how dangerous it was to be special.

The fact that Toronto is now called Southern Metropolitan City suggests that major changes have happened to the world in the novel. It's also telling that Mitch, who's also just a kid, feels the need to sacrifice himself for his little brother—clearly, these two are in grave danger, and their whole family was running at some point. In this moment, Mitch steps into an adult role and does whatever he can to make sure that Frenchie has the best chance at life possible.



Frenchie's daydream reminds the reader how young he is (he later reveals that he's eleven here) and shows too how much he longs for his biological family, even when he understands logically that reconnecting with them is impossible. Breaking Mitch's arm on the way into the van suggests that the Recruiters are inhumane and don't care about their victims.



Frenchie's comment about feeling special speaks to the mindset he's in as an Indigenous person: he should be proud of who he is, and he is special—especially in this world, where the reader will later learn that Indigenous people are the only ethnic group that can still dream. However, Frenchie is also very at risk for that reason. This begins to teach Frenchie that he shouldn't take pride in his identity and that it's a liability, when in reality—as he'll later learn—taking pride in his identity is the only way to come out of this alive.



Back in Frenchie's present, he knows that he has to get out of the tree and stay away from the **schools**. He knows he'll never see Mitch again. He waits until the van is gone and then carefully climbs down the tree, grabs the bag of chips, and runs. Frenchie runs all night and when he finds water the next morning, he can barely keep it down. Near an old outlet mall, Frenchie avoids wildlife—giant raccoons and flying cockroaches—and he throws rocks at guinea pigs in a doorway. The largest male stands up and stares down Frenchie, his large family behind him, and Frenchie threatens to eat his children. He suddenly feels horrible and starts to cry. Frenchie misses his family.

Frenchie hits the trees by early evening and collapses. He knows that he doesn't have enough clothes to stay warm, so he builds a small fire and stares at the stars. He jerks awake early in the morning. His cough is worse, but he does his jumping jacks, thinks of Mitch and Mom, and wonders how he's going to find food. He remembers the day that Mom left. The night before, she'd refused to eat. The next morning, she went to the Friendship Center to scavenge for supplies, even though it was a hot spot for Recruiters. She never came back.

Frenchie spends another day running and another night sleeping in the open. He drinks expired meal replacement, which tastes sour. Frenchie falls asleep wishing Mom would find him and wakes up to realize that he spilled the rest of his meal replacement. He throws the tin, wishing Mom had never gone to the Friendship Center, and says out loud that he's going to die. Frenchie vows to die fighting, picks himself up, and continues on. His cough gets even worse. He sits down, watches the stars appear, and thinks that dying will be like a dream. He wonders what happens to those who don't dream when they die. He falls asleep.

Frenchie wakes up and hears voices like his parents'. A man gives Frenchie water and then spoon-feeds him soup. Frenchie looks around and sees several children of varying ages and an old woman. The man introduces himself as Miig. Frenchie recognizes the name and says, "north." Miig agrees that's where he's going and invites Frenchie to join him. Frenchie sobs.

Seeing the safe and intact guinea pig family throws Frenchie's situation makes it even clearer to him that because of who he and his family are, they won't have the opportunity to actually live as a family anymore. The intense physicality of Frenchie's run adds a sense of urgency and necessity to this and starts to make the case that running so hard that he gets sick is preferable to the alternative at the residential schools.



The strain of simply existing in a world where one's body is exploited is too much for Mom, especially when she's the sole protector for her two vulnerable children. Though it's impossible to tell, Frenchie seems suspicious that Mom allowed the Recruiters to take her. This shows how effective this kind of consistent trauma is at subduing a population, robbing them of their hopes and dreams for the future.



Vowing to die fighting, unlike how Mom likely gave herself up, shows that while Frenchie might be scared, he hasn't given up trying to make it in this hostile world yet—at this point, he still understands that taking pride in the fact that he's alive is important and valuable, despite how his environment values him.



Frenchie running into Miig opens up the possibility that there simply aren't many Indigenous people around, if it's so easy to run into someone he knows. Miig's invitation shows that he knows that helping children grow up in this world is the only way Indigenous culture can survive.



THE FIRE

Five years later, Miig explains to his makeshift family that dreams live in their bone marrow. Seven-year-old RiRi asks how the dreams get there, and Miig says that they're born with the dreams in their DNA. He adds that "they" take the dreams from the marrow. Frenchie, who has become a part of this family group since running into Miig years before, examines his hand and imagines people taking Mitch's dreams at the **residential school**. Miig rolls a cigarette and elderly Minerva cups her hands to pull the smoke over her head in prayer.

Frenchie explains that Miig and Minerva are the only adults in the group. Chi-Boy is seventeen and from the Cree lands. Frenchie is sixteen, Métis, and wears his long hair in a **braid**. There are twelve-year-old twins, Tree and Zheegwon, who are covered in scars, and Slopper, a round nine-year-old. Wab is almost a woman at eighteen; she has a huge scar across her face. RiRi is seven, Métis, and still very much a kid. The children all long for "the old-timey," so they wear their hair in braids and construct ineffective sweat lodges. Miig says that it's time for Story. Slopper gets up and heads for his tent—the younger kids don't get to hear Story—but RiRi puts up a bit of a fuss before leaving the fire.

STORY: PART 1

Miig says that the Anishnaabe people have been on these lands for thousands of years. They welcomed the people who named the land Canada, and the Anishnaabe fought valiantly during wars. However, the newcomers decided they liked subjugating the Anishnaabe. The newcomers opened the first **residential schools**, which almost robbed the Anishnaabe of their language. When the schools were shut down, they eventually reclaimed their land, honored their pain, and moved on. Then, governments began to fight over water. America ran pipelines to Anishnaabe lands, as that's where the freshest water was. They went further and further north for water and when the Great Lakes became too polluted, they fenced the lakes off.

As the governments stole water from the rivers, the North melted. Miig says that the northern people are, as far as he's heard, still okay, which is why they're moving north toward them now. Frenchie tells the reader that Miig tells Story every week in some form or another: sometimes he focuses on the **residential schools**, and other times he explains treaties or earthquakes. Miig believes they have to know the history if they want to know how to survive.

Here, the novel sets up the idea that many people are losing the ability to dream, but the Indigenous population still has it—and this ability is something that can be harvested. This, coupled with the dehumanizing tactics with which the Recruiters took Mitch, suggests that to many, Indigenous people aren't actually people: they're a valuable commodity.



Frenchie uses "old-timey" to refer to a time when it wasn't dangerous to actually participate in the customs of one's culture. In the present, it's impossible for them to do so because that kind of pride and exposure puts them at risk of attracting attention from Recruiters. Because of this, the braids are one of the most effective ways that these kids can connect with their roots. It allows them to look Indigenous, which is still dangerous, but not to the same degree as doing things that extend beyond their bodies. Story, the narrative that traces how the world came to be in its current state, also allows Indigenous people to connect with their history.



The first part of Story reaches back hundreds of years to when settlers first arrived in North America. This makes it clear that what's happening in the present isn't a distinct chapter of history; rather, it's a continuation of a long line of oppression and abuse that Indigenous people have suffered at the hands of white settler governments. The idea that the freshest water was on Indigenous traditional lands suggests that the Indigenous people, because of their long history, have the knowledge to care for the land and keep it pristine, unlike the governments that pollute it.



The idea that Indigenous people need to know the history if they want to survive points to one of the novel's main ideas: the horrific and cruel parts of the past are easy to repeat if people don't remember them and remember what happened. By remembering that the Anishnaabe were once the sole rulers of the land, Miig can give the kids perspective.



Returning to Story, Miig says that after ten years of wars over water, world leaders came to new agreements. The Anishnaabe were spread out, alone, and their home was gone. Because of the earthquakes, rising sea levels, and constant rain, half of the population died—and the corpses made others sick. Those who survived were unable to reproduce naturally, families were torn apart, and people stopped dreaming. Miig stops before getting to the darkest parts of Story and sends the children to bed.

Frenchie hears RiRi calling that she can't sleep, and he lies down with her. This is the new routine: RiRi is desperate to hear Story and understand, but Miig wants her to grow up first before she learns that people view her as nothing more than a valuable commodity. RiRi begs for Frenchie to tell her Story, but Frenchie refuses. He thinks that RiRi is getting older and smarter, and reasoning with her is getting harder. He tells RiRi that they let Slopper hear Story when he was seven, and it was devastating for him. Slopper stopped sleeping well and playing for months.

Frenchie is quiet for a moment and then agrees to tell RiRi something about why they're running. He says that years ago, the world got sick with disease and sadness. People stopped being able to dream and saw their psychiatrists for pills to help them sleep. Frenchie hears a low whistle outside—the alarm—and leaps up. Everyone else but Slopper is around the fire. Miig motions to the east, and Frenchie knows that they'll have to fight if the intruder is dangerous. He grabs a burning stick and steps back into the bushes. Miig moves into the open, and then Chi-Boy emerges holding a girl (Rose) by her forearm. She shouts and glares at everyone, and Frenchie hopes that she's not a cousin.

MAGIC WORDS

Rose relaxes after three weeks, though it takes her longer to share her coming-to story. She's a fighter and speaks out during Story. She was raised by old people and so speaks like them, which makes Frenchie feel as though she's both the future and the past. One warm night, Rose moodily declares that they should go after the government themselves. Miig assures the group that they've survived persecution before and will survive it again and asks them to trust that someone is working for him. Rose mutters that if nobody else comes up with a plan, she will. Frenchie studies her face and hopes he'll dream about it.

This portion of Story refers to rampant climate change, which was specifically caused by these governments that seemed uninterested or unable to stop and fix what they were doing. Again, this suggests that the Indigenous people should've been consulted, given that they're the ones with the knowledge of how to both maintain and heal the land.



Miig's unwillingness to let RiRi hear Story shows that he understands the consequences of knowing that one isn't thought of as entirely human by others: for Slopper, clearly, this knowledge forced him to grow up too fast and reckon with the horrors of the world too soon. With this, Miig suggests that children need to follow a particular progression as they grow and come of age, which will also apply to Frenchie.



As one of the older kids in the group, Frenchie has some responsibility to help guide RiRi toward adulthood—and in this case, he's beginning to see that while she's still young, she's becoming more mature and is possibly ready to handle the truth. Juxtaposing the beginning of Story with the fear surrounding Rose's arrival reminds the reader of just how precarious Frenchie and his family's position is. Though Rose is a friend, they can't forget that their lives could've changed dramatically for the worse.



Frenchie's assessment that Rose is both the future and the past speaks to the status that children hold for Indigenous people in the novel. They are a representative of the future, as if they can survive, they're the ones who will carry the culture forward and make it so it doesn't die. Rose's grasp of the accent and the inflection of Indigenous Elders makes it clear that one can still be undeniably Indigenous, even in an English-speaking context.



One morning, Miig tells the group he's taking hunting that they need to work harder at learning to hunt. Frenchie is thrilled to be with the hunting group; those at the campsite have to babysit Minerva. He avoids Rose's glare as he winds his way out of camp and blushes as Miig tells them how to look for animal dung to see if there are any creatures around. They look at marks on trees where deer rubbed their antlers and after they catch several rabbits, head back to camp. Frenchie joins Chi-Boy and Slopper in a joyful song, but Miig is unusually quiet. Frenchie joins him and asks what's going on, and Miig says that the birds seem too quiet.

At the campsite, Miig gives the rabbits to Wab to skin and cook. Rose sits down next to Frenchie, and Frenchie says that she feels bad for those that have to stay in the campsite with Minerva, doing "useless" things. Rose casually says that being with Minerva is "nishin," which she says is part of the language. Frenchie is distraught: he feels somehow more deserving of learning language than Rose and pulls his **braid** out of his shirt as though it proves this. Rose snaps that Minerva knows the language, and those who spend the day with her learn it. Frenchie walks into the trees, feeling ready to cry or scream. Miig calls him back and before Frenchie falls asleep, he repeats the word in his mind like a prayer.

