The Round House

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF LOUISE ERDRICH

Louise Erdrich was born in 1954 in Little Falls, Minnesota. Erdrich's father, a German-American man, enjoyed telling stories to his children, which Erdrich would later cite as one of her major writerly influences. Erdrich's mother, from whom she derives her Chippewa heritage, was an enrolled member of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians. Erdrich attended Dartmouth College in the 1970s, where she met her future husband, writer Michael Dorris. Dorris became Erdrich's writing and romantic partner. The couple married in 1981, raising six children together before their separation in 1995. Erdrich, a National Book Award recipient, has authored fifteen novels as well as numerous other works, and she owns a famous Native-focused bookstore in Minneapolis.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Louise Erdrich's work refers explicitly to various events in the history of the Ojibwe people, and in the history of indigenous people in the United States and Canada more generally. These include the vast catalog of Supreme Court cases dealing with Native rights and autonomy that Joe finds in his father's *Handbook*, starting as far back as the early 1800s. Generally, these decisions have centered on land rights. Erdrich links Mooshum's personal history to the Métis rebellions in Canada in the 1800s, led by Métis politician Louis Riel. Louis Riel was born in the Red River Settlement, a primarily Catholic and First Nations and Métis-inhabited area spanning present-day Manitoba and parts of the surrounding territories. During the mid-1800s, an influx of white protestant settlers moved to Red River, claiming formerly First Nations and Métis lands as their own. Louis Riel, emerging as a leader of the resistance to this injustice, tried to diplomatically come to an agreement with the Canadian government about land rights. After failing to do so, Riel and his followers rebelled, establishing an independent government that was later quashed by the Canadian one, forcing Riel to flee. He landed in Saskatchewan Valley, where eventually more white protestant settlers began to filter in. Ultimately, this led to a second rebellion, the North-West rebellion, that ended with Riel being executed by the Canadian government. Louis Riel's execution and the actions of the Canadian government towards the First Nations and Métis people during these rebellions continues to be a source of controversy in Canada's history. Erdrich also refers to historical cultural events, such as the attempted conversion of the Ojibwe people to Catholicism through boarding schools and missionaries. Established primarily in the 19th and 20th centuries, these boarding schools eventually came under the supervision of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, which, at the time, sought to assimilate Native people to white American culture rather than conserving Native cultures. The BIA-approved boarding schools were plagued by neglect, abuse, and misconduct. Ultimately, after the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975, boarding schools became less and less prominent. Nowadays, in response to the terrible legacy of these boarding schools, many reservations have recently begun to prioritize community-based schools and culturally appropriate learning for Native students, even opening colleges specifically geared towards teaching Native students within the context of their cultures.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Louise Erdrich's work is frequently classed with other contemporary Native American authors, such as Sherman Alexie (author of *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*) and Leslie Marmon Silko (author of *Ceremony*), whose work explores the social and political realities that Native Americans face in daily life. Although frequently lumped together as writers of the Native American experience, Silko has publicly criticized Erdrich for what she sees as a preference for postmodern style over advancing the political interests of Native Americans, suggesting that the two authors actually approach their craft and their community in very different ways. Thematically, Louise Erdrich's novel, which focuses on Joe's coming-of-age, would be classed as a *bildungsroman*—a book that focuses on the transition from childhood into adult society. *Bildungsromans* are a common genre of literature, with notable examples being Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*, and James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Stylistically, Louise Erdrich's work is frequently compared to magical realist writers like Gabriel Garcia Marquez (author of *Love in the Time of Cholera* and *One Hundred Years of Solitude*) because of Erdrich's use of fantastical or spiritual elements in otherwise realistic stories. Erdrich, however, rejects the magical realist label. Erdrich cites the oral stories that her family used to tell during her childhood as her biggest writerly influence. The impact of oral storytelling on Erdrich's work can clearly be seen in *The Round House*, which prominently features storytelling both thematically and in its content.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Round House
- **When Published:** 2012
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary American

- **Genre:** Contemporary Native American Literature
- **Setting:** Unnamed Chippewa reservation in Minnesota
- **Climax:** When Joe and Cappy shoot and kill Linden Lark on the golf course
- **Antagonist:** Linden Lark
- **Point of View:** Joe's retrospective first-person viewpoint

EXTRA CREDIT

Work and home. Louise Erdrich was formerly married to chair of the Native American Program at Dartmouth College and fellow author Michael Dorris, with whom she collaborated on several books before their divorce in 1996 and Dorris's death in 1997.

Coed trailblazer. Erdrich was a member of the first class of women to attend and graduate from Dartmouth College.

PLOT SUMMARY

As the novel begins, Joe and his father, Bazil, who works as a tribal judge, are **weeding saplings** out from the foundation of their house. After a while, they realize that Geraldine, Joe's mother, has not yet come home. Joe and Bazil decide to go look for her. They are on the highway when Geraldine speeds past them going back to the house. Joe and Bazil, relieved, head home, only to find Geraldine still sitting in her car, covered in vomit and blood and smelling like gasoline. Bazil, immediately realizing that something is wrong, drives Geraldine to the hospital with Joe. At the hospital, Joe slowly begins to understand that Geraldine has been violently raped. The police take statements from Geraldine and Bazil, and Geraldine has surgery before Geraldine, Joe, and Bazil go home.

The next week, Geraldine, who is terrified to go outside, stays in her bed all day while Joe and Bazil read to her and bring her food that Joe's aunt Clemence has prepared. Curiously, Geraldine refuses to tell Bazil or law enforcement anything about the rape or the rapist, even though it seems like she knows his identity. As bedridden Geraldine struggles to heal physically and emotionally, Joe, feeling stressed out about the lack of progress on the case, distracts himself by hanging out out with his friends Cappy, Zack, and Angus. One night, Joe goes to Cappy's house to help Cappy's brother Randall run his sweat lodge. Joe and Cappy tend to the fire while the men inside sing traditional songs. Randall tells Joe that he saw a vision of a ghost standing over Joe in the flames, and he warns Joe to be careful.

At home the next week, Joe's mother is still jumpy. Bazil brings home case files from his office that he thinks might shed light on Geraldine's case, and he and Joe look through the files together. One of these cases refers to the adoption of Linda Lark by Betty Wishkob. Bazil marks this case as important.

When Joe gets free time, he, Cappy, Zack, and Angus try to investigate the crime. They go to the reservation's **round house** and look for evidence. Joe finds the gas can that the attacker used to douse Geraldine with gasoline and Angus finds a pack of Hamm's beers. The boys drink the beers even though they think they might be evidence. When Joe gets home, he eavesdrops on Bazil and Joe's uncle Edward, who are talking about the possibility that Father Travis, the new Catholic priest in town, may have been the one to commit the crime. As Joe goes to bed that night, he suddenly remembers that, on the day of Geraldine's attack, she had received a phone call and gone to her office, where she worked as the tribal enrollment specialist, in search of a file. As Joe falls asleep he sees a silvery spirit outside his window like the one that Randall saw in the sweat lodge. Joe immediately knows this is a ghost. When he asks Bazil about it the next day, Bazil tells him it could be a spirit from his future.

Joe and his friends go to mass to try to get a read on Father Travis, and this expedition turns into a sleuthing mission in which the boys wind up spying on Father Travis at his home. There, they see that Father Travis has such intense scarring on his genitals that he could not have raped Geraldine. Father Travis catches the boys spying and threatens them before finally letting them go. Joe finds out that Bazil, too, is on to a different suspect, and Bazil takes Joe with him to speak with Linda Lark. Linda tells them her life story, explaining how her mother, Grace Lark abandoned her as a baby because of her birth defect, so Betty Wishkob raised her. Years later, Grace Lark reconnected with Linda in order to try to convince Linda to donate her kidney to Linda's twin brother Linden. Linda went through with the donation even though she found Linden, who was extremely cruel, to be absolutely repellant. Joe begins to understand that his father suspects Linden Lark to be the rapist.

One day after this conversation with Linda, Joe finds a doll in the reservation's lake. When he takes off its head to pour out the extra water, Joe finds forty thousand dollars inside. He takes the money to his aunt Sonja, who works with Joe's uncle Whitey at their local gas station. Sonja helps him deposit the money in a series of bank accounts for college, then buries the passbooks in the woods. Afterward, Sonja offers Joe a job at the gas station, which Joe immediately accepts, because he is extremely attracted to Sonja and wants to be near her. When Joe returns home that night, Bazil is talking with an FBI agent, and Joe tells them both about the gas can and beer that he and his friends found. Joe, feeling guilty about the money he is hiding, then tells them that, on the afternoon of Geraldine's rape, Geraldine went to retrieve a file from her office.

When Bazil and Joe confront her about the file, Geraldine finally breaks down and tells them exactly what happened on the night of her rape, omitting only the attacker's name. Geraldine, who received a phone call inquiring about a file, was

abducted at her office, raped, and then taken to the round house, where Geraldine's attacker was also holding another woman, Mayla Wolfskin, and her baby hostage. The attacker asked Mayla where "the money" was and threatened to kill Mayla and Geraldine by pouring gasoline on them and setting them on fire, but Geraldine escaped and ran to her car.

After Geraldine tells her story, Bazil takes her to a mental hospital so she can rest. Joe stays with Whitey and Sonja and goes to work at the gas station with them every day, cleaning up trash in the yard and changing tires. One day, Sonja goes to work wearing new diamond earrings, which makes Whitey suspect that Sonja is cheating on him. At the gas station, Joe pumps gas for a white man before he realizes, to his horror, that it is Linden Lark. That night, Whitey beats Sonja because he believes she was unfaithful to him, and Joe, who fancies himself in love with Sonja, tries to defend her. Sonja locks them in the bedroom for protection, and the next morning Joe quits his gas station job and goes to stay with Clemence. While Joe is staying at Clemence's house, he sleeps in his grandfather Mooshum's room. Mooshum tells a story in his sleep about wiindigoo justice, or the obligation to kill a wiindigoo, which is someone in Chippewa tradition who feeds on human flesh. The next day, Bazil, who has returned from the hospital with Geraldine, picks Joe up.

Joe goes out with Cappy, Angus, and Zack to the lake behind the church. They run into the church youth group, where Cappy becomes smitten with a teenaged missionary from Montana named Zelia. The boys attend the youth group two days in a row so Cappy can spend time with her. When Joe goes home that day, he asks Bazil again about the identity of Geraldine's rapist, but Bazil refuses to tell him. The next day, Joe and his friends watch a search and rescue unit tow Mayla's car out of the lake. In back of the car, Joe sees the same fabric that was used to dress the doll he found in the lake, and he knows that the doll and money were Mayla's.

Joe asks Bazil again who Geraldine's rapist was, and Bazil shows him a picture of Linden Lark, confirming Joe's suspicions. However, Bazil says, the case against Linden is shaky, especially because they don't know exactly where the crime took place, so they can't establish its jurisdiction. Bazil tells Joe that Mayla's child was found at a Goodwill and the governor of South Dakota, Curtis Yeltow, for whom Mayla worked as a high school student, tried to adopt her. Geraldine, satisfied that the child is safe, gives the file on Mayla to law enforcement, which reveals that Curtis Yeltow is the child's father, and that Mayla and Curtis had an affair while Mayla was underage.

Bazil and Geraldine go to Bismarck to work on the case and Joe stays with Clemence again. While he is sleeping in Mooshum's room, Mooshum tells another story about Nanapush and Akii, who build the reservation's round house as a monument to the buffalo. A few days later, while Joe is still staying at Clemence's house, Sonja shows up and Mooshum tries to rush Joe out.

Sonja, who has come to give Mooshum a lap dance for his birthday, asks Joe to leave, but Joe refuses, saying that he will tell Whitey about the doll money Sonja has been hiding from him if Sonja doesn't let him stay. Sonja dances for them, and afterward she angrily tells Joe that he is just like other men who do terrible things to women.

Joe goes to Cappy's house and Cappy tells him that, in the graveyard on the night of Mooshum's birthday, Cappy and Zelia had sex. Cappy is now heartbroken because Zelia has returned to Montana. Joe comforts Cappy and then goes home, where he learns that, because of the lack of evidence, Linden Lark was not charged for his crime. Geraldine screams. Joe yells at his father, saying that he has no authority as a tribal judge. Later that night, Bazil illustrates for Joe all of the legal disadvantages that he faces as a tribal judge and he explains that he is trying to combat these injustices for future generations.

The next day, Clemence tells Joe that Sonja left Whitey. Joe and Cappy dig up the passbooks that Sonja buried and find that Sonja has left Joe ten thousand dollars of the doll money and absconded with the rest.

Since Linden has been set free and Geraldine no longer feels safe outside her home, Bazil and Joe do the grocery shopping for her. One day, they see Linden Lark in the grocery aisle and they attack him. Linden gets away, but Bazil has a heart attack on the grocery store floor. Bazil gets taken to a hospital in Fargo and Geraldine and Joe stay with him there for several days. While Joe and Geraldine are at a diner and Bazil is sleeping, Geraldine implies that she is going to kill Linden Lark. Joe believes that Linden will kill his mother if she tries, and so he resolves to do it himself.

Joe, now set on his mission to kill Linden, tells Cappy what he intends to do. Joe resists Cappy's offers to help, worried about implicating him in the crime, but Cappy insists on teaching him to shoot with his father's rifle. Despite practice, Joe is a terrible shot. The boys, knowing that Linden is a golfer, plan to ambush and kill him one day while he golfs, since the overlook behind Cappy's house has a good view of the golf course. Next, Joe orchestrates running into Linda during her lunch break and elicits information from her about Linden's golf habits, learning that Linden always plays very early in the morning.

Cappy tells Joe to steal Doe's rifle during the annual summer powwow that weekend. During the ceremonies, Joe leaves and takes the gun from Cappy's house, breaking glass and unplugging the TV to make the robbery seem like an outside job. Joe then buries the gun behind the oak tree on the hill overlooking the golf course. Afterward, Joe tells Cappy firmly that he is going to carry out the rest of the plan alone, and when Cappy insists he wants to help steady Joe's poor aim, Joe agrees, but secretly resolves not to tell Cappy when he is going to the overlook.

The next week, Joe goes to the overlook every day and watches

for Linden. On Thursday, Linden shows up and Joe descends the hill with the rifle to prepare for his shot. Joe shoots Linden in the stomach, botching the job, and then freezes. Suddenly, Cappy comes up behind Joe, takes the rifle out of his hands, and shoots Linden dead. Cappy and Joe flee, disposing of the rifle under Linda's porch and spending the rest of the day drinking at Whitey's, who suspects their involvement in the murder and encourages them to give him their shirts to build up their alibi. When Joe asks Cappy how he knew Joe would be at the overlook, Cappy tells him that he went there every day just in case.

When Joe goes home that night, Bazil asks if Joe knows anything about Linden's death. Joe insists that he does not. The next day, Joe, worried about law enforcement finding the rifle, goes to Linda's house. She invites him in and tells Joe that she knows that he used her information about Linden's golfing to help Linden's murderer. When Joe asks why Linden raped Geraldine, Linda explains that Linden was jealous of Mayla and wanted her to run away with him using the money that Curtis Yeltow gave her to keep her quiet about his paternity of her child. Linda tells Joe that she thinks that Linden had a monster inside him. Joe begins to worry that he, too, has a monster inside, as he is plagued by terrible dreams of the crime he committed. Finally, Linda tells Joe that she found the rifle under her porch, disassembled it, and threw it in the Missouri river. Later that week, Joe talks with Bugger Pourier, who indicates that he found Mayla's body in the construction site near the reservation.

After receiving a letter from Zelia's parents instructing Cappy to never contact Zelia again, Cappy decides to drive to Montana to talk with her. Joe, Zack, and Angus all go with him. The boys buy alcohol and drink it as they speed down the highway. Joe is asleep in the back when the car hurtles off the road and flips. Zack and Angus are severely injured in the accident, but Joe is fine. He walks around looking for Cappy, hoping that he has already gone to seek help. Then Joe stumbles upon Cappy's lifeless body in the grass. Joe continues holding Cappy even after a policeman, who looks exactly like the spirit that Joe saw at his window, approaches him and tells him to "let go." Joe gets taken to the police station, where Geraldine and Bazil pick him up. They drive silently back to the reservation.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Joe Coutts – Joe is a thirteen-year-old Chippewa boy living on a reservation in Minnesota. The novel's narrator and protagonist, he is the son of Bazil and Geraldine Coutts. Throughout the novel, the reader observes as Joe struggles to cope with the aftermath of his mother's violent rape, which leaves Geraldine traumatized while Bazil and Joe try fruitlessly to help her heal. As Geraldine's trauma and Bazil's preoccupation with her recovery leave Joe without much parental oversight, Joe focuses on trying to figure out who raped his mother. When Joe learns that a man named Linden Lark is the perpetrator, but he cannot be prosecuted because of a loophole in tribal law, Joe has a strenuous internal debate over what to do, as well as long discussions with his father and others about different kinds of justice. Ultimately, Joe kills Linden with the help of his friend Cappy in order to keep his family out of danger. Although this brings Brazil and Geraldine peace, Joe struggles with the emotional burden of his choice, which catapults him into adulthood. Along the way, Joe comes into his sexuality and experiments with drugs and alcohol alongside his friends Cappy, Angus, and Zack. The novel, then, simultaneously tells the story of Joe's coming of age and the story of solving a mystery and avenging a crime.

Cappy Lafournais – Cappy is a thirteen-year-old Chippewa boy and Joe's best friend. After Cappy's mother's death, he and his brother Randall were raised by their father Doe Lafournais. Cappy is handsome, charming, and an extremely loyal friend. He and Joe have a deep love for one another, and their friendship is notably intimate: they share shoes, talk about everything, and Joe even calls out Cappy's name in his sleep. Cappy offers Joe support as he copes with Geraldine's trauma and he later helps Joe kill Linden Lark in retribution, despite Joe's protests that he wants to kill Linden alone so that Cappy won't be legally accountable. However, Cappy saves Joe's life by tailing him and delivering the shot that kills Linden when Joe is unable to do so. Over the course of the book, Cappy falls in love with Zelia, a Mexican American girl who comes to the reservation on a mission trip. Through her, Cappy becomes more religious. Cappy explores his adolescent sexuality with Zelia, and once she moves back to Montana, the young couple begins exchanging letters. After Lark's death, Cappy dies in a drunk driving accident while in the car with Joe, Angus, and Zack on the way to see Zelia. Cappy's loyalty and devotion to Joe are a formidable model of friendship in the book, and his death is a tragedy of adolescence that clearly still haunts Joe even years later.

