Love Medicine

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF LOUISE ERDRICH

Louise Erdrich, an enrolled member of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians, was born the first of seven children to Ralph Erdrich and Rita Gourneau, a half-Ojibwe, half-French Chippewa woman. Both of Erdrich's parents taught at a North Dakota boarding school ran by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and Erdrich's grandfather, Patrick Gourneau, was the chairman of their tribe, much like Nector Kashpaw is in *Love Medicine*. Erdrich enrolled at Dartmouth College in 1972—the very first year women were admitted to the school—and graduated in 1976 with a degree in English. In 1979, Erdrich earned a Master of Arts in Writing from Johns Hopkins University. She married Michael Dorris, an anthropologist and her former teacher at Dartmouth, in 1981, and the couple went on to have three biological children and adopt three more. They divorced in 1995. Erdrich is a prolific writer and is considered an important voice in Native American literature. Much of Erdrich's work explores Native culture and identity in modern times, and while she is best known for her novels, she also wrote several poems and short stories early in her career, including "The Red Convertible" in 1974. Erdrich published *Love Medicine*, her first novel, in 1984; however, many of the characters in the novel appear in Erdrich's earlier short stories as well. *Love Medicine* went on to win the National Book Critics Circle Award, and she published *Jacklight*, a book of poetry, to popular and critical acclaim the same year. Erdrich went on to write numerous novels and books of poetry, including *Tracks* in 1988, and *The Round House* in 2012, which won the National Book Award for Fiction. Erdrich lives in Minnesota, where she continues to write and is the owner and operator of Birchbark Books, an independent bookstore that also specializes in Native art and traditional Indian jewelry.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In *Love Medicine*, Lulu Lamartine refuses to leave her late husband Henry's home after she is evicted by the tribal council for squatting. Henry never formally purchased the land he built his house on, and even though the tribe offers to move Lulu to another house on the reservation, she won't budge. Lulu claims the Ojibwe people, who originally lived on the other side of the Great Lakes, were forced to the North Dakota land years ago, and she won't move one more inch west. Lulu's resistance to moving further west is a direct reference to the forced relocation of Native Americans by the United States government after the Indian Removal Act was passed in 1830. The act was signed into law by President Andrew Jackson, and it effectively forced Native Americans living on ancestral lands in the east—particularly those in the southeast—westward, past the Mississippi River, to land that had been deemed "Indian Territory." The forced migration of Native Americans began with tribes in the southeast, including the Choctaw, Seminole, and Cherokee people, and it was a vital step in the mass genocide of thousands of Native people perpetrated by the United States government during the 19th century. Those who survived the violent and dangerous trip west were placed on small reservations far from their families and forced to assimilate to European ways. They were required to become Christians, and they were stripped of their Native language and culture. The Indian Removal Act was met with staunch critics, especially in the north, but any opposition to the act was ultimately unsuccessful. President Jackson claimed that the fall of the traditional Native lifestyle was unavoidable, and the act eventually led to the Trail of Tears, another forced relocation program that effectively removed all indigenous people from the southeast, save for a small band of Seminoles in southern Florida.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

As a piece of contemporary Native American literature, Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine* explores Native culture and identity, particularly the impact of westward expansion and the role of European influence on the forced assimilation of indigenous people. Other important pieces of contemporary Native American literature that interrogate similar themes include James Welch's *Fools Crow*—a story about the Lone Eaters, one of the last bands of Blackfeet Indians to live on ancestral lands in Montana—and *Ceremony* by Leslie Marmon Silko, a novel based on the traditional stories of the Pueblo and Navajo people. Erdrich cites Jane Austen as an influence on her own writing, and the strong women seen in Austen's novels, such as *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility*, are reflected in the resilient female characters of *Love Medicine*. In addition to Erdrich, there are several other prominent female Native American writers, such as Joy Harjo, the first Native American United States Poet Laureate and author of *How We Became Human*, and Paula Gunn Allen, a Native American poet and critic who wrote *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows* and *Coyote's Daylight Trip*. Erdrich also names George Eliot, the English author of *Middlemarch*, and Toni Morrison, best known for her novels *Beloved* and *The Bluest Eye*, as major influences on her own writing.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Love Medicine*

- **When Written:** 1984
- **Where Written:** Minnesota
- **When Published:** 1984
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary American
- **Genre:** Contemporary Native American novel
- **Setting:** An Ojibwe reservation in North Dakota, as well as Fargo, North Dakota and Minneapolis, Minnesota.
- **Climax:** When Gerry Nanapush breaks out of prison and shows up at King Kashpaw's Minneapolis apartment.
- **Antagonist:** America's whitewashed society and the United States government.
- **Point of View:** *Love Medicine* is told through many different points of view. Depending on the chapter and character, it is either first-person or third-person omniscient.

EXTRA CREDIT

Will Write for Money. When Erdrich was a child, her father always encouraged her writing and even paid her a nickel for each story she wrote.

Beauty and Talent. In 1990, Erdrich was named one of *People Magazine's* 50 Most Beautiful People, alongside others including Tom Cruise, Michelle Pfeiffer, and Princess Diana Spencer.

PLOT SUMMARY

It is the day before Easter Sunday, 1981, in the oil town of Williston, North Dakota, and June Kashpaw walks confidently down the main avenue. June is a Chippewa woman, and even though she has "aged hard," she is still attractive. She catches the eye of a man in a bar, and he taps the window, motioning her over. June thinks he looks familiar, so she goes inside. She drinks with the man, an oil worker named Andy, and eats brightly colored Easter eggs. Then, they leave the bar together and drive down a deserted country road. Andy parks the car and begins to take off June's clothes, but he quickly passes out, pinning her down. June reaches behind her head and opens the door, rolling out into the cold night. As she walks, it begins to snow. The lights of Williston appear in the distance, but June turns and begins walking in the direction of the reservation—of home.

Weeks later, Albertine Johnson opens a letter from her mother, Zelda. Albertine can't believe that her mother is just now telling her about her Aunt June's death. June had died in a snowstorm a few weeks back, and even though Albertine has no desire to see her mother, she decides to go home to the reservation anyway. When Albertine arrives at her family's house—the same house that has been in her family since the government allotted their land and "turned the Indians into farmers"—Zelda is in the kitchen with Aurelia, her sister. It is not long before much of the Kashpaw family fills the house, including Albertine's grandparents, Marie and Nector, and her cousin, Lipsha. June's son, King, arrives with his wife, Lynette, and their infant son in the brand-new **Firebird** King bought with June's insurance money. He is supposed to go pick up Eli, June's adoptive father and Nector's brother, but Eli won't ride in the car. Marie, Zelda, and Aurelia make several pies for tomorrow's dinner and leave to go see June's new headstone, but before they do, Marie tells Albertine not to let anyone eat the pies. Later, Albertine hears some commotion in the kitchen and finds King trying to drown Lynette in the sink. Albertine strikes his back, breaking his grip, and Lynette crawls to safety under the table. Albertine notices that the pies are destroyed and filling is everywhere. She screams at King for ruining everything and spends the next hour trying to put the pies back together. They have already been ruined, however, and there isn't much that Albertine can do.

Back in 1934, a 14-year-old Marie starts up the hill to the Sacred Heart Convent. Marie doesn't have "that much Indian blood," and she is sure that the nuns will accept her. She prays better than any other girl on the reservation, and she is ready to take up the habit. Marie has been sponsored by Sister Leopolda, but when she gets to the convent, Leopolda is cruel and abuses Marie. She pours scalding hot water on Marie and even stabs her with a fire poker. Marie leaves the convent and makes her way back down the hill, where she runs into Nector Kashpaw. Nector is going up the hill to sell the two **geese** he shot with his brother, Eli, and he is convinced Marie has stolen the convent pillowcase that holds her few belongings. They struggle over the pillowcase, and Nector is pulled on top of Marie. Nector instantly falls in love with her, even though he is already seeing Lulu Nanapush. From that day on, Nector and Marie are inseparable, and it isn't long before they are married and begin having babies. Nector has no idea what happened. One minute he was in love with Lulu, and the next minute he was in love with Marie, too. Lulu, however, leaves town and takes up with Moses Pillager, a much older man who lives alone on a nearby island. Moses lives a traditional Ojibwe lifestyle and speaks the "old language," but even after Lulu discovers she is pregnant, she still can't get Moses to live on the reservation.

June Morrissey is dropped on Marie's doorstep in 1948. June's mother, who recently died, was Marie's sister, and there is no one else to look after June. Marie doesn't want June at first. Feeding the children she already has is difficult, and she isn't looking to add another; however, Marie sees young June standing there with a **rosary** around her neck and agrees to take her in. June finds her way into Marie's heart and it isn't long before she is Marie's secret favorite, even above her own children. But June prefers Eli's traditional life on the edge of the reservation and asks to live with him instead. Marie lets her go, but her heart is broken. As June leaves to go to Eli's, Marie

absentmindedly touches the beads of June's rosary, which Marie keeps hidden in a can in the kitchen.

On a hot July day in 1952, Nector, a chairman of his tribe, suddenly finds himself in possession of a truckload of surplus butter. He needs to deliver it around the reservation fast, before it melts, but he is going to need air conditioning. Just then, Lulu drives by in her custom sedan. She agrees to help Nector, and they load the butter into her car. Lulu hasn't spoken to Nector in years, and she wonders what she ever saw in him, but by the end of the day, they are in each other's arms and begin a passionate affair. Their affair lasts for five years, until the tribe decides to evict Lulu from her house. Lulu's house, which was built by her late husband Henry, sits on land that was never formally purchased, and the tribe says that Lulu is squatting. As the tribe's chairman, Nector is forced to sign the eviction, and Lulu is furious. Still, Nector loves Lulu, and he writes two letters—one to Marie and one to Lulu—telling both women that he is leaving Marie and loves Lulu. Nector places Marie's letter under a sugar bowl on the kitchen table and goes to Lulu's. When he arrives, Lulu isn't home, so he sits and reads the letter, smoking a cigarette. Reading and rereading the letter, Nector decides to go home and crumples Lulu's letter, throwing it on the ground. A nearby cigarette ignites it, and Lulu's house goes up in flames. When Nector returns home, Marie has already read the letter, but she puts it beneath the salt shaker and doesn't say a word. For the rest of Nector's life, he isn't quite sure if Marie read the letter or not.

By 1982, Lipsha Morrissey hasn't made much of his life. He was taken in by his grandmother, Marie, when he was just a baby because, apparently, his mother had wanted to tie him up in a potato sack and drown him. Marie constantly reminds Lipsha that she rescued him, and Lipsha is grateful, but it is getting old. In his eyes, he has already paid his grandmother back. Lipsha does whatever Marie wants, and he is the only one who can take care of Nector since he began to lose his mind. The problem, Lipsha says, isn't that his grandpa Nector is slowly going insane; it is that he won't stop chasing after Lulu Lamartine. After Lipsha finds Nector and Lulu having sex in the laundry room of the senior living complex, he knows he must do something. Lipsha has "the touch," a sort of divine healing power of some Chippewa people, but he can't get through to Nector—which is why Marie suggests the "love medicine." Like "the touch," "love medicine" is traditional Chippewa "magic" of sorts, and it is extremely powerful. Lipsha thinks about the love medicine and decides to shoot a mated pair of geese and feed their hearts to Marie and Nector. Since geese mate for life, Lipsha hopes that Marie and Nector will as well, and then Nector will forget about Lulu. Marie lends Nector's gun to Lipsha, and he goes hunting. A pair of geese finally land near his blind, and he shoots, narrowly missing them both. He decides to buy two frozen turkeys from the grocery store instead, and the next day, Lipsha presents Marie with two hearts. She pops a raw heart into her mouth and calls Nector to the table. She serves him the heart raw on a bed of lettuce and tells him the doctor ordered more iron in his diet. Nector is hesitant but finally puts the heart in his mouth. He rolls it around in his mouth, giving Marie a hard time, and she smacks him on the back to get him to swallow. Nector, however, chokes and dies.

Lipsha isn't sure if he is to blame for Nector's death, or if Marie is, but when the ghost of Nector comes to visit Marie and Lipsha, Marie knows that the love medicine worked. Lipsha confesses that he had tampered with the hearts. It wasn't the love medicine that has brought Nector back, Lipsha says; it is Nector's love for them. Nector visits Lulu, too, and after she returns from an eye operation, Marie volunteers to help take care of her. Lulu and Marie become close friends, and Lulu soon tells Lipsha all about his mother, June, and his father, Gerry. Gerry is Lulu's son, which makes Lipsha her grandson. She wants Lipsha to know the truth about who he is, and she wants him to know that June didn't want to drown him—she just wanted him to have a better life. Lulu figures she has nothing to lose by telling Lipsha the truth; either she gets a grandson, or some kid that has never liked her still doesn't. Then, she asks Lipsha to choose.

In the following days, Marie tells Lipsha that she doesn't trust the banks and is keeping her money hidden in her underwear drawer. She doesn't know what she will do with it—after all, she's an old woman—and Lipsha senses that she is telling him to take it. It is her way of telling him to get off the reservation and clear his head. So, he does. Lipsha takes the money and goes to a border town, where he joins the army. However, he immediately recognizes his mistake and runs away. Plus, Lipsha wants to find his dad, who Lulu said is being transferred to the state penitentiary. He had allegedly shot a state trooper, and he has a history of breaking out of prison. Lipsha goes to Minneapolis, to King and Lynette's apartment, and they seem strangely uncomfortable. Lipsha is convinced they know he is June's son—just like King is—but their behavior goes beyond mere awkwardness. They begin to play cards, and a news report on the radio says that Gerry Nanapush has escaped from the penitentiary. Lipsha cheers and Gerry walks into the room. He sits down and picks up the cards. It seems that Gerry and King were in prison together and King had snitched on Gerry's plan to escape, adding years to his sentence.

Gerry turns to Lipsha and asks who he is. "Lipsha Morrissey," he says proudly. Gerry smiles. He suggests a round of poker, and they decide the winner will take the Firebird King bought with June's insurance money. Both Lipsha and Gerry have been taught by Lulu how to cheat at cards, and Lipsha deals himself a royal flush. As he lays his cards down, the police bang on the door, and Gerry slips out the back. The police leave, and Lipsha drives away in his new car, discovering Gerry in the trunk. He drives Gerry to the Canadian border, and along the way, Gerry confirms that he is indeed Lipsha's father. Lipsha drops Gerry at

the border and feels a tremendous sense of closure. His father is a good man, despite his criminal past, and June had only wanted Lipsha to have a good life. He understands now and is even more grateful for Marie. Lipsha gets into the car and heads home to the reservation.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Lulu Nanapush / Lulu Lamartine – The traditional Ojibwe wife of Moses Pillager; the Christian wife of Henry Lamartine and Beverly Lamartine; mother to Gerry, Henry, Jr., and Lyman; and Nector Kashpaw's lover. After being rescued from the residential school by her Uncle Nanapush, Lulu meets and falls in love with Nector, but he unexpectedly leaves her after falling in love with Marie. Heartbroken, Lulu moves in with Moses, a traditional Ojibwe man and her second cousin. She soon gives birth to Gerry, but when Moses refuses to leave the isolated island he lives on, Lulu leaves him and moves back to the reservation. Lulu is an openly promiscuous woman, and she makes no apologies for her sexual choices. She marries Henry Lamartine, a kind man who drinks too much, and even though he is not the biological father of any of Lulu's eight sons, he accepts them as his own. Henry, however, is a terrible alcoholic, and he parks his car on the railroad tracks and commits suicide. Lulu has a fleeting affair with Henry's brother, Beverly, which results in the birth of Henry, Jr., but she soon begins to see Nector again, and the two have a weekly affair for over five years. During this time, Nector fathers Lulu's son, Lyman, and after the tribal council evicts Lulu from her house and land (Henry had never officially purchased it, and Lulu is technically squatting), Nector inadvertently burns down Lulu's house, leading to the end of their relationship for several years. Lulu is a strong and independent woman who loves fiercely and lives her life on her own terms. She fights for her family and her home, and when she is branded as sexually promiscuous, she holds her head up high and refuses to be ashamed. In her old age, Lulu becomes a respected member of her tribe, valued for her knowledge of "old-time" Ojibwe traditions. Through the character of Lulu, Erdrich argues the power of love to both enrich and complicate one's life. Lulu lives to love, but love also destroys her, which underscores Erdrich's primary assertion that love, while undoubtedly wonderful, can also be complicated and painful.

Marie Lazarre / Marie Kashpaw – Nector's wife, the adoptive mother of Lipsha, and mother to Gordie, Zelda, and Aurelia. Marie comes from a poor family on the reservation, and she goes up the hill to join the Sacred Heart Convent when she is just 14 years old. Marie is sponsored by Sister Leopolda, a cruel and racist white woman who severely abuses her, but Marie believes Christianity and the nuns will help her to "rise." Marie ultimately discovers that she is mistaken, as Sister Leopolda seeks only to abuse Marie and further assimilate her to white culture. After Marie leaves the convent, she meets and falls in love with Nector Kashpaw, who drinks too much and cheats on her with Lulu Lamartine, but Marie sticks with him and helps to build him into a respectable man. In the early years, Marie is too busy taking care of children to pay too much attention to Nector's infidelity, especially after she takes in June, and later, June's son, Lipsha. Marie falls in love with Lipsha just as she did June and raises him as if he is her own son. After Nector begins to suffer from dementia and starts to chase after Lulu again, Marie convinces Lipsha to conjure the "love medicine" and bring Nector back to her for good. Lipsha agrees and presents Marie with two hearts, supposedly from a mated pair of **geese**, which is sure to secure her Nector's love. Sadly, Nector chokes on the heart and dies, and Marie is left feeling heartbroken and responsible. However, Nector's spirit visits Marie after his funeral, and she can instantly feel his love and knows that he doesn't blame her for his death. Marie volunteers to help take care of Lulu after she begins to go blind, and the two women enjoy a meaningful and unexpected friendship. The character of Marie and her willingness to take in and love adopted children underscores Erdrich's primary argument that true family need not be blood related, but Marie also highlights the power of love to bring both happiness and meaning to one's life as well as agony and pain.

Nector Kashpaw – Marie's husband, Lulu's lover, and father to Gordie, Zelda, Aurelia, and Lulu's son, Lyman Lamartine. Nector and Lulu fall in love when they are just teenagers, but Nector unexpectedly meets and falls in love with Marie one day while going into town to sell two **geese** he had shot earlier in the day. Nector and Marie marry and have a family, but Nector still harbors feelings for Lulu, and he grows increasingly unhappy and dependent on alcohol. Marie sticks with him, however, keeping him sober and encouraging him, and he becomes a leading member of the local tribal council. Nector and Lulu rekindle their relationship during key times in their lives, resulting in the birth of Lyman, but Lulu never tells Lyman that Nector is his father. After the tribal council evicts Lulu from her house and land, Nector decides to leave Marie for good and marry Lulu. He writes two letters—one to Lulu and one to Marie—and, after leaving Marie's letter under the sugar bowl on the kitchen table where she will find it, he goes to deliver Lulu's letter but ends up changing his mind and accidentally burning down Lulu's house in the process. Lulu and Nector's relationship is dormant for several years, until Nector develops dementia and forgets to hide his feelings for her. The two begin running around their senior living complex together, and Marie convinces Lipsha to conjure the "love medicine" in an effort to keep Nector away from Lulu and bring him back to Marie. When Marie feeds Nector Lipsha's love medicine—a heart from a store-bought turkey—Nector chokes on the heart and dies. After his funeral, Nector's spirit visits Marie, Lipsha, and Lulu, sending them feelings of love from beyond the grave. The

character of Nector highlights love's power to transcend all things, including death, but Nector also underscores love's more complicated qualities. Through Nector, Erdrich argues that love is complicated and not always confined between two people, and while it can certainly bring happiness and meaning to life, love can also be a considerable source of pain and heartache.

June Morrissey / June Kashpaw – Eli's adoptive daughter, Gordie's wife, and King and Lipsha's mother. June's own mother dies when June is just a young girl, and June is taken in by Marie, her mother's sister. Marie does not want June at first, but she quickly falls in love with her and is heartbroken when June decides to live with Nector's brother, Eli, instead. Eli welcomes June with open arms and loves her like his own, but like Marie, Eli is upset when June decides to marry Gordie, Marie's son and June's brother for all intents and purposes. Gordie and June have a toxic marriage, and Gordie frequently abuses her, causing June to repeatedly leave him. During one of Gordie and June's periods of separation, June meets Gerry Nanapush and quickly becomes pregnant with Lipsha, who she hands over to Marie not long after he is born. June loves Lipsha, but she doesn't feel as if she can take care of him, and she wants him to have a better life than she can give him. June spends most of her adult life leaving Gordie and going back to him, until she finds herself in a bar in Williston, North Dakota, with a stranger named Andy. Andy and June spend the day drinking, and then he drives her out to a deserted country road. They begin to have sex, but Andy passes out drunk, and June walks out into a snowstorm, where she later dies of exposure. Through the character of June, Erdrich highlights the disproportionate amount of violence women in the Native American community are forced to endure. June is brutally abused by her husband, and while she is not physically abused by Andy, he sexually exploits her and this ill treatment leads directly to her death. Despite this violence, however, June remains strong until the end. She defends herself to the best of her ability and won't back down without a fight. In this way, June represents both the incredible strength of women and their vulnerability to the oppression and violence of abusive men.

Lipsha Morrissey – Marie and Nector's adopted son, June and Gerry's biological son, and King's half-brother. June hands an infant Lipsha over to Marie not long after he is born, and he is not told who his real parents are. Marie tells Lipsha only that she saved him from his biological mother, who wanted to drown him in the river. Growing up, everyone knows the secret of Lipsha's parentage but Lipsha, and King, who Lipsha believes is his cousin, calls him an orphan and tortures him every chance he gets. Lipsha has "the touch," meaning he has the power to heal others by the laying on of hands, but he can't seem to heal Nector, who suffers from dementia and in his confusion won't stop chasing after his longtime lover, Lulu. To dissuade Nector from seeing Lulu, Lipsha tries to conjure "love medicine," a sacred and powerful Ojibwe tradition that ensures lasting love. To conjure the love medicine, Lipsha attempts to shoot a mated pair of **geese** and feed their hearts to Nector and Marie, but he is not the best hunter and is forced to feed Marie and Nector frozen turkey hearts from the local grocery store. As Marie feeds Nector the love medicine, he tragically chokes and dies. After Nector's death, Lulu tells Lipsha the truth about his identity, and he takes a trip to Minneapolis to clear his head and see King. At King's Minnesota apartment, Lipsha meets his father, Gerry, for the first time and wins King's car—a **Firebird** bought with June's insurance money—during a game of poker. The Firebird symbolizes Lipsha's newfound connection to June, and in it he gives Gerry a ride to Canada, coming to terms with their relationship along the way. Through Lipsha, Erdrich argues that true family need not be closely related by blood. Marie and Nector raise Lipsha as one of their own and love him like a son; yet Erdrich also implies that knowing where one comes from is essential to understanding one's identity and self.

Gerry Nanapush – Lulu's son, Dot's husband, and Lipsha's father. As a young man, Gerry meets and falls in love with June, and it isn't long before she is pregnant with Lipsha. Gerry wants to marry June, but she is already married to Gordie with an infant King at home. After Lipsha's birth, June hands him over to Marie, and he is not told that Gerry is his father. Gerry spends most of the novel in and out of prison after getting into a bar fight with a man who calls him a racial slur. Most of Gerry's prison time, however, is not related to his initial charge, but is instead due to his continued escape attempts. Gerry believes in justice not laws, and since he has served his original sentence, he refuses to spend one more minute in prison. Law enforcement considers Gerry a hardened criminal—an animal to be caged—but his reservation sees him as a local wonder, and a bit of a hero. He is like a legend of sorts to the Ojibwe people, one who evades capture and resist the oppressive white government, and they tell stories about his daring escapes. Gerry and King do a stint in the state penitentiary together and they grow close, but King betrays Gerry and snitches on his planned escape, adding years to Gerry's sentence. At the end of the novel, Gerry again breaks out of prison and goes to King's Minneapolis apartment to seek revenge, where he meets Lipsha for the first time. After the police beat down King's door looking for Gerry, he escapes and hides in the trunk of Lipsha's car. Lipsha agrees to drive Gerry to Canada, and along the way, they come to terms with their relationship as father and son. Gerry serves to illustrate the systemic and institutionalized racism of American society. Gerry is not a violent or dangerous man, yet he is criminalized by a racist justice system that seeks to imprison him simply because of his Native American identity.

Gordie Kashpaw – Marie and Nector's son, June's husband, and King's father. Gordie is an alcoholic who falls off the wagon

not long after June's death as a means of coping with his guilt over the lifelong abuse he subjected her to. Gordie's ill treatment of June began when they were just children, when he tried to hang her from a tree during a game of cowboys and Indians, and this abuse continued into their adulthood and marriage. Gordie seems determined to drink himself to death, and he indeed succeeds, but not before he finally accepts responsibility for the role he played in June's death. While Gordie is not directly responsible for June's death, his abusive behavior is in large part what drives her away from the reservation in the first place, where she dies of exposure during a snowstorm. Gordie finally accepts responsibility for his role in June's death after striking a deer with his car. He thinks the deer's hide may earn him a bottle or two of liquor on the reservation, so he loads it into his car. The deer, however, isn't dead, merely stunned, and Gordie is forced to bludgeon it to death with a tire iron. In the throes of acute alcohol withdrawal, Gordie hallucinates and believes he has instead killed June, and he goes to the Sacred Heart Convent to confess. During this hallucination and subsequent confession, Gordie finally admits his abusive behavior and seeks forgiveness for June's death, and then promptly resumes drinking himself to death. He later shows up at his mother, Marie's, and when she doesn't have any liquor in the house, he drinks Lysol (a chemical-laden disinfectant) out of desperation for the alcohol content. Like his son, King, Gordie's character underscores the ugly truth of domestic violence. As Gordie's son grows up watching his father abuse his mother, King likewise abuses his own wife, Lynette, which implies that domestic abuse often runs in families and is repeated from generation to generation.

King Kashpaw – June and Gordie's son, Lynette's husband, Howard's father, and Lipsha's half-brother. After June's death is deemed of natural causes, her life insurance pays out to King, who uses the money to buy a brand new **Firebird**. The Firebird is symbolic of King's connection to June—he sees the car as his birthright, so to speak—and he is exceedingly protective of it. King is a cruel and abusive man who repeatedly beats his wife (he even tries to drown her in a sink full of dishwater), and when she takes the keys to the Firebird and locks herself inside to evade King's abuse, he threatens to kill her. King is Lipsha's half-brother, and while Lipsha doesn't know the truth about his identity, King does, and he spends much of their childhood torturing Lipsha and calling him an "orphant." King lives in Minneapolis with his family in a dark and depressing apartment, and he even spent some time in prison with Gerry Nanapush. King betrayed Gerry in prison when he snitched on one of Gerry's many escape attempts. Near the end of the novel, as Lipsha is coming to terms with his identity, he goes to visit King in Minneapolis, during which time Gerry again breaks out of prison and pays King a visit as well. Gerry claims that King is "an apple"—"red on the outside, white on the inside"—by which Gerry means that King is a traitor to his fellow Native American and is no better than a white man. Gerry forces King into a game of five-card stud to pay for his transgression, and Lipsha suggests they play for the Firebird. King refuses, but Gerry threatens to kill him, and Lipsha takes the car with a royal flush. King's character sheds light on the tragedy of domestic violence, and it is through King that Erdrich suggests domestic violence is a problem handed down from generation to generation. King watched his father, Gordie, abuse his mother when he was young, and he ultimately grew up to repeat the same violent behavior.

Albertine Johnson – Zelda's daughter, Marie and Nector's granddaughter, and cousin to Lipsha and King. Albertine first hears about her Aunt June's death weeks after she was buried. Albertine is away from the reservation studying nursing, and her mother didn't think Albertine had time to attend the funeral because of the demands of her schooling. Albertine and Zelda have a strained relationship, and even though Albertine has no desire to see her mother, she decides to go home to the reservation. At her family's home, Albertine's female relatives burden her with numerous domestic chores, and Zelda makes snide comments about Albertine's aversion to marriage and her desire to be a "career girl." Albertine resents the narrowly defined role of women within her Native American culture, and she rejects the gendered role that is forced upon her. Albertine is independent and outspoken, and she even quits nursing school to study medicine, since being a nurse is "not enough for her." Like the cooking and laundry her mother and grandmother expect of her, Albertine sees nursing as a traditionally female role, so she rejects it in lieu of becoming a doctor, a profession that has long been dominated by men. Albertine's character serves to upend popular gender stereotypes, such as women being dependent and incompetent, and underscores Erdrich's argument that women are just as capable as men.

Sister Leopolda – A nun at the Sacred Heart Convent. Sister Leopolda is a cruel and abusive woman, and she sponsors Marie when she decides to join the convent as a young girl. Sister Leopolda carries a long wooden pole meant for opening high windows, but instead of its intended use, she uses the pole to beat Satan out of her young students. Sister Leopolda convinces Marie that she is more vulnerable to the evil of the Devil simply because she is Native American, and she subjects Marie to continued violence to bring her closer to God. She scalds Marie with boiling water and stabs her through the palm of the hand with a fire poker before knocking her unconscious. Sister Leopolda covers up her abuse by telling the other nuns Marie had been spontaneously struck with the wounds of stigmata. Marie leaves the convent soon after, but she returns to visit Sister Leopolda years later on her deathbed. Leopolda is still cruel, despite her failing health, and she aggressively beats a metal spoon on her bedframe to ward off evil. She levels racist insults at Marie and insists she will spend eternity burning in hell. Sister Leopolda represents Christianity within the novel, and her racist and abusive approach paints both Leopolda and

her religion in a negative light. Sister Leopolda and the Sacred Heart Convent should offer spiritual guidance and support to the Native community in which they serve, but they prove instead to be just another way to assimilate the Native people to white culture, oppressing and further marginalizing them in the process.