Frenchie dreams that he's in the pine tree, unable to shout at Mitch down below as six Recruiters surround him. As Frenchie points at the Recruiters, Mitch yells angrily for Frenchie to hang on. Frenchie wakes up drenched in sweat when Zheegwon pokes him. Miig says they need to leave and move quickly, so others carry Minerva and RiRi's packs. After an hour, Rose catches up to Frenchie, says that nishin means "good," and says that she'll share Minerva's lessons with him.

HAUNTED IN THE BUSH

Frenchie struggles to sleep for a week. He has nightmares about Mom and Dad when he sleeps, so he spends time with RiRi and tells her about Mitch. It's painful to talk about him, but Frenchie feels as though he remembers his family better the more he talks. He wakes up one morning freezing cold, having fallen asleep in RiRi's tent. Outside, Wab and Chi-Boy step away from each other awkwardly and in a way that makes Frenchie feel especially awkward. He tries to engage Wab in conversation about breakfast, but she narrows her eyes at him.

It's interesting that Frenchie so clearly devalues Minerva here when he celebrates Rose's way of speaking as being similar to the way that Elders speak. This suggests that Frenchie doesn't yet understand just how important it is for him and for his family to protect Minerva and her wealth of cultural and language knowledge. More specifically for Frenchie, this shows that he doesn't yet have a full grasp of the necessity of living in a family that's composed of people of all ages.



This confrontation impresses upon Frenchie the necessity of treating Minerva with respect and reverence, as difficult as she may be to reason with at times. At the very least, she's okay to be around when someone like Rose expresses interest in learning from her. This begins to set up the idea that the youth in the novel need to be willing to learn from those who are older and more knowledgeable than they are, as those people are the ones who possess the key to surviving this—even if the youth themselves are also the key.



Frenchie's dreams of Mitch keep him emotionally grounded in his biological family, even though he's now become an essential part of Miig's chosen family. His growing connection with Rose suggests that Frenchie is beginning to see that he has multiple families available to him.



The fact that Frenchie can understand the importance of talking about his blood family to remembering them acts as a small representation of the novel's greater point that only through reciting and passing down traditional stories and customs will those customs stay alive. Choosing to celebrate them allows people to continue to celebrate themselves and remember that they're a part of a larger community.



Everyone sits in a circle to wait for breakfast and Miig passes out watches to those who will hunt today. Miig remarks that they used to not need watches, but now, nobody knows how to tell time by the sky. Zheegwon and Tree open cans of condensed milk and Minerva stashes the lids in her bag. After a breakfast of mush, Miig leads the hunters an hour away from the camp. He notes that he's seen signs of deer and sends everyone off in different directions. They're supposed to walk for one hour, wait for two, and then meet back at the starting point. Frenchie has the rifle today and is careful to keep his pace steady, which will make it easier to track someone who doesn't return on time. He settles himself in some tree roots.

Frenchie lets his mind wander and thinks that the world suddenly went mad when it poisoned drinking water, created an environment prone to earthquakes, and then started harvesting Indigenous people for medicine. He wonders if they're that different from anyone else, and if the Indigenous people would act the same way if the positions were switched. Frenchie wonders if he'd have been able to torture a child for marrow if Mitch, Mom, or Dad had gotten sick.

As Frenchie listens and thinks, he suddenly hears footsteps and lifts his head. The moose is as huge as a tree. Frenchie aims at the moose's head, but then lowers it to the chest, which Miig always says is "the sure target." The moose raises its head and looks right at Frenchie. Frenchie thinks it seems like the moose is ancient and watched all the destruction happen. The moose would also be food for a week, hide for blankets, and a surefire way to impress Rose. Frenchie realizes that they can't eat all the meat before it rots, and Miig won't let them smoke it for fear of being found. He lowers the rifle.

As Frenchie returns to the meeting point, he vacillates between feeling good about his decision and ashamed that RiRi will go hungry. He feels better when he sees that Chi-Boy and Miig both got turkeys. Wab is late getting back. They wait anxiously for almost 40 minutes before she slips into the clearing. Wab says that everything is fine, but Frenchie tells the reader that a week later, Wab will reveal to them what she saw.

Miig's comment about the watches shows that in this world, Indigenous people are already losing valuable information as they're forced northward and into the schools. It's not just that the youth don't speak the language; it's also that the adults around don't have all the information that their ancestors once had to keep them safe. This also means that the novel's contemporary Indigenous people are losing skills that can keep them safe from the Recruiters.



As far as Frenchie is concerned, the white powers that be have created the current mess and are now reaching for wildly inhumane ways to fix it, something that he questions whether Indigenous people would've been able to do in the first place. This begins to speak out against the settler state as a whole and suggests that this whole conflict could've been easily avoided.



For Frenchie, the moose symbolizes the natural world that's unchanged, watching the world change around it. Taking down the moose would be taking down any hope of restoring that natural world and the history stored in the memories of both the moose and the land itself, which bears the scars of the trauma that's been inflicted upon it. Choosing to let it live shows that Frenchie is choosing to not act like the government that's after his marrow.



Frenchie's shame about RiRi going hungry shows how dedicated he is to his family and how much responsibility he feels to care for them. With this, the novel suggests that Frenchie is beginning to step into a more adult role in his family and take on more responsibility for keeping them safe and fed.



A PLAGUE OF MADNESS

Frenchie says that in a sense, he got the moose: he dreamed about following the moose on the shores of Lake Huron. Because the group hasn't seen a Recruiter in weeks, they travel more slowly and happily. Wab, however, seems anxious. After a few days, she asks one evening if circumstances make people bad, or if people make bad circumstances. Miig says that he once read a book by Camus about a town that was quarantined due to the plague. Over time, some people changed. The doctor dedicated his life to helping people, which Miig suggests means the doctor got closer to his true nature.

Wab takes this to mean that people change because of circumstances and asks if good people just change in good ways. Miig says it's more complicated: people do what they need to in order to stay safe, depending on what motivates them. Rose asks if their current situation is the same sort of thing: they run because of the Recruiters, and the Recruiters chase them because of the **schools**. Miig says that they and the Recruiters are both motivated by survival—people are killing themselves because of the dreamlessness, and Indigenous people are, to the Recruiters, the solution. Wab confirms that Miig thinks that they are, in a way, the same as the Recruiters, and then declares that she's right. Since the Recruiters are bad, they must be bad, too.

Miig asks Wab what she'd do to save them. Chi-Boy says he'd do anything, and Wab says she'd do everything. Rose takes Frenchie's hand. Miig says that for now they are on the run, but this might change. After a long silence, Wab says that she saw two men in the woods, one of which she recognized. She says the man wasn't honest and confirms that they were both Indians. Rose and Frenchie look excited, but Miig warns that not all Indians are true Indians.

THE FOUR WINDS

Frenchie explains that after the Indigenous people left their territories, lots of the surrounding businesses disappeared. Eventually, the big resorts closed too, though lots of companies hired security firms to build fences and patrol the resorts to make sure nobody was trying to live there. Frenchie and his family come to the Four Winds resort, which has twelve-foot-high, razor-edged electric fencing. Miig drops his pack and prepares to touch the fence to test if it's still electrified. Frenchie watches the looks of fear cross over everyone else's face, decides that Miig is too important to lose, and grabs the fence himself. Frenchie feels a jolt of adrenaline but no electricity, and he says that they're safe in a small, scared voice.

Wab's query shows that she's curious if subjugating Indigenous people is something that white settlers do, no matter what, or if they've just been driven to do horrible things by circumstances. Miig's unwillingness to give her a straight answer indicates that he believes coming of age and being an adult means coming to some of these conclusions for oneself, not simply buying into a bigger narrative.



Humanizing the Recruiters allows Miig to take the higher ground and not stoop to their level (given that the Recruiters dehumanize the Indigenous people so drastically). Wab's conclusion shows that at this point, she's not interested in following Miig. As far as she's concerned, she needs to be sure of her righteousness and of the evil of the Recruiters in order to make sense of what's going on.



This exchange begins to introduce the idea that in these desperate times, the family may have to do drastic things in order to survive. Miig's comment that not all Indians are real Indians suggests that seeing Indigenous bodies as a commodity isn't exclusive to white people—it's possible that Indigenous people can ensure their safety by exposing others.



The aside that the resorts hired security shows just how greedy and nonsensical those in power were as things were beginning to go downhill. For them, maintaining power was more important than allowing people of any ethnicity to find a safe place to stay. Frenchie's choice to touch the fence suggests that he's continuing to figure out where he fits in with his family, and here, he believes that he's not as necessary as someone like Miig, with whom they wouldn't be able to live without.



Chi-Boy uses a Pendleton blanket to get himself safely over the fence and then begins to hunt for a way to get everyone else in. Miig forces Frenchie to look him in the eye and tells him sternly that nobody is more important than anyone else, and nobody should sacrifice themselves. He turns away when Frenchie's face burns. Frenchie feels sorry for himself until Rose grabs Frenchie's hand and squeezes it quickly. Chi-Boy gets a gate open and everyone files in. The sight of the resort shocks Frenchie, and everyone enters the main building with an air of awe and reverence.

Everyone walks down the hallway until they reach a dark opening. Miig and Chi-Boy begin to pull back the drapes to let in moonlight. Miig insists that they can't use the stone fireplace, but he suggests they light the huge candles. Slopper curiously runs his hands over some lumps covered in sheets, and he's delighted when Chi-Boy pulls off the sheet to reveal a green sofa. RiRi and Slopper giggle, and Frenchie feels happy to be in a confined space. He gets up to look behind the front desk. He tests the telephone, finds a package of bottled water, and then yanks open a drawer filled with what Miig identifies as room keys.

The group shuffles upstairs with room keys and candles. Chi-Boy unlocks the first room cautiously, but when it's clear that there's no threat, he snuggles onto the bed with a silly grin. Frenchie grabs a key and runs to the corresponding room, tailed by RiRi. RiRi is shocked by how huge the room is and she gets very upset when Frenchie takes his boots off without checking for snakes first. He assures RiRi that there are just monsters under the bed. RiRi flounces away to accompany Rose to her room. Frenchie listens as everyone settles in and as RiRi and Slopper race up and down the hallway.

Frenchie hears Wab settle Minerva in a room. Because of her age, Minerva would've spent more time than any of the rest of them in a real bedroom. She's delighted to be indoors and even speaks in full sentences. Frenchie hears Minerva tell Wab to bring the girls into her room so she can tell them the story of the Rogarou. Excited to hear an "old-timey story," Frenchie sits outside the door to listen. Minerva explains that her grandmother told her this story when she was becoming a woman, and that Rogarou is a dog that "haunts the half-breeds" and keeps girls inside while men travel.

Miig's talking-to seeks to impress upon Frenchie that it's important for him to stay alive, something that sacrificing himself won't allow. Though other characters do sacrifice themselves a number of times over the course of the novel and Miig doesn't suggest it's a bad thing, he shows here that he believes it's his responsibility to instill in his charges the understanding that they're no good to their goal if they're dead.



Frenchie's happiness at being in a confined space begins to illustrate one of the many consequences of spending a life on the run: the sense that he doesn't have a home or a safe space to inhabit. The resort represents a kind of safety and luxury that many of these kids probably never got to experience, and by experiencing it at this point in time, they're able to reverse history somewhat and take advantage of their oppressors' foolishness and greed.



Being in this confined space also begins to separate Miig's group from the natural world in a way that they find comforting. This suggests that while the Indigenous people may be the proper stewards of the land, part of that means that they still deserve the opportunity to live in a sheltered environment and spend time in nature when they want to, not just because they have to in order to stay alive.