Mooshum – Mooshum (which is the word in Anishinaabe for "grandfather") is Joe's grandfather, who lives with Joe's aunt and uncle Clemence and Edward in their house. Although Mooshum is quite elderly, he still enjoys some youthful pursuits, such as drinking whiskey when Clemence will allow him and receiving a lap dance from Sonja on his birthday. Mooshum, who was brought to the Chippewa reservation with his Métis family after the Battle of Batoche in the late 1800s, has a wealth of knowledge about Chippewa culture and religion, and younger members of the tribe often consult him for advice. It is Mooshum who tells Joe the story of Nanapush, the buffalo mother, and explains to him wiindigoo justice.

Mooshum shows the value of elders on the reservation. He represents a body of knowledge about Chippewa culture that, although diminishing, is being kept alive by members of the younger generation.

Geraldine – Geraldine is a Chippewa woman whose brutal rape catalyzes the events of the novel. Joe's mother and Bazil's wife, Geraldine is a tribal record keeper who is widely considered to be smart, beautiful, and highly competent; a good worker, mother, and wife. Geraldine's rape changes her, however, leaving her jumpy, lethargic, and constantly afraid. Geraldine rarely leaves her room in the weeks that follow the rape and she refuses to give up information about her rapist, Linden Lark, for fear of endangering herself and Mayla, a woman that Linden has kidnapped and threatened to kill. As Geraldine's experience renders her unable to mother Joe, her absence also catapults Joe into adulthood. Although Joe and Bazil try to help Geraldine, Geraldine feels that they are unable to understand her pain, suggesting the limits of men's understanding of the effects of gendered violence. Geraldine's rape exemplifies the real-life sexual assault patterns that plague many Native reservations.

Bazil – Bazil is a tribal judge on the Chippewa reservation where he lives with his wife Geraldine and his son Joe. Bazil is a doting husband who, after Geraldine's assault, does everything he can—from planting her a flower garden to tracking down her rapist—to ensure that Geraldine recovers from her trauma. Bazil serves as one of Joe's most influential role models in the book. He is extremely smart and well-read, particularly in regards to the legal history of Native people. As a tribal judge, Bazil is the primary source for many of the legal questions and information in the book. Although Bazil is aware of all the legal challenges that native people face, he expresses hope that unjust legal precedents will be overturned so the justice system can protect Native rights instead of upholding injustice.

Randall Lafournais – Randall Lafournais is Cappy's older brother and Doe Lafournais's oldest son. Randall is interested in traditional Chippewa medicine and culture, making regular trips to meditate in the sweat lodge he built in his backyard, and becoming an expert dancer who regularly participates in the community's powwows. Cappy and Joe tease Randall for his womanizing ways and particularly the fact that he attracts so many white women. Although Randall does seem genuinely interested in Chippewa medicine, Cappy and Joe sometimes feel that he is doing it for show. Randall, who is one of the only young people in the book who regularly practices Chippewa medicine, shows how the culture is being transmitted to younger generations, but also how it can be susceptible to fetishization.

Linden Lark – Linden Lark is a local white man who rapes Geraldine at the book's beginning. Linden, who is the son of Grace and George Lark and is Linda Lark's twin biological brother, is a disturbed and bigoted man. He enjoys verbally abusing people, including Linda, and then mockingly apologizing for it. Linden, suffers from drug and alcohol problems, and received a kidney from Linda several years before the novel starts. Linden rapes Geraldine after he discovers that Geraldine is trying to help Mayla enroll her child in the Chippewa tribe. Linden, who says that he is in love with Mayla, is distraught that she had a child with someone else, and he also seems to intend to steal the money that the baby's father, South Dakota governor Curtis Yeltow, gives her. Linden kills Mayla and hides her body in the construction site near the reservation. Because of his crimes, Linden meets the qualification of a wiindigoo (a human that feeds on other human flesh), meaning that Joe acts according to tribal justice when he kills Linden towards the book's end.

Linda Lark – Linda Lark is a white woman and expert banana bread baker who works in the reservation post office. Linda was raised by Betty Wishkob in her Chippewa family after Grace and George Lark, Linda's biological parents, abandoned her because a birth defect. Betty fought hard to keep Linda after social workers tried to remove her from their family, and she helped to reshape Linda's malformed limbs and head. When Linda is an adult, Grace approaches her to manipulate her into donating her kidney to Linden, Linda's twin brother, which shows the cruelty of all the members of her biological family. Linda, who is friends with the Coutts family, helps provide the family with information about Linden's intentions and whereabouts. After Joe kills Linden and hides the gun under Linda's porch, Linda takes a sick day to disassemble and hide the gun, ensuring Joe's safety. Linda, a highly spiritual person, feels that she is constantly in the presence of another spirit as well as her own, which she believes is related to the fact that she was separated from her twin at birth. Linda's experience with Grace and Betty implies that families are also chosen, not born into, which is one of the book's major thematic conclusions.

Sonja – Sonja is Whitey's long-time partner (who many people believe is his wife). A former stripper, Sonja now works at the counter of Whitey's gas station. Sonja loves Joe and cares for him when he comes by the gas station. Sonja and Whitey's relationship is plagued by domestic violence, which Joe experiences firsthand when he stays with them for a few days while his parents are at the hospital. Joe considers himself to be in love with Sonja, who is well known for her large breasts. After Joe finds a doll in the lake that is filled with money, Sonja helps Joe hide the money in various savings accounts, saying it will be used for his college. However, Sonja soon begins to spend the money on expensive clothes and jewelry. When Sonja shows up at Clemence's house to give Mooshum a strip dance for his birthday, Joe blackmails Sonja by saying he will tell Whitey about the money if she does not let him stay and watch. Sonja, saddened and angered by Joe's lack of respect for her, tells Joe about her past as a stripper, listing the many nasty

things men did to her and saying that Joe is no different than the rest of them. Sonja later leaves Whitey, but then returns to him. Sonja serves as Joe's foray into sexuality and a warning about his potential to treat women badly.

Doe Lafournais – Doe is Cappy and Randall's father. Doe works as the janitor at the tribal offices, he intermittently serves as the tribal chairman, and he MCs for the annual summer powwow. Doe's house is frequently the meeting point for Joe, Zack, Angus and Cappy's adventures, while Doe's on-again-off-again role as tribal chairman lightly parodies reservation politics.

Grace Lark – Grace Lark is Linda and Linden's mother, a white woman who used to own a gas station near the reservation. Grace and her husband George were once convicted of trying to swindle older and disabled Chippewa people who bought things from the gas station store. After Linda's birth, despite being a vocal opponent of abortion, Grace abandoned her daughter because she had a birth defect. Linda was raised instead by Betty Wishkob, and after Betty's death, Grace tried to gain legal custody of Linda in order to steal the land Linda had inherited. In retaliation, Linda's adoptive siblings started a boycott of the Lark gas station, putting them out of business. Grace later approaches Linda under the pretense of wanting to reconnect with her, but she is really trying to manipulate Linda into giving Linden a kidney. Grace represents a hypocrisy that Bazil said is prevalent among white people: pretending to be friendly with Natives while secretly hating and exploiting them. Grace's character shows how the exploitative, two-faced attitudes that Bazil finds in the language of old court decisions persists into the modern day.

George Lark – George Lark was a white man who once owned a gas station near the reservation. He was Grace's husband, Linden's father, and Linda's biological father. George, like his wife and son, was known for his racism towards Native people; he regularly tried to swindle Native people at his gas station before a boycott drove him out of business. George features much less prominently in the novel than his wife, Grace.

Zack Peace – Zack is a close friend of Joe's, and he, Cappy, Angus, and Joe hang out together almost every day, riding bikes, drinking beer, and talking about sex. Zack's parents are divorced and Vince Madwesin is his stepfather. Grandma Ignatia Thunder is Zack grandmother, to whom Zack, Cappy, and Angus occasionally go in search of food. Zack is injured during the car accident that kills Cappy.

Angus Kashpaw – Angus is one of Joe's close friends from childhood, and Angus goes with Joe, Zack, and Cappy on many of their adventures throughout the book. Angus's family is very poor and they live on the reservation in a rundown house without a phone. Angus was raised Catholic and he regularly goes to confession. Angus is injured during the car accident that kills Cappy.

Zelia – Zelia is a Mexican-American girl and devout Catholic whom Cappy meets while she is on a summer mission trip to the reservation. Zelia is extremely beautiful and she and Cappy fall in love after Cappy courts her by attending the church's youth group. Zelia and Cappy have sex in the graveyard and in the church basement before Zelia returns to Montana. She helps open Cappy up to religion, teaching him about the rapture and encouraging him to go to confession. Zelia corresponds with Cappy via letters until her parents find out and send Cappy a threatening letter, instructing him to stop speaking to their daughter. It is this letter that compels Cappy, Angus, Zack, and Joe to drive to Montana, where they get in a car accident that kills Cappy.

Curtis Yeltow – Curtis Yeltow is the governor of South Dakota (in the world of the novel). He is well known for giving lip service to his commitment to Native causes, which he hypocritically pairs with policy that oppresses and disadvantages people living on reservations. Curtis Yeltow has also been caught on tape saying extremely bigoted things about Native people. When Mayla goes to work for him as a high school student, Curtis, a much older man, begins a relationship with her. When Mayla gets pregnant with Yeltow's baby, Yeltow pays Mayla for her silence and he tries to adopt the child after Mayla's murder. Yeltow, who never gets punished in the book, seems to represent how powerful people and politicians can grossly mistreat Native people (both as a group and as individuals) without recourse or reproach.

Clemence – Clemence is Joe's aunt. A devout Catholic, Clemence has two adult children of her own with her husband Edward. Clemence and Edward live down the road from Bazil and Geraldine. After Geraldine's rape, Clemence helps the family by cooking their food and taking care of Joe when needed. Clemence also cares for Mooshum, her elderly father and Joe's grandfather.

Whitey – Whitey is Joe's uncle and the owner of the reservation's gas station. Whitey lives with Sonja, an ex-stripper who most people think is his wife even though they are not married. Whitey gives Joe a job at the gas station during the summer. Whitey is a jokester and a loving uncle whom Joe adores until one day he sees Whitey beat Sonja because he thinks she's cheating on him. Joe, horrified by his uncle's actions, tries to reconcile the uncle he loves with Whitey's capacity for violence.

Father Travis – Father Travis is the head of the reservation's parish. He is known as an edgy priest—a former Marine who likes to shoot prairie dogs in his spare time. Father Travis curses liberally and tries to throttle Cappy when he confesses to having had sex with Zelia in the church. Father Travis was originally Bazil and Joe's primary suspect as Geraldine's rapist, but when Joe confronts him about it, Father Travis makes it very clear that he had nothing to do with the rape. Nonetheless, Joe, Cappy, Angus, and Zack spy on Father Travis at home,

noticing that his genitals are scarred (an injury, it turns out, from an attack on a U.S. Embassy). After he catches them spying, Father Travis gives the boys advice on women and dating, and he seems to imply that he became a priest because of his genital injury. Father Travis, whose personality seems ill suited for priesthood, is a point of humor in the book, as his character seems to mock the perceived righteousness of Christian clergy.

Mayla Wolfskin – Mayla Wolfskin is a beautiful young Native woman who Linden Lark murders. Mayla, who started a job in the South Dakota governor's office as a high schooler, has an illicit affair with governor Curtis Yeltow, an older white man. When Curtis finds out that Mayla is pregnant, he pays her to keep quiet about the baby's paternity. Linden, who also worked for Yeltow and who is obsessed with Mayla, abducts her out of possessive jealousy and greed for her money. Linden later kills Mayla and leaves her body in the nearby construction site.

Betty Wishkob – Betty Wishkob is Linda's adoptive mother, who decided to take Linda home after Grace and George Lark abandoned her because of her birth defect. Betty was a loving and patient mother who worked hard to try to reshape Linda's misshapen head and limbs. Although Betty was extremely devoted to her daughter, she had a temper and could say mean things when she was mad. Betty dies before the events of the novel take place, leaving Linda her house.

Bugger Pourier – Bugger Pourier is an alcoholic drifter who has returned to the reservation at the book's beginning in order to spend time with his dying mother. After his mother passes away, Bugger hangs around the reservation drinking. At one point, Bugger steals Joe's bike because he wants to go somewhere and find out if something he saw was a dream or was real. It is through this interaction that Joe later finds out that Bugger discovered Mayla Wolfskin's body in the nearby construction site.

Akii – Akii, a character in the story Mooshum tells while asleep, is Nanapush's mother and Mirage's wife. Akii is very smart and she can read dreams, using them to help her husband hunt. When the hunt is scarce, Mirage convinces himself that Akii is a wiindigoo and he gathers together the rest of the village's men to try to kill her. Akii manages to stay alive even after they try to drown her. While underwater, the fish teach her a buffalo song so she can find the buffalo again, and she teaches it to Nanapush. Later, Akii follows Nanapush's song to save him from the buffalo carcass he is trapped in.

Mirage – Mirage is Akii's husband and Nanapush's father in Mooshum's story about the buffalo mother. Mirage is a good hunter, but he is not a very good husband, as he cheats on Akii and, when times get tough, he blames Akii for their bad luck. Mirage, thinking Akii is a wiindigoo, convinces the other men in the village to help him kill her. Mirage seems to represent the quickness with which some men will resort to violence, even toward people they love, and also the limits of wiindigoo justice.

Nanapush – Nanapush is Akii and Mirage's son, a hero of Chippewa mythology who reappears in many different Chippewa stories. In the story that Mooshum tells, Nanapush remains loyal to his mother even as his father tries to kill her. Akii sends Nanapush in search of buffalo, and he finds and kills one, saving his village. Nanapush then follows the instructions of the buffalo he kills to build **the round house** in homage to the buffalo's body.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Edward – Edward is Clemence's husband and Joe's uncle. Edward helps Bazil cope with the stress of his wife's trauma and supports Bazil in his attempts to deliver justice for the crime, particularly by helping him parse the evidence.

Dr. Egge – Dr. Egge is Geraldine's doctor in the emergency room where she is treated after her rape.

Vince Madwesin – Vince Madwesin is the tribal policeman who helps investigate Geraldine's case. He interviews Geraldine and her family several times. Vince Madwesin is also Zack's stepfather.

Mrs. Bijiu – Mrs. Bijiu is Grandma Ignatia Thunder's friend who comes over while Joe, Angus, Cappy, and Zack are eating at her house. The older women make raunchy sex jokes, horrifying the boys.

Soren Bjerke – Soren Bjerke is the Swedish FBI agent who is assigned to Geraldine's case. For Joe, Bjerke's presence on the reservation represents the reservation's lack of sovereignty, since, if the Chippewa people had total autonomy, they would have their own investigators.

Larose – Larose is Geraldine's close friend from childhood and a relative of Mayla Wolfskin. Larose and Geraldine were inseparable as girls. Joe learns a little about Mayla's background from Larose when she stops by Whitey's gas station while he is working.

Neal – Neal is Zelia's friend at the church youth group who tries to kick Cappy, Joe, Angus, and Zack off the beach, and who then has a seizure when Cappy dunks him underwater.

Opichi – Opichi is Bazil's secretary. She is a gossip who always knows everything going on at the reservation, so she is an invaluable resource for Bazil.

Suzette and Josey – Suzette and Josey are Cappy and Randall's relatives who camp with them at the annual summer powwow. Suzette and Josey cook for the boys all weekend. They are skilled dancers and they enjoy their heavy, ornate regalia.

Grandma Ignatia Thunder – Grandma Ignatia Thunder is Zack's grandmother, an older Chippewa woman living on the reservation. Grandma Thunder feeds Zack and his friends when they come to her house, and she is well versed in Chippewa medicine. She is often lewd and talks about sex explicitly and raunchily.

Aunt Star – Aunt Star is Angus's aunt and the head of his household.

Sheryl Wishkob – Sheryl is Linda's adoptive sister and friend. Although Sheryl and Linda did not always get along as children, as adults they are very close, and Sheryl does everything she can to help Linda.

Joseph and Evey – Joseph and Evey are Clemence and Edward's adult children and Joe's cousins.

Pearl – Pearl is Sonja's watchdog that she gives to Joe, Bazil, and Geraldine after Geraldine's attack. At first Joe is disappointed, having wanted a dog that would play fetch, but he slowly warms up to Pearl, who is loyal and loving.

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.

WOMEN, BIGOTRY, AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE

The Round House, which examines an instance of sexual violence against Joe's mother Geraldine, explores the particular difficulties faced by Native women and how those struggles stem from an often-toxic culture surrounding sexuality, tribal identity, and gender.

Although Erdrich's book is a work of fiction, Geraldine's violent rape is part of a real phenomenon: Native women are far more likely to experience sexual violence than non-Native women and men. Often, the perpetrators of this violence are non-Native men, and because of rules against prosecuting non-Native people on reservation land, it is often impossible to bring them to justice. This demonstrates how long-term institutional racism and oppression directly threaten the physical safety of Native people (and Native women in particular) by removing consequences for crimes and leaving violent criminals at large.

Linden Lark takes part in this terrible trend, as he not only violently rapes Geraldine, but he also abducts and murders Mayla out of jealousy over her relationship with another man. Linden's possessiveness over Mayla and his fury at her rejection seem to be exacerbated by his sense of racial superiority as a white man. Linden's violence is certainly closely intertwined with his bigotry, as he "hates Indians generally" and he has called Native women a word so ugly that Geraldine would not repeat it.

Many other men in the novel, both Native and non-Native, mistreat women in ways much less severe. Curtis Yeltow, for example, sleeps with underage Mayla, using his power as a governor and an older man to manipulate her. Whitey, Joe's beloved uncle, beats Sonja, a fact that seems to be known amongst the rest of Joe's family and goes more or less ignored. Even Joe, the story's protagonist, treats Sonja poorly. Through Joe, Erdrich shows the reader how boys and young men are indoctrinated with problematic senses of entitlement to women, whom they sexualize in ways that are often degrading and dehumanizing. Though all the boys in Joe's friend group presumably receive similar messaging about women and sex, Joe and Cappy deviate in their approaches to romance. While Cappy loves and respects Zelia, Joe objectifies and manipulates Sonja, first masturbating to pictures of her before forcing Sonja to let him watch her strip. Although Sonja explicitly tells Joe she does not want him to watch the dance she has planned for Mooshum, Joe threatens to blackmail Sonja if she does not let him stay.