Lyman Lamartine – Lulu and Nector's son and brother to Gerry and Henry, Jr. Lyman is the product of Lulu and Nector's longstanding affair, but Lulu never tells Nector that Lyman is his son. Still, both Lyman and Nector suspect the truth, although they never meet as father and son. Lyman and his brother, Henry, Jr. are the first to own a **convertible** on the reservation, and after Henry, Jr. returns home from Vietnam a scarred and broken man, Lyman uses the car as an excuse to get close to him. Lyman trashes the car—he rips the muffler from the undercarriage and wrecks the tail pipe—and then he and Henry spend time together, fixing the car and talking. Lyman is with Henry, Jr. when he walks into the Red River and drowns, but he tells Lulu that Henry, Jr. died in an accident to save her from the pain of his suicide. Lyman finally asks Lulu about his father after Nector's death, but Lyman ultimately decides it doesn't matter who his father is. Like the rest of the Lamartine boys, Lyman serves to highlight the incredible connection between brothers and family, even a nontraditional family like Lulu's.

Eli Kashpaw – Rushes Bear and Kashpaw's son, Nector's brother, and June's adoptive father. When Eli is a young boy, Rushes Bear keeps him from the residential schools by hiding him in the floorboards, and he spends most of his early life hidden in the bush, away from the influence of white society. Eli lives as close to a traditional Native lifestyle as he can living on the reservation. He speaks the "old language" and is the only one left on the reservation who can still snare a deer. After June's mother dies, and she is taken in by Marie and Nector, June decides that she would rather live with Eli, and he welcomes her with open arms. Eli raises June as if she was his own daughter, and he is devastated after her death. Eli's character, much like Nanapush and Moses Pillager, represents "old-time traditional" Ojibwe culture, but he also serves to illustrate Erdrich's primary assertion that true family need not share blood ties.

Zelda Kashpaw – Nector and Marie's daughter, Albertine's mother, and sister to Aurelia and Gordie. As a young girl, Zelda considers joining the Sacred Heart Convent, but she instead marries Swede Johnson, a white man from off-reservation, and soon gives birth to Albertine. After Albertine's birth, Swede joins the army but goes AWOL during boot camp and never comes back. Zelda raises Albertine alone in a trailer on the edge of her family's reservation land and keeps the books for the priests and nuns at the convent. Zelda is a deeply devout Catholic, and when she asks Albertine if she has met any "marriageable boys," Albertine knows that Zelda really means Catholic boys. Zelda is a proud Ojibwe woman, and even though Albertine's father is white, she insists that her daughter "is an *Indian*." Albertine and Zelda have a strained and difficult relationship, but they value and love each other nonetheless, which underscores Erdrich's primary argument of the importance of family within Native American culture.

Lynette Kashpaw – King's wife and Howard's mother. Lynette is a white woman, and King's Aunt Zelda constantly criticizes and shames her for everything, from the color of her skin to her preference for disposable diapers. King is a violent and cruel husband, both verbally and physically, and Lynette frequently wears the welts and bruises of his abuse. Lynette's character is another example of violence against women in the novel, and like the other women, Lynette manages to stay strong in the face of abuse and oppression. She subtly insults King during casual conversations and keeps their dark apartment from being too depressing by decorating with brightly colored pictures and thriving house plants. Despite the obvious power and oppression King holds over Lynette, she still manages to exert some power of her own, even if only in small ways.

Beverly Lamartine – Henry's brother, Lulu's third husband, and Henry, Jr.'s father. Beverly is a successful door-to-door salesman living in Minneapolis. He is married to Elsa, whom he "adores," but he has always had feelings for Lulu. After Henry's death, Beverly and Lulu have a fleeting affair that produces Henry, Jr., but Beverly doesn't see her again until several years later, when he returns to the reservation to get Henry, Jr. and bring him back to Minnesota. Beverly, however, can't bear the thought of taking Henry, Jr. away from his brothers, and he never does tell Henry, Jr. he is his father. Beverly and Lulu are married right before Nector burns down Lulu's house, but he fails to tell her that he is already married to Elsa. Lulu sends Beverly back to Minnesota to divorce Elsa, and she sends her son, Gerry, to make sure he does, but neither Gerry nor Beverly ever come back, and Lulu never sees him again.

Henry Lamartine, Jr. – Lulu and Beverly's son and brother to Lyman and Gerry. Henry, Jr. is named for Lulu's second husband, Henry, and he was born just nine months after Henry's death. Like all of Lulu's sons, Henry, Jr. is not Henry's son, but is the son of Henry's brother, Beverly. Henry, Jr. and Lyman by a red **Oldsmobile** convertible together, and they drive all the way to Alaska before Henry, Jr. is sent to Vietnam, where he is captured as a prisoner of war. After the war, Henry, Jr. comes home a scarred and broken man. He is angry and withdrawn, but he spends a few precious days bonding with Lyman over their Oldsmobile before walking into the Red River and drowning himself. The character of Henry, Jr. represents the trauma of war and the toll such a struggle can take on returning soldiers.

Moses Pillager – Lulu's Ojibwe husband and Gerry Nanapush's father. Moses lives on an island away from the reservation, and no matter what Lulu does, she cannot talk him into leaving the island for life on the reservation. Like Eli and Nanapush, Moses

speaks the "old language" and lives a traditional Native lifestyle. Lulu is drawn to Moses after she leaves the residential school and is hungry for her culture and language, but she ultimately is not happy living Moses's isolated life on the island, and she soon leaves him for another man. Moses represents "old-time traditional" Ojibwe culture within the novel, and he manages to maintain his Native identity despite the widespread whitewashing of modern American society.

Aurelia Kashpaw – Marie and Nector's daughter, Zelda and Gordie's sister, and Albertine's aunt. After June's death, Aurelia reminisces with Marie and Zelda about their childhood, and Marie mentions the time Aurelia and Gordie tried to hang June from a tree in the backyard playing cowboys and Indians. In the past, the story of hanging June in the tree had been told with a laugh, but in June's death, Aurelia feels obvious guilt for her harsh treatment of June. Aurelia and Gordie's attempt to hang June reflects not only the abuse June endured for much of her life, but the underlying racism of American society as well. Their childhood game is anything but innocent, and it is predicated on the racist trope that Native Americans are savages that must by hunted down and hanged by white cowboys.

Sister Mary Martin de Porres – A nun at the Sacred Heart Convent. Gordie Kashpaw comes to the convent window in the dead of night looking to confess June's murder, and Sister Mary is the only nun awake. Sister Mary is obviously frightened when Gordie shows up at her window hysterically rambling about a confession, but she also displays bravery and compassion. In this way, Sister Mary is a prime example of the incredible strength of women in the novel, but she also embodies the thinly veiled racism that plagues the novel's Native American characters. For instance, once Sister Mary discovers the dead deer in the back of Gordie's **car**, she turns on him and chases him off into the woods. She treats him like an animal, driving him back to the bush, and then she sits and listens to him cry in the distance. Lipsha later asks Sister Mary to bless the hearts for his love medicine, but she refuses. Sister Mary assumes that Lipsha's love medicine is a silly love spell instead of what it actually is: a sacred and powerful Chippewa tradition. Sister Mary dismisses his request, nearby minimizing Lipsha and his cultural beliefs.

Nanapush – Lulu's uncle and one of Rushes Bear's husbands. Nanapush rescues Lulu from the residential school, and afterward she comes to live with him. Nanapush and Rushes Bear have a rather volatile relationship, and she hates Lulu, but Rushes Bear can't stay away from Nanapush for long. Nanapush is an old man, and he asks Lulu to bury him high in a tree when he dies, so he can see the government **cars** coming. Nanapush lives a traditional Native lifestyle despite the whitewashing of modern America, and like Eli and Moses Pillager, he represents "old-time traditional" Chippewa culture.

Henry Lamartine – Lulu's second husband and Beverly's brother. Like many of the characters in the novel, Henry is an alcoholic, and he commits suicide by parking his car on the railroad tracks. Exactly why Henry commits suicide is never revealed, although Marie claims he did it because of Lulu's infidelity. Lulu has an assortment of sons named Lamartine, including Henry, Jr., but none of Lulu's boys are actually Henry's sons. Despite this, Henry accepted each of Lulu's boys as his own, even those who were not, by name, Lamartines, which aligns with Erdrich's overreaching argument that family is more than blood ties.

Dot Adare – Gerry Nanapush's wife. When Dot is first introduced, she is six months pregnant with Gerry's baby. She is one of the only women who works at a local construction site, along with Albertine, whom Dot later befriends. Dot is a kind but no nonsense woman who doesn't tolerate any other women looking at Gerry, and she is another example of female strength in *Love Medicine*. Presumably, when Gerry escapes prison near the end of the novel and runs to Canada, he is going to be with Dot and their daughter.

Rushes Bear / Margaret Kashpaw – Nector and Eli's mother and the wife of Kashpaw and Nanapush. Rushes Bear is a "passionate, power-hungry woman," and she spends much of the beginning of the book making Lulu and Marie miserable. Rushes Bear is given her name when she literally rushes a bear, and she is another example of the strength of women in *Love Medicine*.

King Howard Kashpaw, Jr. / Howard – King and Lynette's son. Howard is a young boy, somewhere around kindergarten age, and he is completely traumatized by his abusive father. Howard hides in the bathroom, listening to his parents fight, and prays for the police to come arrest his father. Howard insists on being called by his middle name, not King or Junior, as a way of distancing himself from his father.

Fleur Pillager – Lulu Lamartine's mother and Moses Pillager's cousin. Fleur serves as a sort of holy woman or medicine woman for the tribe. When Marie is in the throes of a difficult labor that threatens her life, Rushes Bear brings Fleur to help deliver the baby; and when Lipsha decides to conjure love medicine for Marie and Nector, he considers going to Fleur for help. Fleur speaks the "old language" and, like Moses, represents a traditional Native lifestyle in the novel.

Man in the Bar / Andy – June meets Andy at the bar in Williston, North Dakota, and he drives her out to a deserted country road. June and Andy begin to have sex, but he passes out drunk. June leaves him in his truck and walks out into a snow storm, later dying of exposure. While Andy did not kill June outright, he cares little about her beyond using her for sex, and he is certainly complicit in her death. Andy represents the general disrespect for women that is seen throughout the novel, and, more specifically, he embodies the oppressive force of the white man on Native American women.

Elsa – Beverly Lamartine's wife. Beverly is married to Elsa

when he marries Lulu, and Lulu sends him back home to Minnesota to divorce Elsa immediately. Lulu sends her son, Gerry, with Beverly to make sure that he leaves Elsa, but neither Beverly nor Gerry ever come back. Erdrich never does reveal what ultimately happens to Elsa or Beverly.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Kashpaw – Rushes Bear's husband and Eli and Nector's father. Kashpaw is known as "the original Kashpaw," and his family is one of the last hereditary leaders of their tribe.

Swede Johnson – Zelda's ex-husband and Albertine's father. Swede is a white man from off-reservation. After Albertine is born, Swede joins the army but goes AWOL from boot camp and is never seen again.

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.

TRIBAL CONNECTION AND FAMILY TIES

Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine* is a generational look at two Anishinaabe families, the Lamartines and the Kashpaws, and their lives on an unnamed Ojibwe reservation somewhere in North Dakota. Both families have deep ties to the reservation land, and Nector Kashpaw, the patriarch of the Kashpaw family, is a member of the local tribal government. Despite inhabiting the same land, the two families live seemingly separate lives on opposite ends of the reservation, due in part to the animosity stemming from Nector's longstanding affair with Lulu Lamartine, the Lamartines' matriarch. This perceived distance, however, is only superficial, and there are many connections—some secret, others not—that join these two families together in profound ways. From husbands and wives to fathers and sons, the Kashpaws and the Lamartines are as connected to each other as they are to their Native land, and the family tree Erdrich provides in the beginning of the novel is evidence of this. Through the depiction of the Lamartines and the Kashpaws at the center of *Love Medicine*, Erdrich at once underscores the important role that tribal connection plays among different families, and ultimately argues that family is more than blood ties.

In addition to Nector and Lulu's affair (which produces a son, Lyman), there are multiple connections between the Lamartines and Kashpaws, and these connections involve other families on the reservation as well. These familial links highlight the interconnectedness of family and tribe within Native American culture. Nector's mother, Rushes Bear, is married to Nector's father, "the original Kashpaw," but she also has a second husband, Nanapush, who is Lulu's uncle. Nanapush raised Lulu after taking her from the residential schools as a young girl. In her childhood, Lulu looks to Rushes Bear as her aunt, even though Lulu has relatively little to do with her later in life. This distant, yet significant, relationship illustrates the ties between different families within the same tribe, even though Lulu and Rushes Bear aren't related by blood. June Morrissey, the niece of Nector's wife, Marie, is the daughter of Marie's late sister and a man referred to only as "a Morrissey," an unknown relative of Lulu's second husband, Morrissey. Not only is Lulu connected to the Kashpaws through her connection to Rushes Bear, she is linked with Marie, as well, through the birth of June. June's second son, Lipsha, is born after June's affair with Gerry Nanapush, who is Lulu's son with her first husband, a much older tribe member named Moses Pillager. Traditional Native American culture often focuses on one's connection to land, nature, and all living things—including other humans—and the complex web of relationships between the Lamartines, the Kashpaws, and other Anishinaabe families draws attention to this deep connection.

Many of the strongest familial relationships within *Love Medicine* do not align with traditional European ideals of family, which suggests that Native culture's definition of a true family incorporates much more than strict blood ties. After the death of June's mother, she is taken in by Marie and Nector. It isn't long, however, before June develops a preference for Eli, Nector's brother, and his more traditional lifestyle on the edge of the reservation. June asks to live with Eli, and he raises her "like his own daughter." It does not matter to Eli that June is Marie's niece—he sees a child in need and quickly rises to the responsibility, offering her both stability and love. Similarly, Lulu is the mother of eight sons, collectively known as the "Lamartine boys," yet none of them are the biological sons of Henry Lamartine, Lulu's third husband after whom several of the boys are named. Despite their many different fathers, Lulu's sons grow "into a kind of pack," as if they are "of one soul [...] bound in total loyalty, not by oath but by the simple, unquestioning belongingness of part of one organism." While the Lamartine boys do not align with more traditional notions of a nuclear family, their relationships are both close and meaningful. Not long after Lipsha is born, June goes back to her husband, Gordie, and Marie and Nector take in Lipsha and raise him as if he is their grandson. "Lipsha," Marie says to him as a grown man, "you was always my favorite." Marie and Lipsha are extremely close, and while Marie raises her own children plus several others, she always has a "soft spot" for Lipsha, even though he is not her biological son, or even her grandson. Her fondness for Lipsha suggests that, for the Anishinaabe, family ties need not be based on blood relationships—rather, they are rooted in love and a shared cultural connection.

The end of *Love Medicine* focuses on Lipsha as he comes to terms with the identity of his biological parents after June's untimely death. As Lipsha sits playing poker with his biological father, Gerry, and his half-brother, King, Lipsha deals himself the winning hand. "I dealt myself a perfect family," he says. "A royal flush." Lipsha's words reflect more than just his winning poker hand; they reflect how thankful he is for his family—not only his newly-discovered biological family, but his adoptive family as well. The interconnectedness of tribe and family means that Lipsha is part of a much larger family unit, which he fully embraces by the novel's end.

NATIVE CULTURE, ASSIMILATION, AND RACISM

While *Love Medicine* focuses on the Native American identities of the Kashpaws and the Lamartines, most of their Native culture has been lost to assimilation and the westward expansion of European colonialism. Both the Kashpaws and the Lamartines can trace their families back to the very beginning of their North Dakota reservation, when the government allotted each of the Native families small swaths of land—although this doesn't mean that their lifestyles and families were left intact. On the contrary, families were forced to separate due to land shortages and the devastating effects of residential schools, which isolated children from their communities and stripped them of their Native culture and language. In fact, Native culture appears at first glance to be nearly absent from the lives of the Kashpaws and Lamartines, who live mostly modern lives with modern jobs, cars, and clothing. Despite this forced whitewashing and the inevitable racism that comes along with it, Native American characters within *Love Medicine* manage to maintain a critical essence of their culture and identity, through which Erdrich ultimately argues that Native culture and identity in modernity is often a mix of Indian tradition and European influence.

The cultural assimilation of Native Americans is a constant presence in Erdrich's novel, which underscores the widespread whitewashing of Native culture at the hands of the United States government. When Albertine Johnson, the granddaughter of Marie and Nector Kashpaw, is first introduced, Albertine says she was raised by her mother, Zelda, in a trailer on the same land Albertine's great-grandparents, Rushes Bear and the original Kashpaw, "were allotted when the government decided to turn Indians into farmers." Not only does the government tell Albertine and her family *where* to live, they tell them *how* to live, forcing them to abandon their traditional lifestyle of hunting and gathering for farming. As Lulu Lamartine tells the story of her early life on the reservation, she speaks of the government school from which she frequently ran away. She was found each time and returned to the school, where she was forced to wear a "hot-orange shame dress" as punishment for running away. She was constantly disciplined and isolated. "I lived by bells, orders, flat voices, rough English," Lulu says. "I missed the old language in my mother's mouth." By removing Lulu from her family and depriving her of her Native language, she was effectively separated from her culture as well. Later, Lulu marries Moses Pillager, an elderly tribe member who lives alone and as close to their Native culture as possible. Moses speaks "the old language," and he uses "words that few remember, forgotten, lost to people who live in town or dress in whiteman's clothes." Lulu is drawn to Moses because of his connection to traditional Anishinaabe culture—particularly his ability to speak their language, which has been largely erased by European culture.

In addition to this forced assimilation, Erdrich's characters are faced with daily racism and discrimination as well, which reflects the widespread racism against indigenous people present in American society. When Marie is a young girl, she joins the Sacred Heart Convent, where Sister Leopolda repeatedly abuses her because of her Native identity. Sister Leopolda is convinced that Marie is the absolute worst of the children and claims that "the Dark One wants [Marie] most of all." Marie is made to believe that she is more vulnerable to the evil of the devil simply because she is a Native American. As a young man, Nector Kashpaw goes to Hollywood where he is recruited as an actor and a model. However, movie directors only want him to grab his chest and fall dead from horses, and a well-known painter makes him the center of the *Plunge of the Brave*, a painting that hangs in the Bismarck state capital, in which Nector is jumping naked from a cliff to a rocky river below. "The only interesting Indian is dead, or dying by falling backwards off a horse," Nector tells others of his Hollywood experiences, which further serve to highlight the deep-seated racism Native Americans are forced to endure across the United States. By the time Lulu is an older woman, she is so mistrusting of the American government that she refuses to open her door to the United States census. "I say that every time they counted us they knew the precise number to get rid of," Lulu remarks, again stressing the widespread, and often violent, discrimination faced by indigenous people in American society.

Despite pervasive racism and the whitewashing of Native culture, Erdrich does not portray her characters as victims. Each of the characters in *Love Medicine* manage to embrace their culture in small yet meaningful ways, and it is never fully erased despite the best efforts of the United States government. By the end of the novel, both Lulu and Marie are known for their knowledge of "old-time traditional" Anishinaabe culture, and even Lipsha, Marie's nephew and Lulu's grandson, has Lulu's traditional "insight" and Marie's ability to ascertain "visions" from "a lump of tinfoil." The identities of Erdrich's Native characters are at once products of traditional Native culture *and* European customs, which implies that most Native Americans in modernity are a little bit of

both.

GOD AND RELIGION

Perhaps the most obvious evidence of Native Americans' assimilation to white American culture in *Love Medicine* is the heavy presence of Christianity, especially Catholicism, within the novel. Catholic marriages are as common as traditional Ojibwe marriages in *Love Medicine*, and at the top of the highest hill of the novel's unnamed North Dakota reservation sits the Sacred Heart Convent, a Catholic nunnery. The novel is littered with references to Christianity and Catholicism, and when the story opens in 1981, it is Easter Sunday, and June Kashpaw is surrounded by cartons of brightly-colored eggs. When June's aunt, Marie Kashpaw, is a young girl on the reservation, she goes up the hill to join the Sacred Heart Convent, where Sister Leopolda, one of the convent's nuns, badly abuses her. Yet in the midst of this clear and sometimes oppressive Christian presence is traditional Anishinaabe spirituality as well, through which Erdrich effectively argues that it is possible to have faith in more than one religion.

Catholicism is a major part of several of the characters' lives, which underscores the prevalence of Christianity in European culture and its impact on Native American identity. Like her mother, Marie, Zelda considers joining the Sacred Heart Convent. She ultimately marries and has a family, but she spends her entire working life keeping the books for the priests and nuns at the convent. While she doesn't join the convent in a traditional way, she remains closely associated with it, which reflects the importance of Catholicism in her life. When Marie's niece, June, first comes to live with the Kashpaws as a young girl after the death of her mother, June's only possession is a **rosary**, which she wears around her neck. June refuses to remove the beads, and while she doesn't fully understand their significance, they represent her connection to her mother, and her mother's connection to Catholicism. After Zelda's own daughter, Albertine, grows up and moves to Fargo, Zelda is constantly asking if Albertine has met any "marriageable boys." Albertine knows that by "*marriageable*," her mother means "Catholic," which again underscores the importance of religion in Zelda's life, as the only men she considers appropriate for her daughter are Catholic.

On the other hand, traditional Anishinaabe spirituality is present in *Love Medicine*, too, which implies that Native religion persists, even in the face of Christianity. Marie's nephew and surrogate grandson, Lipsha, speaks of "Indian Gods," such as the trickster, Nanabozho, and Missepeshu the water monster. Within Native American culture, Nanabozho is often worshiped in connection with the creation of the Earth, and this god is clear evidence of Anishinaabe spirituality within the novel. Lulu Lamartine also practices traditional Anishinaabe spirituality, and Lipsha refers to her as a "jiibay witch whose foundation garments was a nightmare cage for little birds." While Lipsha clearly considers Lulu's religion a bit strange, it is nevertheless an important part of Lulu's life. What's more, Lulu is not the only character to partake in traditional Anishinaabe religious practices, as both Lipsha and Marie believe in the power of "love medicines," an "old Chippewa specialty" and itself a form of Anishinaabe spirituality. While both Marie and Lipsha are undeniably devout Catholics, they still have faith in love medicines.

As Marie's husband, Nector, ages and suffers from some form of dementia, he begins to loudly yell his prayers at the top of his lungs. "God don't hear me otherwise," Nector tells Lipsha. Suddenly, it occurs to Lipsha that "God's been going deaf since the Old Testament." God used to pay more attention, Lipsha claims, but now it seems he doesn't have the time. Lipsha doesn't know if the "Higher Power" is ignoring them, is really deaf, "or if we just don't speak its language." At any rate, Indian Gods "aren't perfect," Lipsha says, but they will "do a favor if you ask them right. You don't have to yell." In this way, Lipsha implies that even if the Christian God has forsaken them, there is still faith and power to be found in Anishinaabe spirituality.

LOVE

All of the characters in *Love Medicine* are motivated by love in some way, even when it works directly against their strongest desires. For example, Rushes Bear, who is married to both Nanapush and Kashpaw, has a rather volatile relationship with Nanapush, which is only made worse by her dislike for Lulu, Nanapush's niece, whom he also raises. Rushes Bear tries to "punish" Nanapush by spending more time with Kashpaw, but she can't stay away for very long. "What's your love medicine?" Lulu asks her Uncle Nanapush. "[Rushes Bear] hates you but you drive her crazy." Nanapush jokingly says it is his rejection of clocks and "white time," which means he has extra time to pleasure his wife, but Erdrich's point is clear: Rushes Bear keeps coming back to Nanapush because she loves him. Similarly, the other characters are driven by love as well, and while their lives may take them far away from the reservation, they are each brought home because of the deep love they feel for their families. With the depiction of love in *Love Medicine*, particularly that of "love medicines," a traditional form of Anishinaabe spirituality and "an old Chippewa specialty," Erdrich ultimately argues that love has the power to overcome anything—including distance, betrayal, and even death.

Most of *Love Medicine* revolves around the love triangle of Nector Kashpaw, his wife Marie, and his longtime lover Lulu Lamartine. Despite the pain that Nector and Lulu's affair causes themselves and Marie, their triangle is never broken, which speaks to the lasting power of love. When Nector is just a young man, he falls in love with Lulu, and she makes him "greedy." There are many girls who would like to date Nector,

but he wants only Lulu, and he becomes "selfish" for her. The young couple meet behind the dance house and kiss, and they flow "easily toward each other's arms." Their love is natural and strong. However, Nector soon meets Marie when he goes up the convent hill to sell some **geese**, and he immediately falls in love with her. While Nector doesn't fully understand it, everything changes when he meets Marie. His whole life begins to "loop around and tangle," which suggests that love has the ability to completely disrupt one's life. Nector and Marie marry and immediately begin a family, but he never stops loving Lulu, nor does Lulu stop loving him. They rekindle their affair at key times during their lives, and they even secretly have a son, Lyman, together. Nector's love for Lulu endures even illness, and when he slips into the dementia of Alzheimer's disease, Nector never forgets his love for Lulu—or for Marie, to whom he married until the day he dies.

The power of love is perhaps most prominent in Lipsha's conjuring of the Chippewa "love medicines," which he hopes will rekindle Nector's love for Marie and cause him to finally reject Lulu. Of course, Nector never does stop loving Lulu, which again implies the resilience of love, even in the face of Ojibwe "magic." Lipsha's "love medicine" consists of the hearts of two geese, which, according to Lipsha, "mate for life." Lipsha claims that if Marie and Nector each consume the raw hearts of a mated pair of geese, they, too, will mate for life, loving only each other. Lipsha and Marie's belief in the geese heart ritual underscores the importance of love, loyalty, and mating to the Ojibwe culture as a whole, since the ritual is part of their traditional medicine. However, Lipsha is never able to obtain the hearts from a mated pair of geese, and he is forced to use frozen turkey hearts from the grocery store as a substitute. Marie immediately swallows the raw heart Lipsha presents to her and she encourages Nector to do the same, but Nector is not as easily convinced. Nector is skeptical, even though he belongs to the same tribe and holds the same beliefs, which suggests that his love for Lulu as well as Marie transcends even his most deeply-rooted traditions. His hesitation again speaks to love's power to transcend all else. Marie claims the heart has been ordered by Nector's doctor, who insists he needs more iron in his blood, but Nector still won't swallow the heart. To expedite the process, Marie strikes Nector on the back, between his shoulder blades, hoping it will cause him to swallow. Tragically, Nector chokes on the raw heart and dies, leaving both Marie and Lulu alone and heartbroken. The fact that Marie's insistence and impatience regarding the ritual (lying about the heart, forcing him to eat it, and causing him to choke by hitting him) is what kills Nector shows the power of love to drive people to do dangerous, destructive things in order to hold onto their loved ones.

After Nector's death, his ghost comes to visit Marie. "It's the love medicine, my Lipsha," Marie says. "It was stronger than we thought. He came back even after death to claim me to his side." Nector doesn't just visit Marie, but Lipsha and Lulu, too, which suggests that Marie was not the only one to benefit from the love medicine. Erdrich, however, implies that Lipsha's love medicine isn't, strictly speaking, in keeping with the traditional Chippewa ritual of love medicine. Lipsha's love medicine is, after all, made not from mated geese but from frozen turkeys, and the process does go horribly wrong. In this way, Erdrich shows that it is merely Nector's love, not Lipsha's love medicine, that is responsible for Nector's supernatural abilities. This ultimately suggests that love alone has the power to transcend both time and death.

FEMALE OPPRESSION AND STRENGTH

Despite being largely relegated to traditional domestic roles within *Love Medicine*, the Native American women in Louise Erdrich's novel refuse to resign themselves to a social position that is inferior to that of men. Lulu Lamartine, for instance, won't hide her nontraditional lifestyle, which includes multiple husbands and several affairs. Lulu has nine children from nearly as many men, and while others on the reservation try to brand her a whore, she absolutely refuses to apologize for the choices she has made. Marie, too, is the formidable matriarch of the Kashpaw family, and though she may take on the traditional roles of wife and mother, she remains in complete control of her life and family, even in spite of Nector's betrayal and infidelity. While the women of *Love Medicine* are undeniably strong, several are still forced to endure the violence of men, an injustice to which Erdrich repeatedly draws attention. Through a representation of women that highlights both their power and their vulnerability, Erdrich sheds light on the prevalence of violence against indigenous women in American society while also highlighting their profound and undying strength. In this way, Erdrich effectively rejects sexist assumptions of women as the weaker sex, even though they face unrelenting abuse and oppression.

Several of Erdrich's female characters are depicted in ways that challenge popular assumptions of the weakness of women, instead demonstrating that women are just as strong as men. Marie's mother-in-law, Rushes Bear, is represented as a "passionate, power-hungry woman," and Lulu, who is Rushes Bear's niece, respects this about the older woman. However, Lulu never forgets "how hard it was to live beneath the stones of [Rushes Bear's] will." Despite her traditional role as a woman in Native culture, Rushes Bear is a force to be reckoned with, and she intimidates even the strongest women and men. Lulu herself is incredibly strong, and after the local tribal government tries to kick her off her late husband Henry's land for squatting, she adamantly refuses to leave, even after her house is burnt to the ground. Lulu remains on the land in a tin shack with her nine children until the tribe finally agrees to build her a new house, even better than the old one. "I accepted

their restitution," Lulu says of her new home, highlighting her own power over the men of the tribal council. Albertine, Marie's granddaughter, moves to Fargo to attend nursing school, but by the end of the novel, she changes her mind. Albertine decides that being a nurse is "not enough for her," so she is determined to become a doctor. Albertine abandons her initial plans of nursing, a traditionally female profession, in favor of becoming a doctor, which historically has been considered a more masculine job. Like Lulu and Rushes Bear, Albertine refuses to be confined by her gender.