The legend of the rogarou exists in many cultures in North America, and it refers to a type of werewolf that, in many cases, attacks Catholics who don't properly observe Lent. The presence of this archetype in Minerva's narrative speaks to the history of the Métis people, who are a distinct ethnic group with both Anishnaabe roots and lineage tracing back to French trappers and explorers (rogarou comes from loup-garou, or werewolf in French).



Minerva tells them that she was drawing water from the river when she felt Rogarou watching her and smelled the blood. She stood and spun, but the big black dog just watched her and breathed steadily. She raised her arms, growled, and the beast stood up and came close. It was huge, but Minerva wasn't scared: she took her heavy water dipper and hit Rogarou across the nose, giving him a huge bloody gash. As the blood dripped onto his chest, he began to transform and when he finished, a tall, naked man stood before her, looking like a hungry, desirous man. At this, Wab insists that she needs to take RiRi to bed.

After a moment, Minerva says that it started and ended with violence: she beat Rogarou with the dipper and then a switch, but they eventually became "like man and wife." They bit each other and gradually, Minerva became just a woman, not a daughter, a granddaughter, or a Catholic. She says that she's "marked." She believes that some people know that Rogarou marked her. One man told her that they kill unless a person challenges them without fear. The man says that Rogarou will come back every full moon until his chosen target dies—and then, Rogarou will mark the next member of the family. Minerva laments that she's damned her whole family. She stops talking and minutes later, she starts to snore.

Rose catches Frenchie outside the door and gives him a tight smile before heading to her room. Frenchie guiltily slips back to his room and crawls into bed, but he can't sleep. Someone pulls Frenchie's door shut and he sits up and sees that it's Rose. She has a strange look on her face that makes Frenchie's breath catch. She climbs into bed next to Frenchie, snuggles in beside him, and then starts to tell him her story.

Rose says that her mother's family were all extremely short, and her dad was from an island on the Indian Ocean. Both of her parents were taken at the beginning of the experiments, before people realized they needed to run. Rose stayed with her grandmother until it became clear that they needed to run. At that point, Rose's grandmother refused to leave her home and sent Rose with her brothers, William and Jonas. They traveled for six years until William fell ill and died. Jonas was quiet but told Rose that their family survived **residential schools** and cautioned her to trust no one. He'd say that children need walls of some sort to keep them safe. He declared that he was Rose's walls, and when he died, that Rose should use a rifle to make her own walls.

The way that Minerva speaks about not being afraid of Rogarou and fighting back encourages her listeners to take pride in who they are and stand up to interlopers like Rogarou. Taking RiRi to bed reminds the reader that she's a child, and Miig is still interested in keeping RiRi in the dark about difficult truths in the world.



The Rogarou can be read as a metaphor for Indigenous culture as a whole and specifically, the ways in which it had a sometimes loving and often violent with white oppressors, as represented by the rogarou. This cycle of abuse and questionably ethical romance repeats through the generations, as when the rogarou continues to mark members of the family through the generations.



Rose choosing to come to Frenchie allows him to feel as though she isn't just toying with him. They do indeed have the opportunity to get to know each other intimately, assuming he's willing to listen to her story and give her a safe place to share it with him.



Jonas's comment about the family surviving residential schools reminds the reader again that the schools of the past aren't just of the distant past. There are people alive who remember them and who grew up on stories of them, and they understand that the current schools function in much the same way. Rose's choice to share her story with Frenchie suggests that she's learning to trust him, and that she's decided to make sure that she doesn't forget her story. The only way to do that, per the novel, is by telling it.



Jonas taught Rose to hunt, showed her the direction to go in, and eight months ago, he died. Rose says that she sat by his grave for four days. She considered returning to her grandmother but started walking and ended up running into Miig. Her story finished, she nuzzles into Frenchie's chest. Frenchie starts to get an erection and puts his hand over it to hide it, but Rose puts her hand over Frenchie's. They kiss and Frenchie feels ready to die of happiness, but the moment ends when RiRi sneaks up and asks if she can sleep with them. Rose lets RiRi in and pulls her close. Frenchie tries to snuggle close to Rose but gives up when Slopper asks to crawl in on Frenchie's side.

Frenchie wakes up to hear Minerva coughing. She's sitting in a chair and waves to Frenchie. He looks around and sees Tree and Zheegwon lying perpendicular across the bottom of the bed, Wab and Chi-Boy sleeping close to each other on the floor, and Miig on the floor across the room.

After two days at the Four Winds, Miig wants to leave. Chi-Boy scouts around for supplies and finds knives, blankets, candles, and a lady's fur hat that he sneaks into his sweater. Miig discovers a two-wheeled cart that they can use to pull Minerva. That afternoon, Frenchie wanders around in search of something to convince Miig to stay longer. He hopes that Rose might visit him again. Frenchie happens upon the manager's office and finds Wab sitting at the desk with a bottle. She looks sleepily at Frenchie and says that her mother was awful. She asks Frenchie if his mom was horrible too, and then says that before she found Miig, she ran.

Frenchie is scared and feels like Wab should be alone. Wab's face darkens. She stands, steps around the desk, and then falls onto Frenchie and cries. Frenchie tells the reader that everyone is uneasy around Wab. Her trauma seems dangerous and messy. Miig has never been willing to share her coming-to story, and the boys often swap rumors that Wab was a mercenary. Miig, knowing that the boys all had crushes on Wab, told them that if the rumors are true, they should be careful. In the present, Chi-Boy helps Frenchie carry Wab to the front room. Miig lights a smudge for her and with Minerva and the little kids safely on the front porch, Wab tells her story.

The little kids crawling in with Rose and Frenchie is a scene that many readers will recognize as something that plenty of small kids do with their parents. With this, Frenchie and Rose have the opportunity to feel more adult, and to make the choice to attend to the needs of the younger kids—their future—rather than fixating on their own desires to be alone together. This version of adulthood that cares for others, the novel suggests, is a display of maturity.



Everyone ending up in Frenchie's bedroom illustrates how close everyone is to each other, and how safe they feel together. As a family, they draw strength, comfort, and safety from each other.



Wab's episode suggests that returning to the built world, as represented by the Four Winds, can force people to confront their past in ways that they don't necessarily have to out in the forest. This continues to make the case for the superiority of the natural world over the man-made world, while Wab's comment about her mother reminds Frenchie that not all blood families are as kind and as caring as Mitch was for Frenchie.



Miig's insistence on helping Wab maintain her privacy surrounding her story shows that, in addition to generally understanding the power of storytelling, Miig also recognizes that there are some stories that people would likely love to forget. If this is the case, they shouldn't be forced to share them. Specifically, in Wab's case (where her story is extremely traumatic), this also means that Wab isn't forced to trust others before she's ready to cope with her past on her own.



WAB'S COMING-TO STORY

Wab says that before people left the cities, the cities were teeming with desperate, hungry people. People lived in cardboard structures in alleys, and others huddled in the hallways of apartment buildings. Wab lived on the top floor with her mother, who drank and saw lots of men. Sometimes the men would try to touch Wab, but she could usually defend herself. Wab and her mother ended up on the street after the building burned down. Wab was ten. They lived in a dumpster with a mute Malaysian man named Freddie. Freddie's Taiwanese wife had been taken away while they were at the food bank, so most Indigenous people stopped going to the food banks. They knew they'd end up being murdered eventually.

Wab's mother traded sexual favors for alcohol, so Wab had to feed herself. She was a strong runner so after they cut the phone lines and blocked cell service, Wab began delivering messages and running errands in exchange for soup or bread. She ran for a year until she was caught by "everyday assholes" with a bogus run. They sent a drug-addicted Indian to give her a letter and pay upfront with a box of Danishes. Wab ate two and ran to the appointed building, where men with baseball bats led her into an old deli. The men started laughing, and men sitting inside silently watched Wab walk to the back. There was a man with red hair there. His teeth were filed to points.

Wab tried to give the man his letter and leave, but the guards moved closer as the man took the letter and touched Wab's hand. He explained that he wants to start a business delivering messages, but nobody wants to pay his prices when Wab will perform the same task for a tin of food. He showed Wab that the envelope is empty. She turned to run, but guards forced her into the broken freezer. The red-haired man came inside with Wab, untied his pants, and told her to stop her business. With a knife, he cut from Wab's forehead to her chest and then took her pants off and raped her. Wab stopped feeling anything, but she learned later that she was there for two days as she was repeatedly assaulted by all of the men at the deli. She limped home when they released her, and Freddie tried to clean up her face.

Wab says that when she was healed enough, she started to walk out of the city and into the wilderness. She saw the man who set up the run last week in the woods. RiRi interrupts, terrified, and asks if the man is coming to take Wab away. Nearly hysterical, RiRi asks why people are being murdered. Frenchie wonders how long RiRi was there and what he can do, but Miig calls RiRi forward to hear Story.

The image of the cities that Wab creates suggests that, at this point in time, cities are a representation of the worst parts of humanity and the lengths that those in power will go to keep people from improving their lives. By making the food banks a dangerous place for Indigenous people, the government effectively tells them that they can't trust anything—even if the measures put in place are purported to be helpful.



Here, Wab shows her tenacity and ability to fend for herself, even as a young child. (Remember that she's about eleven years old here.) The men—and the horror to come—remind the reader that though Wab is certainly at risk of violence for her marrow, she's also uniquely at risk of sexual violence because she's female. These intersections among different elements of Wab's identity show that, even within the oppressed Indigenous population, there are still those who are more at risk than others.



Blacking out and not remembering what happened to her in the freezer is one of the human body's natural ways of protecting itself from trauma. That Wab doesn't remember it shows that with such intense trauma, she can only share her story by using the accounts of others. In other words, though this happened to Wab, her body tried to protect her by not giving her the tools and the memories to even have the story in the first place.



The choice to tell Story to RiRi shows that Miig believes that learning of the violence and the danger in the world means that a child then must know the reason why the danger exists. By sharing with RiRi, he's going to better prepare her to make sense of the violence she sees going forward.



STORY: PART 2

Miig picks up where he left off on the night when Rose arrived. He says that the earth broke: the north melted, sea levels rose, and there was a flurry of tornados, earthquakes, and tsunamis. Pipelines broke and poisoned forests and lakes. Millions of people died, and the survivors migrated inland. Those in power refused to change. They made people work harder and longer as the sun disappeared for weeks at a time. People got sicker, stopped dreaming, and started to kill themselves and others. Many refused to work. Governments, churches, and scientists started to look for a cure to restore dreaming.

People with money hired sleep counselors and hypnotists, and many people turned to Indigenous people like the New Agers once did, with openness and curiosity. When the Indigenous people refused to let others into their ceremonies, the white people started to look for ways to take the ability to dream and co-op the ceremonies. The government began to move Indigenous people off of their lands, just like in the past. The Indigenous people still had each other, so they weren't worried until the church and the scientists came up with the solution to the dreamlessness.

They first asked for Indigenous volunteers and paid people, but not many volunteered. They started pulling people out of prisons, and rumors spread that they'd come up with a way to pull dreams out of Indigenous bones. People were taken away and never came back. Miig says that it got to the point where the scientists needed more bodies, so they turned to history and looked at the **residential schools** to build new ones. Now, Indigenous people go to the schools and their dreams are stolen from their bone marrow. Indigenous people die, join the ancestors, and hope that there are enough dreams left in the world for the next generation.

BACK INTO THE WOODS

Frenchie believes there's something beautiful about the natural world of today. Vines reclaim electrical poles and pipelines, and animals are doing the same. Miig believes that in 50 years, animals will hunt humans again. Frenchie helps get ready to move out as snow starts to fall. Everyone wants to stay at Four Winds where they feel safe. Wab moves slowly, and RiRi is quiet and seems to be trying to act mature enough to handle the truth. Minerva is the only one who seems to be doing well, and she sings as she sits in the cart along with a barbeque they found.

The pipelines that Miig refers to are likely the oil pipelines that run through North America, showing again how industry and harnessing the natural world in the reader's present could later prove to be the earth's downfall. That the powerful people refused to change suggests that they felt they could dominate over the changing world rather than heal it, a stark contrast with the way the Indigenous characters conceptualize their relationship to the natural world.