Joe's actions surprise both himself and Sonja, and after the dance Sonja, angry and upset, shows Joe where her old manager cut her breast with a razor while she was a stripper. Joe begins to cry, and Sonja tells him that "lots of men cry after they do something nasty to a woman." Clearly, Sonja associates the gendered sexual violence she has experienced, like the mutilation of her breast, with actions like Joe's less obviously harmful manipulation and objectification. Thus, as Joe begins to adopt a more adult role in his family and his community, he has also begun to mimic the kinds of adult male attitudes that indirectly caused his mother's rape.

Erdrich never directly resolves what makes some men more violent or disrespectful towards women than others, but Linda Lark suggests some possible reasons for this when she talks with Joe about her twin brother. Linda tells Joe that she thinks that Linden was spoiled by Grace's guilt over abandoning Linda, producing a "monster" inside him. When Joe asks Linda about this, Linda tells him that not everyone has a monster, but that those who do can choose to keep it locked up. Linda seems to imply that some people are more capable of or inclined towards violence than others, perhaps due to the sadness, hatred, or bigotry they are exposed to in their lifetime (like Linden's upbringing in the cruel Lark family). However, Linda implies that the control of those impulses is what really matters. Thus, though Erdrich does not shy from exploring and condemning the toxic attitudes about gender and sexuality that threaten women (and particularly Native women), she proposes that the onus for controlling violent impulses rests on individuals.

CHIPPEWA TRADITION VS. CATHOLICISM

As characters in *The Round House* engage in religious and spiritual practices, they straddle two different traditions: the Native Chippewa religion and the Catholicism that was brought to the reservation by Europeans.

As these two traditions come into each other's orbit, the two religions, which are ideologically different, sometimes clash with or eclipse one another.

Chippewa religion is a large presence in the novel, which is itself named after the reservation's **round house**, a sacred site for Chippewa rituals. At the round house, the community gathers for events like the annual summer powwow, where they perform dances in traditional regalia. Some characters (medicine people, in the Chippewa terminology) like Mooshum and Randall practice traditional Chippewa medicine more fastidiously than others. Randall dances in the community's powwows and sits in a sweat lodge to experience visions, while Mooshum recites the Chippewa legends that form the basis of Chippewa religion. Mooshum's stories incorporate ideas like wiindigoo justice and thr concept of "doodems," which give people special connections with different kinds of animals. Randall and Mooshum clearly feel extremely connected to Chippewa religion, and they help other members engage in Chippewa spiritual practice.

Catholicism, meanwhile, is also prominent in the community. Many Chippewas, like Joe's aunt Clemence, have a strong attachment to the Catholic Church and regularly attend services led by Father Travis. Even less devout members of the community, however, like Joe's parents, still baptize their children and make them undergo confirmation. Unlike the tradition of Chippewa religion, Catholicism is a theology with strong ties European thought and culture, and Joe and his friends often mock Catholicism more explicitly than Chippewa religion, perhaps reacting to how Catholicism represents the European hegemony (ruling order) that they have grown up resisting.

Joe draws the reader's attention to Catholicism's role in Native oppression, particularly through its often-harmful conversion practice, which historically attempted to suppress Chippewa religion and culture. Many of the older locals "had Catholicism beaten into them" at Catholic boarding schools, which attempted to erase any traditional Chippewa religious practices from their students. Meanwhile, prior to 1978, the Chippewa tribe was not allowed to practice their own religion, forcing them to disguise their traditional ceremonies as Bible studies and other Christian events.

Interestingly, however, Catholicism and Chippewa religion—which have been in conflict historically—do not seem to be especially in conflict for characters in the book. While some characters, like Joe's aunt Clemence, have an exclusive attachment to the Catholic Church, and others, like Mooshum, reject Catholicism in favor of Chippewa traditions, many members of the reservation community partake in both religions intermittently, depending on their needs. Often these engagements with religion are not especially spiritual, and have more to do with convenience or opportunism than genuine faith. For example, Joe, Zack, Angus, and Cappy's attendance at the Catholic youth group is primarily meant to impress Cappy's soon-to-be girlfriend Zelia, while Joe and Cappy aid Randall in maintaining his sweat lodge in exchange for dinner.

In other instances, these two religions offer differing outlooks that individuals combine or choose between in an earnest attempt to fulfill their spiritual needs. When Joe is concerned by his dreams, for instance, he immediately decides to consult Mooshum, since Chippewa religion centers dreams in a way that Catholicism does not. On the other hand, when Joe goes to see Father Travis, hoping to learn to shoot a gun, Father Travis tells Joe about the Catholic understanding of how good inevitably comes out of evil, giving him perspective on his impending decision to kill Linden.

By portraying her characters' blend of Catholicism and Chippewa religion as a positive hybridity, Louise Erdrich suggests the potential value of pluralistic religious practice and imagines the possibility of reconciling two traditions that have historically been in conflict. Erdrich also shows how people use religion practically in their everyday lives—both for genuine spiritual practice, and as a kind of cultural currency that can be used for personal gain. Erdrich, who seems to have a high tolerance for this kind of unsacred treatment of religion, appears to be implying that religion, rather than an unapproachable, homogenous monolith, should be a cultural institution which people actively question and shape.

STORYTELLING, FORMALITY, AND WRITING

In addition to Joe's retrospective narrative, *The Round House* features many stories-within-stories: references to mythology, to novels, and to television, as well as factual and fictional stories told second- or third-hand. These stories affect people in multiple ways, but most importantly, they provide their listeners with behavioral and emotional models to teach them how to act in difficult situations and how to talk about their lives. As story consumption becomes insufficient to help people cope with their most painful experiences, some characters find catharsis by transitioning from story listener to story teller. Throughout the book, the reader sees how storytellers and listeners mutually benefit from the storytelling process, healing and learning from each other at the same time.

Stories provide behavioral various behavioral and emotional models to characters throughout the book, who then explore and (hopefully) connect with them. For example, when Joe, Cappy, Angus, and Zack watch *Star Trek*, the boys see the kind of people that they want to be: people like Data, who confidently mocks white people, or Worf, who solves problems head on. Some stories, like Mooshum's tale of Nanapush and the Buffalo woman, pass down traditions and value systems that might otherwise be lost, allowing contemporary Chippewa

people to model their own culture on their ancestors' and to understand how their present situations (like the continued violence against women) connects to their past (like the story of Mirage and Akii). Sometimes these old stories provide morals intended to help prevent people from making the same mistakes, as when Mooshum tells Joe the story of Mirage trying to use wiindigoo justice incorrectly to kill Akii. Mooshum's stories also obviously play a pivotal role providing a behavioral model by teaching Joe about wiindigoo justice and structuring how he thinks about his choice to kill Linden. Without Mooshum's story, Joe likely would have thought about the possibility of killing Linden through different moral understandings, and he might not have killed Linden at all.

Consuming stories can also help people process difficult situations by giving them emotional models and helping them to understand that other people have experienced similar troubles. At the height of Geraldine's mental distress after her attack, she requests that Joe read her sad, sometimes disturbing poems. Although Bazil tries to convince Geraldine to read happy ones instead, Geraldine insists on hearing stories that match how she is feeling, seeming to suggest that what is healing about encountering stories is not their happy mood, but how they help make people who have undergone similar experiences feel understood and give them the vocabulary to discuss their traumas.

Although Erdrich seems to be enthusiastic about how consuming stories can help people shape their lives or change them, she also suggests that certain kinds of stories are limited. She draws attention to these limits in the scene in which Bazil talks to Joe, after Linden's murder, about whether he would give the murderer up to law enforcement. Joe, clearly burdened by his crime and the lack of resolution following it, looks at the books (predominantly by white authors) on the shelf "as if they could help us," but then feels that he has moved beyond what reading literature can resolve, and into the realm of "Mooshum's stories." In this moment, Joe seems to feel that there is no book that appropriately addresses his feelings of guilt after murdering Linden, since his experience is so culturally specific, and the literary canon is predominantly white. Joe's pessimism about books turns out not to be entirely true, since Joe later feels incredibly moved by the science fiction book *Dune*, but it does suggest that, for people like Joe who have been through intense experiences in very specific cultural contexts, the kinds of stories that they want to access may simply not exist in literature. Perhaps this is why Joe moves from story consumer to storyteller— in an attempt to create the book that he wished he could read, and in order to heal himself through that process.

Joe's own narrative (which is to say, the entire book), therefore, could be seen as an attempt at the same catharsis he seeks as a reader, and an attempt to create the literature that he did not have access to for someone else. Throughout the book, when Joe draws attention to his narrative's retrospect, he also alludes to his lack of closure after his childhood traumas. In one instance, Joe refers to looking back through his mother's case files as an adult, and he alludes several times the fact of his father and Cappy's deaths, clearly indicating that, for him, the past is still unresolved.

The understanding of Joe's narrative as an attempt at catharsis could help explain a few noteworthy formal choices in the book, wherein certain stories are set off from the main narrative and others are included within it. Geraldine's description of her rape appears in a dialogue between Bazil and Geraldine that Joe accidentally observes, and this dialogue (as well as the rest of the dialogue in the book) lacks quotation marks. This suggest that, rather than being direct quotes, the story is reproduced according to Joe's memory as Joe's personal (and emotional) experience of hearing his mother's trauma, rather than a firsthand account of the crime. In other words, Geraldine's story, as it functions in the text, is part of the trauma that Joe is trying to cope with and understand, so it becomes a part of his own story, and retelling it as he experienced it is part of his healing process. Mooshum and Linda's stories, on the other hand, are lengthy third- and first-person narratives that are set off from the main text by titles, suggesting that the two stories are separate narratives from Joe's, existing on their own. While they certainly affect Joe's actions and understanding, they are not a part of his trauma and do not belong to him to editorialize, but rather to Linda and, in the case of Mooshum's stories, to the Chippewa people as a whole.

PARENTHOOD, FOSTER FAMILIES, AND COMING OF AGE

The Round House takes place on a reservation teeming with overlapping family connections, connections that are even more important to the characters because of the small size of the Chippewa community and its strong national identity. Although the families in *The Round House* are well established, many of these families are not nuclear, and some are not even genetically linked. On the reservation, the reader encounters a plethora of different kinds of families whose dynamics shift as children enter adulthood and as families endure life's various challenges and traumas.

Ever-evolving, not-necessarily-nuclear families seem to be the norm on the reservation: Zack's mother is divorced and lives with his stepfather, Angus lives with his aunt and his many cousins, Mooshum lives with Clemence and Edward, and Whitey and Sonja are partnered but not legally married. In this context, the Coutts household—Joe and his parents Geraldine and Bazil—seems like an anomaly. Joe's family is "the perfect family … loving, rich by reservation standards, stable." This stability dissipates, however, in the aftermath of Geraldine's violent rape, when the family dynamic is upended. Geraldine becomes unable to fulfill many of the tasks that Joe associates

with attentive motherhood, and Bazil is so preoccupied with helping Geraldine heal and bringing her attacker to justice that he stops paying as much attention to Joe. Joe feels that Geraldine is now "someone different from the before-mother," and he suddenly finds himself trying to take care of the parents who always took care of him.

Although Joe finds himself without parental oversight, the fluid family structure on the reservation seems practically designed to absorb Joe when he feels emotionally orphaned. Whereas in another community Joe's lack of parental guidance might be more conspicuous, other adults in the reservation community intuitively know to take care of him. Sonja states that she feels like Joe is her son, and she and Whitey take care of Joe by hiring him, making him sandwiches, giving him advice, and letting him sleep over. The Lafournais family brings Joe with their family to the annual summer powwow. Many other adults on the reservation have open-door policies for Joe and his young crew, feeding them when they drop by unannounced and trying to keep them out of trouble. Although Joe feels that he loses his own parents that summer, Joe's ties to the community ensure that he is cared for.

The way the Chippewa community reacts to Joe's parents' absence reflects a larger trend of fostering in Chippewa culture. Mooshum recounts how his own family, who were Métis (of mixed Native and French origin), were taken into the reservation after a military conflict in Canada displaced them. Mooshum's family was welcomed "by an unusually kind-hearted chief who told the US government that maybe it threw away its half-breed children…but that the Indians would take these children into their hearts." In this quote, the chief imagines the tribe as adoptive parents of people cast out of white society, suggesting that, while European-American culture has a narrower definition of who belongs to its "family" and who does not, the Chippewa community welcomes orphans of all sorts and makes families out of all kinds of disparate people.

This inclination towards adoptive and makeshift families is also is reflected in Linda Lark's story, as Linda was raised in a Chippewa family on the reservation after she was abandoned by her white parents due to a birth defect. Betty's role as Linda's true mother shows how parenthood is not defined by blood, but rather by choosing to play a certain parental role in someone else's life.

Although this familial flexibility is obviously extremely helpful for people like Linda and Joe, Erdrich does imply that this fluidity can be destabilizing. Because of the flexible roles that community members play in their families, Joe soon finds himself in an unexpectedly adult position in his household. He takes on a parental role, bringing his mother food and reading to her to help her fall asleep. Though Joe loves his mother and is happy to help her, he also seems unnerved by this sudden role reversal, taking an increased interest in adult activities in his social life to blow off steam. In fact, his drinking progresses from an occasional beer with his friends to the drunk driving incident that kills Cappy. Though these poor choices could certainly be attributed to Joe's young age, they also seem to be a consequence of him being forced to cope with a situation that is more stressful than he, as a thirteen-year-old, is equipped for.

Later, as Joe is weighed down by the emotional burden of having killed Linden Lark, he watches his parents interact at the dinner table, feeling "like [he] was the grown-up and the two of them…were the oblivious children." In alleviating his parents' suffering, Joe has come into his own as an adult. Because of that process, however, Joe also bears the pain of adult responsibility very early in life, which makes him feel alienated from the people he loves. Joe's experience of coming-of-age extremely quickly suggests the downside of flexible families, as Joe's topsy-turvy family situation causes him to grow up much too fast.

LAND, THE JUDICIAL SYSTEM, AND JUSTICE

The Round House explores a tricky concept: how to ensure justice for people belonging to a culture—the Chippewa culture—that the legal system has been built to disadvantage and ignore. After Geraldine's rape, Joe and Bazil want to bring her rapist to justice, but this process is full of bureaucratic complexity and infuriating roadblocks. Ultimately Joe turns to an old Chippewa tradition of justice to supplement the law's shortcomings, though this comes at a cost to Joe's emotional health. As Erdrich follows her characters' path to justice, she reveals the pitfalls of both the American justice system and the Chippewa concept of wiindigoo justice, delicately balancing criticism of the legal system's treatment of Native people and hope for future change.

Joe, who grew up with a tribal judge as a father, is familiar with the case law from the past several hundred years that forms the basis of contemporary Native autonomy and rights. Bazil taught Joe about cases like *Johnson v. Macintosh*, which allowed the United States government to seize lands from Native people in the first place, and *Oliphant v. Suquamish*, which took away the right of Native people to prosecute non-natives for crimes committed on Native land. While the legal history of Native people is quite disheartening, Joe does not feel the brunt of it until after his mother's rape, when Joe's engagement with this legal history becomes much more urgent and personal. The legal system, which is built on cases designed to disadvantage Native people to the advantage of white Americans, ultimately limits Geraldine's ability to get justice, since her assault by a white man occurred on Native land.

Since, ironically, the United States justice system prevents Geraldine from actually getting any justice, Joe must reach back into the traditional, pre-colonial Chippewa legal system

for other options, learning about the traditional practice of wiindigoo justice from his grandfather Mooshum's stories. According to Mooshum, wiindigoos are people who "lost all human compunctions" and "crave the flesh of others," and must therefore be killed. Wiindigoo justice is not arbitrary, as it requires community consensus to determine whether someone is, in fact, a wiindigoo. Wiindigoo justice does, however, lack the formal procedure of a modern trial, and it focuses more on communal values and harmony than on abstract values like "justice," "truth," or "innocence." It is with this understanding of wiindigoo justice that Joe makes the choice to kill Linden into order to restore his community's stability and safety.

Though wiindigoo justice does allow Joe to restore harmony to his community, killing Lark also comes with a price. Unlike the United States justice system, in which no individual person is directly responsible for punishing other people, wiindigoo justice means that "the person who killed Lark will live with the human consequences of having taken a life." Certainly, Joe feels the effects of his crime profoundly, as he is plagued by nightmares and the anxiety that, in killing Linden, he has become a wiindigoo himself. Furthermore, Erdrich shows wiindigoo justice to be an imperfect system, in that it is easily overwhelmed by a mob mentality, as is apparent in Mooshum's story of the buffalo woman.

By presenting both the wiindigoo justice system and the judicial system as differently flawed, Louise Erdrich suggests that neither wiindigoo justice nor governmental justice is ideal. However, Erdrich does seem to imply through Bazil that the judicial system could be reformed to better serve the Chippewa community. After Joe expresses frustration with Bazil's lack of power as a tribal judge, Bazil explains to Joe that, in all of the cases he decides, no matter how small, he tries to make decisions that establish a precedent to strengthen Native claims to autonomy. Bazil even believes that, if Joe were ever tried for killing Linden, he could argue that wiindigoo justice should be allowable on reservations. In doing so, Bazil would be establishing precedent that would allow for a blend of traditional Native legal practices, like wiindigoo justice, and the mainstream justice system. It is unclear whether Erdrich believes that this idealist fusion of Native and legal justice is really possible, as Joe expresses impatience and skepticism when Bazil brings up this idea. However, Joe's choice to become a lawyer and therefore become a part of the justice system seems to imply that, ultimately, Joe and Erdrich believe it could be possible to reform the justice system from within.