Despite the undeniable strength of the women in *Love Medicine*, many female characters are subjected to domestic abuse and violence, through which Erdrich draws attention to the disproportionate amount of violence endured by Native American women. Early in the novel, Albertine remembers her Aunt June telling her about the abuse she suffered at the hands of her husband, Gordie. "He used the flat of his hand," June would say. "He hit me good." Though the Anishinaabe are characterized by their feisty women, it's clear that some of these women are also subject to abuse which threatens to undermine their strength. Sadly, Albertine sees this same pattern of abuse manifest in June's son, King, and his own marriage to his wife, Lynette. Albertine often suspects that King beats Lynette due to her multiple bruises and cuts, and Albertine's suspicions are confirmed the day she walks into her mother's kitchen and finds King trying to drown Lynette in a "sink of cold dishwater." This turn of events suggests not only the prevalence of abuse in Native communities, but its tendency to occur from generation to generation. King's half-brother, Lipsha, also suspects King of abusing Lynette, and his suspicions are likewise confirmed at the end of the novel when he discovers Lynette's swollen lip. King and Lynette's life seems so depressing to Lipsha, but he does notice "a couple of attempts at doing something to reclaim this twilight zone." Plants and cactuses decorate the apartment, as well as velvet rugs depicting dogs playing a game of cards. Despite the bleakness of Lynette's existence as King's battered wife, she adamantly refuses to fully submit to his violence and still tries to salvage some small aspects of her life.

Even in light of the widespread abuse of women within the Native American community, the women of *Love Medicine* remain a powerful force and often dominate the men in their lives. In this way, Erdrich demonstrates the dual strength and vulnerability of women, but ultimately argues that women won't be overpowered by men.

SYMBOLS

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

GEESE

Geese appear throughout much of *Love Medicine*, and they are symbolic of Chippewa love medicines as well as love and fidelity more broadly. Geese first appear when Nector goes up the hill to sell the two geese he and Eli shot earlier in the day, when he meets Marie for the first time coming down the hill, away from the Sacred Heart Convent. At the time, Nector is already in love with Lulu and intends to marry her, but he inexplicably falls in sudden and instant love with Marie. As Marie continues home, Nector gives her the geese to take back to her family, forfeiting his payment for a day's work in the name of his newfound love for Marie. As Nector gives Marie the geese, she remains faithful, while Nector never stops loving Lulu.

Geese appear again when Marie asks Lipsha to conjure the love medicines to bring Nector back to her and away from Lulu, and after thinking about it, Lipsha decides that the love medicines should consist of the hearts from a mated pair of geese. As geese mate for life, Lipsha hopes that by eating the hearts of a mated pair, Marie and Nector's love will be revived, and Nector will finally forget about Lulu and love only Marie. Lipsha and Marie's belief in the geese heart ritual underscores the importance of love, loyalty, and mating to the Ojibwe culture as a whole, since the ritual is part of their traditional medicine. Of course, Lipsha misses the geese when he shoots, and he is forced to substitute the goose hearts for frozen turkey hearts from the grocery store. Nector chokes and dies eating the turkey heart, and after his death, his ghostly form visits both Marie and Lulu, which suggests that Nector continues, in even death, to love both women.

JUNE'S ROSARY

After June's mother dies, she arrives on Marie's doorstep with no possessions, save for the clothes on her back and a rosary around her neck, which symbolizes Marie's connection to June as well as Marie's modified approach to religion and the presence of Christianity in their Native lives and experiences. June's rosary is evidence of white, European culture and the assimilation of Native Americans to that culture. Westward expansion and residential schools have brought Christianity to the Native Americans, and Erdrich implies this influence is impossible to avoid. Marie takes June's rosary from her neck and places it in a lard can in her kitchen. While Marie doesn't pray in a traditional way, she occasionally puts her hand into the lard can and touches the rosary, in a sort of "secret" prayer.

On the day that June tells Marie she would rather live with Eli, Marie tells her that she is welcome to go, but as she does, Marie reaches her hand into the lard can and touches the rosary. By touching the rosary, Marie offers up a silent prayer for June, whom Marie loves more than even her own children,

to stay with her, but, of course, she doesn't. Later, after Nector dies and Lipsha, June's biological son, is beginning to discover his identity, Marie gives Lipsha June's rosary, which she has quietly kept in the lard can for decades. In giving June's rosary to Lipsha, Marie finally gives Lipsha his own connection to June, after lying to him for so long about his biological mother and her intentions in leaving him.

CARS

Cars are repeatedly mentioned throughout *Love Medicine*, and they represent the deep connection between family members, as well as the assimilation of indigenous people by white America within the novel. After June's death, King buys a brand new Firebird with her insurance money. King loves the new car, and for him, the Firebird represents his connection to this mother, June, after her death. Additionally, Lyman and Henry, Jr. purchase a red Oldsmobile convertible together, and they bond as brothers over a long-distance drive to Alaska. After Henry, Jr. is sent to Vietnam and returns a scarred and broken man, Lyman and Henry, Jr. work on the Oldsmobile together in another instance of bonding, in which Lyman hopes Henry, Jr. will talk more openly about the trauma he has suffered. Even Nector and Lulu rekindle their love and are reconnected in Lulu's luxury sedan when they deliver the surplus butter around the reservation in the comfort of Lulu's air conditioning.

Cars within *Love Medicine* are a product of the new technology brought to America by European settlers, yet cars remain an important part of the lives of the Native American characters and the connections shared between family and tribal members. At the novel's end, Lipsha cheats at cards and wins the Firebird that King bought with June's insurance money, and suddenly, King's connection to June becomes Lipsha's connection to June, which has been lacking in his life since birth. Lipsha drives his new car home, in essence bringing June home as well, and for the first time has a relationship of sorts with his mother.

THE PLUNGE OF THE BRAVE

The Plunge of the Brave is the painting Nector sits as model for, and it symbolizes the racism that Native American people face, but, more specifically, it also symbolizes the negative representation of Native Americans in popular culture, such as in arts and entertainment. Nector is initially excited to sit for the painting, until he is asked to remove his clothes and pose nearly naked. Then, Nector is painted as a brave man jumping from a rocky cliff to certain death to the river below. The painting, which depicts Nector's demise, hangs in the state capitol in Bismarck, and to him, it perfectly captures Custer's famous saying: "The only good Indian is a dead Indian."

Like *The Plunge of the Brave*, Nector's demise is also represented in the Hollywood film he acts in, in which he is asked to grab his heart and fall dead off a horse. Furthermore, this popular trope of killing Indians is reflected in the childhood game of cowboys and Indians that Gordie and Aurelia play as children, in which they try to hang June from a tree in the backyard, and this game undoubtedly is rooted in films similar to the one Nector acts in. After Nector sees *The Plunge of the Brave* for the first time, he is shocked and angry, and he vows to "get out" of the painting, a metaphor for America's racist society. Of course, Nector is never able to "get out" or escape the racism of American society, and this is evident years later, when Lulu moves into the senior living complex and hangs a copy of *The Plunge of the Brave* on her living room wall. Nector is still in the painting both literally and figuratively, and as long as the painting exists, the negative representation of Native Americans in popular culture continues, further fueling and perpetuating racism against Native American people.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Harper Perennial edition of *Love Medicine* published in 2016.

The World's Greatest Fisherman Part 2 Quotes

❝ Far from home, living in a white woman's basement, that letter made me feel buried, too. I opened the envelope and read the words. I was sitting at my linoleum table with my textbook spread out to the section on "Patient Abuse." There were two ways you could think of that title. One was obvious to a nursing student, and the other was obvious to a Kashpaw. Between my mother and myself the abuse was slow and tedious, requiring long periods of dormancy, living in the blood like hepatitis. When it broke out it was almost a relief.

Related Characters: Albertine Johnson (speaker), Marie Lazarre / Marie Kashpaw, Lipsha Morrissey, Lynette Kashpaw, King Kashpaw, Gordie Kashpaw, June Morrissey / June Kashpaw, Zelda Kashpaw

Related Themes:

Page Number: 7

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs just after June dies, when Zelda neglects to tell her daughter, Albertine, about June's death for several weeks. Albertine is away from the reservation and her family, attending nursing school in Fargo, when she receives Zelda's letter about June. Albertine is so affected

by June's death the she feels "buried, too," reflecting Albertine's connection to her aunt and the pain she feels in her death. Albertine's reaction underscores the complicated nature of families and relationships and the effects of continued abuse over long periods of time.

The fact that Albertine claims "Patient Abuse" is "obvious" to both a nursing student and a Kashpaw implies that the Kashpaws frequently endure abuse, thus being more familiar with it and the pain it can cause. The abuse between Albertine and Zelda, which is "slow and tedious, requiring long periods of dormancy," does not appear to be physical, yet both Albertine and Zelda are greatly affected by it, and their relationship is continually strained. Albertine's reference to abuse as "living in the blood like hepatitis" implies that abuse is like a disease, capable even of killing. Yet Albertine is relieved when the abuse finally breaks out, which underscores the psychological stress of abuse, even during periods of inactivity. Each of the Kashpaws endure different forms of abuse to varying degrees of severity—such as Gordie's previous abuse of June and King's abuse of his wife, Lynette—but this abuse is also verbal and less obvious, like the abuse Lipsha faces from King and even Marie, who tells Lipsha terrible lies about his mother. Despite the varying degrees of abuse endured by the Kashpaws, they are each familiar with it, and it affects them all in different ways.

❝ She had let the government put Nector in school but hidden Eli, the one she couldn't part with, in the root cellar dug beneath her floor. In that way she gained a son on either side of the line. Nector came home from boarding school knowing white reading and writing, while Eli knew the woods. Now, these many years later, hard to tell why or how, my great-uncle Eli was still sharp, while Grandpa's mind had left us, gone wary and wild.

Related Characters: Albertine Johnson (speaker), Nector Kashpaw, Eli Kashpaw, Rushes Bear / Margaret Kashpaw

Related Themes:

Page Number: 19

Explanation and Analysis

This quote appears as Albertine introduces her grandfather, Nector, and his brother, Eli, and it underscores the forced assimilation of indigenous people by the United States government in the form of residential schools and the lasting legacy of pain the schools left behind. During the 19th and 20th centuries, the United States government operated over 350 residential schools for the purposes of assimilating Native Americans to white culture, thereby separating young children from their families and stripping them of their Native language and culture. Children were often neglected in the schools, and abuse was rampant—including physical, emotional, and sexual abuse. Over their years of operation, tens of thousands of children were forced into residential schools against their will, and often times were outright kidnapped by the government.

Albertine's great-grandmother, Rushes Bear, hid Eli from the government, but she "let" them take Nector, which undoubtedly had a lasting effect on Nector. It is unlikely Rushes Bear would have been able to hide both of her young sons from the government, but she makes a conscious choice to keep Eli, "the one she couldn't part with." This implies that she *could* manage to part with Nector, and this must have been exceedingly difficult for Nector to come to terms with as a child. However, some knowledge of white culture was obviously needed in a world increasingly taken over by white settlers, and Nector filled this void for his family. The fact that Nector suffers from dementia and Eli doesn't implies that Nector had terrible experiences at the school that are much too painful to remember.

Saint Marie Quotes

❝ So when I went there, I knew the dark fish must rise. Plumes of radiance had soldered on me. No reservation girl had ever prayed so hard. There was no use in trying to ignore me any longer. I was going up there on the hill with the black robe women. They were not any lighter than me. I was going up there to pray as good as they could. Because I don't have that much Indian blood. And they never thought they'd have a girl from this reservation as a saint they'd have to kneel to. But they'd have me. And I'd be carved in pure gold. With ruby lips. And my toenails would be little pink ocean shells, which they would have to stoop down off their high horse to kiss.

Related Characters: Marie Lazarre / Marie Kashpaw (speaker), Sister Leopolda

Related Themes:

Page Number: 43

Explanation and Analysis

This passage, which occurs as Marie goes up the hill to join the Sacred Heart Convent, underscores the discrimination indigenous people are forced to endure in America and

reflects Marie's own internalized racism regarding her Native identity. Immediately, Marie refers to herself as "the dark fish," a direct reference to her Native identity, and she is looking to "rise," or somehow overcome the lowly status she is forced to occupy by her racist society. Marie implies that other "reservation girls," or Native American girls, aren't able to pray as well as white girls, which implies that Native people are inherently evil or somehow further away from God and righteousness. The "black robe women," or nuns, have traditionally ignored Marie. She is, after all, a Native American, even if Marie doesn't "have that much Indian blood."

Marie is of mixed Native American and European descent, which makes her complexion just as pale as the white nuns. Marie is hoping that her light skin will make it easier for the nuns to accept her, which again illustrates the blatant racism Marie must face. In this way, it is not hard to understand why Marie denies her Native blood throughout the novel, as her race has long since been the reason why she is mistreated. Marie claims the nuns will have to kneel before her, which foreshadows Sister Leopolda's later abuse of Marie and the stab wound Leopolda gives Marie in the palm of her hand. Leopolda tells the other nuns that Marie has been spontaneously struck by the stigmata, the manifestation of wounds corresponding with the wounds suffered by Christ during the Crucifixion. The stigmata is considered a mark of divine favor, and when the nuns believe Marie has been touch by God, they kneel before her and worship her as a saint. Marie's stigmata is, of course, a lie, which makes the nuns' reverence of her false. In this way, both Marie and Erdrich suggest that Marie's initial reverence of Sister Leopolda is false as well, as there is nothing particularly holy or good about the cruel and abusive Leopolda.

❝ I was that girl who thought the black hem of her garment would help me rise. Veils of love which was only hate petrified by longing—that was me. I was like those bush Indians who stole the holy black hat of a Jesuit and swallowed little scraps of it to cure their fevers. But the hat itself carried smallpox and was killing them with belief. Veils of faith! I had this confidence in Leopolda. She was different. The other Sisters had long ago gone blank and given up on Satan. He slept for them. They never noticed his comings and goings. But Leopolda kept track of him and knew his habits, minds he burrowed in, deep spaces where he hid. She knew as much about him as my grandma, who called him by other names and was not afraid.

Related Characters: Marie Lazarre / Marie Kashpaw (speaker), Sister Leopolda

Related Themes:

Page Number: 45

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs when Marie goes up the hill to join the Sacred Heart Convent, and it reflects the deep-seated racism of American society and the long history of genocide against the Native American community by the United States government. This passage also depicts Sister Leopolda not as a holy and righteous woman of faith as is expected but a cruel and evil woman who hides abuse and hate behind a veneer of religious piety. Marie again claims that being accepted by the nuns will help her to "rise," but her description of religion and Christianity as "veils of love" that are "only hate petrified by longing" suggests that Christianity isn't always so loving and peaceful, which has increased meaning considering Native American assimilation was often performed through religion. Christian missionaries came to American from Europe preaching their religion, claiming to bring the word of God to the Native American people. This perceived peace and love of religion, however, was really thinly veiled racism and forced assimilation.

Marie compares herself to the "bush Indians who stole the holy black hat of a Jesuit and swallowed little scraps of it to cure their fevers," only to discover the fabric "carried smallpox and was killing them with belief." For Marie and many other Native Americans, Christianity offers an escape from the pain of assimilation and the history of genocide. It offers comfort and hope, but here Marie claims it is actually hurting rather than helping her, which is how Marie sees the United States government. In the early days of westward expansion, the government perpetrated germ warfare on Native Americans in the form of diseases, especially smallpox. The government gifted indigenous people blankets under the guise of kindness and goodwill, only the blankets were tainted with disease, leading to countless deaths. This is much how Marie sees Christianity, particularly Sister Leopolda: as "veils of faith," or assimilation and abuse masquerading as a peaceful and loving religion.

The Island Quotes

❝ Following my mother, I ran away from the government school. I ran away so often that my dress was always the hot-orange shame dress and my furious scrubbing thinned sidewalks the matrons forced me to wash. Punished and alone, I made and tore down and remade all the dormitory beds. I lived by bells, orders, flat voices, rough English. I missed the old language in my mother's mouth.

Related Characters: Lulu Nanapush / Lulu Lamartine (speaker), Fleur Pillager

Related Themes:

Page Number: 68

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs as Lulu tells the story of her early life on the reservation, shedding additional light on the pain and abuse associated with government schools and the hardships children like Lulu were forced to endure, especially the loss of one's native language. Unlike Rushes Bear and Eli, Lulu's mother, Fleur, was not able to keep Lulu out of the residential school. Lulu was taken from her mother at a young age, which in itself must have been traumatic, evident by the fact Lulu kept running away to find her mother. The "hot-orange shame dress" Lulu was forced to wear as punishment for trying to go home to her mother underscores the psychological abuse of Native children at the residential schools. Instead of responding to heartbroken and homesick children with compassion, the school humiliated Lulu, and forced her to wear a dress of shame, thereby making her pain more public and visible.

In addition to this humiliation, Lulu is forced into ridiculous manual labor. She is made to scrub sidewalks and strip clean beds, which are obviously absurd chores; however, it is likely the school was simply looking to make Lulu suffer, not ensure clean sidewalks and beds. She is "punished and alone," which implies that her poor treatment is made worse by Lulu's isolation. She has no one to comfort or care for her, which must have been exceedingly difficult for a young child to face on a daily basis. Government schools were often ran like the military, and this is reflected in the "bells, orders, [and] flat voices" Lulu lived by. For Lulu, however, the most traumatic part of the school was their "rough English" and the erasure of her native language. Native children were forced to speak English in the residential schools, and they often faced severe punishment and physical abuse if they spoke in their native tongue. Lulu misses "the old language in [her] mother's mouth," and this reflects the tragedy of the loss of indigenous languages by the forced assimilation associated with government schools.

❝ "Although I lost my spirit to Father Damien six years ago, gambling at cards. I'd still like to walk away on the old road. So when my time comes, you and your mother should drag me off, wrap me up in quilts. Sing my songs and then bury me high in a tree. Lulu, where I can see my enemies approach in their government cars."

Related Characters: Nanapush (speaker), Marie Lazarre / Marie Kashpaw, Lulu Nanapush / Lulu Lamartine

Related Themes:

Page Number: 71

Explanation and Analysis

This quote, spoken by Lulu's old Uncle Nanapush, occurs just after he rescues Lulu from the residential school. This passage underscores both Lulu and Nanapush's Native culture and the threat of forced assimilation by the United States government, but it also sheds important light on the role of Christianity in Nanapush's modern Native life and culture. Nanapush says he "lost [his] spirit to Father Damien six years ago, gambling at cards." This statement implies that Nanapush did not freely and willingly embrace Christian beliefs; rather, he "lost" a card game to a priest in which the ante was Nanapush's "spirit," which he presumably handed over to God and Christianity.

In this way, Nanapush only converted to Christianity because he lost a bet, not because he was invested in the faith, which can also be seen in Marie's character as well. After all, she only joins the convent to rise in social status, and she admits she only goes to church so other women on the reservation won't think badly of her if she doesn't. Regardless of why Marie or Nanapush convert to Christianity, they remain observant of their own Native faith and spirituality as well. Here, Nanapush tells Lulu that when he dies, he wants "to walk away on the old road," which is a reference to the Anishinaabe belief that in death, one walks the three-day road to the afterlife. Notably, Nanapush does not mention the Christian notion of Heaven, and he doesn't want to be buried underground as is observed in many Christian funerary practices. Instead, Nanapush wants to be wrapped and placed high in a tree—another Anishinaabe practice so one's spirit can freely pass to the afterlife—not so much to observe his Native religion and spirituality but to keep watch for government cars, Nanapush's "enemies." In Nanapush's experience, the

United States government has only oppressed him and stolen his land, and he doesn't trust them, not even in death.

Lulu's Boys Quotes

❝ Lulu's boys had grown into a kind of pack. They always hung together. When a shot went true, their gangling legs, encased alike in faded denim, shifted as if a ripple went through them collectively. They moved in dance steps too intricate for the noninitiated eye to imitate or understand. Clearly they were of one soul. Handsome, rangy, wildly various, they were bound in total loyalty, not by oath but by the simple, unquestioning belongingness of part of one organism.

Related Characters: Lulu Nanapush / Lulu Lamartine

Related Themes:

Page Number: 114

Explanation and Analysis

This introduction of Lulu's sons highlights the importance of tribal connections and illustrates Erdrich's central claim as to the importance of family, even those who are not exactly blood related. Lulu has eight sons, and not one of them has the same father. The boys are only half-brothers and "wildly various," which reflects their myriad of differences beyond just their fathers. Some are dark complexed, while others are fair with blond or red hair. Lulu's boys are undeniably different, yet they are exceedingly close and will not be separated.

Erdrich's use of the word "pack" to describe Lulu's boys connotes nature and wildlife, and it underscores the boys' connection to the land, nature, and each other by way of the Native identity. The do everything together, especially hunting, which also has increased meaning in light of their Native identity. Lulu and her boys make an effort to live off the land in keeping with their indigenous culture. When a shot is "true," meaning when their hunt is successful, it is a shared celebration of the boys "collectively," and this suggests that not one of them is considered more important or above another. While they may look different, the boys dress alike in "faded denim," and they seem to move as one in "intricate dance steps." They are so connected, the boys appear as "one soul," or "one organism," which again reflects the importance of family and tribal connections within Native American culture.

The Plunge of the Brave Quotes

❝ I could not believe it, later, when she showed me the picture. *Plunge of the Brave*, was the title of it. Later on, that picture would become famous. It would hang in the Bismarck state capitol. There I was, jumping off a cliff, naked of course, down into a rocky river. Certain death. Remember Custer's saying? The only good Indian is a dead Indian? Well, from my dealings with whites I would add to that quote: "The only interesting Indian is dead, or dying by falling backwards off a horse."

Related Characters: Nector Kashpaw (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 120

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Nector recounts going to Hollywood, being cast in a movie, and siting as a model for a famous painting—all experiences that reflect the deep-seated racism of mainstream American society. Initially, Nector is honored to be chosen for both the movie and the painting, until he actually understands what is expected of him as a Native American man. Like the movie Nector acts in—in which he was made to grab his chest and fall dead off the back of a horse—the painting, entitled *The Plunge of the Brave*, depicts Nector's demise. As Nector represents Native Americans in general in both the film and the painting, they both depict the continued genocide of Native Americans.

Furthermore, the fact that *The Plunge of the Brave* hangs in the Bismarck state capitol suggests that the government officially supports the painting's message—that of the killing of Native Americans—and the government has indeed demonstrated to the Native American community time and time again that they *do* support such a message. The government has a history of perpetrating mass genocide against Native Americans, and the representation of indigenous people within popular culture suggests that America hasn't entirely abandoned this idea. Furthermore, Nector is depicted as naked in the painting, furthering his exposure and humiliation. His death at the bottom of the cliff is "certain," not just likely or possible, but definite. There is no mistaking the message intended by *The Plunge of the Brave*, which is mirrored in the famous saying by George Custer, an officer of the United States Army who became famous during the American Indian Wars. Nector is only asked to sit for the painting and act in the film so he can be

killed within them, proving to Nector that the only "good Indian" is indeed "a dead Indian" in the eyes of American society.

The Red Convertible Quotes

❝ One night Henry was off somewhere. I took myself a hammer. I went out to that car and 1 did a number on its underside. Whacked it up. Bent the tail pipe double. Ripped the muffler loose. By the time 1 was done with the car it looked worse than any typical Indian car that has been driven all its life on reservation roads, which they always say are like government promises—full of holes. It just about hurt me. I'll tell you that! I threw dirt in the carburetor and I ripped all the electric tape off the seats. I made it look just as beat-up as I could. Then I sat back and waited for Henry to find it.

Related Characters: Lyman Lamartine (speaker), Henry Lamartine, Jr.

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 184

Explanation and Analysis

After Henry, Jr. returns from Vietnam a changed man—obviously suffering from posttraumatic stress—Lyman wrecks their shared Oldsmobile convertible in an attempt to spend some time with Henry and get him talking. This passage illustrates the love and connection Lyman feels for his brother and his desire to help Henry through his trauma, but it further reflects the discrimination of Native Americans in modern American society. After Lyman goes to work on the car with a hammer, completely trashing it, he claims it looks "worse than any typical Indian car," which implies that the typical car that Native Americans own isn't so nice. The cars are made this way through continuous driving on poorly maintained roads, which implies a general disregard and neglect for reservations and the people on them.

Lyman further says that the reservation roads are full of potholes, just like "government promises." This is a nod to the fraught history between the U.S. government and the Native American community and the government's many broken promises, including broken land treaties and promises of peace. Lyman claims that trashing the Oldsmobile "just about hurt him," and this reflects the love he has for the car. Lyman worked hard for the car, and he has fond memories of driving it to Alaska with Henry before he left for Vietnam. It nearly kills him to destroy the Oldsmobile, but this also speaks to the love Lyman feels for his brother. He is willing to trash his car—arguably his most prized possession—just to help his brother and spend some time with him.

Crown of Thorns Quotes

❝ Her look was black and endless and melting pure. She looked through him. She saw into the troubled thrashing woods of him, a rattling thicket of bones. She saw how he'd woven his own crown of thorns. She saw how although he was not worthy he'd jammed this relief on his brow. Her eyes stared into some hidden place but blocked him out. Flat black. He did not understand what he was going to do. He bent, out of her gaze, and groped beneath the front seat for the tire iron, a flat-edged crowbar thick as a child's wrist.

Related Characters: June Morrissey / June Kashpaw, Gordie Kashpaw

Related Themes:

Page Number: 217

Explanation and Analysis

In a drunken stupor, Gordie begins to hallucinate and believes that the deer he has hit with his car is actually June. This passage reflects the guilt Gordie feels for abusing June, but it also implies that Gordie does not deserve to be let off the hook for his ill treatment of his wife. The deer, symbolically June, looks right through Gordie. He can't hide or lie to her, and she knows that he has "woven his own crown of thorns." During the Crucifixion of Christ, the Romans placed a crown of thorns on Christ's head to mock his claim that he was the king of the Jews. In popular culture and art, the crown of thorns is often seen in contrast to crowns of authority. For example after Charles I of England was executed, he was depicted in art as a martyr who removes his royal crown for a crown of thorns.

In this way, Gordie has removed the patriarchal crown of authority that he has worn for years in his relationship with June, domineering over her, beating her, and generally causing her pain, and has replaced it with a crown of thorns. Only Gordie has woven the crown himself, which suggests it is insincere and just for show. He is "not worthy," and he doesn't deserve, at least not yet, any such forgiveness, and what he does next is evidence of this. Gordie doesn't quite know what to do staring at the deer, at June, and his kneejerk reaction is to beat the deer to death. Even the way

Gordie grabs the crowbar, "thick as a child's wrist," harkens to his sickening, abusive history. He grabs the bar much in the way he would grab a child in an abusive way, aggressively by the wrist. Furthermore, when Gordie bludgeons the deer to death, he symbolically beats and kills June. Indeed, Gordie is "not worthy" of the "relief" he has "jammed" on his head in the form of the crown of thorns.

Love Medicine Quotes

I saw that tears were in her eyes. And that's when I saw how much grief and love she felt for him. And it gave me a real shock to the system. You see I thought love got easier over the years so it didn't hurt so bad when it hurt, or feel so good when it felt good. I thought it smoothed out and old people hardly noticed it. I thought it curled up and died, I guess. Now I saw it rear up like a whip and lash.

Related Characters: Lipsha Morrissey (speaker), Nector Kashpaw, Marie Lazarre / Marie Kashpaw

Related Themes:

Page Number: 229-30

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Lipsha reflects on Nector's affair with Lulu and how this impacts Marie. In Nector's elderly and demented state, he forgets to hide his feelings for Lulu—who he's carried on an affair with for years—and the pain of this is reflected in Marie's eyes. There is "grief" in her eyes, as if she is mourning the loss of Nector's love. Marie sees Nector's infidelity as a sort of death of their love, and she has watched it die again and again over the years.

Throughout *Love Medicine*, Erdrich asserts that love transcends everything—time, distance, and even death—and she also depicts it as enduring and nearly indestructible, regardless of the pain it may cause people. Lipsha, a young man of only 20, had assumed that love faded over the years, becoming stale and unimportant, but he can see from Marie's reaction to Nector's betrayal that is not the case. Marie loves Nector just as fiercely as she did when she was 14 years old, and, if anything, her love for him has only gotten stronger over the years. As Lipsha realizes here and Erdrich maintains throughout the novel, love is not all sweetness and light. As much as love can bring comfort and happiness, it can also cause immense pain and "rear up like a whip and lash," which is exactly how Marie feels in the face of Nector's repeated, and poorly concealed, infidelity.

Our Gods aren't perfect, is what I'm saying, but at least they come around. They'll do a favor if you ask them right. You don't have to yell. But you do have to know, like I said, how to ask in the right way. That makes problems, because to ask proper was an art that was lost to the Chippewas once the Catholics gained ground. Even now, I have to wonder if Higher Power turned it back, if we got to yell, or if we just don't speak its language.