As in the cities, where poor people regardless of ethnicity were in trouble, the fact that people with money were able to get help for the dreamlessness shows how the changing world overwhelmingly affects those with the least amount of capital to change anything, while those with money can buy their safety. Protecting their ceremonies allows the Indigenous people to maintain their traditions and not corrupt them, like what happened to the landscape.



Specifically, the fact that the places where the government extracts bone marrow are called "residential schools," just like the old schools, shows that what's happening in the novel's present isn't something new. It's clearly and undeniably connected to the past, and it's just one horrific event of many in which white settlers abuse Indigenous people.



The fact that Frenchie can accept that there's beauty in the way his world is shows that there's some hope for the natural world in his future. It may end up being a good thing that it's taking back the manmade landscape and reasserting itself. RiRi's questionably successful attempts to be mature about Story show that Miig was right to try to keep it from her; it's a lot for a child to take in and understand.



Frenchie wonders if the Four Winds was good for him. He thinks that it was amazing to get close to Rose, but she's avoided him since that first night. He wishes he hadn't heard Wab's coming-to story, and seeing RiRi so scared eats at Frenchie. He also dreamed about Mitch during their stay, but Mitch died horrific deaths in the dreams and Frenchie is almost relieved to be back in the forest, where it's cold enough to change his dreams. Miig points out buds on trees and says that April is here, which means more illness with the damp rains. Frenchie knows there's no time to get sick, and he remembers Zheegwon telling him earlier in the year that illness makes Minerva nervous: she lost a baby to a cough.

Frenchie looks back at the resort several times, wondering if they'd stayed if Rose might've come to him again. RiRi and Slopper are angry and complain that Miig is making them move. Frenchie thinks that RiRi is young enough that her anger is cute, especially since she discovered a pair of bright pink rubber boots at the resort and is wearing them now. Frenchie remembers how, after RiRi first put the boots on, she worried that the boots might've belonged to an Indigenous girl who was taken to the **residential schools**. Frenchie had assured her that the boots probably belonged to a rich blond girl. Whether RiRi believes his story or not, she agreed to keep them.

Around noon, Slopper smells cooking. Frenchie corrects him that it's just smoke, and Slopper is confused that there's a fire with no cooking. RiRi points out that accidental fires exist, and Frenchie notices the fear in her face. Miig asks Frenchie to climb a tree and take a look. Frenchie begins to climb a tall pine, feeling content that he's doing something to protect the people he loves, especially Rose. At the top of the tree, Frenchie can see a smoke plume. Trees shake around the plume and then fall. He can hear a rumble and sees a yellow flash. It doesn't make sense. Back on the ground, Frenchie says that what he saw was weird, and Miig calls him to speak privately.

Frenchie is upset that he can't share what he knows is a dramatic and exciting story. He grumbles to himself that Miig is bossy and just wants the information to himself. Frenchie relays what he saw. After a moment, Miig says that Recruiters interrupted Minerva feeding her baby grandson, raped her, and took the baby. He says that Wab was alone for two years before she joined the group, and she followed them for six weeks before revealing herself. She was too afraid to trust them. Miig says that RiRi and Slopper had a parent each when they arrived, but their parents ended up in the **schools**.

Frenchie's bad dreams make it clear that having dreams can be a burden, and not just because everybody wants to kill him—they're a burden because they influence Frenchie's unconscious imagination in sometimes-unpleasant ways. Even Frenchie's subconscious mind is constantly dwelling on trauma, while the aside that Minerva lost a baby to a cough shows again that there's still more than enough current and potential trauma in Frenchie's real world.



Here, Frenchie attempts to use storytelling to help RiRi feel better and safer, something that by all accounts was successful. This shows, again, that Frenchie is continuing to transition into a more adult, caregiving role for the younger kids in the group, while also demonstrating that Frenchie is well aware of the power of creating particular narratives, true or otherwise. In this case, where it's impossible to know the truth, this story still has the power to comfort RiRi.



Noticing how scared RiRi seems of a possible wildfire indicates again that Frenchie is beginning to come of age: he's starting to see RiRi as more of a full, multifaceted person in her own right, not just a little kid in need of his protection. Frenchie recognizes that her history is her own, and it's not something that he can necessarily protect her from. That Frenchie takes pride in being able to climb the tree illustrates how Frenchie's identity is becoming increasingly tied to his role as a protector.



Sharing these stories with Frenchie functions to impress upon Frenchie that stories shouldn't just be turned into dramatic retellings for the sake of doing so. In this case, they can remind Frenchie of their vulnerability, the violence they've experienced, and the losses they've suffered—likely because of something related to what Frenchie saw from the treetop.



Frenchie asks Miig to stop, but Miig continues. He says that Tree and Zheegwon were captured by a small town, whose residents tried brutally to extract their dreams. Miig found the seven-year-old twins hanging from a rope in a barn, cut open, stitched up, and missing their pinkies. Frenchie wants to vomit. Miig says that he lost his husband Isaac to the **schools**, and Frenchie watches Miig rub the buffalo tattoo on his hand, his "wedding ring" that he shared with Isaac. Miig stumbles and Frenchie quits asking Miig to stop.

Frenchie allowing Miig to continue sharing these stories with him indicates that he's beginning to realize it's his responsibility to listen and to hold onto these stories so that he can remember their shared history and suffering. In this way, Frenchie can go on to honor his family and what they've experienced, rather than pretend it never happened.



MIIGWANS' COMING-TO STORY

Isaac and Miig ran to their secluded cabin in the early days before things got too bad. Their first three months were uneventful. Isaac, a poet, continued to write in English and in Cree. They heard a commotion outside one night and, hopeful that it was game, they took their rifle to check. A ways out from their back shed, they found a man and two women, one of which was clearly plains Cree. Miig couldn't identify the other two. Isaac had always been willing to help "strays," and Isaac decided that they'd approach.

Isaac's trusting nature suggests that he doesn't share the history of trauma and dehumanization like Miig and the kids in Miig's group do, given that he's willing to override Miig's suspicions and meet them. This shows that while family can be a positive thing, trusting can also lead to horrible consequences in some cases.



The older two greeted Isaac and Miig in Anishnaabe, but the young woman tried to pull her hood up. The older woman wouldn't let her. The man told Isaac that he'd hurt his ankle, and the older woman said she was crampy and rubbed her belly. Miig didn't think she looked pregnant. Isaac offered Miig's services as a healer, but the man insisted they didn't need medical attention. Miig says that he should've known from the man's pack, which seemed almost new, and the man's cavalier attitude about food, that something was off.

Importantly, Miig's suspicions of their guests stem from his history as an Indigenous person whose ancestors suffered greatly. Seeing that the man is cavalier about his food suggests that he's not actually out living on the land, and that he possibly has more food waiting for him elsewhere—something that would mark him as, to use Miig's term, not a "real Indian."



The guests slept in the guest room, and the older woman never let the younger one out of her sight. The young woman told Miig and Isaac that the older two were her cousins, while later, the man told Isaac that the two women were sisters. The younger woman seemed scared, but Isaac assured Miig that being on the run would make anyone scared and skittish. Still, Miig kept a close eye on their guests. He woke up in the middle of the second night and stepped into the hallway. The young woman was there, and she shushed Miig and told him that he and Isaac needed to run. She revealed a blinking ankle monitor as the man came into the hallway yelling and the older woman dragged the younger one back to their room. Miig noticed that the man wasn't limping, and the young woman screamed for Miig and Isaac to run.

The controlling behavior of the two older people suggests that the younger woman isn't traveling with them of her own accord. Once it's revealed that these three are working with Recruiters, the younger woman in particular shows how the possibility of working with Recruiters in exchange for safety is something that's morally difficult yet extremely attractive. This illustrates how, in a world like this that's filled with suspicion and danger, the government is able to fracture the Indigenous community further by using spies like these three to capture people like Miig and Isaac.



The man backed away through a doorway, closed it, and began to pile furniture in front of it. Miig realized the rumors were true and knew he needed to move. He locked himself in the bedroom with Isaac and they began to pack, but Miig saw Recruiters driving up. Miig insisted they leave immediately with nothing, but Isaac suggested they try to talk to them. He didn't believe the rumors. Miig was terrified. Isaac's family didn't experience the original **residential schools**, and Miig knew that this was why Isaac wasn't afraid. Before they could argue, Recruiters swarmed into the house. Miig says that if he'd known what was going to happen next, he would've killed himself and Isaac.

Miig's comment that he should've killed himself and Isaac makes it clear that for him, his relationship with Isaac was—and still is—the most important thing to him. At least in hindsight, he's willing to give up on bringing up the next generation of Indigenous kids in order to die with his love, rather than suffer in the schools. With this, the novel suggests that one of the most traumatic parts of this situation is the way that the schools tear families apart.



FINDING DIRECTION

Miig tells Frenchie to trust that people who know more are making good decisions for their community. He says that people are building a new **residential school** but insists that not everyone needs to know so that they can remain hopeful enough to keep going. Frenchie walks in silence and can't bear to look at the others. After ten minutes, he tells Miig all he remembers about what he saw. He misses the person he was an hour ago, when his biggest concern was touching Rose's hand.

At this point, Frenchie is forced to remember that there's something to be said from keeping information from people, as Miig tried to keep Story from RiRi. RiRi was far more willing and brighter before she heard Story, and now, Miig is encouraging Frenchie to allow the rest of the group to remain as optimistic as possible.



That night, the family camps and cooks birds on the barbeque. In her delight, Minerva teaches them the word "abwaad," which means "cooking on a fire." After dinner, Miig says that tomorrow they'll head northeast, away from the forest fires. Nobody protests. Frenchie stays awake later than anyone else and quietly watches Chi-Boy put the beautiful hat under Wab's pillow. He wants to know how Miig escaped from the **schools** but knows he can't ask. He knows that Isaac died in the school, and suddenly Frenchie realizes that losing people is worse than running and worse than the schools. He falls asleep watching Rose and imagines them "building instead of running."

That Frenchie stays awake later than anyone thinking about what he learned shows that he's truly stepping into a more adult role in his family. Understanding that he can't ask about Miig's escape shows that Frenchie is developing even more respect for the people around him and the trauma they've experienced, which in turn will allow him to be more open and compassionate when people do choose to share their stories with him.



THE POTENTIAL OF CHANGE

It snows for five days. The snow is wet and heavy, and everyone is cold and soaked. One evening while they set up camp, RiRi finds a "toy" in the muck. She shows it to Minerva, who raises the alarm. Miig inspects the "toy," which is a broken plastic lunchbox with a superhero on it. Inside is a piece of bread that isn't moldy. Miig says it could belong to the men that Wab saw, and he sends Chi-Boy out to patrol and asks Tree and Zheegwon to set more alarm wires. Frenchie climbs a tree, hoping that the lunchbox belonged to friendly people.

For people on the run, like Miig's family, it's unthinkable to leave valuable food behind. This suggests either that Recruiters were involved in the lunchbox being left, or it's a trap of some sort. Being on the run is beginning to color how Miig and Frenchie see the world and the possibility of meeting others, and it keeps them from being too hopeful or trusting, in case it's a trap.



Frenchie looks around and notices the cliffs recently formed by the earthquakes. He then notices two men about three hours west. One wears a bright red hat. Frenchie climbs down and approaches Miig and Minerva, who looks unusually alert and upset. He shares what he saw. Miig is alarmed that the men have a fire, but Frenchie says that he thinks they're not Recruiters—they didn't have vehicles. Wab confirms that these are the men she saw a few weeks ago, and Tree suggests that they're "townies." Zheegwon's face goes pale, and Tree puts his cap on Zheegwon's head to make him feel better. RiRi suggests that they're "dumb kids" who are doing silly things because they don't have adults to guide them. Miig declares that they'll check out the situation.