SYMBOLS

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

THE ROUND HOUSE

The round house (the novel's namesake) is a structure on the reservation that is used for Chippewa religious ceremonies and celebrations. According to Mooshum, Nanapush built the round house to resemble the body of a buffalo, which were once central to Chippewa culture. The round house is an important site for the Chippewa people on the reservation, as it continues to be used for religious practice. At the same time, for Joe, it is also the site of the extreme violence against his mother. When Joe thinks about the round house, he feels that it represents "a part of something larger… just a shadow of that way of life." This suggests that, while the round house represents the richness of Chippewa culture, part of that culture has become a kind of absence: the void of culture that has been violently stamped out. The round house, therefore, is both a monument to modern Chippewa culture and a memorial to the parts of Chippewa culture that have been violently destroyed.

THE UPROOTED TREES

In the book's opening, during the afternoon of Geraldine's rape, Joe and Bazil uproot seedlings that had begun to grow into their house's foundation, causing the concrete to crumble. As Joe completes the task, he does it with unusual focus and attention, but he also feels guilty about uprooting the trees and he shows his compassion by moving them off of the sidewalk and onto the grass. Clearly, although Joe understands that the saplings must be uprooted in order to protect his childhood home, he also feels a sense of regret about the destruction that it necessitates. Later, Joe thinks back on the saplings several times with a mixture of longing and regret. As the last memory that Joe has of the time before his mother's rape, the saplings seem to represent for Joe a time of blissful innocence. The saplings, therefore, symbolize Joe's departure from childhood over the course of the book and the mature choices he has to make—choices which upset Joe, but which are necessary to protect his family. The violent act of uprooting the saplings for the sake of maintaining his family home's stability symbolically represents Joe's decision to kill Linden in order to restore his family's tranquility— an act which, in turn, kills Joe's own innocence.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Harper Perennial edition of *The Round House* published in 2013.

Chapter 1 Quotes

Small trees had attacked my parents' house at the foundation… As my father prodded away blindly at the places where he sensed roots might have penetrated, he was surely making convenient holes in the mortar for next year's seedlings… it seemed increasingly important to me that each one of these invaders be removed down to the very tip of the root, where all the vital growth was concentrated. And it seemed important as well that I do a meticulous job… It was almost impossible not to break off the plant before its roots could be drawn intact from their stubborn hiding place.

Related Characters: Joe Coutts (speaker), Bazil

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 1

Explanation and Analysis

The book begins with this quote, as Joe talks about spending the afternoon uprooting trees that have begun to break into the foundation of his childhood home. As it later becomes clear, the scene that Joe describes takes place at the same time as Linden Lark rapes and threatens to kill Joe's mother across town.

Joe's afternoon spent uprooting saplings from his parent's house seems to be a metaphor for the larger arc of the novel and Joe's choice to kill Linden Lark in order to restore his home's safety and balance. Joe's stable family situation, represented by the house, is under attack by the trees, which seem to represent the violent trauma that Linden inflicted on Geraldine. Joe, by killing Linden, removes a damaging pest, but he must hurt another being in order to so, and that damages Joe's psyche.

More widely, the trees could be seen as representing the struggle of the Chippewa people to protect their culture and sovereignty against an ever-encroaching white American world. Joe notes that he works meticulously to uproot the trees entirely, while Bazil pulls them out forcefully but uncarefully, and therefore makes holes for the next year's saplings. The contrast between Joe and Bazil's styles could represent the difference between long term planning for increasing Native sovereignty and rash, immediate gratification —think of how Bazil later tells Joe about how, rather make any overstepping decisions as a tribal judge, he must carefully and slowly build a long-term foundation for Native sovereignty. Like uprooting the trees, the struggle to end anti-Native racism and improve Native autonomy is a slow battle that must be executed carefully.

I was parsing out the idea, established in other cases and reinforced in this one, that our treaties with the government were like treaties with foreign nations. That the grandeur and power my Mooshum talked about wasn't entirely lost, as it was, at least to some degree I meant to know, still protected by the law.

Related Characters: Joe Coutts (speaker), Mooshum

Related Themes:

Page Number: 2

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Joe is reading through Bazil's handbook of Native American case law, as he sometimes likes to do for fun. At this point in the novel, Joe does not yet know that Geraldine has been raped.

In this early quote, Joe is still quite optimistic about the state of Native law. He expresses this idealism here as he states that "the grandeur and power [his] Mooshum talked about wasn't entirely lost, as it was…still protected by the law." Clearly, Joe thinks about the history of his people as one of "grandeur and power," expressing a romantic view of the reservation during Mooshum's time that Mooshum actually later undercuts with his stories of the reservation's early starvation and hardship. Meanwhile, Joe feels that American law protects this glory, and he hopes to one day understand exactly how. However, during the course of the book, he ultimately learns that, in fact, much U.S. law still restricts Native autonomy and disadvantages Native people. This quote, therefore, indicates Joe's youthful naiveté about Chippewa history and law, which Joe becomes much more cynical about as the book goes on.

Chapter 2 Quotes

From the government's point of view, the only way you can tell an Indian is an Indian is to look at that person's history. There must be ancestors from way back who signed some document or were recorded as Indians by the U.S. government … after that you have to look at that person's blood quantum… In other words, being an Indian is in some ways a tangle of red tape. On the other hand, Indians know other Indians without the need for a federal pedigree, and this knowledge—like love, sex, or having or not having a baby—has nothing to do with government.

Related Characters: Joe Coutts (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 30

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, which occurs after a conversation between Joe and Bazil about the racial identity of Geraldine's attacker, Joe explains the official United States policies regarding tribal membership and qualifying as a Native American, and contrasts these criteria with how Native people recognize one another.

As Joe describes the official, governmental process of establishing Native heritage, the process is long, complicated, and bureaucratic. Joe describes how, "from the government's point of view," Native people have to prove their ancestry with connections to signatories of old U.S. documents of censuses and with their blood quantum, which is the percentage of Native blood they possess. This identification process, which focuses on documents the United States government used to manage and oppress Native people and uncomfortable biological bases for Native identity, seems out of touch with the historical violence that documentation and genetics have been associated with in Native communities. Joe, meanwhile, seems to find it all ridiculous and excessive as he astutely states that "being an Indian is in some ways a tangle of red tape."

On the other hand, Joe believes that Native people recognize each other in a much more interpersonal, spiritual way, as he describes simply recognizing other Native people intuitively and states that it "has nothing to do with government." By claiming this instinctive recognition as apart from the government's paperwork, Joe reclaims the focus of Native identity as a category established by Native people themselves, not outsiders.

> I didn't like being prayed for. As I turned away I felt the prayers creeping up my spine. But that was Randall, too, always ready to make you feel a little uncomfortable with the earnest superiority of all that he was learning from the elders, even your own elders, for your benefit.

Related Characters: Joe Coutts (speaker), Randall Lafournais

Related Themes:

Page Number: 37-38

Explanation and Analysis

Joe articulates this quote in his narrative describing the night that Joe and Cappy help Randall run his sweat lodge. Randall and his friends have come back to the house after an incident involving hot pepper. After everything settles down, Randall tells Joe that he saw a concerning spirit in the sweat lodge that he felt was for Joe, then says that he will pray for him and his family.

In the quote, Joe responds to Randall's offer to pray for him with discomfort, stating that he "didn't like being prayed for." As Joe describes feeling "the prayers creeping up [his spine]," Erdrich brilliantly evokes the uncomfortable sensation of feeling pitied and looked down on, even benevolently. Joe's unhappiness at Randall's prayers also seems to reflect Joe's discomfort with religion in general, which abates as the novel goes on.

Joe describes how Randall was "always ready" to make someone feel awkward with his "earnest superiority" from his knowledge of Chippewa medicine. Even though Randall's medicinal interests benefit the community at large, Joe still finds the ego-boost Randall derives from it annoying. As she does with Father Travis, Erdrich shows here how religious authority figures, rather than being unimpeachable, can be themselves imperfect despite their perceived religious righteousness.

> We were not churchgoers. This was our ritual. Our breaking bread, our communion... But now they stood staring at each other helplessly over the broken dish... If we'd sat down together that night, I do believe things would have gone on... Anything would have been better than the frozen suspension of feeling in which she mounted the stairs... My father and I had followed her to the doorway, and I think as we watched her we both had the sense that she was ascending to a place of utter loneliness from which she might never be retrieved.

Related Characters: Joe Coutts (speaker), Geraldine, Bazil

Related Themes:

Page Number: 43

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Joe describes the scene after Bazil comes home and surprises Geraldine by putting his arms around

her waist, causing Geraldine to panic and drop the casserole she had cooked for a family dinner together.

As Joe describes it, the aftermath of this incident is devastating. Not only does it reveal that Geraldine's trauma has impacted her more forcefully than Bazil and Joe previously thought, but it also sets Geraldine back in her healing profoundly and induces anxiety in Joe and Bazil that she will never be fully healed. Joe frames the family's dinners together as a kind of religious ceremony, stating that since they "were not churchgoers," dinner together was their "ritual" and their "communion." Obviously, Joe views his family's stability as a core part of his being that is even akin to religious faith. This incident with the casserole makes him question whether his mother will ever be "retrieved" from the "place of utter loneliness" that her rape has relegated her to.

❝ We read with a concentrated intensity. My father had become convinced that somewhere within his bench briefs, memos, summaries, and decisions lay the identity of the man whose act had nearly severed my mother's spirit from her body.

Related Characters: Joe Coutts (speaker), Geraldine, Bazil

Related Themes:

Page Number: 45

Explanation and Analysis

This quote takes place after the casserole incident, as Joe and his father sit in his office reading through files Bazil selected that he thought might shed light on Geraldine's case.

Joe describes them reading with "a concentrated intensity," suggesting that both Joe and Bazil are firmly committed to the possibility that the old files will help them solve the case. Bazil, a tribal judge, has immense faith in the justice system in general, despite its many failings, and continues to believe in it throughout the novel even when it later fails Geraldine. Joe, on the other hand, wavers in his attitude towards the legal system. At this point in the novel, though, Joe seems to feel optimistic that it can deliver justice for his mother. The beginning of this scene, in which Joe and Bazil begin by fastidiously reading Bazil's case files, serves as a reference point as his confidence in the legal system wavers later in the novel.

Chapter 3 Quotes

❝ I had imagined that my father decided great questions of the law, that he worked on treaty rights, land restoration, that he looked murderers in the eye, that he frowned while witnesses stuttered and silenced clever lawyers with a slice of irony. I said nothing, but as I read on I was flooded by a slow leak of dismay… Where was the greatness? The Drama? The respect?

Related Characters: Joe Coutts (speaker), Bazil

Related Themes:

Page Number: 48

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Joe, who has been reading Bazil's court files for quite some time, begins to realize that Bazil's work as a tribal judge is not everything that he thought it was.

Joe, who had imagined his father making landmark decisions to advance Native rights and autonomy, finds that instead Bazil has been deciding squabbles over petty theft and other minutiae. Joe clearly is basing his understanding of what judges do on television crime shows as he describes picturing his father giving witty retorts to lawyers and deciding murder cases. As Joe realizes that his father's job is not what he expected, the readers sees Joe's image of his father change as he makes the key realization that his father is not a superhero, but a normal man. This realization, which is essential to many children's development into adults, signals that Joe is beginning to question his father's previously unquestionable authority. It also changes Joe's perception of Native law, which Joe had believed to be a great mass of life changing decisions. Instead, Joe sees that the legal system he so admired is not everything he dreamed it was.

Chapter 4 Quotes

❝ During the old days when Indians could not practice their religion— well … pre-1978—the round house had been used for ceremonies. People pretended it was a social dance hall or brought their Bibles for gatherings… By the time the priest or the BIA superintendent arrived, the water drums and eagle feathers … and sacred pipes were in a couple of motorboats halfway across the lake… There was one old Catholic priest who used to sit down with the medicine people… The old priest had learned the songs. No priest knew those songs now.

Related Characters: Joe Coutts (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 60

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Joe explains how the Chippewa community used the round house for Chippewa ceremonies when practicing Native religion was still prohibited. According to Joe, Catholicism was forced upon the community, which was supervised by priests and the Bureau of Indian Affairs (the BIA).

The fact that Chippewa religion was restricted up until 1978, less than a decade before the book takes place, may come as a surprise to readers unfamiliar with Native law and culture. Obviously, Joe's history lesson gives the reader a sense of the historically tense relationship between Catholicism and the Chippewa people, since Catholicism was long used as a tool to suppress Chippewa culture. However, rather than converting, many Chippewa people used the trappings of Catholicism against their oppressors by using Bible study as a guise for their traditional ceremonies and gatherings.

Joe also mentions one Catholic priest who partook in the ceremonies rather than shutting them down. By referring to this Catholic leader who, rather than being threatened by Chippewa religion, embraced it, Erdrich seems to suggest the possibility of a harmonious and cross cultural relationship between Catholicism and Chippewa religion, rather than a contentious one.

Chapter 5 Quotes

❝ Now you listen to me, Joe. You will not badger me or harass me. You will leave me to think the way I want to think, here. I have to heal any way I can. You will stop asking questions and you will not give me any worry. You will not go after him. You will not terrify me, Joe. I've had enough fear for my whole life. You will not add to my fear. You will not add to my sorrows. You will not be part of this… All of this… It is all a violation.

Related Characters: Geraldine (speaker), Linden Lark, Joe Coutts

Related Themes:

Page Number: 89-90

Explanation and Analysis

Geraldine speaks this quote after Joe comes up to her room and, obviously upset, asks her why she cannot "come back to life" and tell them who her rapist is. Geraldine shuts Joe's complaints down in this forceful moment.

Joe states that Geraldine takes on a voice like her old self, readopting her motherly authority as she commands Joe not to "badger" or "harass" her. When Geraldine instructs Joe to let her "heal any way [she] can," she seems to be speaking against not only Joe's complaints, but also all of Bazil's attempts to get her to recommence her normal life before she is ready. This suggests that, while Bazil has her best interests at heart, this approach is denying her the autonomy she needs. Geraldine then says that Joe "will not be part of this," saying it is "all a violation." It is unclear exactly what constitutes "this," but Geraldine seems to be implying that "this" is the entire case and the attempts to get her to tell her story and to resume a normal life. The word violation, which is closely linked to the idea of rape, seems to imply that, by forcing Geraldine to hurry up and recover, Bazil and Joe are actually re-victimizing her.

❝ I should have told you I am proud of you… But do you understand that if something should happen to you, Joe, that your mother and I would … we couldn't bear it. You give us life…

You gave *me* life, I said. That's how it's supposed to work. So let me do what I want with it! I ran for my bike…He tried to catch at me with his arms but I swerved at the last moment and put on a burst of speed that put me out of his reach.

Related Characters: Joe Coutts, Bazil (speaker), Geraldine

Related Themes:

Page Number: 93-94

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Bazil tries to tell Joe not to try to take part in the investigation of Geraldine's rape, and Joe becomes angry at his father and bikes away, not coming home for the rest of the day.

This scene follows the classic format of a fight between parent and teenage child, with Joe feeling frustrated by his lack of autonomy and Bazil feeling concerned for Joe's safety. Obviously, in most families this fight is over party-going or dating, not over pursuing a criminal and avenging one's mother. Still, Joe and Bazil's fight shows how Joe is following a typical coming-of-age arc, even though it is

occurring in unusual conditions, and perhaps happening more quickly or painfully because of those circumstances.

Chapter 6 Quotes

The welfare stole me from Betty and I was alone in the whiteness.

Related Characters: Linda Lark (speaker), Linden Lark, Betty Wishkob

Related Themes:

Page Number: 123

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Linda, who is about to donate her kidney to Linden, describes how painful her time away from Betty was after she was removed by social services.

Interestingly, in a book that is loaded with racial tensions and racialized choices, Linda describes her traumatic time away from Betty as "the whiteness." It is unclear why Linda uses that language and whether it is emotional impulse or a specific reference to her surroundings. Still, the description of Linda's deeply upsetting time away from Betty as the "whiteness" suggests that "whiteness" is an overwhelming, negative force. This is extremely interesting because of how, in mainstream Western European and American culture, whiteness is so often coded as a positive thing, both racially and metaphorically. Linda would have been around mostly white people during her time away from Betty, and her use of the word "whiteness" could be a reference to her negative experience of white people as a unit. Regardless, Erdrich's word choice seems specifically intended to upset racial hierarchies that are reinforced by coding "darkness" as negative and "whiteness" as positive.

Chapter 7 Quotes

We came to the tree that people call the hanging tree, a huge oak. The sun was in its branches. There were prayer flags, strips of cloth. Red, blue, green, white, the old time Anishinaabe colors of the directions, according to Randall. Some cloths were faded, some new. This was the tree where those ancestors were hanged. None of the killers ever went on trial. I could see the land of their descendants, already full of row crops.

Related Characters: Joe Coutts (speaker), Sonja, Randall Lafournais

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 140

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Joe and Sonja go to the hanging tree to bury the passbooks for bank accounts they filled with money from the doll Joe found in the lake. As they pass by the tree, Joe meditates on its significance.

The hanging tree is the spot where, several generations ago, a band of white men lynched several Chippewa men and then were never punished for their crimes. The tree obviously represents, and is even named after, an act of incredible bigotry, injustice, and hatred on the part of white people against Chippewa people—one of many throughout history. By bringing up this hate crime that occurred several generations ago as Joe goes to hide money that is connected to Mayla's death at Linden's hands, Erdrich draws attention to the lack of generational change in white aggression towards Chippewa people. Elsewhere, Bazil notes that Linden's great-uncle actually participated in this hanging, suggesting that the deeply rooted racism of white people around the reservation has been passed down directly and without interference.

Considering that Linden's own hate crimes are symbolized in the beginning of the book as the trees Joe must uproot from his family house's foundation, the reader could view the hanging tree as a symbol of what happens when instances of racism are not punished, and instead become rooted in the community's memory as reminders of oppression and pain.

You don't swear on the job, said Sonja. You're representing something.
Okay.
We drove for a few miles. I asked what I was representing.
Reservation-based free market enterprise. People are watching us.
Who's watching us?
White people. I mean, resentful ones. You know? Like those Larks who owned Vinland. He's been here, but he's nice to me. Like, he's not so bad.
Linden?
Yeah, that one.

Related Characters: Joe Coutts, Sonja (speaker), Linden

Lark

Related Themes:

Page Number: 141

Explanation and Analysis

In this dialogue, Sonja, who has just offered Joe a job at the gas station, stipulates that Joe must not curse while working because he is representing a Native business and white people are "watching them."