Related Characters: Lipsha Morrissey (speaker), Nector Kashpaw

Related Themes:

Page Number: 232

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs after Nector begins to shout his prayers so God can hear him, and it is significant because it again underscores the whitewashing of Native American culture and the devastating effects of the loss of one's native language. Lipsha's own Native American Gods have all but been erased by colonialism and the spread of white, European culture, particularly Christianity. Lipsha and his family still follow their indigenous religion and spiritual practices, but they are immersed in Christianity as well, and they even attend Catholic mass each week. Here, Lipsha implies that the Christian God has forsaken the Native American community. Lipsha openly admits that Native American Gods "aren't perfect," but the Christian God doesn't even show up, and a person has to yell to be heard.

Lipsha claims the Native American Gods will listen to him, and he doesn't have to shout, but he must know "how to ask in the right way." Lipsha claims that the right way to ask has been lost to the Catholics, which harkens to the spread of white culture, particularly the English language, through residential schools. Residential schools were built by the government but ran by the Catholic Church. Not only were Native children forced to speak English and punished severely for speaking their native language, they were forced to convert to Catholicism, replacing both their indigenous language and religion with English and Catholicism. Lipsha wonders now if language is the barrier keeping him from the Christian God, or "Higher Power," as God never seems to hear Native prayers, regardless of how loud they yell.

It was Grandma Kashpaw who thought of it in the end. She knows things. Although she will not admit she has a scrap of Indian blood in her, there's no doubt in my mind she's got some Chippewa. How else would you explain the way she'll be sitting there, in front of her TV story, rocking in her armchair and suddenly she turns on me, her brown eyes hard as lake-bed flint.

"Lipsha Morrissey," she'll say, "you went out last night and got drunk."

How did she know that? I'll hardly remember it myself. Then she'll say she just had a feeling or ache in the scar of her hand or a creak in her shoulder. She is constantly being told things by little aggravations in her joints or by her household appliances.

Related Characters: Lipsha Morrissey (speaker), Sister Leopolda, Lulu Nanapush / Lulu Lamartine, Marie Lazarre / Marie Kashpaw

Related Themes:

Page Number: 236

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Marie asks Lipsha to conjure the love medicine. This moment reflects Marie's Native identity and culture, but it also highlights Marie's own internalized racism regarding that same Native identity. Like Lulu, whom Lipsha calls a "jiibay witch," Marie is portrayed as having near magical powers, which Lipsha considers proof of her Native Chippewa identity. Still, Marie refuses to acknowledge her Native American blood. Since her racist society has deemed Marie's Native American identity to be something less than white and something to be ashamed of, she prefers to deny her identity and pass for white.

Marie seems to be able to read Lipsha's mind, and she instantly knows when he has done something she considers wrong, especially drinking, which has been such a problem within their family and wider Native American community. Marie's ability to read minds and intuit things is closely associated with Native American religion, as is the power of love medicine, and this is reflected in the "ache in the scar of her hand." Marie's scar, the remains of the stab wound that Sister Leopolda gave her, represents in itself religion and Christianity. Sister Leopolda told the other nuns that Marie's wound was a spontaneous manifestation of the stigmata in order to cover up her abuse, and the fact that the same scar aches in connection with Marie's ability to divine what is unknown makes Marie appear holy. Notably, Lipsha considers Marie's ability to divine things a Chippewa power, but this power is closely associated with Christianity and white culture in the story. In this way, Erdrich implies that modern Native American identity is often a mix of both indigenous and European culture and beliefs.

But when she mentions them love medicines, I feel my back prickle at the danger. These love medicines is something of an old Chippewa specialty. No other tribe has got them down so well. But love medicines is not for the layman to handle. You don't just go out and get one without paying for it. Before you get one, even, you should go through one hell of a lot of mental condensation. You got to think it over. Choose the right one. You could really mess up your life grinding up the wrong little thing.

Related Characters: Lipsha Morrissey (speaker), Fleur Pillager, Marie Lazarre / Marie Kashpaw

Related Themes:

Page Number: 237

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Lipsha reflects on the power of love medicines within the Chippewa culture, as well as the power of love in general. As soon as Marie says the words "love medicines," the hair on the back of Lipsha's neck stands on end. Clearly, love medicines are nearly frightening in their power, and they demand an enormous amount of respect and caution. Again, Lipsha explains love medicines as a uniquely "Chippewa specialty" and something that is specific to Marie and Lipsha's precise Native American culture.

Lipsha claims love medicines are "not for the layman to handle," yet he doesn't seek assistance from any kind of holy person within his Native American community. He briefly considers going to Fleur Pillager for help, a local medicine woman of sorts, but he decides against it (she is Lulu's mother, so going to about how to get Nector to stop chasing after Lulu seems inappropriate) and ultimately conjures the love medicines alone. Lipsha is, for all intents and purposes, a "layman," even though he does have "the touch" (the ability to heal people by laying his hands on them), and Marie is certainly gifted as well. Lipsha does give the love medicines much thought, or a "hell of a lot of mental condensation," but he ultimately abandons his plan when he substitutes the geese hearts for turkey hearts. Arguably, Lipsha doesn't "choose the right one," and, after Nector chokes on the heart and dies, he really messes up his life by "grinding up the wrong little thing." As it is Marie's love for Nector that causes her to ask Lipsha to conjure love medicines, this

implies that love alone is just as strong as love medicine.

> As I walked back from the Red Owl with the rock-hard, heavy turkeys, I argued to myself about malpractice. I thought of faith. I thought to myself that faith could be called belief against the odds and whether or not there's any proof How does that sound? I thought how we might have to yell to be heard by Higher Power, but that's not saying it's not there. And that is faith for you. It's belief even when the goods don't deliver. Higher Power makes promises we all know they can't back up, but anybody ever go and slap an old malpractice suit on God? Or the U.S. government? No they don't. Faith might be stupid, but it gets us through. So what I'm heading at is this. I finally convinced myself that the real actual power to the love medicine was not the goose heart itself but the faith in the cure.

Related Characters: Lipsha Morrissey (speaker), Lulu Nanapush / Lulu Lamartine, Nector Kashpaw, Marie Lazarre / Marie Kashpaw

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 241-2

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Lipsha decides to substitute the goose hearts for turkey heats, after his hunting skills fail to obtain a mated pair of geese. This moment is significant because it reflects Lipsha's faith in both his Native religion and Christianity, and it further underscores the oppression of the Native community by the United States government. Geese are symbolic of love medicine in the novel, and to a greater extent, love and fidelity, but here Lipsha realizes that it isn't actually the hearts that give love medicine its power. It is Lipsha's faith in his Native culture and religion that gives love medicine its power, and it is his faith in the love between Marie and Nector as well. Deep down, Lipsha knows Marie and Nector's love will always be there, just as God and religion is always there as well.

Lipsha implies earlier in the novel that the Christian God has forsaken the Native American people because he doesn't seem to hear their prayers, but Lipsha still believes in God and has faith in Christianity, "even when the goods don't deliver." Lipsha's faith, even when his prayers aren't answered, is what sees him through the trials of his life, such as the broken promises of the United States government and the continued oppression of indigenous people by white America. Lipsha isn't being dishonest by substituting the hearts, and he isn't committing love medicine "malpractice"—he is relying on his faith, which is the very basis of love medicine.

> "Love medicine ain't what brings him back to you. Grandma. No, it's something else. He loved you over time and distance, but he went off so quick he never got the chance to tell you how he loves you, how he doesn't blame you, how he understands. It's true feeling, not no magic. No supermarket heart could have brung him back."

Related Characters: Lipsha Morrissey (speaker), Lulu Nanapush / Lulu Lamartine, Nector Kashpaw, Marie Lazarre / Marie Kashpaw

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 253

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs after the ghost of Nector visits Marie from beyond the grave, and it underscores Erdrich's central argument that love transcends all, including death. Marie assumes that Nector has come back to her because the love medicine is so strong that it is effective even in death, but Lipsha believes otherwise, especially since he didn't exactly follow the love medicine recipe to a tee. When Lipsha failed to shoot a mated pair of geese, he substituted the goose hearts for frozen turkey hearts from the grocery store. Thus, the heart that Nector choked on, resulting in his death, was not technically love medicine, and, as Lipsha says, "no supermarket heart could have brung him back."

Lipsha claims it is love alone that has brought Nector back to them. Nector loves Marie "over time and distance," which means that nothing, not even death, can keep him from her. Nector's accidental death was sudden and completely unexpected, and as it happened so fast, there was absolutely no preparation and little closure. Lipsha implies that Nector knows it was Marie's love for Nector and her devastation over his affair with Lulu that caused her to encourage Lipsha to conjure the love medicine. Marie's jealousy and pain is undoubtedly what leads directly to Nector's death, but it is Nector's infidelity that pushes her there. In this way, the novel suggests that Nector and Marie are *both* to blame for Nector's death. In the end, Lipsha maintains, it is love, "not no magic," that has enabled Nector

to return to Marie in death.

The Good Tears Part 1 Quotes

> And so when they tell you that I was heartless, a shameless man-chaser, don't ever forget this: I loved what I saw. And yes, it is true that I've done all the things they say. That's not what gets them. What aggravates them is I've never shed one solitary tear. I'm not sorry. That's unnatural. As we all know, a woman is supposed to cry.

Related Characters: Lulu Nanapush / Lulu Lamartine (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 273

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Lulu recounts her personal story, which underscores the discrimination she faces by her sexist society, as well as her strength and her refusal to confine herself to the narrowly defined role that society has deemed appropriate for women. Throughout most of the novel, Lulu is branded as sexually promiscuous and sexually deviant by her community. She has had several husbands and countless lovers, and each of her nine children come from different fathers. Lulu's community disrespects and insults her because of her sexual choices and behavior, yet they say nothing of the men who fathered her children, many of whom are members of the tribal council and are respected in the community. While Lulu is marginalized and degraded for her sexual history, the men who engage in the same behavior are left unscathed.

Despite Lulu's mistreatment, she refuses to apologize for her sexual history. Lulu loves fiercely and frequently, and she doesn't deny that she has had many sexual partners; however, Lulu implies that her actual sexual behavior is not what has caused people to discriminate against her. Instead, Lulu believes that it is because she refuses to occupy a traditional female role within society. Among other stereotypes, Lulu refuses to cry, which is at odds with what society has decided a woman should be. According to America's sexist society, women should be sensitive and emotional, but Lulu refuses to behave this way. While Lulu is undoubtedly hurt by the harsh comments and abuse that the community directs at her, she does not show it, which disrupts popular gender stereotypes and makes others uncomfortable.

> I believed this way even before those yellow-bearded government surveyors in their tie boots came to measure the land around Henry's house. Henry Lamartine had never filed on or bought the land outright, but he lived there. He never took much stock in measurement, either. He knew like I did. If we're going to measure land, let's measure right. Every foot and inch you're standing on, even if it's on the top of the highest skyscraper, belongs to the Indians. That's the real truth of the matter.

Related Characters: Lulu Nanapush / Lulu Lamartine (speaker), Henry Lamartine

Related Themes:

Page Number: 278

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Lulu recounts being evicted from her house and land on the reservation, a moment that reflects the broader theft of indigenous land by the United States government and the impact it has on the Native community, even in modernity. Lulu knows immediately when she sees the "yellow-bearded government surveyors," or white men, measure her land that she is about to lose it, which underscores the long-term plight of the Native community. Native lands are still being shifted, changed, and diminished as they are bought by the white community, and this mirrors the initial theft of indigenous lands and the forced relocation of Native people.

Neither Lulu nor Henry had ever thought to measure or buy the land, because as far as they were concerned, it already belonged to them. Henry's family has been on the land since they were forced West by the United States government generations before, and it is their home. Now, because white people have bought the land and want to put a factory on it, Lulu is forced to leave—she has no choice in the matter. Lulu's resistance to the loss of her land reflects the struggle of countless Native people for generations. The novel highlights that indigenous people have a native claim to the land; thus, measuring and allotting land does little good when it already belongs to them. Lulu's comment exposes "the real truth of the matter": that every scrap of land owned and occupied by white America has been stolen from the Native American community.

Crossing the Water Part 4 Quotes

He was right about that, of course. I'd never seen. He could not go back to a place where he was known and belonged. No matter where he settled down he would always be looking behind his shoulders. No matter what, he would always be on the run.

Related Characters: Lipsha Morrissey (speaker), Gerry Nanapush

Related Themes:

Page Number: 329

Explanation and Analysis

After Lipsha tells Gerry that he is "home free" now that they are on their way to Canada, Gerry claims he can never go home again. This poignant moment underscores Gerry's loss of his freedom and access to his indigenous lands, which reflects the widespread loss of Native American land and culture as well. Gerry is a wanted man, and even though he has evaded the law for now, he can never go home again, where he is known and runs a greater risk of capture. In this way, Gerry isn't exactly free, since he can't freely go where he pleases or inhabit his Native land.

While Gerry's inability to go home is certainly due to his criminal past and repeated prison breaks, this also applies to the broader Native American population as well. For the most part, indigenous people have been relocated from land all over the United States to smaller areas west of the Mississippi River known as Indian Territory. For those forcibly relocated, they cannot go home back to where they are "known and belong" either. Gerry will always be on the run, "looking behind his shoulders," Lipsha says, but this seems to be the case for the greater Native community, too. Native Americans in the novel are constantly on the lookout for government officials looking to betray or oppress them, and they are often on the run (like Lulu running away from the residential schools). In this way, Gerry's inability to go home again represents the collective loss of countless Native American lands and homes.

I still had Grandma's hankie in my pocket. The sun flared. I'd heard that this river was the last of an ancient ocean, miles deep, that once had covered the Dakotas and solved all our problems. It was easy to still imagine us beneath them vast unreasonable waves, but the truth is we live on dry land. I got inside. The morning was clear. A good road led on. So there was nothing to do but cross the water and bring her home.

Related Characters: Lipsha Morrissey (speaker), June Morrissey / June Kashpaw, Marie Lazarre / Marie Kashpaw

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 333

Explanation and Analysis

This quote, which is the closing passage of *Love Medicine*, reflects Lipsha's connection to June through the Firebird, as well as Lipsha's connection to Marie, his tribe, and his indigenous lands. Just as the car symbolizes Lipsha's connection to June, the hankie symbolizes Lipsha's connection to Marie. While June was Lipsha's biological mother, Marie is his adoptive mother, and coming to terms with his identity as June's son does not diminish Lipsha's connection to Marie or his love for her.

The ancient river that had once covered the Dakotas represents Lipsha's Native ancestors and the importance of his tribe and the connections within it, such as Lipsha's connection to Marie. Like the ocean, Lipsha's tribe—his family, for all intents and purposes—is "miles deep" and reaches far and wide, and their connections and love can "solve all [their] problems." For Lipsha, it is simple to imagine his Native life and culture before the encroachment of white settlers and the theft of their land and language; however, this is not the reality. Lipsha's reality is complicated and at times incredibly unfair, but there is nothing to do but continue on. Lipsha's final line, that there is "nothing to do but cross the water and bring her home" is a reference to his newly obtained car, but it is also a reference to June. As the car symbolizes June, he is bringing her home as well.

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.

THE WORLD'S GREATEST FISHERMAN PART 1

It is the day before Easter Sunday in Williston, an oil town in southern North Dakota. June Kashpaw, a Chippewa woman, walks down the main avenue. She is "aged hard in every way" but attractive and sure of herself at the same time. She catches the attention of a man in a bar, and he taps on the window. June thinks he looks like someone she knows, but she thinks this about a lot of people, so she goes inside the bar to see.

June is immediately introduced as a strong, yet fragile woman. She is "aged hard," meaning she has had a rough life, but she is still confident and proud. While it isn't explicitly stated, Erdrich implies that June is a prostitute; thus, many men look familiar to her.

Inside the bar, cartons of brightly color eggs are everywhere, and the man sits peeling the shell of a pink egg. June sits down, and the man remarks on her shirt, claiming her turtleneck is the same color as the egg. June corrects him; it is not a turtleneck, she says, but a "shell." The man tells her that he is willing to "peel" that shell, too, and hands her the egg. June can't remember the last time she had anything to eat, so she eagerly takes the egg.

The Easter eggs connote Christianity, particularly Catholicism, which reflects the influence of European culture on American society. Christianity was brought to America by white settlers, and Native Americans, such as June, have been assimilated to this culture at the detriment of their own indigenous culture and spirituality.

June tells the man that she doesn't have much time until her bus, but he tells her to never mind the bus. She looks at him. Maybe the eggs are "lucky," she thinks, and maybe he isn't like the others. Her bus ticket will always be good, and no one is really expecting her back on the reservation. Plus, June's ex-husband, Gordie, would always send her money if she really needs it. "Ahhhhh," June says out loud, surprising even herself. Her voice is nearly one of "pain." She looks again to the man, whose name she has learned is Andy. "You got to be different," she says.

Andy immediately assumes a position of power over June. She tells him she must leave, and he tells her that she isn't going anywhere. While June is certainly free to do as she pleases, Andy tells her rather than asks her what she will be doing, which aligns with the oppression of women seen throughout the novel. In June's experience, most men seek to do her harm—they either beat her, abandon her, or use her for sex—and she is desperately hoping Andy is different, which is why her voice is full of "pain."

Sitting at the bar with Andy, June suddenly feels "fragile." She gets up and heads toward the bathroom, thinking that her skin feels "hard and brittle," like she could crack at any moment. She feels uncomfortable in her clothing, and she has begun to sweat under her vinyl jacket (a gift from her son, King). Taking the jacket off is out of the question, as she needs it to hide a large rip in the shirt underneath. Inside the bathroom stall, June fumbles and drops her purse. The contents spill to the floor, including a large doorknob, which she has to take with her every time she leaves her room to lock the door. She picks up the porcelain knob and puts it in the pocket of her jacket.

It's likely that June puts the doorknob in her pocket so that it can be easily accessed for self-defense in case Andy turns violent. June is a battered woman, but the fact that she arms herself again reflects her strength. June is ready to fight and won't submit willingly to the violence of men. She is strong, yet she is "fragile" and prone to cracking and breaking. This suggests that, despite her strength, she is still vulnerable to the oppression and violence of men. Furthermore, June's ripped shirt and vinyl jacket suggests that while she doesn't have much, she is still a fiercely proud woman.

Andy drives June out to a country road on the outskirts of town and parks. He begins to take her clothes off, but he is drunk and awkward, and she must help him along. She pushes up her top, being careful to keep the rip hidden, and arches her back so he can unbutton her pants. Andy pulls June's tightfitting pants down her legs and static electricity sparks in the dark. "Oh God," Andy says, laying on top of June and grinding his hips. "Oh God, Mary." Then he suddenly stops, falling with all his weight on top of her. June shakes him, but he doesn't move.

Andy drives June out to a deserted country road, which suggests he could do anything he wants to June and no one would be around to help her. This isolation reflects just how vulnerable June is; she is at his mercy with only a porcelain doorknob to protect herself. Andy's calls to God also reflects the prevalence of Christianity in American society. Even in the throes of passion, June can't escape this European influence.

Andy is deadweight on top of June, but his breathing is deep and easy. She begins again to feel "frail," like she will "crack wide open," so she reaches behind her head and swings open the car door. Leaving the door open, June walks out into the cold, in the direction of Williston. After walking a while, she can see the town's light in the distance, but she suddenly decides to change direction and head for the reservation instead. The wind blows—a "Chinook wind," June thinks—and she pretends that she is just heading home to Uncle Eli's after a dance or from a friend's house. It begins to snow, and June's fee are numb, but she doesn't stop. She is going home.

June's feelings of frailness and the sensation that she will "crack wide open" again reflects her vulnerability as a woman. Despite this vulnerability, however, June remains strong and walks away, even though she is heading towards her death. This passage also reflects June's Native identity and her desire to get home to her family and tribe. A "Chinook wind" is a wind that blows off the Rocky Mountains near the end of winter, and it is calling June home to her North Dakota reservation.

THE WORLD'S GREATEST FISHERMAN PART 2

Weeks later, Albertine Johnson opens a letter from her mother, Zelda. Albertine's Aunt June has passed away, Zelda writes, but they knew that Albertine wouldn't have been able to get away from her studies, so they didn't tell her sooner. Albertine is away from home, attending nursing school in Fargo. June's mother had been the sister of Albertine's grandmother, Marie, and June's father was a "no-good Morrissey" who left the reservation long ago. June was raised by Albertine's great-uncle Eli, and then June married Gordie, her cousin and brother for all intents and purposes. Marie had been so angry when her son, Gordie, married June, she didn't let either of them in her house for over a year.

The complex web of connections between the Morrisseys and the Kashpaws reflects the deep connection between tribal members and families in Native American culture. Even those tribal members who are not related by blood are tied together by other significant relationships, such as Eli's adoption of June or June's marriage to Gordie. This passage also establishes the Morrisseys as "no-good," which is to say the Kashpaws look down on them as inferior, and this has important implications in the story since both June and Lipsha are Morrisseys.

June had been a terrible mother, and even Eli, who was always "crazy about his little girl," admitted it. Despite this, however, Albertine thinks June was the best aunt. June always had gum in her purse, and she talked to Albertine like an adult, not a kid. June and Gordie's marriage was always rocky, and she frequently ran off. She worked odd jobs, and even studied to be a beautician, but June never made anything work for very long. She even once showed up to a job drunk and was promptly fired. Over time, June "broke, little by little." Albertine knows all about the kind of cowboys in towns like Williston, near where June's body had been found. Men like that think Native American women like June are "nothing but an easy night."

Albertine's comment that June is a terrible mother suggests that June's family expects *her to be a good mother simply because she is a woman. Acceptable roles for women, especially Native women, are narrowly defined and usually confined to the domestic sphere within the novel, but June refuses to occupy this space. Albertine seems to know June's death wasn't exactly natural. While Andy did not technically kill June, he presumably thought she was "an easy night," and this assumption led to June's death. The fact that June "broke, little by little" again implies a certain fragility despite her obvious strength, and Eli's unflinching love for June—his adoptive daughter—suggests that family is more than blood ties.*

Albertine is furious with Zelda for not telling her sooner about June's death. Albertine thinks that her mother should have joined the Sacred Heart Convent like she wanted to in the first place, but Zelda had married Swede Johnson, a white man, and had Albertine instead. Swede joined the army not long after marrying Zelda and went AWOL during boot camp; no one has seen him since. Even though Albertine doesn't particularly want to see her mother, she decides to go home.

Zelda's interest in joining the Sacred Heart Convent as a young girl reflects the strong influence of Christianity in her life. Zelda is Native American, yet being an authentic Native American in modernity often means having religious beliefs that reflect both Christianity and Native spirituality. Albertine's identity as part Native, part European (her father's name is Swede because he is Swedish) suggests that Native people are often a mix of both cultures as well.

Zelda lives on the very edge of the reservation with her new husband, but the land Albertine grew up on belongs to her grandparents, Marie and Nector, and it was allotted to them back "when the government decided to turn Indians into farmers." The government's policy for land allotment was ridiculous, Albertine thinks, and much of it has since been sold to white people. The main house, where all of Nector and Marie's children were raised, is now maintained by Albertine's Aunt Aurelia, her mother's sister.

Love Medicine *dispels many Native American myths and stereotypes, one being that Native Americans were traditionally farmers. Popular images of indigenous people often depicts them as farmers (such as in portrayals of Thanksgiving), but most were not. Most were hunters and gatherers that were forced by the government to become farmers when their ancestral lands were taken, like Albertine's family. This passage also reflects the deep family connections within Native culture, as the Kashpaws' home is handed down from generation to generation.*

Arriving at the main house, Albertine enters the kitchen and finds Aurelia and Zelda busy cooking. They welcome Albertine warmly without stopping their work, and Zelda hands her a jar of pickles, telling her to dice them. Zelda asks Albertine if she has met any "marriageable boys" in Fargo, and Albertine says she hasn't. Albertine knows that by *marriageable*, her mother means "Catholic."

Domestic work is pushed onto Albertine the minute she enters the room—Zelda doesn't even stop to hug her—which implies Albertine is expected to do such gendered work, and this further confines Albertine to this narrow role. Zelda's belief that only Catholic boys are "marriageable" again reflects the central importance of Christianity in her life.

Zelda stops working. She asks Albertine if she plans on being "a career girl." Why not? Albertine asks her mother, pointing out that Zelda has always worked. Suddenly, a red **Firebird** pulls up outside. It is June's son, King; his wife, Lynette; and their son King, Jr. Both Marie and Nector are also crammed into the car's tiny backseat, along with several cases of beer. "There's that white girl," Zelda says. Aurelia reminds her sister that Zelda was once married to a Swedish man. Zelda admits that this is true, but she learned her lesson.

Zelda seems dismayed that Albertine does not want to pursue a domestic life and would rather be "a career girl," which reflects societal assumptions that women should remain in the home. Zelda is a woman herself and has worked for most her life, but for some reason she still expects Albertine to fill a domestic role. Zelda's dislike for Lynette because she is white is evidence of the racism and forced assimilation Zelda has had to endure as a Native American. She is constantly oppressed by white people—both by the government who stole her land and culture, and by her husband who abandoned her with an infant.

As everyone files out of King's **car**, Albertine marvels at how old her grandfather, Nector, looks. Albertine watches Lynette climb out of the car with her diaper bag and thinks about June. June had always told Albertine things she probably shouldn't have when Albertine was a child, like how Uncle Gordie had often hit her with the "flat of his hand." Gordie "hit me but good," June had said.

That Albertine thinks of June's stories of abuse when Lynette gets out of the car suggests that Albertine suspects that King abuses Lynette, just like Gordie abused June. This not only draws attention to violence against women but implies that it often repeats generation to generation.

Outside the house, Nector looks around. He says that the place looks familiar, and Marie laughs. It is his house, she says. Each time he comes to the house now, it is like his first time. The land had been allotted to Nector's mother, Rushes Bear, when Nector was just a child, and his brother, Eli, still lives on the opposite end of the allotment, but Nector remembers none of this. Rushes Bear had sent Nector to the government school, but she had hidden Eli from them. Now, Eli's mind is still in top shape, but Nector's mind has checked out.

Nector's appears to be a defense mechanism of sorts. Erdrich implies that Nector had terrible experiences at the residential school, and his memory has failed as a way to protect himself from them. The history of residential schools in America is exceedingly dark. Children were not only forcibly taken from their families and culture, but were also neglected and abused physically, mentally, and sexually. Eli did not go to the school; thus, he did not have the same terrible experiences and has retained his memory.

In his younger years, Nector had been a big part of tribal government. He had schools built, and even a factory, and he was responsible for saving their reservation land from a policy known as "termination." Nector even went to Washington once to meet with the government there, but that man is long gone now. As Albertine watches her grandfather discover his childhood home again for the first time, she thinks about King, Jr., who is happy because he doesn't yet have a memory, while Grandpa Nector is happy because he has lost his memory.

The Indian termination policy was a policy of the United States government from the 1940s-1960s. The policy was another form of forced assimilation, and it sought to terminate the sovereignty of Native tribes, thereby making each indigenous person an American citizen like all nonindigenous people. Under this policy, Native people were no longer exempt from state and federal taxes, and their reservations and tribes were disbanded, forcing them to move to mainstream society. Nector saved his tribe and land from such a fate, which reflects his importance to both within his tribe and family.

Inside the house, Marie takes a ham from a can and, gently patting it, places it carefully in the oven. Zelda and Aurelia smile; they can remember when they had to trade for meat or slaughter their own. Zelda asks Marie if being in the kitchen with everyone reminds her of when they were younger. Marie comments that the kids were never really any trouble, except for the time they all tried to hang June in a tree out back. They had all been playing "cowboys and Indians" and had strung June from the tree when Zelda came running into the house to tell Marie.

This passage is further evidence of Native American assimilation. Marie's life has changed significantly over the years because of European settlers. Traditional ways of living—trading and slaughtering meat, for example—have been replaced by European ways and culture, like meat in a can. The game of "cowboys and Indians" reflects the widespread racism against indigenous people in American society. The killing of Native Americans by "cowboys" (i.e., white men) is so common in popular entertainment that the children have turned it into a game.

Aurelia claims they never would have really hanged June, but Zelda doesn't seem so sure. Marie remembers that June wasn't scared in the least, and she had made sure everyone knew it. Outside, King revs the **Firebird**'s engine. Zelda remarks that the car has a tape deck, which costs extra. King is expecting to go pick up Eli, but both Zelda and Aurelia know Eli won't ride in the car. Confused, Albertine asks why. June's death has been deemed of natural causes, so her insurance money paid out, and King bought the car. Eli isn't happy about it, Zelda says, and won't ride in the car because it reminds him of June. King revs the engine again and peels out of the driveway.

June suggests that her siblings would have truly hurt June had Marie not intervened. This treatment suggests that June was an outcast among the other children. June was not Marie's biological child (although Marie loved her most), and the other kids treated her badly because of it. King sees the Firebird as his birthright as June's "real" son, but Lipsha claims this birthright by the end of the novel.

Hours later, Zelda wonders where King and Eli are. They are probably out joyriding, she says, remarking again on Lynette. "That white girl," Zelda claims, "won't keep King long." Aurelia looks to her sister, exasperated. Who cares if Lynette is white, Aurelia says. After all, Albertine's father, Swede, was white, too. "My girl's an *Indian*," Zelda says. Aurelia nods, agreeing completely.

Zelda is so resentful of white people, who have long oppressed her and her people in the past, that she refuses to see Aurelia's point. Zelda is quick to disregard Albertine's white father, but Erdrich ultimately argues that authentic Native people often have European ancestry as well. Albertine is Native largely because she lives a Native life with Native culture, not because her blood is entirely Native.