They begin to head in the direction of the men. Frenchie can't shake a story that Tree and Zheegwon told a few weeks ago about the wiindigo people, who are cannibals. Rose startles him when she brings him a bowl of porridge. As he grudgingly eats, Frenchie observes that it's stressful to be in a situation where their lives could change so much because of one decision. Rose nods and says that if she'd gone west after she left her uncle, she never would've found Frenchie. They sit in silence and Frenchie notices that spring is coming. Chi-Boy returns from scouting and says that they're an hour away from the men. Frenchie has been watching them from trees and has found them strange: they have lots of food and move slowly. They don't seem worried about Recruiters.

THE OTHER INDIANS

Frenchie's family catches the men by noon. They discovered tracks and trash on the way to them and when Frenchie and Chi-Boy scout around their camp, they see that the man in the red hat is carving wood. The other seems to be napping. Miig is concerned by this and privately says they need to keep the girls in their sights at all times. He tells Chi-Boy to have his knife ready and gives Frenchie the loaded rifle. The three return to the others and announces that they're going to go meet the men, but if they're dangerous, they need to take care of each other.

Miig leads his family toward the men and one of the men yells at them. This is concerning; people who are confident enough to yell are possibly Recruiters. Miig begins speaking in Cree, introducing himself and trying to ascertain what nation these two are part of. The men introduce themselves in broken Cree as Travis and Lincoln and Miig leads his family into the clearing. The short man with the hat, Travis, greets Miig and bows to Minerva. Minerva is thrilled to hear the language spoken, and Frenchie thinks that if he weren't so anxious, he'd be hanging on every word. When Travis sees Wab, he visibly reacts. Frenchie steals a glance at Wab. Her eye is narrowed at Travis.

RiRi's assessment of the situation shows that after hearing Story, she understands that Miig and the other near-adults in the group want to protect her, and that children in general need that kind of protection to avoid making mistakes like these men are clearly doing. Frenchie's unwillingness to think ill of the men shows how desperate he is for more of a connection with people like him who might be able to add to his understanding of the culture, his history, and what's going on in the world.



As with the Rogarou, the wiindigo function as a symbol for the dangerous in the world—though in this case, one that's posed by other Indigenous people. This foreshadows the horrific events to come (these men are dangerous double agents, just not cannibals). That Frenchie is able to make observations (such as the food stores and the pace) that tell him clearly that they shouldn't trust these men, suggests that Frenchie is learning to think more critically about who he meets and how he chooses to trust and evaluate potential threats.



By reminding the family that they need to look out for each other, Miig makes it clear that while they may be part of a wider community of Indigenous people that might technically include these people, any outsiders need to prove themselves trustworthy before he'll allow them to infiltrate his family. His comment about the girls reminds the reader again that the women are even more at risk than the men are.



Frenchie knows that he should be excited to the Cree language, and reveling in finding more people who speak it, but seeing Wab's reaction to these men and all the other suspicious things reminds him that people who speak the language aren't all trustworthy. This shows how Frenchie's adversaries can actually weaponize language and use it against their victims by luring them into this false sense of safety.



Miig cautiously says that he's going to travel on, but Travis invites them to stay and share in their stew and bread. Slopper exclaims at the sight of food and Frenchie wonders if Miig saw Wab's reaction. He's also distracted by the food, but he knows he needs to act maturely. Travis says that he was just in Espanola to get supplies. Miig agrees to stay; Frenchie tells the reader that Miig is desperate for news from a town. Everyone sits down except for Wab and Chi-Boy, who slips off to scout the area. Frenchie wants to be useful, so he gets up to look around too. Lincoln calls to Frenchie but lets him go. Frenchie can't figure out why he feels nervous around Lincoln.

Frenchie walks around the clearing and discovers that it's in the shape of a big spoon, with a cliff at the top of the handle. He peers over the tall cliff and Chi-Boy startles him. They decide to head back, but Chi-Boy stops and asks Frenchie if he noticed how Travis looked at Wab. He says they need to keep an eye on it. Frenchie feels very adult and tries to imitate Chi-Boy's silent way of moving. As they step into the clearing, they see Lincoln swallow something from his palm. They slip into the circle next to Rose and Miig, and Chi-Boy whispers quietly in Miig's ear.

Travis talks about Espanola and says that it's the last town in the region. He hands out bread, and Frenchie is hungry enough that he doesn't follow through on his plan to let the girls eat all the food. Travis says that Espanola is the link between the new **residential schools** and supplies from the south. Miig notes that he's heard that there's an Indigenous resistance group outside Espanola. Frenchie sits up and notices that Lincoln stops carving and Travis makes a defensive movement. Travis says that the group is fighting, but they'll be hauled in soon. Lincoln declares that resisting is stupid; people need to run or find other ways to fit in. Miig asks what they're supposed to do to fit in, and Frenchie checks the gun. Frenchie knows that Miig is remembering being betrayed.

Chi-Boy stands and looks ready to fight as Miig stares down Lincoln. Travis assures Miig that Lincoln is talking about hiding and tries to get Slopper to agree that there are Indigenous people who look white. Slopper leans away. Travis continues and says that he's happy to stay in the forest, since cities bring out the worst in people. Wab starts to pace, and Travis says that he used to have bad habits, but he would've never done what he did if he'd known what the outcome would be. He says he didn't want people to get hurt and looks up at Wab. He explains that he's different now and now that he's teamed up with Lincoln, he'll never go back. Slopper points out that none of them can go back because of the Recruiters.

Even if this meeting weren't going to turn out badly, Frenchie should still listen to his gut about Lincoln. Learning to trust his instincts around people who make him uncomfortable is part of growing up and being an adult who thinks critically—especially in Frenchie's world where there are so many threats. Following after Chi-Boy shows that Frenchie desperately wants to be an adult, but he just doesn't quite know how to do that yet.



That Frenchie feels so adult when Chi-Boy lets him in on his suspicions about Travis again reminds the reader that, for Frenchie, coming of age at this point means feeling more secure and competent in his role as a protector. That this conversation happens out in the wilderness again reaffirms Frenchie and his group's connection to the natural world.



Calling Lincoln out on his comment shows that Miig lives constantly with the memory of trusting people who ultimately sold him to the schools, and he'd rather fight and win now than have to lose more of his loved ones. That Frenchie recognizes this and checks the gun shows how loyal he is to Miig and to the family, as well as shows how Frenchie is becoming more and more observant of his family members and their nonverbal cues.



Slopper's nervous demeanor despite Travis's generosity makes it clear that something is wrong. Wab's unwillingness to accept Travis's apology shows that as far as she's concerned, Travis's complicity with the men who hurt her (and, by extension, with the government who wants to profit off of her body) is too grave an offense to forgive. Wab has to live daily with the knowledge that people can say one thing and mean another, suggesting that Travis will need to show he's sorry rather than just say it.



Travis laughs and invites Miig to camp in the clearing for the night. Miig seems nervous to stay, but Frenchie knows that leaving this late is also dangerous. Travis assures Miig that they don't mind sharing and claps Lincoln on the shoulder. Lincoln's eyes are glassy, and he seems cloudy somehow, but he tells Rose and Wab to stay close for safety. The girls turn away, but Frenchie says they didn't know then how dangerous Lincoln would turn out to be.

Miig's dilemma over whether to stay or leave shows just how precarious his family's situation is, since it's safer to stay with these suspicious men than it is to continue in the questionable weather. Lincoln's comment to Rose and Wab reads as extremely predatory, suggesting that Miig is misguided in trusting Lincoln.



THE WAY IT ALL CHANGED

Miig and the family set up tents in the woods, midway between Travis's fire and the cliff. Miig gives orders for keeping watch but they're still caught unaware. Frenchie wakes up when a body crashes into his tent and onto him. He hears Wab scream, pushes the body off of his tent, and unzips it. Travis has Tree and Zheegwon at gunpoint, Chi-Boy has a knife in his arm, and Miig is standing, his gun on the ground. Frenchie sees Lincoln, who looks inebriated, holding RiRi off the ground by her throat. Miig and Travis convince Lincoln to let RiRi down and Frenchie grabs the rifle. Travis tells Lincoln they can't kill anyone—the Recruiters are on their way and dead Indians are worthless.

This shows how dangerous it can be to trust people just because they share the language, as Travis and Lincoln are clearly working for Recruiters. For Frenchie, this experience shows him specifically how dangerous life can be for a kid like RiRi, who has no hope of fighting back against a large man like Lincoln. With this, Frenchie continues to put together his understanding of the ways in which different people are differently vulnerable to violence or exploitation.



Rose emerges from her tent, shouts for them to let RiRi go, and holds Minerva back from trying to get to RiRi. Lincoln drops RiRi entirely and starts to laugh. As Travis turns, Chi-Boy stabs him in the leg, Miig grabs his gun and punches Travis, and Lincoln grabs RiRi and starts to run. Miig and Wab chase Lincoln while Zheegwon and Tree tie up Travis. When Travis is secure, Frenchie follows the others into the dark. He trips over Minerva and finds the others at the edge of the cliff. Wab is on the ground, Rose is vomiting, and Miig leans over the edge. Frenchie angrily asks Miig where Lincoln went but when no one answers, he decides to find Lincoln himself. He stops when he sees one of RiRi's pink boots at the edge of the cliff.

Going over the cliff with Lincoln means that RiRi's death is entirely pointless—nobody, Indigenous or white, was able to make use of her skills or qualities to either create medicine or pass along cultural knowledge. This senseless death mirrors what happened to many children in residential schools that died needlessly of disease or poor treatment, showing again how the novel draws on past history to give more weight and heft to what happens in this fictional future.



Frenchie feels as though he's totally alone with the boot and the rifle. He turns and runs back from whence he came, not listening to Miig telling him to stop. Frenchie startles the twins and Travis sighs and asks if Lincoln killed RiRi. Travis tries to reason with Frenchie, but Frenchie angrily notices Travis looking panicked. Travis pleads as Frenchie points the rifle at him. Frenchie can barely hear Tree trying to reason with him and points the rifle first at Travis's face, then his chest. He pulls the trigger.

Killing Travis is the most drastic thing Frenchie does as he moves from child to adult, and he does it in service of RiRi. This shows that his role as a protector does have its limits—acting like this when he had the choice to react differently doesn't always pay off in the long run. This act is something that Frenchie will have to live with for the rest of his life.



THE LONG STUMBLE

Frenchie feels like he's in a trance as they pack up camp and run. He carries the gun until they hear the Recruiters' whistles, and then starts to feel more himself as he takes some of Rose's items. They run until the following evening, crying and grieving. They erect two tents that night and sleep all together. Though Rose sleeps against Frenchie, he can barely feel her. He feels like something changed after he killed Travis. Frenchie admits to himself that he killed a man, that RiRi is dead, and that misses his parents more than he has in years. They continue to run for the next several days. Minerva is unresponsive and rides on Chi-Boy's back.

On the fourth day, Miig calls Frenchie up to the front of the line. Frenchie complies slowly, thinking that he could just die. Miig says that he didn't want to live when Isaac couldn't escape. He kept going because he made a promise to himself to go back and save Isaac. He ran for days until he found a Cree family. The family gave him food and clothes, and told him about the small Anishnaabe settlements sprinkled around. This is when Miig met Dad. Miig promised to show Dad and his Council to the capital in exchange for a gun. The Council believed that they could talk sense into the government. Dad gave Miig the rifle when they got close.

Frenchie thinks of how Mom changed after Dad didn't come back. Frenchie knows that Dad went into the city because he loved Mom, Frenchie, and Mitch. Miig resumes his story and says that he walked back to the **school** and sat for two days, staring at it. He knew it was a suicide mission. On the third day, Miig followed a pickup truck leaving the school, hid himself in the back, and when the driver stopped to urinate, Miig held him at gunpoint and said he needed to get into the school. The man looked at Miig quizzically and said that Indians enter the schools to die—harvesting marrow kills them. Miig punched and kicked the man and asked where the people were.