Sonja, who is herself white, seems to acutely understand the racial dynamics underlying interactions between white people and Native people when she talks about Joe's need to represent himself well in front of white people. Sonja seems to be implying that, by cursing on the job, Joe would be reinforcing negative stereotypes that "resentful" white people have about Native people. In this scene, Sonja teaches Joe, who is at first confused and seems to never have thought of this, that, as a member of a minority, he will frequently be seen as a representative of his people (or, as Sonja says in reference to the gas station, "reservation-based free market enterprise"), whether he likes it or not.

Now the crane Mom used to watch, or its offspring, flapped slowly past my window. That evening it cast the image not of itself but of an angel on my wall…Through some refraction of brilliance the wings arched up from the slender body. Then the feathers took fire so the creature was consumed by light.

Related Characters: Joe Coutts (speaker), Geraldine

Related Themes:

Page Number: 148

Explanation and Analysis

Joe narrates this quote as he describes himself lying in his bed and watching a crane fly past his window. Joe has just finished telling the reader about how, when Geraldine was pregnant, she used to watch cranes fly by Joe's window as she painted his room.

Joe is thinking about all the things that make him anxious or upset or angry, from Geraldine's rape to his lust for Sonja, when suddenly the crane appears. As he watches the crane fly by, Joe's language use, such as his description of the bird's wings as "brilliant" and idea of the bird being "consumed by light," suggest that the crane's presence is comforting and beautiful, taking Joe's mind off of his worries. Notably, Joe describes the crane, which is also his doodem in Chippewa religion, as an angel. The description of the bird as an angel, which is a figure from Christian ideology, then suggests the potential for a harmonious hybridity of Joe's religious faith.

Chapter 8 Quotes

I suppose I am one of those people who just hates Indians generally… my feeling is that Indian women are—what he called us, I don't want to say… He said we have no standing under the law for a good reason and yet have continued to diminish the white man and to take his honor… I won't get caught, he said… I know as much law as a judge. Know any judges? I have no fear… The strong should rule the weak. Instead of the weak the strong! It is the weak who pull down the strong.

Related Characters: Linden Lark, Geraldine (speaker), Joe Coutts, Bazil, Mayla Wolfskin

Related Themes:

Page Number: 161

Explanation and Analysis

Linden Lark speaks this quote in the round house to Mayla and Geraldine, and Geraldine then paraphrases it to Bazil and Joe as she finally tells the story of her rape. In the quote, Linden, who has just raped Geraldine and is threatening to kill her and Mayla, talks about his hatred for Native people, and especially Native women.

Through this quote, Erdrich shows how Linden's violence is fueled by his bigotry, his misogyny and the intersection of the two. As Linden expounds on his white supremacist ideology, he makes it clear that he views white people as both inherently superior to Native people and victims of injustice at their hands as he talks about how, at present, "the weak" rule "the strong" and Native people continue to "diminish the white man and to take his honor." Linden's peculiar sense of both victimization and superiority gives the reader insight into how warped and irrational racist ideology really is. Interestingly, Linden also evokes the idea of law repeatedly, bragging that he won't get caught and that he "knows as much law as a judge." Linden's hubris regarding the legal system, and his conviction he won't be caught (which actually turns out to be accurate) suggests that the privileges white people experience in the justice system empower criminals like Linden to commit more violent crimes than they might otherwise because they believe that they will not face the consequences.

I won't touch her, see? Even though some prick she's stringing along bought her diamond earrings. I won't touch her. But she is dirty. His eyes rolled toward her, red with weeping now. Dirty. Someone else, Joe.

Related Characters: Whitey (speaker), Sonja, Joe Coutts

Related Themes:

Page Number: 175

Explanation and Analysis

Whitey speaks this quote after he has beaten Sonja and Joe comes in and stops him.

In this quote, Whitey promises Joe that he won't hit Sonja again, but he also tries to justify his actions by calling Sonja "dirty" and telling Joe that Sonja has been cheating on him (even though Joe knows that Sonja actually bought the earrings with the money from the doll—but he can't tell Whitey that). Whitey's fury at Sonja stems from his possessiveness of her and his irrational jealousy as he jumps to the conclusion that Sonja is cheating without even asking her about it in earnest.

Upsettingly, Whitey, who is Joe's favorite uncle and a respected member of the Chippewa community, reasons that it is okay for him to beat Sonja in the same way that Linden rationalizes hurting Mayla, minus the bigotry against Native people. Like Linden, Whitey sees infidelity as a justification for assaulting his partner, and, like Linden, he uses misogynistic language (like the word "dirty") to describe her. By showing how Whitey's violence mirrors Linden's, even though it is less extreme, Erdrich suggests that violence against women is a pattern that any man can perpetuate, not just people like Linden who are disturbed and on the margins.

As he dragged himself along ... Nanapush sang the buffalo song although it made him cry. It broke his heart. He remembered how when he was a small boy the buffalo had filled the world. Once, when he was little, the hunters came down to the river. Nanapush climbed a tree to look back where the buffalo came from. They covered the earth at that time. They were endless. He had seen that glory. Where had they gone? ... people had seen white men shoot thousands off a train car, and leave them to rot.

Related Characters: Mooshum (speaker), Joe Coutts, Nanapush

Related Themes:

Page Number: 184-185

Explanation and Analysis

This quote is excerpted from the second part of the story that Mooshum tells Joe in his sleep about Akii, Nanapush, and their search for buffalo. In the quote, Nanapush, who has left his mother to go pursue the buffalo, becomes upset as he sings the buffalo song, crying and reminiscing about the buffalo he remembers from his childhood.

While Nanapush walks, he thinks about the how plentiful the buffalo were when he was young, so many that they "covered the earth" and "were endless." As Nanapush wonders where this "glory" went, his wistfulness resembles Joe's own sadness about outgrowing his childhood. Nanapush's growing pains are much different, obviously, but both boys express a sense of having lost the security that they once had—for Nanapush, it is food security and a part of his culture, and for Joe, it is domestic stability. Notably, both boy's innocence was ended due to the violent actions of white people to harm Native people: in Nanapush's case, the mass slaughter of the buffalo, and in Joe's case, Linden's crimes against Geraldine.

Chapter 9 Quotes

It was true, however, that Mooshum had still been a child when his family left behind their neat cabin, their lands, their barn and sweet water well, and fled Batoche after Louis Riel was caught and sentenced to be hanged. They came down over the border, where they were not exactly welcomed with open arms. Still, they were taken in by an unusually kind-hearted chief who told the U.S. government that maybe it threw away its half-breed children and gave them no land, but that the Indians would take these children into their hearts.

Related Characters: Joe Coutts (speaker), Mooshum

Related Themes:

Page Number: 201

Explanation and Analysis

Here Joe relays Mooshum's story of his childhood. Joe tells the reader how Mooshum, who is not actually Chippewa by birth, but rather is Métis, traveled with his family from Canada to the Chippewa reservation as refugees after a failed Métis rebellion.

The Métis rebellion that Joe refers to, like so many standoffs between Native people and the governments of

the United States and Canada, was started because of a land dispute when white settlers began to encroach on Native land. Mooshum's family was among the people displaced in this skirmish. By drawing attention to Mooshum's family's displacement, Joe once again draws the reader's attention to how central land control is to the history of injustice against Native people.

Upon crossing the border into the United States, Mooshum's family found shelter with the Chippewa people, whose chief stated that "maybe [the U.S. government] threw away its half-breed children…but that the Indians would take these children into their hearts." The chief sees the United States government as abandoning the people who belong to them but do not to fit the norm, while he imagines the Chippewa tribe as a collective foster family for these people. The chief's words show how the trend of foster and surrogate families, which is highly present on the reservation, traces back through history. This dynamic maps neatly onto Linda's situation, as the Larks, representing white America, cast her aside for her imperfections, but Betty Wishkob and the Chippewa community welcome her with open arms.

> I lay awake thinking of the place on the hill, the holy wind in the grass, and how the structure had cried out to me. I could see a part of something larger, an idea, a truth, but just a fragment. I could not see the whole, but just a shadow of that way of life.

Related Characters: Joe Coutts (speaker), Mooshum

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 215

Explanation and Analysis

Joe, who has just finished listening to the end of Mooshum's story about how Nanapush based the construction of the round house on the buffalo, meditates on the structure and what it represents.

Joe sees the round house as a sacred place, describing "holy wind in the grass" and the structure's magnetic energy. Obviously the round house, which is a central meeting place for religious ceremonies, is extremely important to Chippewa religion. As Joe thinks about the culture, religion, and history that the round house represents, he thinks that he can see "something larger, an idea, a truth," but he then realizes that it is "just a fragment… a shadow of that way of life." Joe's words imply that, while the round house gives him a window into traditional Chippewa life and religion, that lifestyle and culture has been so diminished by the efforts to suppress it that it is now only a shadow of its former self.

Joe does not indicate whether this culture might be restored or not. Notably, the round house is based on a buffalo, which were central to Chippewa culture but no longer exist in Minnesota, so it is possible that this culture is no longer entirely reachable. On the other hand, people like Randall obvious make a huge effort to involve themselves in Chippewa culture, and maybe can help to revitalize it. Regardless, as Joe thinks of the round house, he realizes the violence of the cultural suppression that Chippewa people have faced.

> You're crying, aren't you? Cry all you want, Joe. Lots of men cry after they do something nasty to a woman… I thought of you like my son. But you just turned into another piece a shit guy. Another gimme-gimme asshole, Joe. That's all you are.

Related Characters: Sonja (speaker), Joe Coutts

Related Themes:

Page Number: 222-223

Explanation and Analysis

Sonja speaks this quote after her strip dance for Mooshum, which Joe insisted on watching as well. When Sonja asked Joe to leave, he threatened to tell Whitey about the money she hid from him, blackmailing her into letting him stay. Just before this quote, as Sonja is winding down from the strip dance, Sonja tell Joe about the excessive male violence she has faced in her life.

As Sonja tells Joe about all of the men that have hurt her, he starts to cry, and Sonja then compares Joe to those same men, saying that "lots of men cry after they do something nasty to a woman." By connecting the dots between Joe's manipulation and the violence that those men inflicted upon her (such as cutting her breast with a broken bottle), Sonja shows Joe how his coercion of her was its own kind of violence. Joe, who has, until this point, only objectified Sonja, crosses into behavior that Sonja classifies as truly treating women poorly. Joe's path from ogler to "piece a shit guy" shows how smaller instances of disrespect towards

women can lead to more damaging forms of misogyny.

❝ These are the decisions that I and many other tribal judges try to make. Everything we do, no matter how trivial, must be crafted keenly. We are trying to build a solid base here for our sovereignty. We try to press against the boundaries of what we are allowed… Our records will be scrutinized by Congress one day and decisions on whether to enlarge our jurisdiction will be made. Some day. *We want the right to prosecute criminals of all races on all lands within our original boundaries*… What I am doing now is for the future, though it may seem small, or trivial, or boring, to you.

Related Characters: Bazil (speaker), Joe Coutts

Related Themes:

Page Number: 229-230

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Bazil explains to Joe how he sees the state of tribal law and why he feels that his role as a tribal judge matters by building a structure out of silverware and a rotting casserole. Joe, who went from believing that Bazil was a superstar judge at the beginning of the book to telling Bazil that he had no authority after the justice system failed to charge Linden, listens carefully as his father describes how he sees his life's work.

When Bazil describes how he believes his small, individual, and minute decisions are building toward an ultimate goal of increased Native sovereignty, his understanding of his role is obviously not as a superhero like Joe used to think, but as a public servant to his people, devoting his time to improving Native law even when it is tedious, painstaking, and ungratifying. Again, and as he does throughout the book, Bazil draws attention to the fact that his primary goals for Native sovereignty involve land rights. After this conversation, Joe seems to have a better understanding of his father and his father's work, which, although humbler than Joe originally imagined, is much more meaningful, purposeful, and stewardly.

Chapter 10 Quotes

❝ Every time there is an evil, much good comes of it— people in these circumstances choose to do an extra amount of good, show unusual love, become stronger in their devotion to Jesus… I have seen it in people who go their own ways, your traditionals, and never come to mass except for funerals… They come to the wakes. Even if they are so poor they have nothing, they give the last of their nothing to another human. We are never so poor that we cannot bless another human, are we? So it is that every evil, whether moral or material, results in good.

Related Characters: Father Travis (speaker), Joe Coutts

Related Themes:

Page Number: 254

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Father Travis preaches to Joe, who has come to him under the pretense of wanting to learn the Catechism, but actually hopes that Father Travis will teach him how to shoot. Father Travis talks with Joe about the different kinds of evil and how to understand and process them.

The thesis of Father Travis's miniature sermon (which is only excerpted here) is, essentially, that God must allow for evil in order to allow for goodwill, but that he makes sure that good also comes out of it. In this particular quote, Father Travis suggests that what God wants is for people, when they encounter evil, to turn their anger and upset into love for the people around them.

As Father Travis speaks, Joe, who has already plotted to murder Linden, becomes extremely uncomfortable, as he is clearly doing the exact opposite of this teaching. Caught between Catholic and Chippewa belief systems, Joe sees his choice as the execution of Chippewa wiindigoo justice, and so has come to believe that it is justified. Father Travis's description of extremely poor "traditionals" (which is to say, followers of the Chippewa religion) attending funerals and giving "the last of their nothing to another human" seems to particularly bother Joe, who has firmly rooted his violent choice in the teachings of Chippewa religion. As Father Travis describes how even "traditionals" strive to make good out of evil, Joe seems to be doubting whether his choice is really justifiable in any belief system.

Chapter 11 Quotes

I should have felt happy watching them across the table, but instead I was angered by their ignorance. Like I was the grown-up and the two of them holding hands were oblivious children. They had no idea what I had gone through for them.

Related Characters: Joe Coutts (speaker), Bazil, Geraldine

Related Themes:

Page Number: 305

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Joe, who has just killed Linden, watches as his parents, who are much happier and more at ease now that Linden is dead, hold hands and act lovingly towards one another. Joe, knowing he should be happy for them and that this is exactly what had wanted, instead becomes angry.

Joe feels "angered by [his parents] ignorance," and that it is like he is "the grown-up" and the two of them are "oblivious children" who cannot understand or appreciate the sacrifices that Joe made for them. In this interesting role reversal, Joe, who has been taking on increasingly adult roles since his mother's rape, often caring for her and making independent choices including killing Linden, seems to resent his new role. Interestingly, being the person making sacrifices, which Joe's parents have done for Joe his entire life, makes Joe angry. This might reflect the damaging emotions that murdering Linden instilled in Joe, making him angrier than he used to be. It might also be a natural reaction to the transition from childhood to adulthood—coming of age generally means accepting all the pain and complication of the world and giving up childish ignorance, and this can be a frustrating process.

Behind them in the next room the shelves of old books stood… *Meditations*. Plato. *The Iliad*. Shakespeare… There was William Warren, Basil Johnston, *The Narrative of the Captivity and Adventures of John Tanner*, and everything by Vine Deloria Jr… I looked at the books as if they could help us. But we had moved way far past books now into the stories Mooshum told in his sleep. There were no quotations in my father's repertoire for where we were, and it was beyond me at the time to think of Mooshum's sleeptalking as a reading of traditional case law.

Related Characters: Joe Coutts (speaker), Mooshum, Geraldine, Bazil

Related Themes:

Page Number: 307

Explanation and Analysis

Just before this quote, Bazil, alluding to the fact that he suspects that Joe killed Linden, tells Joe that he would not tell law enforcement anything about who killed Linden if he knew. Bazil then goes on to imagine that, if that person were convicted, he may be able to argue that they were acting according to old but valid Chippewa law.

Bazil's comment about arguing that Linden's murder is wiindigoo justice makes Joe think about all the books, including the handbook on case law, that are on Bazil's bookshelf. After listing the many titles there (which are primarily written by white men), Joe decides that they had moved "way far past books now into the stories that Mooshum told in his sleep." Joe's belief that he is now beyond the reach of the books on Bazil's shelf and in the domain of Mooshum's stories seems to suggest that the books, which are primarily written in the white European or Euro-American tradition, do not touch on Joe's own experience anymore, which is so rooted in a cultural context outside of the white American norm. That Joe feels they are instead in Mooshum's stories suggests that Joe feels much more connected to Native narratives, and perhaps informs Joe's later choice to write his own story.

In all those miles… there was nothing to be said. I cannot remember speaking and I cannot remember my mother or my father speaking. I knew that they knew everything. The sentence was to endure… I do remember, though, the familiar sight of the roadside café just before we would cross the reservation line. On every one of my childhood trips that place was always a stop for ice cream, coffee and a newspaper, pie… But we did not stop this time. We passed over in a sweep of sorrow that would persist into our small forever. We just kept going.

Related Characters: Joe Coutts (speaker), Cappy Lafournais, Geraldine, Bazil

Related Themes:

Page Number: 317

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, which ends the final chapter of the book, Joe describes the drive home from the police station after the

car crash that kills Cappy.

Joe's memory of the drive home is utterly devoid of dialogue, perhaps implying the impossibility of putting the tragedy that just occurred into narrative. Joe knows that his parents "know everything," meaning, presumably, that they know that Joe and Cappy killed Linden. When Joe says that "the sentence was to endure," he implies that his punishment, rather than being dealt from the legal system or his parents, is a spiritual obligation to "endure"— to carry on in the absence of Cappy, his best friend, and with the shame and guilt of his actions.

As Joe's family passed by the roadside café where they used to stop on long road trips during Joe's childhood, they do not stop, symbolizing that Joe has departed fully from his childhood innocence. When Joe states that they "passed over in a sweep of sorrow that would persist into [their] small forever," he suggests that, whereas previously he tried to restore his childhood by helping Geraldine out of her trauma, Joe has finally accepted with Cappy's death that he can not undo the heartache he and his family have experienced.

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.

CHAPTER ONE: 1988

The Round House opens as the narrator, Joe, describes himself and his father Bazil weeding **saplings** that have grown into the foundation of his parents' house. As Bazil removes some of the seedlings, he accidentally makes spots for new trees to grow the next year. Joe expresses surprise that any of the saplings had survived the hard winter. Bazil stands up and tells Joe they've done enough, but Joe continues to work as Bazil goes into the house to call Geraldine, Joe's mother. Joe continues to weed alone all afternoon with an unusually sharp focus. Joe says that he retrospectively wonders why he was so focused on the project.