When King finally comes back, it is nearly dark. Lynette gets out of the **car**, her eyes "watery and red." She adjusts her blouse, which is a "dark violet bruised color," and goes in the house to check on King, Jr. Moments later, Gordie Kashpaw pulls in the driveway in his old truck with Eli next to him. Gordie is obviously drunk, and he circles the old Chevy twice around the driveway before he parks. Eli gets out and goes in the house. Next to Eli, Nector looks even older and "paler," and he doesn't recognize Eli as his brother.

Lynette's eyes are "watery and red" because she has obviously been fighting with King, and her shirt, a "dark violet bruised color" reflects the domestic abuse she's implied to be suffering at King's hands. As it turns out, Eli did refuse to ride in the Firebird, and he rides instead with Gordie. Next to Eli, who has led a more traditional Native lifestyle, Nector looks "pale," which suggests Nector is more assimilated to white culture than Eli is.

June's gravestone has just recently been erected, and Zelda, Aurelia, and Marie want to go see it before it gets too dark. As the women leave, Marie stops and tells Albertine to hang the laundry and keep an eye on things. There is plenty of food if anyone wants to eat, she says, but Albertine is not to let anyone touch the pies they have baked for the following day. "They can eat!" Marie yells to Albertine again on her way out. "But save them pies!"

Once again, Albertine is expected to do domestic chores. Albertine doesn't live there, and it likely it isn't even her laundry, but she is expected to do these tasks anyway. Marie's warning to save the pies foreshadows what is to come when King assaults Lynette and wrecks the pies in the process.

THE WORLD'S GREATEST FISHERMAN PART 3

As Albertine visits with her family, Lipsha Morrissey arrives. Lipsha was raised by Marie and is always around whenever Albertine comes home. Albertine is aware of the family "secret"—that Lipsha is June's son, born during one of the many times June left Gordie—but Lipsha seems to know very little about his biological parents. As they sit around the table, Gordie says that Eli is the last one on the reservation that can still snare a deer.

It is later revealed that everyone knows the "secret" about Lipsha's parentage, except, of course, Lipsha. Lipsha resents being the only one in the dark about his identity, and he ultimately finds tremendous comfort and closure in knowing who he is, which implies that one's heritage is an important aspect of their identity. The fact that Eli is the only one who can still snare a deer is further evidence of Native assimilation to white culture—there is little reason to go through the trouble of snaring a deer when meat can be purchased in cans.

King adjusts his hat, which reads: "World's Greatest Fisherman." He asks Eli for a cigarette, and Gordie, King's father, says that King should have said "*ciga swa*." Eli agrees. "You got to ask a real old-time Indian like me for the right words," he says. Lynette laughs. Eli has to teach them all their culture, she says, and when Eli is gone, their heritage will be, too. King yells harshly at Lynette to have some respect, and then he turns to his uncle and father. Eli might be the best hunter, King says, pointing to his hat, but King is the best fisherman. Eli claims he once caught a 14-inch trout, and King takes the hat off. "You're the greatest then," he says to Eli, giving him the hat.

King instantly snaps at Lynette, belittling her in front of others, which can in itself be considered a form of abuse. The notion of lost Native language is prevalent throughout the book, which implies that language is intricately hooked with culture in general—when one's language is lost, so is their culture, and King's hat is evidence of this. King doesn't speak his native tongue, nor does he live a native lifestyle off the land like Eli.

Later, after both Lynette and King have left the table, Albertine hears shouting outside. "Bitch! Bitch! I'll kill you! Gimme the keys!" King yells. Albertine runs outside, and finds Lynette has locked herself in the **Firebird**. Gordie runs from the front porch and embraces King, who falls to his knees and cries for June.

King's treatment of Lynette and her need to lock herself in the car to get away from him is yet another example of violence against women in the novel. She is clearly afraid of him, and he threatens to kill her, but King's behavior also suggests he is deeply grieving his mother's death. The car is a physical symbol of June, and King reacts badly to Lynette taking the keys.

After Gordie calms King down, Albertine and Lipsha sit outside, looking up at the Northern Lights. Albertine has been wanting to talk to Lipsha about his mother, June. "Your mother," Albertine begins, but Lipsha interrupts. His "mother" is Marie, he says, and if his real mother ever returns, he won't give her the time of day. Albertine is surprised. What if giving him up was "just a kind of mistake," she asks. Lipsha says it wasn't; she had wanted to drown him. Albertine asks if Lipsha at least wants to know his father, and Lipsha admits that he does.

The book later reveals that Marie told Lipsha that his mother wanted to tie him in a sack and drown him, which is why he doesn't believe it was a "mistake" that his biological mother gave him up. Lipsha's insistence that Marie is his "mother" reflects Erdrich's overreaching argument that family is more than blood ties, but it is also the reason why Marie lies to Lipsha about his mother trying to drown him. Marie loves Lipsha like a son, and she doesn't want to lose him.

Suddenly, Lipsha and Albertine hear a loud commotion from inside the house. Albertine runs inside and finds King drowning Lynette in a sink full of cold dishwater. Albertine jumps on his back, knocking loose his grip of Lynette. When King realizes what has happened, he turns to Albertine with his fists clenched. Albertine is instantly frightened. She turns, expecting to see Lipsha, but she finds herself alone. Staring at King, Albertine's fear subsides and is replaced by anger.

Albertine is instantly frightened when King turns to her because she fully expects him to respond aggressively and violently. Statistically, Native women are subjected to a disproportionate amount of violence, and this passage reflects this. King abuses Lynette and is prepared to go at Albertine as well, but is ready to fight back.

Albertine looks past King, to the counter where the pies are cooling. They are destroyed. Albertine yells at King as Lynette runs and hides under the table. King leaves the room, and Albertine turns to the pies, trying to salvage them by scooping up the spilled filling and pressing down the demolished crusts. She works for over an hour and does her best, "but once they are smashed there is no way to put them right."

The smashed pies are a metaphor for Albertine's family and their struggles. June's death—in addition to other stressors, like cultural assimilation, racism, alcoholism, and domestic violence—has wrecked their family, and, much like the pies, they cannot be made whole again.

SAINT MARIE

Marie is 14 years old and quite naive. She believes that no other reservation girl has ever prayed as hard as she does, and the women up the hill will not be able to ignore her anymore. She is going up the hill to join the Sacred Heart Convent, and she is sure the nuns will accept her. After all, Marie thinks, she doesn't "have that much Indian blood."

Erdrich's novel does not follow a linear timeline, nor does it follow a single point of view. The novel shifts between characters and time periods, offering multiple perspectives, often of the same event. Here, Marie tells the story of when she went to join the convent, which again underscores the importance of Christianity in Marie's life, but it also reflects the racism she is forced to endure as a young Native American woman. Marie thinks that the nuns will accept her because she doesn't have much "Indian blood" and has lighter skin, which implies they would reject Marie if her complexion was darker.

Marie has the soul of a "mail-order Catholic" raised in the bush alone. She has sold her soul, and now she is on her way to the top of the "highest hill" on the reservation to the convent. As Marie climbs, the sun shines off the whitewashed surface of the brick building, and she is nearly blinded. The Sacred Heart Convent is a convent for nuns who can't get along in other churches, so it doesn't really surprise Marie that Sister Leopolda has been placed there.

The white nuns and the whitewashed church will never accept Marie—a Native American and "mail-order Catholic"—into the fold. The fact that the convent is at the top of the "highest hill" reflects not only the convent's spiritual importance, but its association to white European culture as well. The convent sits in a position of superiority over the reservation below, and no matter how hard the indigenous people pray or work to conform, they will never be accepted.

Marie thinks that Sister Leopolda is just the nun to help her "rise." Leopolda knows all about the "Dark One," just like Marie's grandmother, only Marie's grandmother knows him by a different name and isn't scared of him. Sister Leopolda always carries an oak pole in her classroom, which is meant for opening high windows, but she uses it to catch Satan. If she sees Satan entering the minds or mouths of her students, she strikes them with the pole. Sister Leopolda claims that the "Dark One wants [Marie] most of all," and Marie has always believed her.

Marie believes that she will "rise" in social status if she is accepted by the nuns, which aligns with the racist assumptions of mainstream America. The "Dark One," or the Devil, wants Marie most of all, Leopolda claims, because Marie is a Native American. Ironically, Leopolda assumes that Marie is somehow inferior because of her race, but it is Leopolda who proves herself to be a despicable woman who beats children with a pole and physiologically tortures them by carrying it around.

Sister Leopolda is the nun that has sponsored Marie to come up the hill to the convent. Marie has *other* options—her light skin means she can have any man on the reservation—but she longs for Sister Leopolda's "heart." Marie's main problem, however, is that half of the time she wants Leopolda's heart in "love and admiration"; and the other half, Marie wants Leopolda's "heart to roast on a black stick."

Marie automatically assumes that Sister Leopolda is a good person and has a good heart simply because she is a white nun at the convent. Marie respects Leopolda's station, not Leopolda herself, which is why Marie both admires Leopolda's heart and *wants to roast it on a stick.*

Marie arrives at the Sacred Heart Convent, and Sister Leopolda answers the door. She leads Marie into the kitchen and tells her that she will sleep on a cot behind the stove. Marie asks if she gets a habit (tunic), but Leopolda tells her no. They might not get along, she says to Marie, or maybe Marie won't want to stay. For now, Leopolda says, they will do "God's labor," and she leads Marie to the dishes and cooking. "If this is God's work," Marie says, "then I've done it all my life." Marie accidentally drops a cup, and it rolls beneath the stove. She reaches for the poker in Leopolda's hand, the one used to push food to the back of the oven, but Leopolda holds the poker tight. She tells Marie to use her arm to retrieve the cup instead, so she can feel Satan's "hellish embrace."

Just as Marie and Zelda expect Albertine to do domestic work, "God's labor" is gendered, domestic work as well. Marie has done "God's labor" her whole life, which means she has always been expected to fill a domestic role in one way or another, and this again reflects the oppression of women within American society and the restricted roles they are expected fulfill. Again, Leopolda is abusive and racist, and she implies here that Marie deserves to feel Satan's "hellish embrace" simply because she is a Native American.

As Marie bends to grab the cup, she has a strange feeling. She sees Sister Leopolda lift the poker and hears it scrape the metal of the stove above. Then Marie hears water and feels her skin begin to burn. As an entire pot of scalding hot water dumps onto Marie, Leopolda holds Marie down with her foot. She threatens to "boil" Satan out of Marie if she moves by pouring hot water in her ear. After that, Marie knows she should leave the convent, but she is reluctant. She can pray better than any of them, Marie thinks to herself.

Sister Leopolda's treatment of Marie is absolutely abusive, and it reflects the racist assumptions of mainstream American society. Leopolda believes Marie is inherently sinful and evil because she is Native American, and while Marie doesn't necessarily believe this, she is willing to put up with the abuse if it means she can stay at the convent and "rise."

Sister Leopolda tells Marie that it is time to bake, and two other nuns come in the kitchen and ask Leopolda who her new girl is. "Marie. Star of the Sea," Leopolda says. "She will shine," Leopolda continues, "when we have burned off the dark corrosion." Marie and Leopolda bake in silence, and then Leopolda asks Marie if her skin hurts. Marie turns and tries to leave, but Leopolda holds her back. Marie begs to leave, but Leopolda refuses to let go. Her work has just begun, Sister Leopolda says, and it is time to get the bread from the oven.

Years later, when Marie goes back to the convent to visit a dying Sister Leopolda, she again calls Marie "Star of the Sea." Sister Leopolda implies that Marie will "shine" when her "dark corrosion" has "burned off," meaning Marie will shine only after she fully assimilates to white culture and embraces Christianity. Of course, Marie can never assimilate enough to satisfy Leopolda, which is more evidence of the deep-seated racism that indigenous people face.

Sister Leopolda opens the oven and reaches for the bread with the long poker. As she bends over the open door, Marie kicks her as hard as she can. Leopolda lunges into the oven, but the poker lodges against the back wall, and she is able to gain her balance. "Bitch of Jesus Christ!" Marie screams. Leopolda stands and stabs Marie through the palm of her hand with the poker, then pulls the poker back and swings at Marie's head, knocking her unconscious.

Marie's resistance to Leopolda is evidence of her strength as a woman, particularly as a Native American woman. Marie refuses to be abused and insulted by Sister Leopolda, even if that means Marie can't "rise" quite the same way. Marie is beginning to understand how naive she has been in coming in to the convent. Leopolda is not automatically better than Marie just because she is a white nun.

By the time Marie wakes 30 minutes later, she is on the couch in Mother Superior's office "being worshipped" by the nuns. As Marie opens her eyes, Sister Leopolda goes to her. She has told the others of Marie's "passion," Leopolda says, and how the stigmata just appeared on Marie's hand, causing her to "swoon at the holy vision." Marie suddenly understands. Leopolda has lied to cover her tracks and instead told the other nuns it was a miracle. "Christ has marked me," Marie says. Looking at Leopolda, Marie no longer feels confidence in her, only pity.

Ironically, Marie ends up "being worshipped" by the white nuns just as she initially wanted. The stigmata, the wounds inflicted on Christ during the crucifixion, are marks of divine favor and only manifest in those who are considered the most holy and touched by the Lord. The other nuns believe this about Marie and worship her accordingly. By lying and keeping Leopolda's secret, Marie finally has power over the abusive nun.

WILD GEESE

Every Friday, Nector and Eli build a hunting blind and wait for **geese** to land. One particular summer Friday, after shooting two geese, Nector goes into town to sell them. He is a handsome young man, and he can have any girl on the reservation that he wants, but he has his heart set on Lulu Nanapush. Nector thinks about Lulu as he walks and doesn't even notice Marie as she barrels down the hill, coming from the direction of the Sacred Heart Convent. She is carrying a pillowcase that has the convent's monogram, and Nector assumes she has stolen it. After all, Nector thinks, she is a Lazarre, "a family of horse-thieving drunks," and it is just the sort of thing she would do.

Nector's opinion of Marie's family relies on popular Native American stereotypes. Nector assumes Marie's family members are all alcoholics, and he also assumes they are "horse-thieves," which harkens to early days of westward expansion and Native Americans stealing the white settlers' horses. Marie's family clearly has not been stealing horses—they all drive cars—but Nector means to insult Marie's family by implying they are typical Native Americans and no good.

Nector stops Marie, holding her by the arm. "Lemme go, you damn Indian," Marie snaps. "You stink to hell!" Nector laughs. Marie is "just a skinny white girl," and she is nothing compared to the Kashpaws. Suddenly, Nector loses his balance and falls on top of Marie, dead **geese** and all, tearing her shirt in the process. Marie begins to struggle, but Nector refuses to get up. He demands that she give him the pillowcase. She shouldn't have stolen it, he says, and Marie begins to laugh.

Marie, who has little Chippewa blood, denies her Native ancestry for much of the novel, and her shame related to her heritage can be seen in her insults to Nector. Nector sees Marie as a "white girl" but still uses racist language and stereotypes to insult her, which again reflects the racism undergirding American society. Here, Nector restrains Marie against her will and even ignores her pleas to get up. In this way, Nector shows very little respect for Marie, and women in general, as he assumes a position of power over her and disregards her voice.

Nector is infuriated that Marie is laughing at him, and he strikes her across the mouth. Marie grabs her face and looks hatefully at Nector, but he begins to act strangely. He reaches up and gently touches Marie's face, and in that one moment, Nector falls in love. All of a sudden, Nector realizes that they are out in the open and in view of anyone who is watching. Nector rolls off of Marie and gets up. For the first time, Nector notices Marie's bandaged hand and head and thinks that she must be in great pain. He hands her the dead **geese**. Marie can take them home, Nector says.

Geese, which mate for life, are symbolic of love and long-term commitment in the novel, and here the geese seem to have a mysterious effect, as Nector instantly falls in love with Marie. Nector's disregard for Marie as a woman continues here when he slaps her for laughing at him. Nector is emasculated when Marie laughs in his face, and he recovers that lost power by physically assaulting her. Marie's hate and resistance is more evidence of her strength; she won't succumb to Nector's abuse, even if he does physically overpower her.

THE ISLAND

Lulu Nanapush has never grown very far from her mother's arms, and even when they sent her to the government school, Lulu ran away to get back to her. Lulu has been punished repeatedly for running away from the school, and she is often forced to wear the "hot-orange shame dress." Her life is a series of "bells" and "rough English," but Lulu misses "the old language." She can hear her mother's voice, even at the school, but it is old Uncle Nanapush who comes to finally take her home.

This passage reflects the painful legacy left by residential schools in the U.S. Lulu is humiliated at the school through the "shame dress" and is not shown love or respect. She was forcibly taken from her mother and stripped of her Native language, something that Erdrich repeatedly implies is intimately linked with one's cultural identity. Lulu also seems to miss her Native language more than any of the trappings of her old life, which again suggests that language sits at the very center of her culture.

Free from the school and back on the reservation, Lulu feels as if the government can no longer "cage" her. When Nanapush came to get Lulu, he brought along his wife, Margaret Kashpaw, the one they call "Rushes Bear." Rushes Bear doesn't like Lulu, so she punishes Nanapush by spending more time at the Kashpaw allotment. "What's you love medicine?" Lulu asks Nanapush one day. Nanapush and Rushes Bear's relationship is quite volatile, and she even seems to hate Nanapush, but Rushes Bear keeps coming back. Nanapush tells Lulu it is because he lives on "Indian time," which gives him more time to love and pleasure his wife.

Lulu's reference to the residential school as a "cage" implies that the government considers Lulu and other Native Americans as animals that must be restrained, not human beings worthy of freedom, dignity, and respect, which again reflects the racism of broader American society. Rushes Bear is married to Kashpaw as well as Nanapush, and this further illustrates the deep connections between tribal members, even those who are not blood related. This is the first time "love medicine" is mentioned in the book, and it reflects the deep love Nanapush and Rushes Bear share. Nanapush jokes about the relationship, claiming Rushes Bear just wants him for sex, but Erdrich's point is clear: Rushes Bear loves Nanapush, and that is why she keeps coming back.

Nanapush tells Lulu that he is old and will soon die. He "lost his spirit" years ago in a card game with Father Damien, Nanapush says, but he still wants to "walk away on the old road." He tells Lulu that when he dies, he wants her to bury him in the highest tree, so he can see the government cars coming.

This passage reflects the presence of both Christianity and Native spirituality in Nanapush's life. Notably, this recognition of Christianity does not appear to be something Nanapush willingly accepts (he "lost" his spirit to Christianity in a card game), and he wants to observe Native spirituality in his death. Many Anishinaabe people believe that one's soul walks a three-day "road" at death, and Nanapush references this belief here. Anishinaabe burial practices often involve wrapping a body and placing it high in a tree so the spirit can escape unencumbered, but this passage also reflects Nanapush's distrust of the U.S. government, which has repeatedly oppressed and mistreated the Native people.

Meanwhile, Rushes Bear's son, Nector, begins to look at Lulu, and just when Lulu thinks Nector is putty in her hands, Rushes Bear tells her that he went out with Marie Lazarre. Lulu can't believe it; Marie is pale as can be. "She's ugly," Lulu cries. "White as a fish!" Nanapush tries to encourage Lulu to forget about Nector, claiming the entire Kashpaw family is "poison."

Nanapush's reference to the Kashpaw family as "poison" is more evidence of the power of love medicine. Even he thinks Rushes Bear and her family are poisonous, so to speak, but he can't stay away from her because he loves her. This passage represents Lulu's perspective of Nector and Marie's relationship, which she is clearly upset about. Like Zelda does, Lulu resents white people (and those she perceives as white), which ties back to the anger she feels related to the oppressive nature of America's racist society and the forced assimilation of Native people.

In the spring, Rushes Bear comes back to Nanapush's allotment and stays for quite some time. Her attitude is even worse than usual, and she tells Lulu that Nector is marrying Marie, one of those "lowlife" Lazarres. With the prospect of Nector gone, Lulu is forced to stay home with Nanapush, and Rushes Bear seems determined to make her miserable. She complains about everything Lulu does, says her stews are too salty, and pokes her bare skin with a stick, all the while claiming she prefers Lulu to Marie Lazarre.

Rushes Bear's reference to Marie as a "lowlife" suggests that Rushes Bear, too, believes the Lazarres are no good. Presumably, Rushes Bear prefers Lulu to marry Nector instead of Marie because Marie is as good as white in her eyes, yet Rushes Bear's harsh treatment of Lulu in spite of this lends valuable insight into Rushes Bear's character. She is a strong woman and holds much power over her family, but she obviously believes that women should fill a domestic role, and she thinks Lulu is lacking in this respect.

Lulu is convinced that she can't spend another minute with Rushes Bear, and she begins to spend her time sitting on a rock, staring out at the island where Moses Pillager lives. Lulu can remember him from when she was a child. He would come to the reservation and speak to Nanapush in the "old language." Lulu knows, however, that Moses is off limits. He is too closely related, but she can't stop thinking about him.

Moses is off limits because he is Lulu's mother's cousin, and he is considerably older. Lulu is attracted to Moses because she sees him as a means to escape, but he also represents traditional Anishinaabe culture. Lulu has been craving her culture, particularly her native language, since her residential school experience, which implies Lulu has a desire to return to a traditional Native lifestyle.

One day, Lulu asks Nanapush to tell her about Moses, but Nanapush is reluctant. Lulu asks why she shouldn't visit her cousin, and Nanapush warns her to stay away. Moses has been on the island since a sickness wiped out much of the tribe when he was younger, and he hasn't moved off since. Lulu says that she is going to see him, but Nanapush forbids it. Moses is too old, he says, plus, he is rumored to be "*wiindigoo*." According to Nanapush, Moses's grandfather ate his wife.

The wiindigoo *is a Native American myth about an evil spirit, usually depicted as a large monster or beast, with ties to cannibalism. The myth of the wiindigoo is often interpreted as a cautionary tale against isolation, and this interpretation certainly fits Moses. Nanapush draws attention to Moses's isolated life on the island, away from the reservation and tribe.*

Lulu goes to the island anyway. Before long, Moses has completely fallen for Lulu, and he speaks to her in the "old language," using words that have been "lost to people who live in town or dress in whiteman's clothes." The seasons pass, and Lulu finds herself pregnant. She asks Moses when they can return to the reservation. She can't possibly stay on the island, Lulu says, and Moses grabs her, throwing her to the floor in silence. Lulu knows the answer. They don't really need words after all.

Lulu falls in love with Moses largely because he speaks her native language, which again underscores the importance of language and the tragedy that comes from the loss of said language. Lulu's native language is nearly extinct, and, by extension, so is her Native culture. Assimilation has forced many Native people to "live in town and dress in whiteman's clothes." In other words, they have assimilated to white culture, and in the process have lost their own. Moses represents a way for Lulu to get her culture back. However, Moses responds to Lulu's request to leave the island with physical violence, which again underscores the disproportionate amount of violence Native women are faced with.

THE BEADS PART 1

Marie does not want June Morrissey the day the child is dropped at her doorstep. June's mother was Marie's sister, but she recently died, and June was found in the woods, surviving on only pine sap. Marie looks at the girl and notices that she has a **rosary** around her neck. She doesn't want June because she can't feed the children she already has, but Marie takes her anyway, and before long, Marie begins to love June even more than the other children.

June's rosary is symbolic of Christianity's presence in Native life and experience, and it is further evidence of Native assimilation to European, or white, culture. Marie's deep love for June harkens to Erdrich's central claim that family is more than mere blood ties, but it also lends insight into why Marie later tells Lipsha that June wanted to drown him. Marie's lie causes Lipsha undue pain, but it is Marie's way of ensuring that Lipsha, whom she loves as fiercely as she loves June, doesn't leave her the way June eventually does.

Marie had married Nector because she thought he was smart, but that is only if she can keep him away from alcohol. Now, he is hardly home, and Marie is left alone with the children. One day, Zelda runs into the house and tells Marie that Gordie and Aurelia are hanging June from a tree. Marie runs outside and hears June telling the children to tighten the rope. Marie grabs Aurelia and Gordie, giving them a firm swat, and pulls June from the tree. June is upset and blames Marie for ruining their fun. Marie swats June, too, and throws her into the house.

Most of the characters in Love Medicine *struggle with alcoholism, which is further evidence of the hardships indigenous people face related to racism and discrimination in America. Erdrich implies her characters drink to escape their pain or forget their past, which is directly linked to the trauma of forced assimilation. Surprisingly, June is upset that Marie ends their dangerous game, which doesn't necessarily mean June wants to be hanged, she simply wants to be accepted by the other children and included in their "fun." June is not biologically a Kashpaw, and she frequently feels disconnected from them.*

With Nector gone in town most of the time, his brother, Eli, begins to spend more time with Marie and the children. Eli lives alone on the other side of the reservation, and even though he does drink some, he never goes overboard. He often sings old Cree songs that make Marie feel lonesome. Marie knows that Nector is having an affair (everyone in town knows, too), and he sometimes doesn't even bother to come home at night.

Eli is less assimilated to white culture and has been less affected by the government, as he did not attend residential schools and has spent his entire life on the reservation. Since Eli has less experience with the government—and thus also has less trauma—he does not drink to the same extent Nector and the others do, which suggests he has less pain and has less to forget or avoid.

One day, June tells Marie that she wants to live with Eli. Marie tells her to go, and then she reaches silently into the lard can, where she keeps June's **rosary** beads hidden. Marie touches the beads without removing them. Marie never prays and only goes to church so others don't think badly of her, but she sometimes stops to touch the rosary. It is her "secret," and she doesn't even look at the beads as she runs her finger over them.

June's rosary is symbolic of Marie's connection to Christianity, which she observes in her own tentative way. Secretly touching the beads is like a modified prayer to Marie, and she turns to the comfort of this prayer to help her through the pain of June leaving. June's rosary is also symbolic of Marie's connection to June—even though June is not Marie's biological child, she still deeply loves her and is connected to her.

THE BEADS PART 2

Rushes Bear got her name because she once rushed a bear without a weapon. She charged it head-on and lived to tell the tale. Now, she is living with Marie and seems determined to make Marie miserable, just like she did to Lulu years earlier. Coming to her wits' end, Marie kicks Rushes Bear out, but Rushes Bear has nowhere else to go.

The fact that Rushes Bear gets her name from actually rushing a bear is more evidence of the strength of women in the novel. Women are expected to be demure and timid, but Rushes Bear is tough, and she serves to disrupt popular stereotypes of women as weak; however, Rushes Bear is still vulnerable, as she relies on Marie and has nowhere else to go.

Soon, Marie is pregnant again, but her labor is harder than ever before. Rushes Bear sits by her side as the pain progresses, and Nector insists they go to the hospital. Marie refuses, and Rushes Bear goes to get Fleur Pillager, Lulu Nanapush's mother. Fleur and Rushes Bear see Marie through labor, speaking the "old language" to one another. Marie doesn't know what they are saying, but she understands them completely. After a baby girl is born, Nector tries to give Fleur some money, but she leaves without it. He then tries to give it to Rushes Bear, but she won't take it either. Nector reminds Rushes Bear that he is her son, but she says she doesn't have a son anymore, only a daughter. "But she's a Lazarre," Nector says. "You shame me," Rushes Bear replies.

Rushes Bear's connection to Fleur Pillager again illustrates tribal connections beyond blood. Like Lulu, Marie finds comfort in their native language, even if she can't speak it. Nector's money is further evidence of assimilation, and he tries to pay Fleur, but she presumably has little need for a white man's money. Nector still insults Marie for being a near-white Lazarre, but Rushes Bear has softened. Marie's challenging labor has proved her strong in Rushes Bear's eyes, and she respects Marie because of it. Rushes Bear's claim that Nector has shamed her is a reference to his affair, and her refusal to recognize Nector as her son and her recognition of Marie as her daughter again implies that true family is more than just shared blood.

LULU'S BOYS

On the last day that Lulu is Henry Lamartine's widow, she sits drinking beer with Henry's brother, Beverly. Beverly is a large man with huge muscles bursting from everywhere. As he has a rather feminine name, Beverly has always nipped any snide remarks in the bud by being big and intimidating. His arms are covered in tattoos, just as Henry's had been, and Lulu is reminded of her late husband as she stares at Beverly. She knows he has a tattoo of a bird, and when he flexes his arm, it appears to be flying.

Beverly represents Henry in Lulu's eyes—he looks like Henry, shares the same genes, and even has the same tattoos—which undoubtedly influence Lulu's feelings for Beverly.

Lulu hasn't seen Beverly since Henry's funeral seven years ago. Henry died in a car crash after driving drunk onto the train tracks and getting struck by a train. "She comes barreling through, you'll never see me again," Henry had said before he died. Others had thought he was talking about Lulu, but she never complained about his drinking or anything, so it was pretty clear he had been talking about the train.

This passage makes it clear that Henry committed suicide, although his exact reasons for doing so are never revealed. Elsewhere, Marie implies he did it because Lulu frequently cheated on him and had other men's children, while Lulu holds that their relationship was happy despite her infidelity. Lulu also implies that Henry was deeply upset about government interference in their Native lifestyle, which suggests oppression may have, at least in part, fueled Henry's decision to end his life.

Lulu has always been known as a "flirt," and many people in town say terrible things about her. She has eight sons; her three oldest are Nanapushes, although they have her maiden name; the middle sons are Morrisseys, but they are each named Lamartine; and the youngest Lamartines are each red-headed or blond, and they look nothing like their brothers. The youngest, Henry, Jr., was born just nine months after Henry's death, but Beverly is certain the boy is his, and he has come to take him home.