The man said that the last group of people was "used up," and they're in the back of the truck. Miig pulled aside a tarp and found crates. The man told him to look inside. Miig found rows of glass tubes and pulled one out. It was filled with thick liquid and labeled with a serial number, age, sex, and tribe. He dug until he found a vial that he identified as Isaac's. Without thinking, Miig shot the man and left. He drove to a lake, hiked in with the crates, poured each vial into the ground, and "sang them home." Miig grabs Frenchie's shoulder and says that people sometimes have to do things they never thought they'd do, but that Frenchie needs to make sure his intentions remain good.

Missing his parents shows that, for Frenchie, killing Travis has thrust him uncomfortably into an adult role that he never expected to be in. Now that he's on the other side, he sees all that he lost by leaving his childhood behind and that becoming an adult in this world means coming to terms both with the violence he'll experience, as well as the violence that he'll inflict on others out of necessity.



Miig tries to impress upon Frenchie that while they will inevitably lose people, it's still important that he keep working toward making the world a better place and saving others, as Miig did by working with Dad in order to return to Isaac. This also shows how important of a motivator love is and suggests that as Frenchie continues to fall in love with Rose, his own motivations will become clearer to him.



For Miig, learning the truth about what happens in the schools is one of the most traumatic and horrifying experiences of his life. His violence toward this man shows that Miig's emotional state makes him more likely to behave cruelly, even if the man possibly doesn't deserve this kind of treatment. This also reinforces Miig's assertion that they and the Recruiters are somewhat the same—they all have the capacity to behave violently like this.



That Miig took the crates and performed the burial rites for these murdered people shows the importance of ceremony. It gave Miig a sense of closure and allowed him to feel as though he'd performed his responsibility to his people, and it allowed the deceased to join the ancestors. This is one of the many reasons why preserving Indigenous languages and culture is so important: it allows living people to connect with the dead, and the dead to be properly honored.



ROGAROU COMES HUNTING

Eight days after RiRi's death, Miig stops suddenly and tells everyone to scatter into the trees. Frenchie hears Recruiters' whistles and they run until they can't hear them anymore. Miig stops when they find a barn and sends Frenchie up a tree to look around. As Frenchie climbs, he thinks that the sky to the north is black and the **schools** keep coming. He wonders if going north is pointless, and wonders if anyone will welcome him since he couldn't protect RiRi. Miig calls Frenchie down and Frenchie takes his pack from Rose. She gives him a smile that makes him feel better.

The barn is entirely empty. Zheegwon scampers up a ladder to a loft and announces that it's full of hay. Miig and the others join him, and Miig agrees that they can sleep there. Minerva, however, refuses to come up the ladder. She insists that everyone else stay up there, so Miig and Wab make her a comfortable bed on the ground. Miig smokes on the ground with her and Minerva smudges herself with the smoke. At one point, Minerva catches Frenchie's eye and puts a finger to her lips. Frenchie doesn't know why; he's already quiet. Eventually, everyone falls asleep.

Frenchie jerks awake when he hears two whistles. He sees flashlights below and looks down to see Minerva. She puts her finger to her lips and smiles at Frenchie. Several Recruiters rush in and take Minerva away, and Miig pulls Frenchie down so they won't see him. The Recruiters declare the barn clear and then drive away. Nobody moves until dawn. Miig discovers that Minerva moved the ladder, and they realize that Minerva sacrificed herself for them. Frenchie starts throwing hay over so they can jump down onto a soft pile. They roll up Minerva's bed.

Rose discovers jingles—like what used to hang from women's dresses at powwows—made from can lids and rolled into a hide. Slopper is confused; he knows they need to be quiet and confirms that the jingles are supposed to make noise. Chi-Boy says that Minerva risked everything "for a life worth living," even though she won't get to live it. Rose cries and puts the hide into her pack. Outside, Miig declares that they'll keep going north. Frenchie says that he's going to go after Minerva.

Frenchie's hopelessness and specifically, his comment about how the schools keep moving north suggests the possibility that the Indigenous people may not always be able to rely on the natural world to save them—at some point, they may simply run out of space to go. The schools on the land, however, are monuments to the fact that the settlers have abused and victimized both the Indigenous people and the land.



Though Frenchie's thoughts on Minerva have changed somewhat since Rose chastised him, it's still telling that he shrugs off her silencing gesture as useless and odd. He's still underestimating her and how sane and aware she actually is, which reminds the reader that Frenchie still has a long way to go toward adulthood, and specifically, toward truly respecting his elders in all ways.



Minerva's sacrifice would suggest that, as far as she's concerned and when forced to choose, the youth are more important than one Elder. She might suggest that the youth are the ones who will carry the culture forward, while some of the culture will die soon with the Elders. Though her decision is understandable, it also ignores the fact that without old people, the youth have no one to teach them.



The jingles represent Minerva's hope for the future, which she hopes will be one in which they can again make noise, be proud, and exist in the open. This hope is what leads Frenchie to decide that they need to go south (and by extension, toward the resistance group). The group, because of its size, makes more noise and lives more proudly.



ON THE ROAD

Without RiRi and Minerva, the group is able to move faster. Frenchie thinks that they're without their roots and their reason to make the world better. They head south in the hope of finding the resistance near Espanola. Frenchie feels as though he's now getting to make decisions with Miig and Chi-Boy. He's so worried about the possible consequences of heading south that he can barely sleep. When they get close to Espanola, Miig calls Frenchie to look at some cuts in a tree. He says they're syllabics, the written language. Miig can't read it. Frenchie touches it reverently.

The next day, Rose invites Frenchie to hunt for mushrooms with her and he follows her into the woods. They walk silently for an hour and then Rose stops. She smells water. They choose a direction and then race forward. Frenchie thinks that Rose is impossibly beautiful and that he loves her. Rose breaks through the trees and emits a small scream. Frenchie joins her, afraid, but she points to the small stream with fish in it. Frenchie falls to his knees, feeling like everything is too heavy, and laughs until he cries. Rose steps forward and lets Frenchie pull her into his lap.

Frenchie remembers being with his uncle once when he was a little kid. His uncle told Frenchie to choose a "good" CD, and Frenchie chose one from the middle of the stack. Frenchie's uncle inspected the CD, smiled, and declared it was just what they needed. He lumbered to his feet, inserted it into the stereo, and explained that the album was by Pearl Jam. Frenchie listened to the sound of the drums, guitar, and vocalist, and felt uncomfortable. His uncle asked him what he thought, and Frenchie said that it sounded "like if gray could make noise." Frenchie thinks that that's what he's hearing now, sitting with Rose by water. He wonders how anything can be bad when he loves Rose, and they kiss.

FOUND

That night, Frenchie jerks awake to the sounds of a fight outside his tent. He pokes the gun out, but another person points a gun in at Frenchie. The man takes Frenchie's rifle and Frenchie feels furious with himself. Frenchie stares down his captor and yells for Chi-Boy. He ascertains that everyone is fine, and the captors herd everyone into a group. The captors all wear kerchiefs over their faces. Miig tells Frenchie that these are the people who left the syllabics, and Frenchie says that he's been looking for them. He sees that the people are Indigenous. The captors suggest that Frenchie is working for the **schools**. Frenchie says that he's killed "snitches." The captors confer and one woman jogs away. Frenchie puts his arm around Rose, who's shivering.

Frenchie's assessment of what they've lost in losing Minerva and RiRi shows that he now understands the importance of being a part of a family and a community that includes people of all ages, as they all have a unique role to play in keeping the culture alive. That Miig can't read syllabics reminds the reader again that, even though Miig is knowledgeable, he's not a true Elder who possesses all the Indigenous wisdom.



Finding this stream with fish shows Frenchie that a future is possible. That he feels this way because of something he found in the natural world shows again that the future of these Indigenous people is intrinsically tied to the land and whether or not they'll be able to work with it and heal it going forward. This intimate moment shows that Frenchie also sees that his future should include romantic, chosen family, as represented by Rose.



The confluence of this memory, the intimate moment with Rose, and the healthy stream shows that the past, love, and the natural world are all connected. Together, these elements create a roadmap for the future for all Indigenous people, not just Frenchie. His inability to focus on anything bad in this moment speaks to the emotional power of seeing the future laid out for him like this.



While Miig gives Frenchie information, Frenchie is the one to actually address the captors and dictate how they deal with them. This suggests that Miig is beginning to let Frenchie test himself in a leadership position and effectively pass the torch to the younger generation so that if he's taken, like Minerva, the kids will have the skills and the confidence to take care of themselves. It's comforting that the captors seem just as nervous about Miig's group as Miig was about Lincoln and Travis; this suggests they're genuine.



The woman returns with an older man not wearing a kerchief. He looks vaguely familiar. When Miig introduces himself, the man looks shocked and says that Miig's group should be treated like guests. He instructs his followers to help them pack up camp. Frenchie steps toward the man who disarmed him earlier, and he pulls his kerchief off to reveal that he's not much older than Frenchie. The young man (Derrick) says he'll help Frenchie, but is more interested in talking with Rose. When Frenchie finishes packing his tent, he helps Miig and asks who these people are. Miig isn't willing to say, but he says he recognizes the older man. Frenchie feels frustrated and approaches Rose. She sits Frenchie down and re-braids his hair. Frenchie happily notices that Derrick watches jealously.

The guards lead Frenchie and the group to a hill. Guards appear out of the bush and into a cave. Frenchie feels panicky and aggressive, afraid that this is a trap. The cave opens into a low room filled with blanket tents and people. They head out the back of the cave, and Rose reassures Frenchie. He grabs her hand and thinks that he might be happy enough about Rose to be okay with dying. They emerge in a valley surrounded by rock cliffs, and the smell of tobacco, cedar, and sweetgrass makes Frenchie forget his anxiety. The older man from the woods approaches, greets Miig, and says that they'll talk when the Council gets out of the lodge.

Frenchie can barely breathe—he's never seen a real sweat lodge. Men begin to pour out of the lodge and they all smile at Miig. The last man is missing half of his right leg and calls, "Francis?" Frenchie realizes it's Dad. He throws himself in Dad's arms and feels like everything will be okay. When Dad learns that Mitch is gone, they cry and grieve. Later, Frenchie sits between Miig and Dad. Dad introduces his Council: Clarence, Mint, Bullet, General, Jo-jo, and Rebecca. Miig introduces his group and explains losing RiRi and Minerva. Bullet sits up at this, and Dad says they've heard of Minerva. General says she's in Espanola.

That Derrick stirs up Frenchie's jealousy reminds the reader that Frenchie is still in the throes of puberty and is dealing with the emotions, good and bad, of his first love. While he can act mature and speak with their captors, he's also still in a stage where Miig feels it's necessary to withhold information and where his jealousy rises up out of nowhere. Braiding Frenchie's hair for him gives Rose the opportunity to connect with Frenchie through something that allows them to connect to their roots and their culture.



Frenchie's comment about being possibly okay with dying because of Rose continues to illustrate the liminal space he's in because of his age: he's thrilled because he's madly in love for the first time, while also scared to trust and knows that his life depends on his ability to take care of himself. Forgetting his anxiety because of the smells suggests that these are soothing smells for Frenchie, and that they signal safety and home for him.



Finding Dad confirms that this group is safe and trustworthy, and it continues to expand Frenchie's understanding of what home and family can mean. Now, he has access to two different families (his chosen family with Miig and his biological connection to Dad), as well as the possibility of a romantic, chosen family with Rose sometime in the future. This complicates Frenchie's understanding of family and allows him to see that he needs multiple people to fill various roles.