The opening scene of the book is loading with symbolic significance, as Joe uproots trees that have begun to grow into the foundation of his house. As the plot of the novel unfolds, it later becomes clear that this scene foreshadows Joe's murder of Linden Lark to avenge his mother's rape. Like the murder, uprooting the trees protects Joe's childhood home, but both also require Joe to be violent in a way that hurts him and diminishes his innocence.

When Joe finally quits weeding the **trees**, he goes into Bazil's study to peruse Bazil's copy of *Handbook of Federal Indian Law*. Joe notes an exclamation point in the margin next to a case called *United States v. Forty-three Gallons of Whiskey*. Joe finds the name funny, but the case is actually very important, as it upheld a precedent that Native treaties with the United States government were the same as those of sovereign nations. Joe drinks a glass of water as he reads and thinks that the "grandeur and power" of the Chippewa people that his grandfather, Mooshum, talks about has not been totally lost because it was legally protected.

As Joe reads through his father's anthology of Native case law, he demonstrates a reverence towards his father's work. Early on in the book, Joe is optimistic about the protections, powers, and autonomy that the law provides to Native tribes. Later, as Joe comes of age and grows increasingly frustrated by the lack of progress on his mother's case, he becomes extremely cynical about law, his father's work, and Native sovereignty in America.

Bazil walks into the study and Joe hides the book under the table. Bazil then asks Joe where Geraldine is. Joe and Bazil stare at each other briefly in a way that Joe thinks is "somehow adult." Joe suggests that Geraldine may be at work. It is a Sunday, but Geraldine, who is a tribal enrollment specialist, had received a phone call and then told Joe she was going to her office to find a file. However, Joe thinks his mother should be back by now. Joe muses that, unbeknownst to women, men count on the "regularity of [women's] habits," so Geraldine's absence surprises them.

As Bazil questions Geraldine's absence, Joe and Bazil exchange a look that is "somehow adult." This look, which conveys concern for Geraldine's well being, is the first indication that Geraldine's rape will usher in a new adult role for Joe. Meanwhile, Joe's comment about women's habits reflects the gender roles that later make it difficult for Bazil and Joe to adjust to domestic life without Geraldine.

Bazil and Joe exit the house to borrow Joe's uncle Edward's car and find Geraldine. Joe explains to the reader that his father is a judge. Joe walks with his father to his aunt Clemence and Edward's house. Joe's grandfather Mooshum, who is very elderly, also lives with them. Joe and Bazil borrow Clemence's car and drive to Geraldine's office, but the parking lot is empty. As Joe and Bazil drive to the grocery store to see if Geraldine stopped there, Joe begins to feel how abnormal it is that Geraldine has not come home.

As Joe describes Clemence and Edward's proximity and Mooshum's presence, Erdrich shows Joe's extended family to be extremely tight-knit. This familial network becomes essential later, when Geraldine and Bazil, distracted by Geraldine's healing and her case, are too busy to parent Joe, and Joe spends extended periods of time with his aunts and uncles.

Once they are halfway to the grocery store, it occurs to Joe that it is closed on Sundays. Bazil keeps driving, however, and suddenly Geraldine speeds past them going in the other direction, looking anxious, and presumably heading home. Bazil speculates that Geraldine is angry that she had also forgotten that the grocery store was closed on Sundays, exclaiming "oh Geraldine!" Joe can tell from those two words how much Bazil loves Geraldine. Knowing Geraldine is safe, Joe and Bazil relax. Bazil and Joe then take their time returning Clemence's car.

Bazil's love for Geraldine, which is so palpable in this moment as well as later in the book, offers Joe a model of a man having a loving and caring relationship with a woman rather than a manipulative or exploitative one. This serves as an important balance in a book where many men, including men that Joe thinks of as role models, mistreat, objectify, and even abuse women.

When they get to the house, Joe and Bazil see that Geraldine is still in her car. Bazil runs toward her, realizing that something is wrong. He opens the driver's side door and pries Geraldine's fingers from the steering wheel, then lifts her out of the car. Joe notices that she has vomited on the front of her dress and that the back of her dress and the car seat are both covered in blood.

In this gruesome description, Erdrich and Joe emphasize the violence that Geraldine has endured by dwelling on the vomit and blood on her dress. Joe's attention to detail in this description underlines the fact that seeing his mother immediately after her rape has clearly traumatized him.

Bazil tells Joe to tell Clemence that he is taking Geraldine to the emergency room. He lays Geraldine in the backseat. Geraldine, though conscious, does not speak. Joe sits with her, noticing the smell of gasoline on her, and he insists on staying with his mother rather than going to talk to Clemence. Joe realizes that he rarely challenges his father, but Bazil concedes now. Joe holds Geraldine, who is shaking, and tells his father to drive fast. When they arrive at the emergency room, someone immediately comes over and puts Geraldine on a gurney. Bazil sends Joe to call Clemence. The nurses wheel Geraldine away to be seen by a doctor.

As Joe challenges his father for the first time while Bazil is intent on rushing Geraldine to the hospital, he begins to test authority in a way that shows his growing adult agency. When Bazil concedes, it seems like his decision may be primarily due to his distraction and desire to get Geraldine to the hospital quickly, showing how Geraldine's trauma is part of what catapults Joe to adulthood.

Joe sits down in the waiting room across from a pregnant woman who is reading a magazine. The woman asks Joe if "you Indians" don't have a hospital on the reservation. Joe tells her that the emergency room is under construction. The woman says, "still," and Joe gets angry. He uses the phone in the nurse's office to call Clemence, but no one picks up. Joe sits back down in the waiting room as far away from the pregnant woman as possible.

The pregnant woman in the waiting room shows that bigotry exists prominently in the area around the reservation, so much so that it is even openly expressed and normalized. The fact of the woman's pregnancy, meanwhile, emphasizes the trans-generational nature of prejudice.

The pregnant woman turns to the woman next to her and audibly speculates that Geraldine has had a miscarriage or has been raped. The woman then looks back at Joe to see his reaction. Joe walks over to the woman, takes the magazine from her hands, rips its cover off, and then rips it up. Joe gives the pieces of the magazine cover back to her and walks out. Outside, Joe hears the woman complaining to the nurse. He resolves to stay outside until the woman leaves or Bazil comes to get him. Joe mulls over what the pregnant woman said, thinking it cannot be a miscarriage because Geraldine had had an operation to make her infertile. That only left the other possibility— rape.

As the pregnant woman hypothesizes that Geraldine was raped or suffered a (apparently violently induced) miscarriage, her significant glances at Joe seem to imply that Geraldine endured violence at the hands of a Chippewa man. Clearly, the woman has bought into racist stereotypes of domestic unrest in Native communities, and though she seems to present her comment as sympathy for a victim of gendered violence, she is actually using it to belittle Joe during this traumatic time.

Later, the pregnant woman leaves the waiting room, so Joe goes back inside and calls Clemence, who, upon talking with Joe, leaves for the hospital immediately. A nurse brings Joe to see Geraldine in her hospital room. Joe finds his mother in a hospital bed, with Bazil standing over her. Joe notices Geraldine's swollen and distorted face and asks what happened. Geraldine doesn't answer this, but tells him she is "all right." Joe reaches out to touch Geraldine, but Geraldine yelps and pulls her hand away, to Joe's dismay. Bazil gestures for Joe to follow him, and once they are outside the room Joe tells his father that Geraldine is "not all right." Bazil says that Geraldine was attacked, but does not know by whom. Bazil tells Joe that they will find the attacker, and Joe agrees.

In this scene, the reader sees Joe confronting the reality of his mother's trauma, both physical and emotional. He takes in her bruises and swelling, realizing that she is badly hurt. It is her fearful reaction to Joe's touch, though, that makes Joe deeply concerned for Geraldine's well-being. Although Geraldine tells Joe that she is all right, she obviously cannot make him believe it. Geraldine's trauma moves her from being a comforting mother to Joe to a source of worry, and hence forces Joe into an adult parental role.

Bazil hopes the police will come quickly. When Joe asks "which police?" (meaning tribal or not) Bazil responds, "exactly." Three officers arrive at the hospital—a state trooper, a local town officer, and Vince Madwesin of the tribal police. Bazil asked for the three different officers to be present since it was not clear whether the crime had been committed on state or tribal land and whether the perpetrator was Native or not. Bazil leaves Joe and speaks with the officers one by one in a private room. Afterward, the officers shake Bazil's hand and leave.

This moment speaks to the confusing, overlapping jurisdictions that come into conflict on reservations. The line between tribal and state jurisdiction, which is rooted in the control of land, is one of the key legal issues that Erdrich explores in the novel, as it perpetuates the injustices of colonization and continues to fail Native people seeking justice.

When Bazil and Joe go back into Geraldine's room, Geraldine's doctor, Dr. Egge, is there. Dr. Egge suggests that Joe leave and gives Bazil a harsh look, so Bazil tells Joe to see if Clemence has arrived yet. Joe objects, but Bazil makes him leave. From the waiting room, Joe watches Bazil and Dr. Egge speak from afar. Bazil turns and presses his forehead and hands to the wall outside of Geraldine's room. Dr. Egge sees Joe watching and points to the waiting room. Instead, feeling "resistant to authority," Joe runs to his father and hugs him.

In this scene, like the instance when Joe challenged Bazil's command and came to the hospital, Joe actively defies his father's instructions. Joe's feeling of being "resistant to authority" shows that he is beginning to experiment with his own adult agency and capacity for disobedience, though in this poignant moment, that defiance comes from a place of love.

Joe interrupts his narrative to say that, years after Geraldine's attack, after he had gone into law and looked into his mother's case, he realized that this moment was when Dr. Egge first told Bazil the extent of Geraldine's injuries. After Joe hugs his father for awhile, Clemence arrives, separates Joe from Bazil, and leads him into the waiting room. Clemence tells Joe that Geraldine is going into surgery. Clemence proposes taking Joe home with her so he can go to school the next day, but he objects.

Joe breaks the linearity of his narrative to remind the reader that he is telling his story in retrospect, and so his account of events is highly subjective. As Joe admits to later looking through his mother's case files again, the reader understands that Geraldine's rape and its aftermath continue to traumatize Joe far into his mature adulthood.

Joe asks Clemence if his mother was raped, and she says yes. Joe then asks if Geraldine will die from it, and Clemence says no, but tells Joe that it can be "more complicated." Clemence points out that Geraldine was hurt very badly and that some rapes are more violent than others. Clemence and Joe both cry, and Joe asks Clemence why Geraldine had smelled like gasoline. Clemence says nothing, then puts her head between her knees as if she were going to faint. Joe does not ask again. He falls asleep in the waiting room and wakes up later. He sees Dr. Egge talking to Clemence, then feels a wave of relief, sensing that his mother is okay. Joe falls back asleep.

As Clemence counsels Joe about Geraldine's trauma, it is clear that Clemence, perhaps because of her identity as a woman, understands how violent rape like the one that Geraldine endured can affect not only physical well-being, but also can have detrimental long term affects on mental health. Meanwhile, Joe's youth shows as he asks naïve questions and tends to fall asleep during trying times.


CHAPTER TWO: LONELY AMONG US

Joe retrospectively states that when he was an adolescent, he had three friends, and one of them, Cappy, is now dead. Joe still carries around a black stone that Cappy gave him for comfort after his mother's rape. Joe then resumes his narrative. Geraldine, now returned from the hospital, sends Joe back to school for the last two weeks of class before summer. Joe describes how he and his three friends (Cappy, Angus, and Zack) are inseparable. Cappy lives with his older brother, Randall, and his father, Doe, who works as a janitor and as the on-and-off tribe chairman. Zack's family is composed of his mother and his stepfather, Vince Madwesin, who is the tribal police officer. Angus's family is "hardcore poor" and Aunt Star heads his run-down household.

Here Joe alludes to Cappy's death, which, although stated here, is not explicitly linked to the plot of Joe's narrative until later, when it cements Joe's transition into adulthood—but the early mention here means that Cappy is meant to be seen as a tragic character from the start. Joe's descriptions of his friends' families, meanwhile, showcase how Joe's community is full of non-nuclear families—aunts taking care of nephews, single fathers, stepparents— a fact that, rather than making the community more disparate, makes it even more tightly knit by allowing for people to be easily taken into families they are not related to.

Cappy walks Joe home after Joe's first day back to school. Though they normally spend time at one another's houses after school, Cappy does not stay over. Bazil is at his office, preparing for a leave of absence to care for Geraldine. When Joe tries to open the door to his house, he notices with surprise that it is locked. Joe gets the spare key and quietly enters the house. Normally, Geraldine would not yet be home, so Joe could have the whole house to himself. Joe realizes that everything is different now, though. He feels that the air in the house is flat, because no one has cooked since Geraldine's assault. Joe goes to the kitchen and pours himself a glass of milk, then takes a sip and, realizing it is sour, pours it back out.

Even though Geraldine has returned from the hospital and Joe has returned to school, Joe's life is far from normal again when he goes home to find the door locked. Due to Geraldine's post-traumatic stress, the entire household, which once revolved around her actions, feels utterly foreign to Joe. In this moment and throughout the book, like when Joe uproots the saplings from the house's foundation, Joe's house stands in for his entire domestic and family life, which is so altered after Geraldine's attack.


Joe feels a "tremendous hush" in the house and runs up to his parent's bedroom to see his mother. Joe throws himself down on the bed next to Geraldine. Geraldine, who had been sleeping heavily, wakes up and hits Joe in the face. Geraldine then realizes he is Joe. Joe, not wanting Geraldine to know she hurt him, tells Geraldine that the milk is sour. Geraldine panics about the idea of going to the grocery store, so Joe offers to bike to Whitey's gas station and buy more milk. Geraldine, relieved, gives Joe money, slurring as she speaks because of her sleep medication.

When Geraldine hits Joe, her actions constitute the exact opposite of what Joe would expect from his mother, who is normally so loving towards him. Joe, having intended to go to Geraldine for comfort, sees that his mother is no longer able to provide him with that. Geraldine's surprise at her own reaction to Joe suggests that violence, by instilling fear in the people who suffer from it, can beget further violence.


Joe rides his bike to his uncle Whitey's gas station, where Sonja, Whitey's wife, is working behind the counter. Sonja looks up from counting Slim Jims, sees Joe, and gives him a big hug. As Sonja hugs Joe, the feeling of Sonja's breasts turns Joe on. Joe then picks out his groceries. When he tries to pay for them, Sonja refuses his money. Sonja asks how Geraldine is, and Joe, who is still disturbed by how his mother hit him, responds that she is "not good." Sonja tells Joe that they will bring Pearl, their watchdog, to Joe's house.

Here the reader is introduced to Sonja, Joe's aunt and his major adolescent crush. While Joe and Sonja have a close friendship, Joe's sexual interest in Sonja is apparent from their first interaction, when Joe describes being turned on by Sonja's breasts. Joe displays an adolescent sexuality here that only becomes more intense over the course of the book.


After Sonja brings Pearl over, Joe complains to Bazil over dinner that Pearl is too old to play fetch. Geraldine is upstairs in her room, having declined to eat. Bazil explains that they need a watchdog because Geraldine's attacker is still at large. According to Bazil, the attacker dropped a book of matches from the local golf course at the crime scene, so they have narrowed their search to golfers. Joe asks why the man dropped the matches, and Bazil tells Joe that he was trying to light them. Joe begins to tear up. After a moment, Bazil looks up from his food and informs Joe that, after the attacker failed to light the matches, he went in search of a new box. Bazil smiles and tells Joe that Geraldine then used the spare key Bazil had stashed under her car's frame to escape. She ran to the car, got the spare key, locked herself inside, and drove away as the attacker ran towards her.

As Bazil and Joe discuss Geraldine's attack, Joe is overwhelmed by the reality of the brutality towards his mother. He begins to tear up as his father tells him about the matches, but does not articulate or mentally acknowledge any understanding that the rapist tried to burn his mother alive. Joe, whose tears seem to indicate that he recognizes what happened on some level, is perhaps unable to confront the reality of his mother's suffering because of his juvenile state. At this early stage of the novel, Joe is not yet comfortable absorbing the reality of such violence.


Bazil tells Joe they aren't sure whether the attacker is still after Geraldine, or whether the attacker is Native, white, or local. Joe explains to the reader how the government identifies Native people, stating that they look at personal history, then at blood quantum (what percentage of their genetics are from which tribes). Joe calls "being an Indian" a "tangle of red tape." Joe also says, however, that Native people recognize one another intuitively, without any paperwork.

As Joe explains the process that the government uses for establishing whether someone is Native or not, his description of Native identity as a "a tangle of red tape" reflects how, when considered from an official legal standpoint, just being *Native, like the rest of the government's Native law, is a confusing and messy process.*

One night, Bazil decides to cook dinner. Joe goes to get a pie from Clemence for dessert. At Clemence's house, Whitey, Mooshum, and Clemence are sitting around drinking iced tea. Clemence, who is caring for Mooshum in his old age, will no longer let him drink whiskey. Clemence leaves the room to check on the baking pies and Joe sits with the men while they discuss whether they think Geraldine's rapist was Native or not. Clemence reenters the room, silencing the conversation with a glance. Mooshum complains about not being allowed to drink whiskey, so Clemence goes into the kitchen and pours whiskey into shot glasses. Clemence drinks one herself, then angrily walks outside, surprising the men.

In this scene, as the men speculate and gossip about Geraldine's rape (albeit from a compassionate and Geraldine-allied standpoint), Clemence becomes extremely angry. Clemence's anger and the men's obliviousness towards it suggest that Clemence feels either that the men should not be discussing Geraldine's rape at all, or that they fail to talk about it in a useful way. Clemence's anger implies that men fail to truly understand and meaningfully discuss how women experience gendered violence.

The men return to discussing the rape, but quickly stop when they remember Joe's presence. Mooshum asks Whitey to tell him about "Red Sonja," referring to Sonja's old stripping persona, which clearly turns Mooshum on. Joe thinks of the picture of Sonja that Joe keeps in his closet for when he wants to masturbate. Clemence takes the pies out of the oven and then goes outside to smoke. Joe is surprised, as Clemence usually does not smoke. Whitey asks Joe how Geraldine is doing, and Joe tells him that she is coming out of her room that night for dinner. Mooshum warns Joe not to leave her alone too much.