Lulu has quite the reputation on the reservation for being sexually promiscuous, and she is seriously disrespected within her community because of it. Lulu is demonized because of her behavior, yet the men who have sex with her and father her children are never mentioned, which again illustrates the oppression of women in the novel. None of Lulu's sons have the same father, and none of them actually belong to her late husband, Henry Lamartine.

Beverly lives in the Twin Cities, where there are plenty of opportunities for Native Americans. He has made a decent living for the last 18 years selling after-school study books door to door, and he is the best salesman in the entire area. The secret to Beverly's success is a picture of Henry, Jr., which he shows to his customers. He creates elaborate stories about his son, Junior, who plays baseball and has better marks than anyone else in his class on account of his father's after-school study guides. Each night, Beverly goes home to his wife, Elsa. Elsa has never much wanted children, but Beverly "adores" her, and he is hoping that she will help raise his son.

Beverly claims to "adore" Elsa, and he does appear to love her, but it is later revealed that he marries Lulu behind Elsa's back. Beverly's secret marriage to Lulu is similar to Nector's affair with Lulu. Both men undeniably love their wives, but they both have a history with Lulu (and they have both fathered one of her sons) that they can't deny or ignore. In this way, Erdrich implies that love is complicated and often painful, and at times is not confined to one person as expected in white, European culture.

Sitting across from Lulu in her kitchen, Beverly can't believe how long it has been since Henry's death. He looks around Lulu's immaculate house. Even with eight sons, Lulu's house is always spotless. He asks her if she remembers playing strip poker with him and Henry before she and Henry were married. Lulu laughs and tells Beverly that after she took his shorts with a pair of twos, she knew who she wanted to marry. Some men "react" in such circumstances, Lulus says, and she had been looking for such a "reaction." Beverly is quiet. Lulu got a "reaction" when she wanted it, he thinks to himself.

This passage implies that Lulu was looking for one of the men to get an erection during the game, and since Beverly did not, Lulu decided to marry Henry instead. Clearly, sex is an important part of Lulu's life—which disrupts popular stereotypes of women as restrained and demure—and she bases her relationships, at least in part, on sexual attraction and prowess. Beverly resents this; Lulu has his son, so he is obviously competent sexually. But Lulu seems to be looking for a certain openness to sex that she didn't immediately think Beverly had.

Henry, Jr. comes in and asks Beverly to make his bird tattoo fly. Beverly rolls up his sleeve and flexes his arm, creating the illusion of a bird in flight. The boy runs back outside, and Beverly can hear gunshots. The older boys are teaching him to shoot, Lulu says. Lulu's boys are like "a kind of pack" They are always together, like they have "one soul" or belong to same "organism." Beverly watches as the older boys fuss over Henry, Jr., helping his aim and shoot the rifle, and he knows nothing will ever come between them.

The language used to describe Lulu's boys—they are a "pack" or "organism" with "one soul"—underscores the importance of family connections in Native culture, yet the fact that Lulu's boys each have different fathers suggests that this connection does not need to adhere to traditional notions of a nuclear family to be strong. Beverly knows that he can't separate Henry, Jr. from his brothers, which, incidentally, illustrates why residential schools were so successful in assimilating indigenous people: they separated Native children from their families and their shared experiences.

By that evening, Beverly has completely abandoned his plans to take Henry, Jr. back to Minneapolis. Beverly watches Lulu as she readies dinner for her boys. She is so efficient and skilled that the meal seems to make itself, and she makes quick work of the mess as well. Beverly thinks of the night he and Lulu shared seven years ago, and before he knows it, he has fallen in love with Lulu. She finishes her work and goes to her bedroom, leaving the door open a crack. Beverly thinks about Elsa and his life back in Minneapolis. He loves Elsa and his life in the city, but he slips quietly into Lulu's bedroom anyway.

Later in the novel, Lipsha refers to Lulu as a jiibay *(Ojibwe) witch, who has special, magical powers. These magical powers are reflected here as well, as food seems to appear out of thin air and the mess cleans itself. These perceived superpowers are more evidence of Lulu's strength as a woman. Ironically, Rushes Bear implied earlier that Lulu wasn't any good at domestic work, but Lulu is clearly competent and manages eight boys by herself, which seems a near-impossible task.*

THE PLUNGE OF THE BRAVE

For as long as Nector Kashpaw can remember, he has had everything he ever wanted. He used to think that it was because he is Kashpaw, the final hereditary leaders of his North Dakota tribe, but he pretty much got what he wanted off the reservation too. He has always been handsome, and as a young man he was given roles in the movies in Hollywood. The only problem was the directors always wanted him to fall dead from a horse. A famous painter even painted his portrait once. The painting is called **The Plunge of the Brave**, and it hangs in the Bismarck state capital. It depicts a naked Native American (Nector) jumping to his death from a cliff to a rocky river below.

The Kashpaws are seen as near royalty on the reservation, as their family is one of the oldest, which again underscores the importance of family within Native culture. Ironically, Nector doesn't get everything *he wants, as he is never respected by white society. The representation of Native American people in popular culture (like in paintings and movies) is overwhelmingly negative and heavily stereotyped—just think of any early Western film in which white cowboys are attacked by "savage" Native Americans and forced to kill them. In this way, Erdrich points to popular culture as a means of perpetuating racist assumptions and beliefs in American society.*

When Nector first saw **The Plunge of the Brave**, he thought of Custer's saying—"the only good Indian is a dead Indian"—and he refused to die on those painted rocks. He would make it out of the painting. Each year at the government school, Nector was made to read *Moby Dick*, and he began to see the story as a metaphor for his circumstances. Just like Ishmael survived the great white whale, Nector was determined to get out of *The Plunge of the Brave*.

The painting is a metaphor for the oppression Nector is subjected to in America's racist society, but Erdrich suggests that Nector can never get out of the painting—that is until he loses his memory. Nector's use of Moby Dick *as a metaphor for his circumstances also suggests that he will never be free, as* Moby Dick *is a product of white culture and further evidence of its profound influence on Nector's life and Native identity.*

Years before, Nector had fallen in love with Lulu Nanapush. She was just what he wanted, and they would sneak behind the dance house and kiss. Then, Nector met Marie, and it was all over. Even now, Nector doesn't understand it. He went up the hill to sell two **geese** and came back down still holding the geese—and Marie's hand.

The fact that Nector himself doesn't understand his feelings for Marie speaks to the power of love medicine, which is symbolized by the geese (Lipsha later tries to conjure love medicine with geese hearts). Nector is inexplicably drawn to Marie by the power of love.

The years passed quickly and the children grew. Nector started drinking and "caught holy hell" from Marie for it. One day in 1952, Nector suddenly realized that his life was passing him by. He had done what was expected of him—married, had kids, even became the chairman of the tribe—but he felt as if the life had been "squeezed" from him. He began to think of Lulu. He had never really gotten over her, and the more miserable he became, the more he thought about her.

Marie's anger described as "holy hell" again reflects the white, European influence of Christianity on Native life and culture, as does Nector's alcoholism, since he presumably drinks to cope with the oppression and disappointment of his whitewashed society. Nector feels suffocated by his traditional marriage and life, and Lulu represents an escape from this stress.

On the hottest day in July of 1952, the reservation received an unexpected shipment of surplus butter. Nector suddenly found himself with 17 tons of melting butter and nowhere to store it. It had to be delivered quickly, but he would need air conditioning. Just then, Lulu drove by in her fancy custom **car**. Nector yelled to her, asking if her car had AC, and she agreed to help him deliver the butter. They hadn't seen each other in years, and Lulu thought Nector looked old, but they made easy small talk. Near the end of the day, Nector asked Lulu to forgive him for the way he had treated her in the past, and they were suddenly locked in a passionate kiss, rolling around in melted butter.

Like several other characters—including Gerry and Lipsha, and Lyman and Henry, Jr.—Nector and Lulu are brought together because of a car. Gerry and Lipsha have the Firebird, Lyman and Henry, Jr. have the Oldsmobile, and here, Lulu and Nector have Lulu's air-conditioned sedan. The ability of cars to bring characters together reflect the importance of cars in their lives, but cars are also more evidence of white culture and influence, which Erdrich argues is, by necessity, a major part of Native identity and existence.

Nector had a job as a night watchman at a local plant, and he worked five nights a week. On the sixth night, he would leave for work as usual, but he would go to Lulu's instead. Their affair continued for five years, until Lulu became pregnant again. Nector didn't know for sure the child was his, and he never asked (he suspected that Lulu saw other men, but what could he say about that when he was married himself?). The boy sure looked like a Kashpaw, though.

Nector's son with Lulu, even though Nector never claims Lyman as his son, is another example of the deep connections between tribal families in Native culture. There is an interconnectedness between the Kashpaws and the Lamartines, even if they don't acknowledge it, and Lyman Lamartine is proof of this.

Now, in 1957, Nector knows that Beverly Lamartine has been visiting Lulu as well, and Nector is insanely jealous, but he still can't bring himself to leave Marie. Nector drives to the lake and strips naked. He submerges himself in the cool water and tries to forget about Lulu. Breaking the surface of the water, Nector is determined to get back to his life.

Nector's cleansing dip in the lake carries religious connotations of baptism and rebirth, which aligns with Erdrich's argument that Christianity is an unavoidable presence and influence on Native Americans in modernity.

In the meantime, an area redevelopment plan is presented to the tribal council. Lulu's house is right in the middle of land the tribe wants to put a factory on, and since the Lamartines are squatting on the land, Lulu doesn't technically own it. As Nector signs the eviction notice as the chairman of the tribe, he knows that he must get Lulu back. At home, Nector writes two letters—one to Marie, telling her he is leaving her for Lulu, and one to Lulu, confessing his undying love and intention to leave his wife—and then he sleeps like a baby.

The fact that Nector sleeps like a baby after unburdening his conscience about his feelings suggest that Nector actually loves Lulu more than Marie—even though he ultimately chooses to spend his life with Marie.

The next day, Nector wakes to find Marie has already left to run errands. He places her letter under the sugar bowl on the kitchen table and heads to Lulu's house. It is obvious no one is home, so he lights a cigarette and waits. He takes Lulu's letter from his pocket and reads it over and over again, thinking about Marie and the letter under the sugar bowl. Nector crumples Lulu's letter and throws it to the ground, where it is inadvertently ignited by the lit end of a cigarette. Nector watches the letter burn, and while he doesn't do anything to help it along, he doesn't try to put it out either. Soon, Lulu's entire house is engulfed in flames, and Nector knows there is nothing he can do to stop it.

When given time to consider it, Nector clearly rethinks his plan to leave Marie, which also aligns with Erdrich's suggestion that love is complicated and often not confined to one person. Nector seems nearly incapable of making a decision between the two, and this also speaks to the power of love. On another note, the loss of Lulu's land and house is a small-scale representation of what countless indigenous people have endured—the seizure of one's land and home without legal recourse.

FLESH AND BLOOD

Marie had heard that Sister Leopolda was sick and dying, but she still couldn't think of one good reason to go up the hill to the convent. Why should she care about an old nun who abused her and left her with a scar on the palm of her hand that pained her every Good Friday? Still, Marie can't forget the woman, and while she badly wants to hate Leopolda, she decides to go visit her anyway, and she takes Zelda along with her.

The scar on the palm of Marie's hand is left from Sister Leopolda's stab wound, which Leopolda had claimed was a spontaneous manifestation of the stigmata, and it is another connection to Christianity in Marie's life. The scar, which marks Marie as holy, hurts on Good Friday, a holy day in Christianity that commemorates Christ's Crucifixion and death.

Others look to Sister Leopolda like she is some kind of saint, but Marie knows better. Sister Leopolda *has* to pray hard because she is so close to the Devil. Marie has been told that the old nun is confined to her bed, and she holds an old iron spoon that she beats on the metal bedframe to drive the evil spirits away.

Unlike when Marie was younger, she no longer believes that Sister Leopolda is automatically a righteous and good person because she is a nun. On the contrary, Leopolda is cruel and abusive, and as a representation of Christianity in the book, she makes the religion as whole appear this way as well.

Marie puts on her best dress made of purple wool and sets out to the convent with an impeccably dressed Zelda. The day is hot and dry, but Marie won't let herself sweat in her good dress. As they walk, Marie points out the place where she first met Nector years before and tells her daughter for the first time that she had been taught by the nuns, too.

The color purple is often associated with royalty, and as Marie is now a Kashpaw, she is often viewed this way. However, purple is also associated with independence, strength, and dignity, and Marie displays each of these attributes in going to visit Leopolda.

Marie and Zelda arrive at the Sacred Heart Convent and are greeted by a pleasant nun. They are shown to Sister Leopolda's room, where the old nun sits in complete darkness. Leopolda does not at first recognize Marie, but after Marie pulls back the curtains and allows light into the room, she knows her instantly. "Marie! Star of the Sea!" Leopolda cries. She has always known Marie would come back.

Leopolda calls Marie "Star of the Sea" just as she did years earlier when Marie first went to the convent. Of course, Leopolda believes Marie has come back to kneel before her and God, which she has, in a way, but Marie has much more power than that.

Marie sits near Sister Leopolda and tells her that she feels sorry for her illness. Leopolda tells Marie that she feels sorry for her, too, seeing how Marie is so poor she had to recycle an old Easter shroud into a dress. "I suppose you had brats with the Indian," Sister Leopolda continues, and Marie points to Zelda and her neat appearance. Leopolda is not impressed and claims Zelda looks just like Marie. She wonders how Marie even feeds her children, and Marie assures her she does fine. After all, her husband *is* chairman of the tribe.

Marie badly wants Sister Leopolda to realize that she has done well in life, but Leopolda will never recognize this. She sees Marie as only a Native American (and sees this as a mark of inferiority), and this is why she isn't impressed by Marie's daughter, who looks just like Marie—like a Native American. Leopolda will never accept Marie no matter how successful she becomes, which again reflects America's deep-seated racism.

Sister Leopolda tells Marie that it is her husband who has done well in life, not Marie, but Marie insists that she made Nector into the man he is. With her help and guidance, Nector became successful and has spoken in Washington and even had dinner with the governor. "No doubt," Leopolda says, "you had a certain talent." Marie again tells Leopolda that she is sorry Leopolda is so sick, and Leopolda tells Marie that she is sorry Marie is going to hell, and then Leopolda reaches over her head with the iron spoon and bangs it repeatedly on the metal of the bed.

The "certain talent" Leopolda refers to is undoubtedly sex, which minimalizes Marie's role and influence in helping to make Nector the man he became. Nector is highly successful, and Marie surely deserves much of the credit, but Leopolda doesn't consider this at all. By banging her spoon on the bed, Leopolda implies there are evil spirits near, which is to say she believes Marie is evil and going to hell simply because she is Native American.

As Sister Leopolda bangs the iron spoon on the bed, Marie knows that she must have the spoon. She tells Leopolda that they have come for her blessing, and Marie devises a secret plan to snatch the spoon while Leopolda is busy blessing Zelda. But when Leopolda blesses Zelda, she holds the spoon close, and Marie isn't able to get at it. Marie kneels at the old woman to be blessed herself and is struck by a strange feeling. She reaches up and grabs the spoon and is pulled by the strength of the dying woman up onto the bed. Marie can't believe the nun's power, and they pull the spoon back and forth before Marie finally releases it. "There is nothing I can do after hating her all these years," Marie thinks to herself.

The iron spoon, much like the iron poker that stabbed Marie, is an extension of Leopolda's power and cruelty. If Marie can take the spoon, she figures she can, in a way, disarm Leopolda. Only Marie can't disarm Leopolda, which implies there isn't much Marie can do to fight the influence of white culture and she must, in a sense, let go. Marie says "there is nothing" she can do after hating Leopolda, and this suggests that Marie must let go of her hate and resentment as well.

On the walk back home, Zelda tells Marie that she is considering joining the Sacred Heart Convent. Marie listens to her daughter talk and advises her not to make any quick decisions. At home, Zelda runs into the house to change, but she soon appears at the door holding a letter with a strange look on her face. Marie asks her where she found the letter, and Zelda tells her it was under the sugar bowl. Zelda goes off to change her clothes, and Marie reads the letter. It is from Nector, and he claims he is in love with Lulu, like he has always been, and is leaving Marie.

Of course, Marie has no idea that Nector has changed his mind and is probably watching Lulu's house burn at this exact moment. The letter is significant because it confirms what Marie has long since suspected. Marie is oddly calm as she reads Nector's letter, and this suggests that Marie, too, understands that love is complicated and at times can be the cause of deep pain.

Marie doesn't know what to do. She folds the letter and puts it in the pocket of her dress. She isn't even sure if Zelda read the letter or not. Strangely, Marie isn't angry, and she is quite convinced that it really doesn't matter how she feels anyway. "He's a man!" she says to herself by way of an explanation, yet she knows deep down it is a poor one. Not all men are like Nector, Marie thinks, and even Lulu's late husband, Henry, is proof of that. Henry knew that Lulu cheated and had children by other men, but he loved them all the same.

Marie's example of Henry as proof that not all men are bad again underscores Erdrich's primary argument that family is more than blood ties. None of the Lamartine boys are actually Lamartines, but that matters little to Henry. However, Marie's claim that Nector is just acting like "a man" implies that she expects him to treat her badly and break her heart, which again highlights the widespread oppression and ill-treatment of women by men in the novel.

Marie decides to peel some potatoes for dinner. Zelda usually helps her, but she isn't around, and Marie suspects she has gone to find Nector. After peeling every potato in the house, Marie still isn't sure what she should do, so she decides to wash and wax the floor. Marie makes it a point not to go on her knees for God or anyone else, but washing the floor is an excuse for her to kneel. Still wearing her good purple dress, Marie strips and scrubs the floor, and then waxes herself into a corner by the table. She removes the letter from her pocket and sits down.

Notably, as Marie struggles with her feelings, she escapes to domestic chores, which suggests that Marie finds comfort—and even some power—in this gendered role. Here, washing and waxing her floor is tantamount to a religious experience or prayer, one in which Marie finds clarity, catharsis, and reason, as she seems to know precisely what to do afterward.

Marie places the letter under the salt can, which sits directly next to the sugar bowl. She decides she will say nothing about the letter, and she will never mention it to Nector. She will leave him wondering "salt or sugar?" for the rest of his life. Suddenly, Marie hears Nector and Zelda outside, and then Nector appears in the doorway to the kitchen. "I just put the wax down," Marie says to her husband. "You have to wait."

In confusing Nector and leaving him to wonder if she ever read the letter, Marie assumes a position of power over him, which again speaks to Marie's strength as a woman. Nector clearly respects this power and does not dare cross it—just as he does not dare cross Marie's freshly waxed floor. In this way, Erdrich points to the sacredness of the woman's domestic role and implies that while women are undoubtedly oppressed, there is profound power to be found in this traditional role as well.

A BRIDGE

Albertine Johnson is 15 years old and is running away from home. She rides the cramped bus to Fargo and steps off into the busy bus station. Albertine is officially out of money and doesn't have a plan. She sits alone in the bus station, staring at the clock, looking for something to tell her what to do. She has come here for a reason, but she can't remember what that reason is.

While Erdrich does not explicitly state why, Albertine elsewhere alludes to a strained relationship with her mother; however, Albertine's desire to become a doctor and her aversion to traditional marriage suggests their disagreement stems from Albertine's refusal to adhere to traditional notions of womanhood.

A man suddenly appears, and he seems to be just what Albertine is looking for, and while she doesn't know it, she is just what the man is looking for as well. Albertine thinks he looks like a soldier, and like a Native American, so she decides to follow him. She follows him outside into the cold and keeps a safe distance as he walks down the street.

Albertine and the man—soon to be revealed as Henry, Jr.—are, in a sense, looking for each other because they are both Native Americans in an overwhelmingly white society. More specifically, Albertine and Henry, Jr. are from the same tribe, which again underscores the importance of tribal connection in Native culture.

The man, Henry Lamartine, Jr., knows that the girl is following him. She isn't exactly pretty, and she looks like "jailbait," but he is still curious. As Henry walks, his body aches. He has so much shrapnel stuck in his body that he set off the metal detector at the airport. He turns to face the girl and learns that she is Albertine Johnson, one of the Kashpaws from back home on the reservation. Albertine knows him as well, she discovers, and tells Henry that she knows his brother, Lyman.

Henry, Jr. thinks that Albertine looks like "jailbait" because she is so young, but that doesn't deter him. Henry is just getting back from Vietnam, where he was a prisoner of war, and he sees Albertine as a badly needed human connection—one that also happens to be closely connected to home and family, especially since Albertine is technically Henry, Jr.'s brother's cousin.

Henry and Albertine find a bar and drink for most of the evening, and then they find a nearby hotel. When they arrive, President Nixon is on the television behind the desk. Henry signs them in as Mr. and Mrs. Howdy Doody, and the desk clerk suspects they are just looking for a place to "shack up" for the night, but he doesn't want to get involved. In the room, Albertine goes into the bathroom, and Henry sits thinking about her. He has been in Vietnam and hasn't seen Native American woman in a while. As he thinks about Albertine, he sees her as an Asian women he had encountered in Vietnam. She was on the ground looking up at him with eyes like a Chippewa and was bleeding badly from a bayonet wound.

The desk clerk can obviously see that Albertine is much younger than Henry, and since he believes they are there to "shack up," he clearly thinks sex is involved, yet he says nothing. He never asks if Albertine is okay, and even though Albertine isn't in any serious danger, the novel implies that her sexual encounter with Henry is, at the very least, inappropriate. For all the clerk knows or cares, Albertine could be in serious trouble, yet he says nothing, which speaks directly to the vulnerability of women in potentially dangerous or violent situations.

Albertine comes out of the bathroom, and Henry asks her if she wants to go to bed. He promises not to touch her (he's too drunk anyhow, he says), and she agrees. Henry leaves the light on as he gets into bed, and Albertine props herself up on her elbow, staring at him. She starts to unbutton her shirt, and he helps. Before long, they are both naked and Henry is on top of her. Once it is over, Albertine rolls over as far away from him as possible and goes to sleep.

Henry is obviously suffering from posttraumatic stress after the war. He must leave the light on to sleep, and he sees dead Asian girls reflected in Albertine. The fact that Albertine rolls far away from Henry after they have sex suggests that she is ashamed or otherwise uncomfortable with what they have done. While this sexual encounter is consensual, Erdrich implies that Albertine, in her youth, has still been taken advantage of.

The next morning, Albertine wakes up and is unsure of where she is, but then she feels the ache between her legs and remembers. She looks to Henry and is just about to say his name when she touches him gently on the back. He wakes up instantly, screaming violently, and Albertine jumps from the bed, crossing her arms over her face. Shaking, in a moment of terror, Albertine removes her arms from her face and discovers that Henry is weeping.

Again, Henry is clearly suffering deep psychological trauma from the war. Albertine catches him off guard, and when she does, he responds violently. Henry's weeping suggests not only that he is traumatized by war, but that he is also ashamed that he has treated Albertine in such a way. In addition to Henry's violent wakeup, the ache between Albertine's legs implies that their sex was quite violent as well.

THE RED CONVERTIBLE

Lyman Lamartine was the first to own a **convertible** on the reservation. He had bought it together with his brother, Henry, Jr. Lyman has always been good at earning money, and when he was just 15, he got a job as a dish boy at the Joliet Café. He worked his way up to busboy and then manager, and by the time he was 16, he owned the café. That year, the worst tornado in North Dakota history blew through town and trashed the café. Structurally, the building was a total loss, and Lyman got a sizable insurance payout—in his mother, Lulu's, name of course.

Lyman Lamartine represents the connection between the Lamartines and Kashpaws. Lyman is technically a Kashpaw, and Lulu claims this is where he gets his sound money sense, as the Kashpaws have always been successful.

Lyman wasted much of the money, and then he saw the car. He was on a ride up to Winnipeg with Henry, and in Lyman's pocket was the last of the insurance money. When they saw the **Oldsmobile** with the "FOR SALE" sign in the window, they couldn't believe it. Henry had two weeks' worth of pay in his pocket, and along with Lyman's money, it would be just enough to buy the car and gas money home. So they did.

Lyman and Henry's shared convertible is symbolic of their connection as brothers—they buy the car together and then further bond as they restore it together. Henry and Lyman's Oldsmobile also represents the influence of white, European culture on Native identities. The car is a product of technology brought to America by white settlers, but the Oldsmobile is undoubtedly an important part of Henry and Lyman's lives, which suggests Native culture and identity is, by necessity, imbued with this obvious influence.

Somewhere in Montana, Lyman and Henry saw a Native American girl hitchhiking. They pulled up alongside of her in the **Oldsmobile** and told her to get in. They asked her where she was headed, and when she said Alaska, Lyman and Henry decided to drive her anyway. It was in Alaska in 1970 that Henry remembered that he had signed up to join the army, so he went off to Vietnam. Lyman doesn't know much about Henry's time in Vietnam, except that he was captured by the enemy not long after he arrived.

As Henry was captured as a prisoner of war within days of arriving in Vietnam, it is safe to assume that his experience was a traumatizing one. The brothers' impromptu trip to Alaska, made possible by the car, is a pleasant memory for Lyman, and it enabled him to grow closer with Henry, Jr. before he went off to Vietnam, after which Henry is never the same.

Lyman writes Henry many letters while he is in Vietnam and tells him about the **convertible**, which he keeps in the yard up on blocks. Lyman is lucky and is never drafted, but when Henry comes home in 1974, he is a completely different man. Lyman notices that Henry is "jumpy and mean," and he is withdrawn and distant. Lulu doesn't know what to do. She can take Henry to the Native American doctor on the reservation, but she doesn't trust old Moses Pillager. Moses is jealous of Lulu's husbands, and she fears he will take it out on Henry. The white man's doctor is out of the question, too, since they will probably keep him and refuse to let him go.

The novel implies that Henry is "jumpy and mean" because he is suffering from posttraumatic stress. The war has been horrific, and he was likely mistreated as a prisoner of war, and Henry is struggling to cope with his experiences. Lulu's fear that the white man's doctor will place Henry in an institution or mental hospital and reflects the racism present in American society. Presumably, Lulu worries that Henry will automatically be institutionalized because he is Native American.

Lyman looks out to the **Oldsmobile** and knows exactly what to do. He takes a hammer and smashes the tail pipe and muffler. He rips the muffler loose from the under carriage and stands back to inspect his work. The car looks even worse than the average "Indian car," and he waits for Henry to notice it. Henry finally notices the car over a month later, and suddenly, Henry is talking again. Lyman spends the next several days helping his brother fix the Oldsmobile. When it is finally done, Henry turns to his brother and tells him it is time to take it for a ride.

Not only do Lyman and Henry bond and strengthen their relationship during the restoration of the car, the Oldsmobile also helps Henry to cope with the trauma of the war. Even though Henry later commits suicide, the car allows him one last chance to enjoy life and his brother.

Henry and Lyman get into the **Oldsmobile** and head toward the Red River. Henry wants to see the high water, he says, and the drive is pleasant through the breathtaking spring landscape. When they arrive, the river is rushing, full of winter trash. Henry hands Lyman the keys and tells him to keep the car outright. Lyman refuses. He doesn't want the car, he says. They argue back and forth other over who should keep the car, but they are soon laughing. Looking at the rising river, Lyman suggests they go back. They can even find some Kashpaw girls, he says. Henry shakes his head. The Kashpaw girls are "crazy," he claims, "every damn one of them."

Telling Lyman that the Kashpaw girls are "crazy, every damn one of them," is Henry's way of keeping Lyman away from the Kashpaw girls, since they are technically his relations. Henry has just recently had his encounter with Albertine, who is one of the Kashpaw girls, and it is doubtful that he thinks she is "crazy," especially since he was the one to break down during their night spent together.

Lyman reminds Henry that they *are* the "crazy Lamartine boys," but Henry isn't ready to go back just yet. Henry stands up and heads for the water. He has to cool off, he says, and jumps in the river. He tells Lyman that his boots are filling with water, and his head slips below the water's surface. Lyman waits just a moment and then jumps in behind him.

Ironically, Lyman is not a Lamartine boy, and while Henry, Jr. is, *his father is Beverly, not Henry Lamartine. Just as Nector does earlier in the book, Henry goes to the water to, in a way, cleanse himself, even if Henry's approach is much more extreme.*


By the time Lyman pulls himself out of the water, the sun has already set. He goes to the **Oldsmobile**, turns on the high beams, and drives it higher up the river's bank. Putting the car in first gear, Lyman takes his foot off the clutch and quickly gets out of the car. The car plunges into the river below, and Lyman watches until the lights finally disappear into the darkness.

By crashing the car into the river, Lyman can claim Henry's death was accidental, not suicide, but he also does this because the car represents his connection to Henry, Jr. He crashes the car in the river to keep it with Henry, thus keeping their connection, even in death.

SCALES

Albertine is on her third or fourth drink sitting at a bar with Gerry Nanapush and Dot Adare. Gerry hasn't had a drink in 13 years, and he sits at the bar with a tonic water. He is 35 years old and has been in and out of prison for most of his life. Albertine first met Dot in a bar just like this one, and it was through Gerry, too. At that time, Gerry had just broken out of prison, and since he was famous on the reservation, Albertine decided to find him.

Gerry Nanapush is famous on the reservation because he is constantly breaking out of prison. Lulu frequently claims that there is no way to cage a Nanapush, which in itself is a form of resistance to white governmental control and oppression. Gerry doesn't believe in white laws, only justice, and there is little justice in Gerry's imprisonment.

Albertine found Gerry at a nearby bar, so she sat next to him and starting talking. Then Dot came in, at least six months pregnant, and threatened to "bend [Albertine] out of shape." She charged Albertine, but Gerry caught her mid-run, allowing Albertine a chance to run away. The next day, Albertine reported for her first day of work at a local construction site and discovered the only other woman on the job was Dot Adare.