THE MIRACLE OF MINERVA

The Council has a man in the schools, Father Carole, who passed along what happened to Minerva. According to Recruiters' logs, Minerva had been easy to bring in, though possibly insane—she only sang and wouldn't or couldn't speak English. They prepared her for the process. One recruiter raced to the restroom, while one stayed to watch the Headmistress and the Cardinals perform the procedure. Minerva hummed as they connected wires to her body, but then she began to sing. She called on her ancestors and put all the dreams in her bone marrow into her song. The Cardinals and the machine couldn't deal with the song. The Council realizes now that Minerva had been collecting dreams in preparation for this day. The system failed and started a fire.

Father Carole visits the **school** the next day to investigate. The once-imposing school is now melted and broken. The fence is down. Several camping Indigenous people followed Father Carole closer to the wreckage, and they pulled the smoky air over themselves in prayer.

Minerva's choice to sing a traditional song when they hooked her up to the machine was a way for her to show how proud she is to be Indigenous, and how secure she is in her culture. While it's unclear if she knew that she'd set the school on fire, the fact that her song had this effect suggests that this pride (and specifically, the language, songs, and stories in the language) can be weaponized to actually destroy the schools. While the schools seek to deprive Indigenous people of their language, asserting the power of the language decimates the schools.



Praying in the smoke from the school shows how meaningful Minerva's victory is for all Indigenous people, as it reminds them that they need to be proud of their identity and their culture in order to make it out of their dire situation alive.



LOSS

Frenchie helps Dad to his living space. He lives in a corner of the cave, so two walls are stone and the other two are blankets. Frenchie looks around while Dad changes for bed. He finds Mom's health card and studies her photo. Dad comes out from behind his sheet and invites Frenchie to stay the night. Frenchie declines and tells Dad that Mitch sacrificed himself so he could get away. He says that Mom couldn't handle being alone. Dad hangs his head and agrees that they can talk about Mom and Mitch later.

Outside, Frenchie's family is around the fire. Slopper is already asleep. Tree and Zheegwon seem surprised and relieved that Frenchie chose to sleep with them, not with Dad, and Frenchie asks Miig if they need to figure things out. Miig agrees that they need a plan, but he's sold on going to get Minerva; Frenchie's instincts are good, and finding his dad is a good sign. Frenchie is somewhat surprised and feels like Miig seems tired and faded. Frenchie presses and asks if they need to discuss that Minerva found the key to beating the **residential schools**, but Miig insists that Minerva had the key all along—they just needed to listen better. Miig says that they can make a plan with the Council tomorrow and excuses himself to bed. Tree and Zheegwon follow.

Dad's unwillingness to talk about Mom and Mitch right now reminds Frenchie that Dad is grieving just as much as he is for the family members they've lost; he's not unfeeling just because he's an adult and chose to leave. Though their journeys have been different in the last six years, they also both share this trauma and, if they choose to, can use this shared experience to get closer to each other.



Miig's ability to quietly chastise all of them for not taking Minerva seriously and making more of an effort to make sense of the things she said shows that he believes they have a responsibility to take what they learned and do better going forward with other Elders. Miig essentially suggests that they've been dehumanizing Minerva to a degree and because of this, they weren't able to appreciate her full potential, just as the residential schools' dehumanizing treatment of Indigenous people blinds them to the ways that the Indigenous population is equipped to help the earth.



Frenchie notices that the twins seem more content, and Wab seems to be feeling the same thing. He turns to his tent when Rose asks Frenchie to come to hers for a moment. Rose asks if Frenchie is okay, remarks on how crazy it is that Frenchie found Dad, and says that Miig seems worried about Frenchie, not finding Minerva. She points out that Frenchie has changed and drops her gaze when she says that people change when they find family.

Frenchie wants to kiss her and tell her that he'll never leave, but he thinks of his memories of Mom, Dad, and Mitch. In those memories, Frenchie feels like there was always an understanding that his only job was to be himself. Now, he thinks that his job is to hunt and protect his new family, but he's failed at doing that and so is failing at being himself. He wonders if the only way to stay sane is to stay with Dad. Rose scoots in front of Frenchie and he still feels like all he wants to do is kiss her. They kiss, lie down together, and fall asleep.

They wake up in the middle of the night, listening to Miig singing and shaking a rattle. His voice moans and sounds pained. Frenchie leaves the tent and watches Miig sitting with a candle and a smudge, singing. When he finishes, he invites Frenchie to him. He asks Frenchie why he's up, and Frenchie nonchalantly says that he hasn't been in his tent yet. He blushes, and Miig kindly says that babies are important for the future and need to be born to families that want them. Frenchie squirms and then asks Miig if he's okay, since he's been strange since they arrived. Miig jokes, sighs, and says he's just tired of missing Isaac. Frenchie thinks of Miig pouring vials into the ground and says that after they get Minerva, they'll shut down the **schools**. Miig tells Frenchie that he knows he'll do that.

THE CIRCLE

Frenchie's family wakes up early and quickly sets out to work on assigned chores. At lunch, Frenchie sits with Clarence. The young man who took Frenchie's gun wanders over, and Clarence introduces him as his nephew, Derrick. Derrick looms over Frenchie and boasts about how skilled he is until Clarence sends him to get food. Clarence says that Derrick's behavior is normal for his age, and that he's just showing off for the girls in Frenchie's group. Frenchie suddenly feels like he's not hungry and decides to walk the perimeter. Rose jogs up to join Frenchie and asks where he's going, but Frenchie gives her one-word answers. He wonders why things feel so uncertain since he found Dad. Rose stops and asks if Frenchie wants her to come. Frenchie says it's her choice, so she stomps back to the group.

Being around other Indigenous people allows Wab and the twins to feel more at ease than they did out on the run. Here, they can be themselves and admit who they are. This shows that, while there may be safety in being a small group, numbers give people a better opportunity to exchange ideas and celebrate their shared identity.



Frenchie's sense that he failed at being himself shows that, while it may seem like he has everything now, he still feels extremely lost and unmoored. This sets up Frenchie to figure out how he can do things that make him proud of himself, as well as come to a definition and understanding of who and what his family is that makes him feel supported and safe, like he did as a kid.



The change in pronouns when Miig and Frenchie talk about shutting down the schools is significant—Frenchie says that they will do it, while Miig shows that he's beginning to give up by taking himself out of the equation. This begins to show one of the consequences of living with such grief: Miig no longer has the drive to try and take down the schools and save people from the fate that Isaac experienced. Miig's comment about babies reminds the reader that, if these characters wish to survive, they need young people to learn the language and customs in order to keep the culture alive.



Though Derrick is certainly being a jerk, Clarence is also somewhat correct that Derrick is acting like a normal teen and trying to seem as adult as possible. But Derrick is failing to make it seem like people should consider him an adult, as boasting in front of Frenchie like this is childish. Derrick mostly shows Frenchie that, as his community expands, he'll naturally experience different conflicts that arise simply from being around more people with differing ideas and opinions. At this point, this isn't a comfortable thought for Frenchie.



When Frenchie returns to Miig and the group at dusk, General is telling Miig about the social dance in the cave later. Frenchie wanders on and knocks at Dad's room. Frenchie sits down next to Dad on the mattress, and Dad asks Frenchie what's going on. Frenchie puts his head in his hands and can't think of what exactly is wrong: they're going to get Minerva, and he found Dad. Dad asks Frenchie what he expects to find here. Frenchie answers that he wants to find Minerva, but when Dad asks why, Frenchie snaps that they're all supposed to look for each other. He asks if Dad tried to look for him and Mitch. Calmly, Dad says he did look. He says that he created this camp so the people in it could all find their communities, but they ended up becoming the community instead.

Frenchie realizes that he resents Dad for leaving him with Mom and Mitch. Dad puts his arm around Frenchie and says that if he'd known how fast things were going to go downhill, he never would've left them. Frenchie leans into Dad and admits that he's "done things," and when Dad kisses the top of Frenchie's head, Frenchie feels safe.

A young man calls Dad and Frenchie to the social and Frenchie hears the drum starting. He hasn't heard drums since he was a child. Dad and Frenchie sit next to Bullet and Frenchie looks around at the community of about 50 people. He thinks that it's too big to be invisible, so they have to find space and defend it. Clarence and Derrick step into the circle with drums, which annoys Frenchie. He gets even angrier when he sees that Rose is smiling and standing next to Derrick. Frenchie remembers that his **braid** is longer than Derrick's, which makes him a "better Indian."

The drumming starts. Many people, including Wab, Chi-Boy, and Slopper, start to dance in a circle, but Frenchie sits and stewes jealously. The next dance is a two-step, and Derrick gives his drum to Tree and then pulls Rose into the circle. Derrick meets Frenchie's eye and gives him a self-satisfied smirk. Frenchie runs back to camp.

WORD ARRIVES IN BLACK

Frenchie wakes up early the next morning, grabs the rifle, and creeps out. He checks Rose's tent—she's alone—and starts to walk. Clarence, Miig, General, and some other men flag Frenchie and invite him to hunt. They spend the day out in the wilderness. Clarence tells Frenchie that as they get closer to the coasts, there's more water. The middle of the continent is poisoned. Clarence says that once it's safe to return to their homelands, they can start to heal. Frenchie, confused, asks how they can go home when home is gone. Clarence patiently explains that they can use their knowledge to heal the land.

Frenchie shows here that finding Dad is difficult mostly because Frenchie feels as though Dad abandoned him. While on some level, this may be true—Dad did choose to go—it also shows that Frenchie is fixating on the emotional trauma of the situation, rather than recognizing that Dad had to fight his way out of a residential school and then had no way to locate his family. As Frenchie begins to understand that things aren't all so simple, he'll become increasingly more mature.



Dad's willingness to treat Frenchie a bit like a small kid here by kissing and comforting him shows that Dad understands how uncomfortable Frenchie is right now as he vacillates between child and adult.



Here, Frenchie begins to see the positive aspects of being in a larger group: because staying hidden is near impossible, they celebrate whenever they can and defend themselves when necessary. This suggests that there's a lot to gain by living in a community with more than a few people in it, as it at least gives people the illusion of a safe space in which they can celebrate who they are.



What Derrick is doing is horrible on an interpersonal level, but it's also worth noting that his behavior is also alienating Frenchie from his community and the cultural experience of being part of the drum circle.



Clarence's patient explanation to Frenchie confirms the novel's assertion that the Indigenous characters are the ones with the ability to fix the issues plaguing the planet, and that the information is contained and passed down through Indigenous languages and customs. This, again, situates language as the thing that will keep Indigenous people and the world at large alive.



Frenchie hears a high whistle and General pulls Frenchie to the ground. Frenchie feels panicky, but General explains that scouts got an animal. Frenchie's group joins the scouts and their buck, and the hunting party returns to camp around mid-afternoon. Frenchie feels smug and then giddy when Derrick jogs up to them and complains that Clarence didn't wake him up. Clarence says that Derrick needs to get himself up like Frenchie did. Rose runs over, touches Frenchie, and compliments the buck. Frenchie feels inexplicably angry, remembers her dancing with Derrick, and rudely tells her to go watch Derrick wrestle.

Rose looks hurt, which makes Frenchie feel flustered. She asks what he's playing at and calls him Francis, but Frenchie asks her to call him French—Francis is what people he respects can call him. He feels horrible immediately, and Rose leads him away from the group. They argue, Rose accuses Frenchie of having changed and of being a jerk, and Rose says that she'll leave after they get Minerva. Frenchie insults Derrick again and says that he won't chase after Rose. Rose starts to cry and Frenchie feels ashamed. He meanders to Dad's room and flops facedown onto Dad's bed.

Dad returns to his room about an hour later and when he's sure Frenchie is awake, he starts to tell Frenchie how he ended up in the city. He says he ran away when he was thirteen. He stopped at an old church first. The church was supposedly a "medicine house," but it didn't look right. Dad says he wanted to find something real, and that's why he went. He didn't care about God, but he knew that his family wouldn't look for him there. He says that he suffered from rages that he barely remembered. He closed his eyes to pray for an answer, and he heard crickets and birds. He got on the highway and went to the city, where he found Mom.