Although Geraldine's rape clearly enrages them, the men fail to see anything wrong with how they themselves treat women as they transition straight from hypothesizing about Geraldine's rape to objectifying Sonja—showing a link between even more "harmless" examples of sexism and extreme gendered violence. Again, the reader gets a sense of Clemence's disgust and anger from her actions (such as smoking), but she does not actually articulate these feelings openly to her relatives.

As Joe is walking home with the pie, Doe Lafournais pulls up in his car and offers to give Joe a ride. Joe shakes his head and tells Doe he will see him later, since he will be coming over to help with Randall's sweat lodge. Joe arrives home and Bazil tells him to go wash up for dinner. After Joe washes his hands, Joe, Geraldine, and Bazil sit down in the dining room to eat the extremely unappealing stew that Bazil made. Geraldine, clearly upset by the effort of trying to act normal, struggles to eat the disgusting meal. Bazil asks if the stew is good, and in response Geraldine says she will start cooking again. Bazil tries to eat the stew but fails. Joe realizes that Bazil does know how to cook, but faked his lack of skill. Joe clears the dishes and Bazil hands out pie.

Bazil's choice to fake his bad cooking reflects his desire to get Geraldine back to her former routine. Notably, although Bazil wants what's best for Geraldine, he tries to help by manipulating her into acting like things are normal, rather than listening to her reasons for not being ready to resume her normal life. Bazil's well-meaning but ultimately unhelpful attempts to make Geraldine recover show the discrepancy between the desires of women coping with trauma and the understandings of the men trying to help them.

After dinner, Joe goes to the Lafournais household to help Randall with his sweat lodge. Joe and Cappy are the "fire keepers," meaning that they stoke the fire in exchange for food. Joe describes how he and Cappy had once roasted hot dogs in the fire and Randall was angry that they ruined its sacredness. Cappy and Joe joked around in response, infuriating Randall. When Joe arrives, Cappy has already made the fire and Randall has set up all the medicine and pipes inside. Randall's friends arrive. As Randall is loading one of the pipes, he tells Joe he is going to pray for Joe's family, which makes Joe feel uncomfortable. Cappy, noticing Joe's discomfort, says that Randall prays for everyone, and he's just interested in Ojibwe medicine in order to attract girls.

As Joe describes the difference between Joe and Cappy and Randall's attitude toward the sweat lodge, it is clear that the younger boys take Chippewa traditions much less seriously than Randall does. As the book goes on, Joe becomes much more interested in Chippewa culture, while Cappy takes an increased interest in Catholicism. The hotdog controversy highlights how religion can be engaged with in a variety of different ways—some more serious than others—and that this range can cause conflict.

It is a hot night, and Joe feels envious of the guys going into the sweat lodge, since when they come out again everything will feel cool in comparison. Randall and his friends settle into the lodge and begin singing. Joe and Cappy go to the house to refill the water cooler and, as they are coming back, they hear an explosion. Randall and his friends, naked, all run out of the sweat lodge and then run toward the house in immense pain. In the house, they try to figure out what happened, and one of Randall's friends speculates that Randall's new Pueblo medicine caused the explosion. Randall sends Cappy to fetch the medicine from the lodge. Cappy returns with the jar and Randall tastes the powder inside. It is extremely spicy, and they realize that the powder is Pueblo hot pepper. When Randall put the medicine on the rocks along with several ladles of water, the powder vaporized, burning their lungs.

In this humorous moment, Randall and his friends, who profess to take religion so seriously, accidentally burn themselves with Pueblo pepper. Throughout the book, Erdrich portrays Randall with a marked ambivalence that Joe and Cappy share—he is a knowledgeable young man engaging with Chippewa culture in important ways that benefit the community, but he also sometimes does not seem to know what he's doing when he organizes rituals (like with the pepper) and other times uses his religiosity mostly to try and impress girls. Through Randall Erdrich pokes fun at overtly devout faith, implying that it can often be at least partially for show.

Randall comes and sits next to Joe. He tells Joe that he saw a vision in the lodge as he was praying for Joe's family. In it, a ghostly man was bending over and talking to Joe. Joe asks what he should do about it, and Randall tells him to talk to Mooshum, because he had a bad feeling about the vision.

Although Erdrich mocks aspects of religious piety, she also seems to profoundly respect genuine religious belief. Several of her characters even encounter real spirits—just as Randall does here.

The next week, Geraldine begins to cook again, and Bazil meets with the police to discuss the case's progress. Bazil is concerned because Native rape cases often do not get prosecuted. On Friday, Bazil tells Joe he needs help cleaning his office, so Joe goes with him to sweep and tidy. As Joe and Bazil file papers in the archive room, Bazil pulls out some files to take home. This strikes Joe as unusual, because Bazil rarely brings works home. When they get back to the house, Bazil says he will wait to bring the files inside until after dinner, making Joe realize that Bazil does not want Geraldine to see them.

In this scene, as Joe and Bazil archive papers and select files to take home, Erdrich draws attention to the abundance of administrative work in Native law (she does elsewhere, too, like when Joe calls Nativeness a "tangle of red tape"). Unlike the romanticized version of law that Joe later admits to having imagined his father practicing, the reader sees here that the foundation of Native law is comprised of fairly boring and frustrating paperwork.

Bazil enters the house before Joe, and, as Joe walks in after him, he hears a crash and a cry. Joe goes to the kitchen and finds his mother with her back to the sink, shaking, and his father standing, arms reached out to her, a few feet away. Between them lies a smashed casserole. Joe realizes that Bazil came up behind Geraldine, putting his arms around her waist in a gesture of intimacy, and Geraldine, thinking he was an intruder, panicked, causing her to drop the casserole. Joe imagines that if this had happened before Geraldine's attack, she would have enjoyed the loving embrace and they would have all had dinner together as normal. Instead, Geraldine goes silently upstairs and back into her room.

This poignant scene forces both Joe and the reader to acknowledge how profound Geraldine's emotional scarring is after her attack. Evidentially, Bazil cannot adjust to Geraldine's fragility, and by acting as if everything is normal, he accidentally triggers her fear. Although Bazil wants Geraldine's life to return to normal, he seems unable to really understand the trauma she has faced. Like in other parts of the novel, Erdrich imply that men cannot fully process woman's trauma from gendered violence.

After Geraldine closes the bedroom door, Bazil and Joe clean up the broken casserole together. Afterward, Bazil tells Joe to help him bring the files into the house, and the two of them unload the car. They go into Bazil's study, where they read the files together. Bazil believes that the cases he selected may help them identify Geraldine's attacker. During the next week, which is the last week of school, they study the files every night. Geraldine does not leave her room, so Joe sits and reads sad poems to her until she falls asleep. Often, Joe hears his mother crying.

By accidentally triggering her, Bazil sets Geraldine back significantly. Still, Bazil tries to aid his wife by focusing on getting legal justice—the field of Bazil's expertise. Later, when Joe reads poems to his mother, Erdrich seems to be suggesting the healing power of literature and language, even if—or maybe especially because—those stories match one's own sadness.

CHAPTER THREE: JUSTICE

Joe, looking at the files with Bazil, reads a court decision about a casino employee who was fired wrongfully. He is surprised by the petty minutiae of his father's job, because he had always pictured Bazil making important and groundbreaking decisions. Joe and Bazil read another case, in which the court determined that the white owners of a gas station, George Lark and Grace Lark, had been charging tribal members extra. Bazil sets this case file aside as important, though it seems fairly normal to Joe. Bazil say he was proud that he claimed jurisdiction over that case, even though Chippewa people did not own the business.

In this scene, Joe begins to understand that, whereas he had thought his father's work was made up of exclusively landmark cases, Bazil's job is actually fairly boring. Over the course of the novel, Joe's relationship to his father changes as Joe comes into his own adult self. Part of this coming of age results in Joe thinking less and less that his father, who he always had looked up to, is actually as powerful as a tribal judge as he once seemed.

However, Bazil says, he set the Lark case aside because of the people involved, not because of his own legal victory. Bazil explains that George and Grace Lark are dead, but that their daughter Linda and their son Linden are still alive. Bazil describes the Larks as the type of people who pretend to have amiable relationships with their Chippewa neighbors in order to con and cheat them. Bazil tells Joe that the Larks were vocal opponents of abortion, but that when the twins Linden and Linda were born, they gave Linda up because of a birth defect. Betty Wishkob, a Chippewa woman, raised Linda instead.

Bazil introduces Joe and the reader to the Lark family for the first time through this court case. By describing George and Grace Lark as a particular "type" of person, rather than a few rotten individuals, Bazil and Erdrich both seem to suggest that the Larks' racism is part of a problematic pattern rather than an exceptional case. This racism, rather than being overt, is insidiously cloaked in a veneer of amicability.

Bazil pulls out another case, which describes how Linda Lark was informally adopted by the Wishkob family and, after her foster parents' deaths, the other Wishkob children let Linda continue to live in the family home. Grace Lark then applied to become Linda's guardian, stating that Linda was mentally incapable of managing herself. Grace did this because she wanted to develop the land that the Wishkobs had left Linda. The case was dismissed because Linda was not formally adopted, legally Native, or actually mentally impaired. Bazil tells Joe that after the Wishkob children found out what Grace Lark had tried to do, they organized a boycott of the Lark gas station and helped Whitey open his own, putting the Larks out of business. Linden Lark returned home around that time, and Grace Lark died soon after. Joe asks if Linden could be the attacker, and Bazil says he is not sure. Bazil explains that Linden was recently working for Curtis Yeltow, the governor of South Dakota. Linden now lives in Grace's old house.

With this second case, Erdrich gives the reader a basic overview of the extremely complicated and painful story of Linda's abandonment and adoption. In contrast to Linda's long, personal and compelling account of her story later in the book, these files and Bazil's bare-bones summary offer a sequence of events that is dramatic but dry and impersonal. Through these two different accounts of the same events—one which is only the facts, and one which is actually a story—Erdrich seems to be drawing attention to how stories, especially stories told about people's lived experience, can touch readers and make them empathize in a way that other forms of conveying information cannot.

When Bazil leaves to get more coffee, Joe reads the last case file. It describes how, during a ceremony at **the round house**, Vince Madwesin, the tribal policeman, was serving off-duty as a security guard. When Vince found some attendees drinking, he asked them to leave out of respect for the ceremony. One of the drinkers stumbled away and was later found dead from choking on his vomit. The man's brother then brought charges against Vince Madwesin. The court found both men innocent. Joe asks why his father has pulled out that case, and Bazil says it is because of the round house. Joe asks if that's where Geraldine was raped, and Bazil does not answer.

Bazil draws attention to the round house here because, as Joe surmises but Bazil refuses to acknowledge, he believes that it is where Geraldine was raped. The incident described in the case speaks to the round house's significance in the Chippewa community as an important site of religious observance and cultural practice. Joe's own interest in the round house's meaning increases later in the book, as he thinks over how it represents Chippewa history.

CHAPTER FOUR: LOUD AS A WHISPER

Joe, Cappy, Zack, and Angus all love bike riding, as it gives them a sense of freedom since they can not yet (legally) drive. One day, Joe packs lunch, leaves a note for his parents saying he is at the lake, and then leaves on his bike to meet Cappy, Zack, and Angus at the **round house**. Joe is the first one there, and he begins to look around for evidence of the crime against his mother in the lawn around the building.

Joe and his friends' bike riding shows their adolescent interest in exploration and branching out from home. However, it also represents their still-intact innocence, especially in contrast to the very adult, dangerous activity of driving, which takes on a sinister light later in the novel.

Joe hears what he thinks is a sound coming from the **round house** itself. Joe goes up to it and looks inside, but sees nothing amiss. Joe explains that, before the Chippewa people were allowed to practice their religion openly, the round house was used for secret religious ceremonies, and people would pretend they were going to Bible study there. According to Mooshum, there was actually one Catholic priest at the time who partook in the Chippewa religious rites alongside the Chippewa people. As Joe stands in the round house doorway, he realizes for certain that it was there, inside the round house, that Geraldine was attacked. Joe begins to cry.

As Joe discusses the history of the round house, it becomes clear that the round house, though it represents centuries of religious and cultural communion, also represents the efforts that were made by white Americans to stifle Chippewa spirituality and heritage. As Joe thinks of this historical weight and the fact of his mother's attack, he is perhaps overwhelmed not only by the violence done to his mother, but also its context in a larger history of cultural violence.

Joe focuses his thoughts on how exactly his mother escaped, mentally tracing her route. Joe then walks out of the building to follow the attacker's probable path along the lake to get more matches—the move that allowed Geraldine to escape. He pictures what the attacker was thinking as he realized Geraldine was escaping, and he imagines that the attacker would have felt an urgent need to get rid of the gasoline can he used to douse Geraldine. Joe imagines he would have waded out into the lake and let the can sink to the bottom. Sure enough, when Joe dives into the lake, he finds the can at the bottom.

In order to get his thoughts in line and complete his mission of finding case evidence, Joe tries to think as if he were Geraldine's attacker, imagining what he might do. This activity, although clearly for the purpose of catching the attacker, is also a strange act of empathizing. Joe's ability to successfully imagine himself as the attacker seems to inform his later concern, after killing Linden, that he shares Linden's capacity for violence.

When Cappy, Zack, and Angus arrive, they find Joe sitting outside of the **round house** and with the gas can at his feet. Joe, finally putting two and two together, feels like he is going to vomit because he has realized that Geraldine's attacker had intended to set her on fire. Joe, however, plays it cool when his friends arrive. Angus offers him a cigarette. After the boys smoke, Joe tells his friends that he wants to "get" Geraldine's attacker.

As Joe finally allows himself to understand that Geraldine's attacker had intended to set her on fire (a fact he earlier seemed to understand subconsciously, but could not actually acknowledge), he is so overwhelmed and upset that he vomits, and then articulates a clear desire for revenge.

Joe and the other boys eat the sandwiches that Joe packed. Once they finish, Joe begins explaining the geography and timeline of Geraldine's attack to his friends. Joe thinks that the attacker must have left a camp in the woods, so all the boys look for it together. As they search, the boys pick up a used condom, crushed beer cans, etc. Soon they are covered in woodticks, so they strip down and go for a swim in the lake. The boys get rowdy and make lewd sex jokes. When they get out of the water, they make a fire and sit around it, talking about Star Trek.

As the boys conduct their amateur investigation of the area, quickly becoming distracted and reverting to play, Erdrich draws an intimate picture of boyhood friendships. Although the boys attempt to help find evidence, they clearly are not actually mature enough to focus on that kind of project. Erdrich shows the reader that, at this point in the novel, the boys are still very much children.

After a while, Angus goes off in the woods to pee and returns with two six packs of Hamm's beer. They follow Angus back through the woods to the area where he found the beer, and they see a cooler and a heap of clothes. The boys drink the beers and then scan the area for evidence, laughing and joking as they look. Joe pokes the pile of clothes with a stick and then suggests that they leave the clothes to the police. The boys decide that they should drink the rest of the beer so the police don't find out that they drank half of the evidence. They jump in the lake again and then each crack open a second beer. Joe expresses his distrust of the police's methods, since they missed both the gas can and the pile of clothes. He suggests that they burn the clothes so the police won't know that they've been interfering with evidence.

When Angus finds the beer, the reader sees Joe and his friends experimenting with adulthood through activities like drinking. This experimentation escalates over the course of the book, becoming increasingly dangerous. However, this scene also reveals the boys' extreme immaturity. When Joe suggests that they burn the clothes that they found, thereby keeping evidence from the police in order to avoid getting in trouble, Erdrich shows how the boys cannot yet think beyond their own relationships to authority to prioritize things more important than themselves.

Suddenly, the boys hear a loud whistle in the woods, startling them. They quickly decide to leave. Joe ties the gas can to his bike and then the boys ride off. Realizing that they are hungry, the boys brainstorm where they can get food. They decide to go to Grandma Thunder's house, since she always is willing to feed them. They decide, though, to avoid any sexual language, because Grandma Thunder loves to joke about sex and that makes the boys uncomfortable. As the boys list all the sexual words that they should not say around her, they all start to get turned on, so they separate and go into the woods to masturbate before getting back on their bikes.

In addition to alcohol, the boys have also begun to engage in another adult domain: sexuality. The boys, none of whom seem to have actually had a sexual relationship at this point, clearly lack control over their sexual impulses, resulting in humorous moments like this one, when the boys all go masturbate in the woods. As the book goes on, Erdrich will show how Joe's currently innocent interest in sexuality becomes increasingly problematic.

The boys arrive at the retirement home where Grandma Thunder lives, and they stop in the lobby so that Joe can call Bazil and tell him where he is. On the phone, Joe asks Bazil where Geraldine is, and Bazil tells him she's upstairs. Joe tries to tell Bazil he loves him, but Bazil has already hung up. Cappy tells Joe to hurry, and Joe, upset, snaps at him.

Erdrich makes it clear that, although Bazil does certainly love Joe, he is not especially emotionally affectionate and cannot give Joe the support that he needs as he grapples with Geraldine's attack.

As the boys walk toward Grandma Thunder's apartment, Joe tries to apologize to Cappy. Cappy cuts him off, though, and says that Joe bought the shoes Cappy wanted. Joe, who covets Cappy's shoes, suggests that they trade, and they do. They all enter the apartment, where Grandma Thunder is cooking, and they start to eat the food she has already laid out. Grandma Thunder finishes cooking the meat and frybread and the boys eat ravenously. Joe is about to put his plate in the sink and say goodbye when Mrs. Bijiu, another older woman, arrives to see Grandma.

Although Bazil and Geraldine cannot support Joe the way he needs them to, Joe finds support in other parts of his community. Obviously Cappy, who is an excellent friend to Joe throughout the book, is one of these people. Adults in the community support Joe in various ways as well, including Grandma Thunder, who, although she is only related to Zach, feeds all the boys when they come to her house.

The boys all thank Grandma Thunder. As Grandma Thunder is waving them out, Mrs. Bijiu comments that one of the boys is "bony," setting the older women off into a series of raunchy sex jokes. The boys are uncomfortable, but also curious, as the women share stories about their own sex lives. They linger a while before leaving the apartment. Joe and Cappy switch their shoes back, but Joe feels that Cappy, a loyal friend, would have let Joe keep the shoes if he thought it would make him feel better.