Like many of the women in Love Medicine, Dot is incredibly strong and does not adhere to popular stereotype of femininity and womanhood. Society expects women to be restrained and weak, but Dot is aggressive and strong, and she will engage in a fistfight even if she is six months pregnant.

Dot glared at Albertine for most of the day, but Albertine wasn't convinced Dot recognized her until Dot cornered her by the coffee truck. Albertine sized Dot up and quickly realized she could never overpower her. Plus, she *was* very pregnant. Albertine tried to explain that she wasn't after Gerry, but Dot only appeared to get more upset. Finding no other option, Albertine threw her coffee in Dot's face and took off running. Later that afternoon, Dot appeared out the door of the weigh shack where she worked, looked at Albertine, and threw her arms in the air. "Okay then!" Dot yelled. As she turned back to the weigh shack, Albertine could see that Dot was laughing.

Albertine stands up to Dot and won't be bullied by her, which makes Albertine yet another example of a powerful woman in Erdrich's novel. Dot appreciates and respects Albertine's display of power, even if she is on the receiving end of it. Like Dot, Albertine won't be pushed around, and the two women spark a meaningful, if unexpected, friendship based on this common trait.

Dot's baby had been conceived in the visiting room during Gerry's last prison stay. She sat on his lap in the crowded room, and they somehow managed to do the deed through a hole in Dot's pantyhose and a rip in Gerry's coveralls. Not long after that, Gerry broke out of prison. Gerry was constantly breaking out of prison and getting caught again, and most of the time he spent there had nothing whatsoever to do with his original crime. Still, Gerry was pretty good at breaking out, and he once even slipped through a prison wall greased up with lard.

Gerry was initially sent to prison for a bar fight—a minor crime—but he has been breaking out ever since, which has seriously added time to his sentence. Law enforcement paints Gerry as a dangerous criminal, which Erdrich implies is due to Gerry's race, but he is exactly the opposite. Gerry is depicted as a decent man who is merely the victim of circumstance and a racist legal system.

Each time he broke out, Gerry would go back to Dot and hide in her trailer. Gerry always said he "believed in justice, not laws," and since he had already paid for his original crime—a bar brawl with a racist man who insulted him—Gerry would not concede to go back to prison. Now, with Gerry hidden in her trailer, Dot is angry at him for making her go through most of her pregnancy alone, but she loves him deeply and can't turn him away.

Gerry and Dot are also evidence of the power of love, or "love medicine," as it is known in the novel. Their love survives years of prison, and Gerry is constantly trying to make his way back to her.

One day in October, Dot arrives to work at the weigh shack with what she thinks are labor pains. She tells Albertine that Gerry better hurry up and get there, and moments later he appears at the door. He squeezes into Dot's compact car and they head for the hospital. Days pass and Albertine hears nothing from Dot or Gerry. It is already a week after Dot's due date, and she is anxious for news. Suddenly Gerry pulls up on an old motorcycle. He tells Albertine that Dot is asking for her, and she climbs on the back.

Gerry has a knack for breaking out of prison and showing up at the exact right time, as he does here when Dot goes into labor, and at the end of the book when he shows up at King's apartment in Minneapolis. Gerry's sudden appearance also speaks to the love he has for Dot—he seems to inherently know when she needs him.

Gerry and Albertine arrive at Saint Adalbert's Hospital, where they go directly to the waiting room. Gerry is allowed to see Dot, and he is gone for nearly 30 minutes. He comes back to the waiting room and sits silently for a minute, then he stands up. He tells Albertine that he is going out for cigars, and Albertine thinks about the time Dot told her that Gerry went out for a roll of toilet paper and was gone for eight months. Albertine is just about to tell Gerry that it is okay to run, when two local cops come through the door. Gerry looks at them and back to Albertine, and then he runs to a back window, jumping three stories to the ground below.

Saint Adalbert, for whom the hospital is named, is further evidence of how widespread Christianity is in American society, but the story of Saint Adalbert also lends increased insight into the story. Adalbert of Prague was sainted around the year 999 due to his efforts to convert Baltic Prussians, the indigenous people of the Baltic region, to Christianity, just as white settlers have converted large numbers of Native Americans to Christianity.


Outside, Gerry lands on the police car, caving in the entire hood. Albertine makes it outside just in time to see Gerry jump on the old motorcycle, pop a wheelie, and race down the street. Two weeks later, Dot comes back to work at the weigh shack, along with her newborn daughter. A few weeks later, Albertine and Dot hear that Gerry had been caught by the police down on the Pine Ridge reservation. There are plenty of guns on that reservation, so when federal agents stormed the place, Gerry pulled a gun. He shot and killed one of the cops, a state trooper according to the local paper, and has been sent to a prison in Illinois.

Like Lulu, Gerry is presented almost as if he possesses some kind of magic superpower, as he is easily able to elude capture, escapes prison again and again, and also seems to innately know when Dot needs him. Lipsha is deeply bothered when he finds out that his father, Gerry, is accused of killing a man. Gerry, however, never admits to the crime and instead claims that it doesn't matter if he did it or not. Gerry will still be guilty, and he will still be imprisoned because his racist society is more comfortable if Gerry is locked up.

CROWN OF THORNS

Gordie took his first drink in a long time about a month after June's death, and he has been in a downward spiral ever since. His hands seem to pick up drinks without any conscious thought, like they remember something he can't. His hands are always remembering things he would rather forget. Gordie looks at his hands now, large and shaking at Eli's table, and thinks of how he was once a Golden Gloves boxer, but he mostly just hit June.

Gordie is obviously struggling with June's death and feels guilty for having abused her for so long. Erdrich draws a direct parallel between Gordie's hands—and particularly his fists—and his drinking problem, which suggests that Gordie drinks to cope with the damage and pain he knows he caused June when she was alive.

Eli pushes an egg across the table at Gordie. It is six o'clock in the morning, but Gordie refuses to eat. Gordie picks up a beer can, empties it into his mouth, and stands to leave. He goes outside and begins to shake again. He hasn't eaten properly in over a week, and his clothes hang off him in a sickly way. Gordie gets in his car and manages to make it home. A few more bottles will straighten him out, Gordie thinks. He calls a friend and convinces him to buy four bottles of liquor to hold Gordie off until payday. Gordie's friend agrees—as long as Gordie pays him interest, of course.

Likely, Gordie has been up all night drinking, and Eli is trying to get some food in him. The fact that Gordie goes to Eli's when he is need of support (Eli is Gordie's uncle and June's adoptive father) harkens to the importance of family in the Native community, but Eli isn't able to comfort Gordie in any way. Gordie is so deep in the clutches of his alcoholism that he is slowly drinking himself to death and there is little anyone can do to help him.

Days pass and the liquor is gone. Gordie manages to find a couple bottles of wine, but he knows he is too far gone. He feels trapped in his small house, and he can't remember the last time he slept. Gordie bought the tiny house and fixed it up not long after June left him. Now, sitting in the silent space all alone, Gordie grows acutely aware of the fact that he both misses June and is glad to be free of her. Still, he finds it hard to believe she isn't coming back. "I love you, little cousin!" Gordie yells out loud. "June!" Gordie is instantly regretful that he spoke June's name out loud. His grandmother, Rushes Bear, always said one should never call the name of the dead—you can never be entirely sure that they won't answer.

In some Native American cultures, speaking the name of the dead is strictly forbidden. Not only is it considered an insult to the dead to speak their name, some believe that speaking the name of the dead is capable of conjuring their spirit. Gordie's immediate fear in saying June's name is a reflection of his Native culture and spiritual beliefs, but it is also a reflection of his shame in mistreating June. Gordie knows that if June's spirit comes back, she has every reason to harbor resentment against him; however, Gordie very clearly loves her.

Sitting in the house alone, the quiet gets to Gordie, so he switches on the television, turning the volume up loud. He flips on the vacuum in the corner and looks to the window in the bathroom. Gordie sees June's face reflected in the dark glass and turns to run. He hears June bang on the window and then the sound of breaking glass. All of the appliances are on in the kitchen, and Gordie stands in the light of the open refrigerator hoping the light will save him from June. He plugs in the toaster oven into the wall to add to the chaos and blows the circuit with a loud crack. Standing in the dark, Gordie can feel June coming for him, so he grabs his keys and runs outside.

The novel implies that Gordie is hallucinating June's reflection in the window and the sound of breaking glass. He has been drinking nonstop for days, and he hasn't eaten or slept, and this, in addition to Gordie's profound guilt over his ill-treatment of June, has him convinced that June is coming back to haunt him. Gordie turns on the television and all the appliances in an attempt to ward off June's spirit—or in this case, her memory—but he is ultimately unsuccessful.

Driving away from the house, Gordie is so relieved to be away from June that he forgets how sick he is. His hands shake as he holds the steering wheel, but he continues to drive slowly and tries to concentrate. Gordie hasn't gone far when a deer runs out in front of his **car**. He takes it square in the hood and gets out to assess the damage. The deer, a doe, is clearly dead. Someone on the reservation will probably trade her for a bottle or two, Gordie thinks, so he drags the doe back to the car.

Gordie is sick because he has again run out of alcohol and is in acute withdrawal. It is clear that Gordie is trying to run from the memory of June and how badly he abused her during their rocky marriage. Gordie is so intent on drinking away June's memory that he immediately thinks about how many bottles the deer is worth upon seeing the dead animal.

Back at the **car**, Gordie can't get the trunk open, so he is forced to cram the dead deer into the backseat. She fits perfectly, and Gordie gets back in and starts driving. As Gordie drives, he looks in the rearview mirror and sees the doe sit up. She was only stunned, he thinks, and then their eyes meet. The deer looks right through Gordie and knows that he has "woven his own crown of thorns" and does not deserve to escape his pain. Gordie grabs the tire iron he keeps under the seat and strikes the deer in the head, directly between the eyes. Gordie turns and continues driving.

The fact that Gordie is willing to stuff a dead deer in the backseat of his car just to get a bottle of liquor is a testament to how bad Gordie's alcoholism is. Gordie's "crown of thorns" is a reference to the wreath made of thorns that Christ was forced to wear on his head by the Romans during the Crucifixion. The crown of thorns was part of the Romans' punishment of Christ, but since Gordie has made his own crown, this implies that Gordie is deserving of his punishment.

As Gordie continues to drive, his shaking worsens. He can feel it deep in his bones, and he is forced to stop the car. After Gordie pulls over, he looks to the backseat and knows in that moment that he has "just killed June." Shaking, Gordie gets back into the car and drives.

When Gordie kills the deer, it serves as metaphor for the role he played in June's death. While Gordie did not have anything to with June's death directly, his abuse is why she kept running off. Thus, Gordie bears some responsibility for June's death.

At the Sacred Heart Convent, Sister Mary Martin de Porres can't sleep. She is startled by Gordie's sudden presence at her window and can't figure out what anyone would be doing sneaking around the convent this time of night. Gordie has come to confess, he says urgently. Sister Mary tries to explain that she isn't a priest, but Gordie continues to talk and is obviously distraught. She finally agrees to hear his confession, and while Gordie's words are hurried and unclear, Sister Mary is able to figure out that this man at her window has just murdered his wife.

In Gordie's delirious state, he absolutely believes that he has just bludgeoned June to death in the back of his car. In going to the convent to confess, Gordie officially takes responsibility for his role in June's actual death and the years of abuse he forced her to live through, which, Erdrich implies, slowly broke June down and killed her little by little.

Sister Mary asks Gordie where his wife is now, and he leads her out to the car. As Sister Mary approaches the car, she braces herself for the dead woman in the back, but when she looks in, she discovers the dead and bloody deer instead. She climbs in just to be certain and then gets out, running directly at Gordie. Gordie runs into the woods, and Sister Mary goes back to the convent to call the police. As she waits with the other nuns for the police to arrive, they can hear Gordie wailing somewhere deep in the woods.

While Sister Mary's interaction with Gordie is undoubtedly distressing, she reacts to him like he is a criminal, or some kind of animal, rather than a man in obvious pain who needs help and compassion. This disregard of Gordie as a human being is yet more evidence of the racism he is forced to endure because of his Native American identity.

LOVE MEDICINE

Lipsha Morrissey has not made much of his life. His grandmother, Marie, frequently tells him that he is no good, and she constantly reminds him that she saved him from his own mother, who wanted to drown him in a potato sack. Lipsha has always been grateful for Grandma Marie, but after a while, even gratitude gets old. Lipsha tells his grandmother that he has more than made up for her taking him in. He waits on her hand and foot and would do anything for her. Plus, Lipsha is the only one who can really take care of Grandpa Nector since he started losing his mind.

The awful lie that Marie tells Lipsha about his biological mother (who he later finds out is June) is difficult to square with Marie's character. She deeply loves Lipsha, even more than her biological children, so it is hard to reconcile the fact that she would knowingly and deliberately hurt him. Lulu later suggests Marie's love is exactly why she does it—Marie wants Lipsha to feel like she is the only "mother" he has so he will never leave her.

Lipsha is well known on the reservation for having "the touch." He can heal others and take away their pain just by placing his hands on them. Lipsha often relieves the pain of the varicose veins in Marie's legs, and the ladies on the reservation pay him five dollars to touch their arthritic joints. Even with "the touch," however, Lipsha can't get through to Nector.

Lipsha's "touch" has the effect of making him appear nearly divine. He later explains his supernatural power as something similar to Lulu's perceived magical power and Marie's ability to mysteriously know things, which he further connects to their Native culture.


Lulu Lamartine, the woman who has always loved Nector, says that Nector's mind got so full it exploded, and Lipsha doesn't doubt it. Lipsha has always thought that is why so many Native Americans are alcoholics. Statistically, Native Americans are the smartest humans on earth, Lipsha says, and their minds are collectively exploding. Nector is so smart that he is aware he is going insane, he just can't stop it, and he doesn't seem to care.

Here, Lipsha implies that alcoholism is common among Native Americans because their racist society marginalizes and subjugates them when they are obviously valuable as human beings and have much to offer society. Lipsha highlights how indigenous people are just as capable, if not more, as their white counterparts, yet they are denied the same rights and freedoms. Thus, drinking is a sort of escape.

Not long after Nector sparks up his affair with Lulu again, Marie asks Lipsha to put "the touch" on Nector. Lipsha doesn't want to, and he knows that it won't work, but he does it anyway. As Lipsha places his hands on the sides of Nector's head, Nector looks up at Marie. "Let's pitch whoopee," he says to her. Marie rolls her eyes and knocks Lipsha's hands from Nector's head. There will be no more whoopee with anyone, Marie says to Nector with exasperation. As Lipsha watches his grandparents, he realizes that love doesn't get easier as one gets older. Nector looks at them and laughs.

Even in Nector's unhinged state, he is still in love with both Lulu and Marie, which suggests that true love remains even when everything else is forgotten and one's health begins to fail. Nector can't remember anything, except that he loves both Lulu and Marie, which is reflected in the playful way Nector propositions Marie for sex. Marie's response is one of love as well; she is clearly irritated with Nector's infidelity, but she can't help but love him.

Later at church, Lipsha sits next to Nector, who begins to shout his prayers at the top of his lungs. Lipsha asks his grandfather why he is shouting, and Nector says it is because God doesn't hear him if he doesn't shout. Lipsha thinks for a while and decides that God has been losing his hearing ever since the Old Testament. He thinks about the Chippewa Gods, like Nanabozho, the trickster, and the water monster called Missepeshu. If you know how to ask them, they will do you a favor, and you don't have to shout for them to hear you, Lipsha thinks.

Lipsha and his family regularly attend Catholic mass and obviously put stock in Christianity, but the religious beliefs of Lipsha's Native culture have stayed with him as well. Lipsha's thoughts of Nanabozho and Missepeshu while sitting in a Catholic church implies that Lipsha has faith in both Christianity and his Native American religion and spirituality.


God must be going deaf, Lipsha thinks, or else they aren't speaking his language. There isn't another way to explain all the awful things Lipsha has seen growing up, like Gordie drinking himself to death and June being left to freeze to death on the side of the road by some white man. There was the "outright germ warfare" of the government and the mass killings of Native Americans, which, Lipsha believes, can only be explained by God's poor hearing.

Here, Lipsha implies that God has forsaken the Native American people. He mentions the mass genocide of indigenous people at the hands of the United States government by introducing fatal diseases such as smallpox, and he refers to the violence and abuse indigenous women like June must face. But God doesn't seem to hear their prayers.



Later that day, Lipsha sees Nector outside talking to Lulu in the courtyard, but when he goes to the courtyard to get him, Nector is already gone. Lipsha looks all around the senior living complex where Nector and Marie live (Lulu lives there, too), but he can't find Nector anywhere. Lipsha even knocks on Lulu's door, but there is no answer. Something tells Lipsha to go into the laundry room, and when he opens the door, he finds Nector and Lulu having sex up against a bank of washing machines.

While Nector hasn't forgotten in his mentally precarious state that he loves Lulu, he has forgotten that he needs to hide it for the sake of his wife, Marie. Nector is constantly caught with Lulu—at the candy machine, in the courtyard, and now the laundry room—and it feeds the gossip at the senior living complex and causes Marie embarrassment and stress.

Lipsha slips into the laundry room and closes the door. He doesn't quite know what to do. Yelling at Nector and Lulu to stop doesn't feel quite right to Lipsha. Suddenly, as Nector and Lulu pick up the pace of their love making, Lulu's wig flies off her head, catching Nector off guard. He steps back and stares at Lulu for a moment with a bland expression. Nector tells Lulu that it was the letter that started the fire, not him, but Lulu doesn't know anything about a letter. Lipsha steps forward and hands Lulu her wig and leads Nector out of the room.

The novel later reveals that Lulu's hair was burned off when Nector accidentally set Lulu's house on fire years earlier. He had gone to Lulu's house to give her the letter in which he promised to leave Marie, but he ended up changing his mind and starting the letter, and the house, on fire with a discarded cigarette. The sight of Lulu's bald head brings this memory back to Nector, which he clearly feels guilty about.

Lipsha doesn't know what to do with Nector. It isn't so much that Nector is going insane, it is that he shamelessly chases after Lulu. If Lipsha could just get Nector to stay away from Lulu, it would solve most of their problems. Marie is finally the one to come up with a plan. Even though Marie refuses to admit that she has any Native American blood, Lipsha knows that she is a true Chippewa. Marie seems to just know things, like if Lipsha has been drinking, and she once told Gordie never to ride in a car with any of Lamartine boys because she had a bad feeling. Within a few days, Lyman and Henry crashed into the river and Henry was killed.

Like Lulu and Lipsha, Marie has seemingly supernatural powers, which Lipsha attributes to their Chippewa heritage. Marie's refusal to admit her Native blood suggests that she is ashamed of her Native identity (Marie says earlier that she does have Native blood, although not much). Marie has internalized the racism of broader society, and it affects the way she views herself and her identity.

Marie's plan involves "love medicine," which is "an old Chippewa specialty." Love medicine must be practiced by someone who knows what they are doing, and it can be very, very dangerous. Lipsha promises Marie he will think about the love medicine, and even he considers going to Fleur Pillager for help but decides against it. One day, while looking up at the sky, Lipsha sees two **geese** fly overhead, and he is struck with an idea for the perfect love medicine. Geese mate for life, Lipsha thinks. If he kills a mated pair and feeds their hearts to Nector and Marie, maybe they will mate for life, too, and Nector will forget about Lulu.

The conjuring of "love medicine" is likened to a religious ceremony or practice in Lipsha's Native American culture that requires an experienced practitioner. Ironically, Fleur Pillager, who is presumably schooled in "love medicine" is actually Lulu's mother, which is likely why Lipsha decides against asking for her help. The geese, which are symbolic of love and lifelong mating, are seen earlier in the novel as well. When Nector first meets Marie he is carrying two geese to town to sell.

Lipsha immediately tells Marie about his idea for the love medicine, and she borrows him Nector's gun so he can go hunting. Lipsha sits in the hunting blind near the water for what feels like hours before two **geese** fly overhead. Lipsha stands and aims the gun, firing off two shots, but he misses and the birds fly away. Disappointed, Lipsha decides to go to the Red Owl grocery store.

Lipsha misses the geese because he isn't as skilled a hunter as Nector was in his youth. Lipsha doesn't even have his own gun, which reflects the slow, gradual assimilation of Native people through the generations. Lipsha no longer lives off the land in the traditional way—he goes to the grocery store.

Later, Lipsha walks home with two frozen turkeys. He has convinced himself that the power of the love medicine is not in the hearts of the **geese** but in "the faith of the cure." The next day, after the birds have thawed, Lipsha removes the hearts and wraps them in a handkerchief. He climbs the hill to the Sacred Heart Convent and asks the priest to bless the turkey hearts, but the priest tells him to ask Sister Mary instead. When Sister Mary won't bless the hearts either, Lipsha dips his fingers in the holy water on his way out the door and blesses the hearts himself.

Lipsha's attempt to have a Christian blessing performed on the love medicine is more evidence of the blending of his Native faith and spirituality with Christianity. Lipsha goes out of his way to have the hearts blessed, which suggests he has great faith in both the love medicine and Christianity. Sister Mary and the priest disregard both Lipsha and the love medicine when they won't bless the hearts, but Christianity is so important to Lipsha that he blesses the hearts himself.

Back at Marie's, Lipsha presents his grandmother with the raw hearts and she immediately pops one in her mouth and swallows it. "Now that's true love," Lipsha thinks to himself in disgust. Marie says that she will find a way to get Nector to eat his, and then she calls him to lunch. She serves Nector the heart raw on a bed of lettuce and tells him it has been ordered by the doctor because he needs iron in his blood. Nector is hesitant. He doesn't want to eat the heart, but he finally puts it in his mouth after Marie orders him to. Nector rolls the heart around in his mouth, teasing Marie, and she stands up and swats him hard between the shoulder blades, trying to get him to swallow the heart—only Nector chokes on it and dies.

Marie's willingness to gulp the heart down raw is a testament to her love for Nector, whereas Nector's hesitance to eat the heart suggest that his love for Lulu transcends even the deeply rooted Native tradition of love medicine, which aligns with Erdrich's argument that love can transcend anything. Marie's impatience and her deep desire for Nector to eat the love medicine is ultimately what kills Nector, which also suggests that love can cause people to do dangerous and destructive things in order to hold on to their loved ones.

Over the next days, the entire family comes home to bury Nector. Even Albertine has come home despite being very busy with her studies. She has recently quit nursing school and decided to go to medical school instead, and she sits now, her eyes red from crying, next to Lipsha in the church pew. Lipsha is suddenly struck by how dependable grief and death are, and he decides then and there to shake King's hand the next time he sees him.

Nector's death brings out the closeness of Lipsha's family, and they all lean on each other during their time of grieving. Nector's death has Lipsha thinking about how short life is, and he doesn't want to waste any more time denying that King is his brother. Furthermore, Albertine's decision to become a doctor instead of a nurse reflects her independence and desire to break from traditional feminine roles and jobs, such as nursing, which she considers oppressive.

Later that night, Lipsha sees the light on in Marie's room, and he decides to go in. Marie is sitting on her bed holding a **rosary** in her hands. Marie tells Lipsha that Nector isn't gone yet. She says that she has seen Nector since his death. It is the love medicine, Marie says. It is so strong Nector has come back from death to claim her. Sitting with Marie, Lipsha becomes aware of Nector's presence in the room. Speaking out loud, Lipsha tells Nector to go back and find June, and then he feels him leave the room.

The rosary, which is symbolic of Marie's connection to both Christianity and as well as June, means that Marie is again offering her modified form of prayer. Marie doesn't pray in the traditional sense, but she does touch the rosary occasionally in a secret prayer of sorts. Nector's presence in the room is evidence of his deep love for both Marie and Lipsha.

That night, Lipsha sleeps like a baby, then he finds Marie the next day and tells her the truth about the **geese** and the love medicine. But it isn't the love medicine that has brought Nector back, Lipsha tells Marie, it is because Nector loves her "over time and distance" and wants her to know that it isn't her fault that he is dead. Marie tells Lipsha that he has always been her favorite, and then places the **rosary** in his hand.

Lipsha's belief that Nector's presence is due to Nector's natural love and not the love medicine supports Erdrich's central argument that love transcends all else, as Nector loves Marie "over time and distance. As the rosary is symbolic of Marie's connection to June, Marie extends this connection to Lipsha as well when she gives it to him, which suggests that Marie herself is coming to terms with the fact that Lipsha is June's son, not her own.

RESURRECTION

In the days after Nector's death, Marie spends most of her time cleaning the house. She goes through Nector's clothes and books, deciding what to keep and give away, and finds his pipe in an old skin bag. The pipe pulls apart in two pieces, and Marie holds them in her hand before putting them back in the case where they are joined as one. Nector had told her that when the pipe is together, it connects heaven and earth. Marie decides to give the pipe to Lipsha.

Just as Marie does during other times of stress, she escapes into domestic chores, which again suggests she finds comfort and clarity within this traditional, gendered role. In giving the pipe to Lipsha, Marie not only connects Lipsha to Nector, but to June as well, which also suggests that Marie is beginning to let go of her sole claim to Lipsha.

In the kitchen, Marie begins to ready the corn for boiling when she sees Gordie walking up to the house. He is obviously drunk, and his clothes, which used to fit before he started drinking, hang off his wasting body. He sways back and forth before falling down into the grass near the back porch. Marie goes outside to Gordie and covers him with an old quilt. She flips him over so he is on his stomach, and she goes back into the house.

Marie takes care of Gordie with an efficiency that suggests she has dealt with drunkenness several times before. She doesn't bother to move him, but she still rolls Gordie on his stomach so he remains safe in the event he vomits and chokes. Gordie is clearly drinking himself to death on account of his guilt over June's death.

After a sleepless night, Marie can hear Gordie rummaging around in the kitchen. He is looking for the secret money she usually keeps hidden, but Marie has recently starting using a new spot. As Marie enters the kitchen, Gordie greets her and immediately asks for a shot of whiskey. She tells him that she doesn't keep any liquor in the house, but he doesn't believe her. He thought she took a little milk in her whiskey, he says, and as he moves closer to her, Marie picks up a small paring knife. Gordie again asks for a shot of whiskey, this time with anger, and goes to grab Marie. She reaches out with the knife and slices Gordie in the palm of his hand. He sits down, and she tosses him a rag to wrap his bleeding hand.

Marie's self-defense is further evidence of her strength and independence as a woman. Gordie clearly thinks that he can intimidate Marie and force her into giving him what he wants—alcohol or money—but she refuses to be a victim. Marie's quick slash with the paring knife not only implies that she won't put up with Gordie's aggression, but it also speaks to their connection as mother and son. Marie has a scar on her palm, and now Gordie has a wound to match.

Outside, Marie stands on the porch watching as shadows pass over the trees she had planted. She loses track of time and doesn't think to check on Gordie until she smells a strong chemical odor. She goes inside and finds Gordie in her storage closet with an empty bottle of Lysol and a loaf of white bread, jerking and seizing about the small room, knocking cleaners and waxes to the floor. He bounces out the door and down the hall to the bedroom, where he falls on the bed and continues to shake. Marie approaches him and can smell Lysol on his breath. She turns and leaves the room.

Gordie's alcoholism and need for more and more liquor has caused him to drink Lysol, a cleaning and disinfecting product, out of desperation for the alcohol content. Gordie has obviously poisoned himself with the harsh cleaner and has, presumably, attempted to absorb the poison by eating bread, which doesn't appear to be working. The extreme lengths Gordie will go to in order to get drunk and forget about June is more evidence of his guilt over having abused her.

Marie goes to the kitchen and picks up the axe from near the stove. She sits at the table, holding the axe in her lap. She is exhausted and closes her eyes. Marie falls asleep and is suddenly startled awake. Her hands grasp the axe handle in her lap, and she looks down the hall to see Gordie moving in the bedroom. He stumbles toward the kitchen and stands in the doorway. Marie stands up, holding the axe at her side. Gordie disappears from the doorway, and Marie considers just opening the front door and telling him to leave. But Marie knows if she lets Gordie go, he will surely die. He is her son and she can't bring herself to kick him out. Marie sits back at the table and holds the axe firmly in her lap.

As Marie sits with the axe, it is another display of her power and independence as a woman. She again refuses to be a victim, even if that means she must arm herself against her own son. The nonchalant way in which Marie grabs the axe suggests that she has had to protect herself against potential violence in the past, and this again underscores the disproportionate amount of violence and abuse against women in the Native community. This is obviously not the first time Marie has been in an unsafe situation.

THE GOOD TEARS PART 1

People have never understood Lulu Lamartine. They often call her "a cat" and say she is incapable of loving anyone, but that isn't true. Lulu is in love with everyone and everything. Lulu claims she is not cruel, nor is she "a shameless man-chaser," and she doesn't want people to forget how she has loved. Still, Lulu knows it isn't exactly her behavior that has surprised people over the years; it is her absolute refusal to apologize or shed a single tear. It isn't right for a woman not to cry, they say.

This passage again points to Lulu's oppression as a woman in a sexist society. Lulu's behavior doesn't align with what is considered acceptable behavior for a woman, and she is punished and degraded for it and made to feel like a "man-chaser." Lulu's refusal to apologize or change her behavior is evidence of her strength—she refuses to live her life on anyone's terms but her own.

"I'm going to tell you about the men," Lulu says, and the "handsome, distinguished man who burnt my house down." Nector had burned Lulu's house down not long after she married her third and final husband. Lulu's head was burnt bald in the fire, and it was all Nector's fault.