Dad and Frenchie hear someone shouting for Dad and they make their way out of the cave. A priest shouts that they'll move Minerva tomorrow, and Miig, Frenchie, and Chi-Boy look at the priest with terror. They adopt defensive positions, but Dad yells that this is Father Carole, their spy. Carole says that they're taking Minerva to the airstrip to take her to the capital. Carole tells Frenchie that the Recruiters have to pass nearby to get there.

In the case of speaking to Rose, Frenchie starts to do here what Derrick did to him the night before and alienate Rose from her family and her friends. This means that Rose won't feel comfortable calling on Frenchie for help, and she certainly won't be sharing any more of the language that she's picked up with him. This conflict, in other words, keeps both of them from being able to take pride in who they are and help the other do the same.



Rose's decision to leave shows the consequences of Frenchie's behavior: his family starts to break up, and specifically, the person he loves is ready to up and leave. Though it takes Frenchie a while, this shows him that he needs to treat people kindly and with compassion, regardless of his emotions, if he wants himself and others to feel safe and secure.



The church, a Western addition to Dad's small town, again shows how Indigenous culture has merged with settler culture at times. In this case, Dad was able to get what he wanted from the church, even if it wasn't what the church intended for him to get. That this experience led to him finding his future wife shows Frenchie that, if he asks for help and listens to the natural world, he, too, might be able to find love and patch things up with Rose.



For those who have been in the residential schools (which were historically run by religious groups), the sight of a priest isn't a good one—it suggests that danger is on the way. Father Carole is, in other words, a symbol for the schools themselves, even as he actively works against the schools.



LOST AND FOUND AND LOST

The Council calls a meeting early in the morning. Clarence explains that they need to organize everyone not participating in the raid to move, as the Recruiters will target them after they attack. Nineteen people prepare to attack. They study the route and at eleven in the morning, head down to hide in the trees alongside the highway. Dad reminds Frenchie before he heads out that the Recruiters think of him as a commodity and instructs him to play it safe. Dad looks terrified.

Frenchie climbs into his tree near Derrick. Miig gives Frenchie his pouch "for safekeeping," and says that it can't go back to the **residential schools**. The plan is to wait for the convoy, disable the drivers, and save Minerva. Frenchie looks up to where Rose is hidden on a hill. She'd been angry when Frenchie insisted she take one of the safest positions. Derrick is in a tree across from Frenchie and they mime insults at each other. Frenchie hears a low whistle from Chi-Boy, and two cars come around the bend. Arrows hit the tires and the car skids. The driver shoots General in the shoulder, and someone on the other side of the road shoots the driver of the van. Frenchie meets Derrick's eyes and sees that he looks like Frenchie did after he shot Travis.

The van driver is slumped onto the horn, and archers shoot the car driver. A Recruiter steps out of the van with his hands up and Tree and Zheegwon tie him up. The twins whoop in celebration and everyone meets at the van. The back door is locked, so Miig steps up to the cab to get the key. The horn stops and they hear a gunshot: the driver isn't dead and fights back. Chi-Boy runs to help Miig, and Frenchie hears another gunshot. Miig runs back with the keys, looking afraid. He unlocks the van and Minerva, bleeding from the chest, falls out into his arms. Frenchie takes Minerva's hand and tries to stanch the bleeding while Miig listens to Minerva's whispered words in the language, smiles, and cries.

Rose takes Minerva's head in her lap and Minerva says, "kiiwen" and begins to sing. Miig picks up the song and sings until Minerva is gone. Miig and Frenchie stand, but Rose won't let go. Frenchie stands guard over Rose, and Rose looks up at him. She says that kiiwen means that they should always go home.

Dad's pep talk for Frenchie shows that at a certain age or maturity level, it's actually beneficial and protective to remember that one's body is a valuable commodity. At this point in Frenchie's life and understanding, he can remember this and use the information to keep himself safe.



Seeing the look on Derrick's face allows Frenchie to begin to humanize Derrick and see him as less of an adversary, and more of a peer. With this, Frenchie continues to expand his conception of family and community and makes room for other people who are going through some of the same changes that he is. Frenchie's insistence that Rose take a safer spot shows that he's still leaning heavily into his role as a protector, even when he knows that it's not getting him anywhere. This starts to show him that he should think about expanding his role.



The driver showed that he's aware that Minerva is valuable to the Indigenous rebels when he shot backwards hoping to get her—by taking her out, he ensures that the Indigenous people won't be able to question her about what happened and figure out how to acquire the language and skills themselves. (Remember that the driver isn't aware that Father Carole has already passed on a majority of the pertinent information.)



Minerva's final words are to essentially tell her family to hold onto each other. At this point, family and home are nearly synonymous, given that they can't live someplace permanent.



KIIWEN

Everyone runs. They bury Minerva's body and leave their captives with soup and a blanket. As they bury Minerva, Rose cuts off her **braid**. Frenchie does the same. It makes him feel vulnerable and increases his grief. Frenchie thinks that Miig is now their elder, and nobody mentions that in losing Minerva, they lost the key to taking down the **schools**. They travel for ten days and then set up camp. Summer arrives over the next few weeks. Chi-Boy and Wab begins living together, and summer clothing makes it obvious that Wab is pregnant.

The Council works hard to piece together the words of the Cree language that they know, as well as the stories. Bullet suggests they start a youth council to pass on what they know to the youth, and they put Slopper in charge. He excels at this. Frenchie explains that they're desperate to create "the kind of Indians who could not be robbed."

One day, Rose takes down her tent and packs up to leave. Frenchie learns how to write "family" in syllabics and when Rose comes to say goodbye to everyone, he hides in the trees until dusk. He hates himself for it, but thinks that he can't leave his family or Dad. He reasons with himself that going back on the run is silly, and fingers Miig's pouch. He opens it and finds tobacco and a half-full glass vial that Frenchie believes must be Isaac's bone marrow. Frenchie knows he needs to give the pouch back.

Frenchie heads back to camp and wanders to Dad's tent. As soon as Frenchie sits down, he starts to cry. Dad puts down his book and says that Mom was always smarter than he was. He says that once, she caught him drinking and told him seriously that running is only effective if he's running toward something rather than away. Frenchie tells Dad that he has to go. Dad kisses Frenchie's head, and Frenchie feels safe enough to run away. He quickly gathers up his things, leaves his tent and Miig's pouch, and runs after Rose. Twenty meters into the woods, Rose's voice startles him. He asks why she's not far away, and she says that she wanted to give Frenchie a good chance at finding her. Frenchie leans down to kiss her but stops when they hear runners.

Frenchie hears three people too close to hide from. He and Rose slide down behind a log. The runners don't sound like Recruiters, so Frenchie peeks. He sees Derrick and calls out. Derrick says that there are people that they're going to "welcome." Frenchie tries to figure out how to convince Rose to stay so they can help when she stands and runs after Derrick. Frenchie runs after her, excited at what they might find.

Cutting off their braids allows Frenchie and Rose to show Minerva respect and reverence. The revelation that Wab is pregnant offers hope for the future, even in these bleak times. Having a baby means that there's another young Indigenous person to learn the customs and the language, be able to dream, and carry this knowledge forward into the future.



The Indigenous people who can't be robbed are the ones who are connected to their history, their language, and their culture. Passing on what they do know to the children allows them to begin this process and celebrate the knowledge they do have.



Frenchie believes that the wider community he's developed with the resistance is far more important than one person, even if this choice makes him feel horrible. Finding Isaac's marrow in Miig's pouch reminds Frenchie how driven by grief Miig is, and how important it is to hang onto those he loves—which he's not doing by letting Rose go.



Just as before, when Dad holds and kisses Frenchie like this, he's able to communicate that he respects the person his son is becoming and understands that Frenchie needs to chase his own dreams and his own family. This is Frenchie's final push toward adulthood in the novel. Fortunately for Frenchie, he doesn't have to choose whether to continue with Rose or to remain with the rest of the community. With this, Frenchie's idea of who constitutes family becomes something that's broader than he previously thought possible.



Derrick's answer, which he gives neutrally to Frenchie, shows that the two boys have come to an agreement and now: they can be allies and work together to either greet or protect themselves from these newcomers. Frenchie's chosen family now includes Derrick, as well as Rose.



LOCKS MEAN NOTHING TO GHOSTS

Miig considers joining the expedition, but he decides to stay back and work on maps with Dad. Frenchie teases them about being old, but he feels strangely pessimistic to have two dads now. He feels it can't last. On the way to the newcomers' camp, Tree and Zheegwon say that they hope they find an Elder who can help them fight the schools. Bullet walks next to Frenchie and tells him that they go into these welcome expeditions aggressive—it's better to apologize than not be able to bury their friends. Frenchie flashes on RiRi and trips.

The group stops to observe the camp. There are two Guyanese women talking happily, one man who reminds Frenchie of Minerva, and two pale men. One has blond hair, the other's hair is wrapped in a towel. Derrick gives the signal and his group leaps into the camp. Nobody puts up a fight, but the men are annoyed by the rough treatment from Derrick and Clarence. The man with his hair in a towel turns around when he hears Clarence let out a Cree word. Clarence shoves him to the ground, but Rose helps the man up. He thanks her in Cree. The women say that they're helping to keep people out of the **residential schools**; they were nurses and snuck children out of the hospitals. Clarence speaks to the man who thanked Rose in Cree.

Clarence pulls Rose, Frenchie, and Bullet aside. He says that the pale man is actually Cree; he's fluent, speaks an old form of Cree, and can give his lineage. Clarence insists that the other non-Indigenous people are true allies. Rose asks if the man is as fluent as Minerva was, and she excitedly says that the man doesn't need to be old to have the key, since the language is old. Frenchie turns around and approaches the man. He sees in the man's face that he is Cree, and he asks the man what language he dreams in. The man smiles and says he dreams in Cree.

Clarence leads the group back to camp. Frenchie finds himself beside the pale Cree man and asks about his history. The man says that the women, Helene and Talia, helped him get out of a school. Frenchie asks how he stayed alive, and the man pushes his hair back and says there was someone he needed to get back to. Frenchie sees a buffalo tattoo on the back of the man's hand and asks, "Isaac?" The man is shocked. Frenchie takes off running for camp and for Miig. He bellows for Miig, and when he appears, Frenchie starts to laugh and cry.

While Frenchie may be in a better place in regard to how he thinks about what his family can look like, his pessimism about having Miig and Dad around shows that he's still suffering from the pain and the trauma of being abandoned by Mom and Dad. He is worried that Miig seems to be more than ready to pass the torch.



Because of the numbers present at the resistance camp, Frenchie and Derrick have the upper hand and can certainly do away with these people if they need to, unlike with Travis and Lincoln. Trying to keep quiet that they speak Cree allows the resistance group to feel out the situation before declaring who they are, which is one of the few ways that they hide their identity for their safety. This shows that, even in the resistance group, the Indigenous people walk a fine line between being proud and remaining cautious.



In general, dreaming in a language implies that a person is fluent in it, which helps this man assert his legitimacy as a Cree person to the resistance group. He now represents the resistance's best hope for the future, as knowing the language means that he likely also knows more of the stories and the songs that convey the culture and its associated wisdom and identity.



Discovering that this man is Isaac upends what the resistance knows about the schools yet again, as clearly, more people have been able to escape than previously thought. That Isaac essentially lists Miig as his reason for getting out again demonstrates the power of love to motivate people to survive and keep searching for a better future.



The rest of the group catches up. Frenchie turns to see that Isaac is the first one out of the trees. Miig makes a strange sound and falls to his knees. The men embrace. Frenchie understands that as long as there are people who dream, he'll be okay. He knows that they'll do anything and everything for each other and for their dreams.

Frenchie now knows that, because he and the other Indigenous characters love each other and love their culture, they have the ability to fight the schools and fight for their dreams—both the dreams in the marrow and their dreams of a better future for everyone.





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