Lulu's perspective is somewhat different than Nector's, as she claims it is all his fault. Notably, Lulu had married Beverly yet told no one (this is the first time their marriage is mentioned), which again reflects her independence—she isn't looking for permission or validation in her relationships.

Nector was Lulu's first love. She remembers meeting him behind the dance hall to kiss, and she remembers when she realized he was seeing someone else. After Nector took up with Marie, Lulu went to live with Moses Pillager, but when Moses refused to move off the island, she married "a riffraff Morrissey for hurt and spite." When Lulu married the second time, she did so out of "fondness," but she always made a point to avoid Nector.

Each of Lulu's relationships and marriages were, in essence, attempts to either ignore or get back at Nector, which is further evidence of her longstanding love for him. Lulu claims to have married her second husband, Henry, because she was "fond" of him, but Lulu doesn't say she loved him. Instead, Lulu seems to have reserved her love for Nector alone.

Lulu's second husband was Henry Lamartine, and he was killed when his car stalled on the train tracks. Of Lulu's eight sons, not one of them was the "factual" child of Henry, but he had claimed them all the same. It has been 26 years since Lulu has lived in Henry Lamartine's house. Henry had built the house on tribal land, and after he died, it was where Nector came to visit Lulu, slipping through the window late at night.

Lulu doesn't seem to believe that Henry committed suicide, as she thinks his car simply stalled on the tracks. Marie believes that Henry killed himself because of Lulu's infidelity, but Lulu seems oblivious to this. Lulu seems to have more memories of Nector in the house than Henry, which again underscores Lulu and Nector's lasting love.

Although no one knows it, Lulu found a dead body in the woods when she was a child. She told no one about the dead body and returned the next day. The man still sat near her playhouse, and she removed his hat to make sure he was still dead. His eyes had clouded over, and Lulu put his hat back and went about cleaning her playhouse. It was late summer, about the time to leave for the government school. Lulu knew that some kids never came back from the school, and that is why she did what she did.

Lulu's discovery of the dead man is clearly linked with her memories of the residential school. She knows that some kids never come back from the school, which is because many of the children are killed outright or die from neglect. Lulu seems to think that her own death at the school is a possibility, which is why she is so curious about the dead body.

Lulu went to the dead body and pulled the old red scarf holding his pants up. The scarf fell to the ground and the man's pants popped open. Startled, Lulu jumped back. Now, she has absolutely no idea what she saw, if anything, or how long she stayed with the body. Not long after, Lulu got on the bus to go to the government school and began to cry. She cried all the tears she would ever cry, and afterward, her eyes simply dried up.

Not only is Lulu curious about death, she also seems to be curious about sex as well, which is why she opens the man's pants. Lulu seems somewhat ashamed of this curiosity, as she immediately runs away, but the fact that she doesn't cry until she boards the bus to the school again associates death with the residential schools.


Lulu has always been happy, but Nector has been the one exception to this general rule. Still, Lulu could not turn him away, and he spent five years sneaking in her window after Henry's death. During this time, Lyman was born "half Kashpaw," which is why he is so good with money, Lulu says. Soon, however, Nector proved to be a politician, and their love suffered.

Lulu feels that Nector should have found a way to stop her eviction from the Lamartine land, but Nector considers his work on the tribal council completely separate from his love for Lulu. Lyman is Nector's son, and both Lyman and Nector suspect this, but Nector never does claim him, which again underscores the connection between the Lamartines and Kashpaws.


Lulu has never believed in "human measurement," and she doesn't believe in "numbering God's creatures." She absolutely refuses to let United States census takers in the house, and she believes that the only reason the government counts Native Americans is so they know how many "to get rid of." Because of this, Lulu immediately disliked the government surveyors who came to measure the land where Henry's house sat. Henry never did buy the land officially because he didn't care much for measuring either. Henry believed just as Lulu does: if you want to start measuring land, you must "measure right" and realize that every inch of it "belongs to the Indians."

Erdrich juxtaposes the seizure of Henry's house and land against the largescale seizure of Native American land by the United States government. Erdrich's language and reference to "human measurement" and "numbering God's creatures" connotes the government practices of blood quantum and the measuring of Native blood, but it also connotes the genocide perpetrated by the government. The United States has already killed large numbers of Native Americans, and Lulu has no reason to believe they wouldn't do it again.

After Lulu received the eviction notice signed by Nector, he came to the house to talk to her. He claimed the eviction meant nothing and begged for her to let him in. He said the tribe was willing to move Lulu and the house, but she had refused to move. The Chippewas had already been moved from the other side of the Great Lakes, and she would not move one more inch west for anyone. She intended to stay right where she was.

Lulu's refusal to move further west is a reference to the Trail of Tears and the forced relocation of indigenous people from their Native land to areas west of the Mississippi that had been deemed "Indian land." Lulu's resistance is further evidence of her strength—even though she is expected to be weak and submissive as a woman, Lulu won't budge.

Soon after, Henry's brother, Beverly, came to visit and claimed he wanted to get married. He had been waiting for Lulu for years, he said, and she believed him. She always had a soft spot for Beverly, and she thought he would make a fairly easy husband. Lulu told Nector when he came to visit that she was going to marry Beverly, and he looked at her with a coldness in his eyes that said he would kill both Lulu and Beverly if she did.

Nector's aggressive reaction to Lulu's decision to marry Beverly is also evidence of the violence against women in the Native American community. Nector never does act on any desire to hurt either Lulu or Beverly, but the thought is clearly there. Nector has no intention of leaving Marie, but he still expects Lulu to remain available to him.

The tribe wanted to build a factory on the land where Henry's house stood that manufactured "equipment of false value." The factory was to make beaded bracelets and "plastic war clubs. Dreamstuff," Lulu says, so she went to the tribal council to fight. When she got there, Nector formally recognized Lulu on the floor, allowing her to speak. "Mrs. Lamartine has the floor," Nector had said, and Lulu heard someone remark that she also had half the men on it.

Lulu's argument that the Native trinkets the factory intends to manufacture are "Dreamstuff" of "false value" implies that the trinkets do not paint an authentic picture of Native culture and identity. The snide comment the man makes when Nector gives Lulu the "floor" is yet another dig at her promiscuity and an effort to further marginalize her.

Lulu argued her case to the tribal council. Their tomahawk factory "mocked" them all, she said, and everything in it would be of "false value." She said that the Lamartines have always lived on that land and her family deserved to stay. Lulu heard the crowd whispering about her sons and their different fathers. "Ain't the youngest Nector's?" someone asked. Lulu stood up straight and faced the council. She offered to name each of the fathers, right there in front of the entire council, and the men grew visibly nervous. Some had forgotten that Lulu even had their sons, but she hadn't.

Lulu's account of her argument to the tribal council again reflects her strength. Lulu will not back down in the face of a panel of men, and she tirelessly argues for their collective culture and Native identity just as fiercely as she does for her own home and reputation. Lulu's refusal to deny her sexual past and her willingness to publicly name the fathers of her sons suggests that she is not ashamed of her past, regardless of how others view it.

The council quickly decided to offer Lulu monetary restitution, and it wasn't long after that her house burned to the ground. After the fire, Lulu had wished that Beverly had been there to stop it, but he was back in Minneapolis. Lulu had already married Beverly with her sons as witnesses, but after a week, Beverly told her that he already had a wife. She was furious and sent her son, Gerry, back to Minnesota with Beverly to make sure he got a divorce. Lulu had no idea who Beverly's wife was, but Lulu was sure that she needed Beverly more than her.

Beverly's secret marriage to Lulu is more evidence of the power and messy complexity of love. Beverly openly admits to loving his wife, Elsa, but he has also been in love with Lulu for most of his adult life, which underscores loves power to make people do unreasonable or ill-advised things. Beverly obviously knows that marrying Lulu is bound to hurt both Elsa and Lulu, but he is compelled to marry Lulu anyway because he loves her so much.

Beverly and Gerry never did come back from Minnesota, and Lulu is pretty sure that Beverly somehow got Gerry thrown in jail. This thought, however, doesn't upset Lulu too much. She knows that her son can never be confined to a cell for very long. Even though she can't prove it, Lulu knows that Nector was the one to burn down her house because she could see it in his eyes.

Lulu implies that Nector burned her house down on purpose, which is clearly more evidence of violence against women—even if Nector has convinced himself it was an accident. Erdrich never does reveal what happens to Beverly, but it is King, not Beverly, who gets Gerry in trouble with the law.

On the day Nector burned down Lulu's house, all the boys were gone except for Lyman, the youngest. Lulu had left Lyman in the house for just a moment and ran next door to trade some rice for cigarettes and eggs. She agreed to have a cup of coffee with her neighbor, and then she noticed the smoke billowing from the windows. Lulu ran into the flaming house, looking for Lyman, and finally found him hiding in a back closet. She got him out of the house and fell in the front yard, her hair singed and gone. The reservation's fire truck was broken that day, although Lulu supposes "that was their plan."

Lulu firmly believes that both Nector and the tribal council burned her house down on purpose to get her off of the land; thus, the broken fire truck is merely part of their "plan" to conveniently clear her land. Tragically, Nector nearly kills Lyman in the process, who, ironically, also happens to be Nector's own son, which again underscores the deep connection between tribe and family.

After the fire, people in town were kind to Lulu and even offered to take her in. She refused, however, and instead stayed on the land in a tiny shack made from tin siding. Each of Lulu's boys stayed with her, and they lived there until the tribe built Lulu a new house on a better piece of land overlooking the entire town. "I accepted their restitution," Lulu says.

Lulu holds out and resists, and while she doesn't exactly get what she wants (she would have rather stayed in Henry's house on the same land), Lulu's "restitution" is evidence of her strength and power.

When Lulu turned 65, she began to go blind. She was able to get a small apartment at the senior living complex, and her sons helped her move in. Lulu's sons bought her some used furniture, and she bought some pictures to hang on the wall, including a copy of **Plunge of the Brave**.

The fact the Lulu hangs a copy of the Plunge of the Brave*—the painting that depicts Nector—on the wall so many years later suggests that Nector has not gotten out of the painting after all. In fact, the permanence of the painting (it hangs in the state capitol and is obviously reprinted), which symbolizes the oppression of indigenous people by white society, suggests that Nector will* never *get out of the painting, and this bleakly implies that indigenous people will always be discriminated against, in some way, by white society.*

THE GOOD TEARS PART 2

Lulu was not responsible for Nector losing his mind, regardless of what people said, and while she knew that Nector and his wife, Marie, lived at the senior facility, she did her best to avoid them. One day, Lulu inadvertently ran into Nector at the vending machines, but he didn't seem to recognize her. "It's me. Lulu," she said, but he stared blankly, talking about peanut butter cups.

Lulu's community is convinced she was responsible for Nector's dementia as they are sure, like Lipsha, that she is some kind of Ojibwe witch who can cast spells and manipulate people's minds. Lulu's community believes she attacked Nector's mind as punishment for breaking her heart.

All the time that Lulu had known Nector, all that mattered to him was his "greed." Strangely, that is what Lulu loved most about him, and it wasn't long before they were again embroiled in an affair. Lulu was in Grand Forks for an operation on her eyes when she heard about Nector's death. After she heard the news, Lyman asked if Nector was his father, but then he said he didn't want to know.

Lyman doesn't want to know if Nector was his father because Lyman considers himself a Lamartine regardless of who his father is, which again implies that familial connections go way beyond blood ties. Nector's "greed" is a reference to his selfish and undying love for Lulu, which she certainly feels for him as well.

Lulu didn't cry when Nector died, partly because nothing could be more painful than the day Lyman told her Henry had been killed. Moses told her once that drowning was the worst death for a Chippewa because they never made it to the next life. People who drowned were destined to wander forever, broken with nowhere to go. Nector didn't drown like Henry, but he did wander. Furthermore, Lulu didn't cry because she was worried she would never stop.

This passage again refers to Lulu's refusal to cry. Lulu doesn't cry because she isn't affected by the tragedies of her life; on the contrary, Lulu doesn't cry because she is extremely affected by such tragedies. By not crying, Lulu, in a way, denies these tragedies so she can keep on living, just as she did by crying all her tears before reaching the residential school. This is further evidence of Lulu's strength, both as a Native American and as a woman who has suffered pain and loss.

Not long after his funeral, Nector came to visit Lulu. He slipped in the window like he used to, and even though Lulu couldn't see him (she couldn't see anything), she could smell him and felt the weight of him next to her in the bed.

Nector visits Lulu in death as just as he does Marie, yet Lulu did not partake in the love medicine, which further supports Lipsha's theory that love, not magic, brings Nector back to them from the grave.

The next morning, Marie knocked on Lulu's door. Lulu had applied for an aid to help with her eye drops, but when none were available, Marie herself volunteered. Lulu let her in and the two sat drinking coffee and listening to the radio. Lulu thanked Marie for offering to help her, but she told Marie that she had no regrets. "That's all right," Marie said. "Somebody had to put the tears into your eyes."

Marie's comment that she "had to put the tears into [Lula's] eyes" implies that Marie's friendship helps Lulu to cry and more freely admit her feelings instead of covering them up. Marie and Lulu are both incredibly strong women, but they also find comfort in leaning on each other.

CROSSING THE WATER PART 1

Howard Kashpaw hides in the bathroom as his parents fight. His father, King, says something about a man who has "busted out again," and his mother, Lynette, screams. Lynette yells at her husband, calling him selfish, asking what she is supposed to do. As they shout and King kicks the table, Howard stares at the wallpaper and wonders how his family even manages to stay together.

Howard is obviously traumatized by King's abuse of Lynette as well. King's comment that a man "busted out again" is a reference to Gerry, who King has previously informed on to the police. King betrayed Gerry, and both King and Lynette are worried that Gerry is coming for revenge.

Howard is smarter than the other kids at school, and he learned to read early by watching *Sesame Street*. At school, Howard's teacher had asked him what he wanted to be called. His full name, King Howard Kashpaw, Junior, has many choices, she said, although he had never really thought of it that way. He told her to call him Howard, and that is what everyone at school has called him since. Once, while cutting out paper hearts, Howard asked his teacher what the word "PERMANENT" on the side of the marker meant. She said it meant "forever" and would never "erase." Perfect, Howard thought as he wrote "Howard" in the center of his paper heart.

By referring to himself as Howard and not King or Junior, Howard manages to distance himself from his father, who is clearly abusive to Lynette and presumably Howard as well. Howard is just a young boy, yet he knows that he doesn't want to be anything like his father, and this is reflected in Howard's delight over the permanence of the marker. If Howard writes his name as Howard and not King, this identity independent of his father cannot be "erased."

Hiding in the bathroom, Howard wonders if the police will come and get King again. It has happened before; the cops came in the middle of the day and put King in handcuffs. Howard hears one of the neighbors bang on their apartment door, and King and Lynette lower their voices. Howard hears them shut the door to their bedroom, and he closes his eyes to sleep.

Again, Howard is obviously traumatized by King's abuse, as he cowers in a bathroom waiting for the police to come and arrest him. Even the neighbors are bothered by King's abuse of Lynette, and they bang on the door when he gets too loud.

CROSSING THE WATER PART 2

Later, Lipsha sits at King and Lynette's table, and King tries to convince Lipsha to turn himself in to the military police. King was in the Marines, he says, during Vietnam, and there is no way Lipsha can outrun the M.P. King is "on the wagon," and he sits drinking 7-Up. Lynette asks Lipsha why he enlisted in the army in the first place, and Lipsha tells her he did it because he thought it was something his mother would have wanted. As soon as Lipsha says this, King and Lynette become awkward and quiet, and Lipsha knows for certain that King and Lynette know that Lipsha is June's son as well, which makes him King's half-brother.

Lipsha is the only one who did not know the truth about his identity, and when he mentions June in front of King and Lynette, Lipsha is poking around to see just how much they know and what they are willing to share. King's avoidance of alcohol suggests that he is trying to correct his poor behavior and his abuse of Lynette, yet he doesn't seem interested in making things right with Lipsha.

Lipsha had learned the facts of his parentage from Lulu Lamartine, the "jiibay witch" who put a spell on Nector when they were young. Lipsha didn't initially think much of Lulu—no one really does—but he respects her now, he says, because her reasons for telling him the truth were sincere. One day when Lipsha went to the senior citizens complex to visit Marie, Lulu stuck her head out of her door and told Lipsha to come in. Lipsha refused, but she persisted and pulled him inside.

The fact that no one thinks much of Lulu and most people refuse to respect her again reflects the oppression and discrimination she faces because of her gender and the choices she has made concerning her sexual past. Lulu's behavior and lifestyle makes others uncomfortable since she doesn't align with accepted notions of womanhood.

Lipsha was scared of Lulu at first. She seems to know things about other people's personal business, but since Lipsha himself has "the touch," he doesn't doubt her powers. Lulu's "insight" intimidates most of the people at the senior complex, except for Marie. Lipsha says that Marie and Lulu are "thick as thieves" since Nector's death, which even Lipsha thinks is a bit strange.

Marie and Lulu's unexpected relationship again harkens to tribal connections and family ties. Marie and Lulu are connected via their tribe and their myriad of familial connections (i.e., Lipsha, June, and Rushes Bear), which takes precedent over any personal disagreements they may have.

As Lulu pulled Lipsha into her apartment, he was surprised by her strength. She got right to the point. Lulu had talked to Lipsha's mother—not Marie, but Lipsha's real mother, June—long ago about Lipsha. He interrupts Lulu. Marie *is* his mother, Lipsha said, his other mother wanted to tie him up in a potato sack and drown him. No, said Lulu, that isn't at all what happened. And then she told him everything.

Lulu's surprising physical strength is more evidence of her power as a woman. Lipsha is caught off guard because he expects Lulu, as a woman, to be weak and demure. Lipsha's insistence that Marie is his mother again underscores Erdrich's argument that family need not be blood related.


Lulu told Lipsha that 20 years ago, her son, Gerry, fell in love with an older woman. That woman was June, and Gerry had wanted to marry her. The problem, of course, was that June was already married to Gordie and had a son, King. Before long, June was pregnant, and not long after her baby, Lipsha, was born, she handed him over to Marie. June wanted her baby to have a good life. "In fact," Lulu said to Lipsha, "it looks like you had the best life of them all."

June did not give Lipsha up because she didn't love him, she gave him up because she loved him enough to give him a better life. As Lulu's comment that Lipsha has had a better life than all of them points out, June succeeded in giving Lipsha a better life simply by walking away, which also points to June's incredible strength. Likely, June's decision to give Lipsha up was unbelievably difficult, but she still managed to make it.


Lipsha didn't believe Lulu at first, but then Lipsha noticed that he and Lulu have the same nose. Lulu told Lipsha that everyone knew the truth, even if they didn't say it, and Marie was too afraid to tell him because she loves him "like a son." Now that both June and Gordie are dead and Gerry is in prison, Lulu felt it was time to tell the truth. Lulu said she didn't have anything to lose; either she gained a grandson or lost a boy who didn't care for her anyway. The choice, Lulu had said, was Lipsha's.

Lipsha's sudden realization that Lulu is, in fact, his grandmother is more evidence of the deep interconnectedness within Native American tribes. This is the first time that Gordie's death is mentioned, which implies he has finally succeeded in drinking himself to death.

One night after Lulu told Lipsha the truth about his parents, Marie told Lipsha, seemingly for no reason, that she didn't trust banks anymore and was hiding all her money in a hankie in her underwear drawer. Marie had said she was an old woman and didn't need all the money, and Lipsha just knew she was telling him to take it. It was Marie's way of telling Lipsha to get off the reservation and get his head straight. So he did.

Marie offers her money to Lipsha in a coded way, which suggests she is herself coming to terms with Lipsha's true identity. In giving Lipsha the money, Maire is, in a way, giving him permission to go find his biological family. Marie finally understands that her connection to Lipsha is so strong, it cannot be undone simply because he finds his biological family.

Lipsha took a bus to a border town and found a room at a hotel for veterans. Lipsha tried to decide what to do next, but mostly he just drank and felt sorry for himself. He saw the sign advertising the army, and he decided to sign up. But then Lipsha saw, *really* saw, all the old veterans at the hotel. They were all neglected and drunk, and Lipsha didn't want to end up that way. He knew he had to run, and he wanted to meet his father, Gerry.

Like the Native Americans, the veterans are marginalized and neglected by the United States government. When Lipsha attempts to flee the military, this suggests that he doesn't want to open himself up to yet another reason for the government to treat him badly.

Lipsha had a vision after his friend accidentally hit him in the head with a whiskey bottle that Gerry Nanapush, who was being transferred to the state penitentiary in North Dakota, was going to break out of prison again soon. Following his vision, Lipsha has ended up in Minneapolis, sitting at King's table. Lipsha has never really cared for King (he always treated Lipsha badly as a child, calling him an "orphant"), but Lipsha puts those feelings aside.

Lipsha again is portrayed as having supernatural powers, much like Lulu and Marie, which Lipsha claims earlier in the novel is part of their Native American culture and identity. Lipsha seems to innately know that Gerry will show up at King's apartment, even though Lipsha has no idea of King's betrayal of Gerry.

Lipsha looks to Lynette. Her lip is bruised and swollen, and Lipsha realizes for the first time just how depressing their apartment is. It is narrow and dark, and the air is stale and smoky. Still, plants litter the room and paintings hang from the walls. There is even a velvet rug. Lipsha looks to King, Jr. and says hello. The child doesn't respond.

Again, it is obvious that Lynette is an abused woman, yet she still tries to make something of her depressing surroundings by adding paintings and plants to an otherwise drab apartment, which is further evidence of Lynette's strength and resilience. Howard does not respond to Lipsha's greeting because Lipsha refers to him as King, Jr.


King begins to tell Lipsha again that he can't hide from the military police, and then they all decide to play poker. Lulu has taught Lipsha how to cheat at cards, and he begins to easily win each hand. Lipsha asks King if he knew Gerry Nanapush when they were both in Stillwater prison. King said he did, and that he and Gerry were close until some other inmates started some rumors about King. Lipsha asks King if he thinks Gerry really killed the state trooper, but King says he doesn't know. This is the one thing Lipsha really wants to know about his father—whether or not he is a murderer.

Of course, the inmates did not start rumors about King. King's relationship with Gerry went downhill because King informed on Gerry to the police and betrayed him, not because of inmate gossip and lies. Lipsha is obviously coming to terms with the fact that his father may have killed a man, but even this is not enough to keep Lipsha from fostering a connection with Gerry.

As they play cards, Lipsha notices that Lynette and King are looking more "jumpy," and then a news report comes over the radio. Gerry Nanapush has escaped the state penitentiary, the newscaster says, and is currently at large in the area. Lipsha stands up and cheers, but King and Lynette are visibly shaken. Lipsha turns and sees Gerry standing in the room.

Like Lipsha, Lulu, and Marie, Gerry, too, seems to possess supernatural powers. His ability to break out of prison is certainly unsurpassed, and he has a knack of showing up at the right place at the right time. In this way, Gerry has the same connection to Native spirituality and magic that Lipsha, Marie, and Lulu do.

CROSSING THE WATER PART 3

Gerry Nanapush calmly walks into the room, sits at the table, and picks up the cards. He quietly explains in a voice completely at odds with his large stature that King is a snitch who had falsely gained Gerry's confidence only to deceive him. Gerry says that he trusted King, like he does all Native Americans, and told him all about his plans to escape prison, only to discover that King is "an apple," meaning he is "red on the outside" but "white on the inside."

Gerry's claim that King is "an apple" further underscores the racism and discrimination Native Americans must face. King apparently had no problem betraying Gerry as long as his decision to do so curried him favor with white people. King gladly sells out Gerry for his own benefit, which makes King just as bad as the white government in Gerry's eyes.

Gerry looks at Lipsha and asks his name. "I'm Lipsha Morrissey," he says proudly. Gerry arches his eyebrows and begins to laugh. As Gerry laughs, Lipsha notes that Gerry is marking the cards quickly and discreetly, just as Lulu had taught Lipsha. Gerry watches Lipsha as he does the same, and a smile crosses Gerry's face.

Gerry laughs and smiles because he knows that Lipsha is his son, and he can see Lulu's influence in the way Lipsha plays cards, which is further evidence of the interconnectedness between families and the tribe.

Gerry throws down the cards and tells King to deal him in, but they must decide what they will play for. King offers money, but Gerry isn't interested in King's money. Lipsha suggests they play for the car, the **Firebird** King bought with June's insurance money. Gerry is visibly affected by the mention of June. "Let's play for the car," he agrees. "June's car." King refuses. It is his car, he says.

Gerry, King, and Lipsha each see the Firebird as a symbol of June and a way to stay connected to her, but King is the only one who believes he is entitled to it. Erdrich, however, implies that Lipsha has just as much right to claim June as his mother as King does.

It is Lipsha's turn to deal, so he picks up the cards and shuffles. King gets a pair and Gerry is dealt a straight, but Lipsha deals himself a royal flush, "a perfect family." He lays downs the cards. "I'll take the keys," Lipsha says as the police pound on the door.

With Lipsha's royal flush he effectively wins June's car, but his hand reflects how he feels about his newfound family as well. Through the car, Lipsha is finally connected to June, but he is connected to his father, and he is grateful for this.

Howard runs to the door to open it, screaming, "King's here! King's here!" In the commotion, Lipsha turns to look at Gerry, but he is gone. The police burst in, and, seeing that Gerry is not there, they apologize to King and leave. Lipsha asks King for the **car**'s registration, and Lynette digs in a drawer for the paper, puts it in front of King to sign, and hands it to Lipsha. Lipsha turns and walks out the door.

Howard believes—or rather hopes—that the police are there to arrest King, which again speaks to the amount of abuse King heaps on his wife and son. Instead of being worried that his father will be arrested, Howard welcomes it.

CROSSING THE WATER PART 4

Lipsha goes out to the **Firebird**. One headlight is pointing toward the sky, and there are already dents and nicks in the paint. He gets in and turns the key, driving "in a general homeward direction." He opens the windows and feels the fresh breeze. He has a full tank of gas and nothing to do. Suddenly, a knocking sound comes from the back end of the car. Lipsha figures a tire iron is rolling around, so he continues to drive. The banging sounds pick up, and Lipsha pulls over. As the car stops, the knocking becomes panicked and violent.

Despite King's desire to hold on to the Firebird, it does not appear as if he respected the car much, just as he didn't respect June while she was alive either. The fact that Lipsha steers the car "in a general homeward direction" speaks to the power of tribal and familial connections, as they are both pulling Lipsha home.

Lipsha opens the trunk of the **Firebird** and Gerry Nanapush jumps out. He gets in the front seat, and Lipsha continues to drive. After a bit of silence, Gerry asks Lipsha to drive him to the Canadian border. He has a wife and daughter in Canada, Gerry says, and he would like to see them. Lipsha agrees and tells Gerry he is "home free," but Gerry says he will never have a home again. Lipsha understands this is true; Gerry can never go anywhere he is known without constantly looking over his shoulder.

Erdrich juxtaposes Gerry's loss of home with the general loss of Native American culture and lifestyle due to assimilation and westward expansion. Gerry isn't the only one who can't go home, as countless Native Americans have been driven from their ancestral lands and have no recourse to get it back.

Gerry asks Lipsha to tell him about the reservation, and Lipsha tells him all about Lulu and her new friendship with Marie. He tells Gerry about how Lulu has gained a reputation for being an "old-time traditional" Native American and argued "Chippewa claims." She even had her picture in a Washington newspaper, Lipsha says. He asks Gerry if he had known June, and Gerry admits he had, and that he was in love with her. They talk a bit about June, and then Lipsha asks Gerry if he really killed the state trooper.

Ironically, Lulu achieves much of what of Nector did before his own death. She embraces her Native culture despite forced assimilation and even argues with politicians to save ancestral "claims" to Native land like Nector did when he saves their land from the termination policy. Lulu is capable of the same things Nector was, which is another testament to her strength as a woman.

Gerry tells Lipsha that no one really knows who killed the trooper, and Lipsha tells Gerry that he is running from the military police. Gerry isn't surprised; he thought that Lipsha was running from something. Gerry asks if Lipsha has had his army physical yet, and Lipsha says he hasn't. Gerry tells him not to worry. When Gerry enlisted, he was turned down because his heart is "slightly fucked." Gerry tells Lipsha that Lipsha is a Nanapush. "We all have this odd thing with our hearts," Gerry says.

Gerry and Lipsha's shared heart defect is more evidence of their connection as father and son. Gerry claims that no one knows who killed the trooper because it really doesn't matter who pulled the trigger. Gerry will be blamed for the trooper's death regardless, which is further evidence of the widespread racism and discrimination that Native Americans face.

Lipsha and Gerry arrive at the border and shake hands. Gerry walks off into the darkness, and Lipsha turns off the **Firebird**'s lights, driving in darkness, until he arrives at the bridge crossing the boundary river near the reservation. Lipsha parks the car and looks over the edge to the dark water below. He thinks of his ancestors who offered tobacco to the water, and then he thinks about June. He knows now what she had done for him in giving him to Marie. The son June claimed, King, has suffered in ways Lipsha hasn't, and Lipsha is grateful for Marie. He reaches in his pocket, where Marie's hankie still sits, and climbs back into June's car. "So there is nothing to do but cross the water and bring her home," Lipsha says.

Lipsha's ride to Canada with Gerry in the Firebird offers them valuable time to bond. It is likely that Lipsha will never see Gerry again, but the connection they have made has given Lipsha lasting closure and comfort. Lipsha also has closure regarding June and Marie, and he remains connected to Marie regardless of the fact that she is not technically his mother. When Lipsha claims it is time to "bring her home," he implies that he is taking home both his new car and June, who has been trying to make it back for some time.

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