In this moment, the reader again sees that the boys are on the cusp of adult sexuality, and are very interested in learning about sex and understanding how adults talk about it. Although the boys are repulsed by Zach's grandmother's vulgar jokes and stories, they are also drawn to them, listening in with fascination.

As Joe arrives back home, Pearl meets him at the door. Joe feeds Pearl an extra sandwich from Grandma Thunder's house, puts his bike away, and goes inside. Edward and Bazil are drinking in Bazil's study. Joe eavesdrops from the couch in the living room, figuring he will pretend to be asleep if caught. Bazil and Edward talk about how Geraldine will not let Bazil sleep in her bed and how she is isolating herself from everyone, including Joe. Bazil has trouble using the word "rape" to describe what happened to Geraldine because it clearly upsets him.

Although Bazil has been trying to be a grounding presence for Joe, Bazil himself also needs support in coping with Geraldine's attack. As Joe eavesdrops on Edward and Bazil talking through Bazil's feelings about the assault, he sees his father as a vulnerable, worried person rather than a confident authority figure, pushing Joe toward a more adult understanding of his father.

Edward tries to comfort Bazil and suggest solutions, like taking Geraldine to church (Geraldine, however, does not attend church since returning from boarding school). Bazil asks what the new parish priest is like, and Edward tells him Father Travis is a handsome ex-marine from Dallas who shoots prairie dogs in his spare time. The two men both begin to wonder whether Father Travis could have been the one who raped Geraldine, thinking that the rape in the **round house** could have been a symbolic assertion of Catholic supremacy. Joe thinks that this sounds plausible.

As Bazil and Edward discuss the possibility that Father Travis raped Geraldine in the round house as a way of symbolically asserting Catholic supremacy over Chippewa religion, they tap into the historically loaded relationship between Catholicism and the Chippewa people. Catholicism, although practiced by many Chippewa people, was frequently used as a tool to erase Chippewa traditions and culture.

Joe falls asleep on the couch and later wakes up to the sounds of Edward and Bazil saying goodbye to each other. After Edward leaves, Bazil tidies up the kitchen, then walks up the stairs into the guest bedroom instead of his room with Geraldine. Joe goes upstairs to sleep, realizing with anger that Bazil did not check to see if he was home. Joe wishes that he could go back to before his mother's attack, replaying the events of that afternoon and wondering what he could have done to change things.

The fact that Bazil and Geraldine are no longer sleeping in the same room implies that Geraldine's trauma from her rape makes her uncomfortable in any kind of intimate situation, including sleeping in the same bed as her husband. Joe's resentment towards his father, meanwhile, increases as he feels Bazil is neglecting him.

As Joe ruminates on the attack, he wonders again about the file Geraldine went back to the office to get that Sunday. Joe suddenly remembers that Geraldine had left to get the file in response to a phone call, and he wonders who could have called. Pearl enters the bedroom and looks fixedly out the window. Joe looks out to see what has gotten her attention, and in the moonlight Joe sees a shadowy silver figure that appears to be a spirit. It seems to be talking to Joe, but he cannot hear it or read its lips. Suddenly the apparition disappears. Pearl relaxes and Joe, exhausted, goes to sleep.

With Joe's sighting of this spirit, Erdrich shows the reader that, in her novel's world, characters encounter real spiritual presences. Although Erdrich pokes fun at both Chippewa and Catholic religions, she also takes religious experience very seriously, never questioning the veracity of the spiritual experiences of characters like Joe and Randall or implying that they are imagined.

The next morning, Joe wakes up early and makes toast. Bazil comes into the kitchen to make coffee and puts his hand on Joe's shoulder. Joe shrugs it off. When Bazil asks if Joe slept well, Joe, who is still upset about his father not checking on him the night before, asks angrily where Bazil thinks he slept. Bazil, surprised, says that he covered Joe with a blanket when he fell asleep on the couch. Joe then tells Bazil that he thinks he saw a ghost. Rather than dismissing Joe's claim, Bazil says that ghosts are "out there." Bazil then takes a cup of coffee up to Geraldine. Joe is angry that Bazil did not try to comfort him by telling him that ghosts do not exist.

When Bazil tells Joe that he did, in fact, check on him before going to bed, and even covered him in a blanket, Erdrich seems to be implying that Joe's anger at his father is not based on neglect on Bazil's part. Rather, Joe's resentment towards his father reflects the pain of breaking away from his parents in order to establish an independent identity. The reader sees this again as Joe is angered when Bazil does not comfort Joe about the ghost.

When Bazil returns, Joe asks what he meant when he said that ghosts are "out there." Bazil explains that he used to see ghosts when he worked in a graveyard. Joe is astonished that Bazil believes in ghosts. He asks Bazil why he thinks the ghost was outside his bedroom window. Bazil suggests it may be because of Geraldine's attack, saying that ghosts are "attracted to disturbances." Bazil also says the ghost may be someone from Joe's future. He suggests that Joe watch out for the ghost in case it's trying to tell him something. Joe then remembers how Randall told him that he also saw a ghost in the sweat lodge. Joe hopes he can appease the ghost with Ojibwe medicine.

Again, Erdrich and her characters obviously take spiritual experiences like Joe's seriously. Bazil's descriptions of what ghosts mean comes from his knowledge of Chippewa religion, in which spirits are not unusual. By taking the ghosts seriously, Erdrich also takes seriously the Chippewa religion that they are affiliated with, rather than dismissing these experiences because they do not fit into white Euro-American logic.

Joe tells his father not to worry about the ghost, and Bazil agrees. Joe suggests they recruit Father Travis to bless the yard to keep the ghost away, and Bazil realizes out loud that Joe was listening to him and Edward talk the night before. Joe confirms that that is true, and he also reveals that he went with Cappy, Angus, and Zack to the **round house**.

Although Joe has begun acting without his parents' approval and making independent decisions, he clearly still is dependent enough on them that he feels the need to tell Bazil what he has been up to, even though he knows it may get him in trouble.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE NAKED NOW

Bazil had hoped that when the lilacs opened in June, Geraldine would be feeling better. As the weeks go by, however, Geraldine does not improve and the garden grows wild. Bazil informs Joe that he is going to plant Geraldine's garden for her. He buys flowers and directs Joe where to plant them. As Joe digs, he ponders his experience seeing the ghost. Once Joe has finished planting the flowers, Joe and Bazil plant onions and tomatoes in Geraldine's vegetable garden.

This scene, in which Joe and Bazil garden, echoes the earlier scene of Joe and Bazil uprooting trees. By returning the reader's attention to the earlier scene, Erdrich seems to be highlighting how different the atmosphere at the house is since before Geraldine's rape, when the family home was a comforting space.

Bazil leaves to buy more plants. Joe makes himself a sandwich and then makes one for his mother, which he carries up to her on a plate with cookies and a glass of water. Joe knocks on the bedroom door and Geraldine tells him to enter. He sets the plate down and wants to leave, but Geraldine asks him to sit. She asks what he and Bazil were doing outside, and when Joe says they were digging, Geraldine asks if they were digging a grave. Joe, repulsed, tells her that they were planting her garden.

Geraldine is still very disturbed by her trauma, as evidenced by the fact that she suggests that Joe and Bazil might be digging a grave. It is unclear who Geraldine imagines would be put in this grave, but her near-death experience and her rape obviously make her think about death and life threatening violence much more frequently than before.

Geraldine pulls away from Joe. Joe tells Geraldine he needs to talk to her, and Geraldine says she is tired, but Joe gets frustrated, saying that Geraldine is always tired. He asks why she cannot get up and "come back to life," and Geraldine says she does not know why, but she can't. Geraldine begins to tremble. Joe then asks her about the file that she went to get on the day of her assault, but she denies the existence of the file. When Joe tells Geraldine he will find and kill her attacker, Geraldine sits up and firmly commands Joe not to. Geraldine authoritatively tells him that he must stop bothering her, asking questions, and threatening to kill her attacker. Geraldine tells Joe that he will not be a part of "all of this…violation." Joe backs down and leaves the room. As Joe goes down the stairs, he begins to suspect that Geraldine does know who raped her but she is hiding his identity for some reason. This idea fills Joe with rage.

Joe, who misses Geraldine's attentive mothering before her rape, tells Geraldine to "come back to life," perhaps suggesting that he thinks Geraldine's earlier comment about digging a grave referred to herself. Geraldine commands Joe not to be a part of "this…violation," implying that, by refusing to let Geraldine heal on her own terms and by asking her to recount the story of her rape before she is ready, Joe is participating in the violation of her autonomy, similarly to the violation of her rape itself. Geraldine's comment implies that the trauma of rape can be exacerbated if victims lack agency in the aftermath.


Bazil pulls into the driveway with more plants, and the father and son spend the rest of the afternoon gardening. Once they are done with their work, Bazil pulls out lawn chairs so they can sit and talk. Joe brings out the gas can he found in the lake and shows it to his father. Bazil is shocked. He tells Joe that he would like Joe to stop investigating the case because he is worried about Joe's safety. Joe is frustrated, as he had expected his father to be proud of his sleuthing. Bazil tries to assure Joe that the police on the case are doing their best, but Joe asks why they did not find the gas can. He furiously tells Bazil that the police do not actually care about Geraldine. Bazil backpedals, telling Joe that he is proud of him and reiterating that he is worried for Joe's safety. When Bazil tells Joe that he "gives [himself and Geraldine] life," Joe jumps up and says that they gave *him* life, so he should be able to do what he wants with it. Joe runs for his bike and pedals away from his father.

In this scene we see that Joe has already begun to feel skeptical about the capacity of the mainstream American justice system to actually deliver justice, as he believes that the police do not care about his mother. Meanwhile, Joe and his father struggle for control over Joe's actions, as Joe feels stifled by his father's commands and Bazil worries about Joe's safety and what it would mean to lose him. Bazil and Joe both seem to be figuring out how they will relate to each other now that Joe is old enough to act on his own, with Bazil unable to understand that Joe has independent desires and impulses, and Joe refusing to accept that his actions will also impact his parents.


Joe, knowing that Bazil would call their relatives and Joe's friends to try to find out where he went, rides to Angus's house because Angus does not have a telephone. When Joe shows up at Angus's house, Angus has a swollen lip, so Joe knows that his aunt or his stepdad has been beating him again. Together, Angus and Joe crush beer cans behind Angus's hose while Joe tells Angus about the conversation between Bazil and Edward the night before about Father Travis. Joe and Angus decide to go to mass to investigate Father Travis further. Together, the two boys bike to the parish church just as mass is starting. They sit in the front-row pews. Joe observes Father Travis when he walks in to begin the ceremony, beginning to feel dizzy. Once the communion line forms, the two boys slip out of the church to smoke cigarettes on the church's playground. Angus, realizing that Joe is upset, tells Joe he is going to find Cappy. Angus rides off. Joe lays down.

Joe seeks solace after his fight with his father at Angus's house, where he finds that Angus has recently been beaten by someone in his family. By contrasting Angus's situation with Joe's, Erdrich seems to be drawing attention to how, despite Joe's parents' troubles, they always try to keep him physically safe in a way that Angus's family fails to do. Afterward, the boys head to mass to scope out Father Travis. Throughout the novel, many of Erdrich's characters, and Joe and his friends in particular, show a markedly cavalier attitude towards religion and religious spaces. In this instance, Joe and Angus go to mass and leave halfway through, unconcerned with their impropriety.


Joe begins to dose off when he hears footsteps and opens his eyes to see Father Travis walking towards him. Father Travis tells Joe that one of the nuns saw him smoking a cigarette on the playground, which is not allowed, but that he is very welcome at mass. Joe grunts in response and Father Travis recognizes Joe as Clemence's nephew. Joe, feeling bold, asks Father Travis where he was on the afternoon of May 15th (the date and time of his mother's rape). Father Travis says he was likely officiating and asks why, but Joe declines to answer. Father Travis then tells Joe that he should join the church's youth group. They shake hands. Father Travis says goodbye and walks away.

In this interaction between Joe and Father Travis, Joe continues to investigate the case despite his father's instructions not to do so. When Joe asks Father Travis for an alibi, he mimics the language of crime shows or books, suggesting that Joe is patterning his behavior on the stories he hears. Meanwhile, Joe experiments with more substances, like his cigarettes, which signal his interest in adult activities.

When Father Travis is out of sight, Joe processes the interaction. Joe thinks he wants Father Travis dead if there is indeed definitely proof that Father Travis is his mother's attacker. Angus finally returns with Cappy. Joe fills Cappy in on his father's suspicion of Father Travis's guilt. The boys hatch a plan to determine if Father Travis drinks Hamm's beer (the same beer found at the crime scene) by spying on him in his house that night. In order to get to the house, the boys will have to ride their bikes through a cemetery where lots of Joe's relatives are buried, which Joe finds unnerving because of his recent ghost sighting. Joe is not afraid of his ancestors' spirits, but he does fear the "gut kick of [their] history."

When Joe thinks about riding through the reservation's graveyard in order to get to Father Travis's s house, he feels afraid, and he attributes this fear not to the ancestors that are buried there, but to the "gut kick of [their] history." Joe implies that, because so many of his relatives died either directly or indirectly as a result of the oppression they faced, it is the legacy of oppression, which continues to affect life on the reservation, that Joe finds unnerving to confront, not the ghosts.

That night, the boys ride through the yard of a woman who owns a lot of dogs to get to the priest's house. The dogs try to attack them, but together the boys fight them off. Once they make it to the cemetery, they walk through it towards Father Travis's house. The boys arrive at the priest's cottage, crawling under the windows so they will be out of sight. They listen as Father Travis goes to the bathroom, then Joe crawls to the living room window, where Joe can see Father Travis drinking a Michelob beer and watching a movie. Joe reports back to his friends.

As Erdrich describes Father Travis watching a movie and drinking beer in his house, she gives a portrait of a religious leader that is far from holy and dignified. As she does when she describes Randall's womanizing and obsession with appearances, Erdrich shows the side of religion and religious leaders that is mundane and lowly rather than divine and lofty.

Next, Cappy ventures over to look in the window and tells the rest of the boys that the priest is watching *Alien*, a movie they all want to watch. The boys creep over and watch the entire movie through the window. After the movie is over, Father Travis gets ready for bed. The boys watch as he undresses. They notice intense scarring on and around his genitals. Disturbed, the boys begin to run away, but Father Travis hears them, runs out the door, and grabs Angus by the throat. Cappy and Joe walk back to help him.

Yet again, although the boys attempt to investigate, their teenage interests distract them. As the boys notice the scarring around Father Travis's genitals, they find it disturbing, perhaps especially given their youthful anxieties about sex. They then assume that, due to the scarring, Father Travis would not have been capable of raping Joe's mother (whether this is true or not).

Father Travis leads them into the house and forces them to sit down. Furious, Father Travis mocks the boys, asking why they were spying on him. He asks Cappy what his name is, and Cappy lies to him, saying his name is the "traditional" name "John Pulls Leg." Father Travis curses at Cappy and yanks him off the couch so that he hits his head hard. Cappy then tells Father Travis his real name.

In this humorous moment, Cappy tries to tell Father Travis that his name is "John Pulls Leg" (a joke about "pulling someone's leg"), assuming that Father Travis, as a white Catholic priest, does not know enough about Chippewa culture to know that that is not a name. Unfortunately, Cappy is wrong.

Father Travis tells the boys that he believes they were spying on him because Joe thinks Father Travis assaulted his mother, since earlier that day Joe asked him for an alibi. Father Travis, cursing at the boys, denies raping Geraldine, saying he would never do something like that since he has a mother and sister and he used to have a girlfriend. Cappy asks about Father Travis's girlfriend curiously, and Father Travis tells the boys he was engaged. He then gives the boys dating advice, counseling them not to date "sluts."

As she does throughout the book, Erdrich portrays Father Travis not as a lofty religious figure, but rather as a normal person, and exploits this discordance to humorous affect. When Father Travis curses at the boys and counsels them not to date "sluts," Erdrich is hammering home how profoundly unpriestly Father Travis actually is.


Father Travis watches the boys silently for a minute before surmising that they want to know how his genitals got so scarred. The priest tells them he was at a U.S. embassy when it was attacked in 1983, causing his scarring, so he came home and got ordained. The priest asks if they have questions, and Joe comments on Travis's gopher shooting. Father Travis dismisses them with a wave of his hand, lost in thought. The boys leave, shutting the door behind them.

Father Travis implies that the injuries he sustained would have prevented him from being capable of raping Geraldine, thus removing Father Travis from Joe's suspicion. By emphasizing Father Travis's unsuitability as a suspect due to his genitalia, Erdrich draws attention to the crime's specifically sexual nature.

CHAPTER SIX: DATALORE

When Joe returns home, he and Bazil act like their fight did not happen. Bazil tells Joe that he had an "interesting" conversation with Father Travis, and Joe tenses up, but it turns out Father Travis did not tell Bazil about the boys' snooping. Bazil has thoroughly dismissed Father Travis as a suspect. Joe asks his father if the police have talked to either Linden or Linda Lark, and Bazil tells Joe that he talked to Linda. Bazil seems troubled as he tells Joe this, because he does not want to involve him, but Joe knows that Bazil needs someone to talk to. Bazil tells Joe he is going to talk to Linda and he asks if Joe wants to come.

Bazil seems to have adjusted his stance on Joe participating in the investigation since he and Joe fought earlier that day. It is unclear why Bazil decides to let Joe help him talk with Linda—possibly Bazil has realized that Joe, who is now thirteen, needs to have more agency of his own. Joe seems to think that Bazil just needs someone to confide in, suggesting that Bazil's intense emotional stress requires him to lean on Joe in a way that he might not normally.

When Bazil and Joe meet Linda at the post office where she works, Joe is surprised by how "magnetically ugly" she is. Bazil asks to speak with Linda, and at first she hesitates, but then agrees. The trio walks across the street to a tiny café. At the table, Bazil makes small talk for a while, and then Linda gets up and leaves. Afterward, Joe comments that Bazil did not ask any hard questions. Bazil said he wanted to "get a feel for how she was doing."

Joe describes Linda as "magnetically ugly," suggesting that Joe, who has newly become interested in sex, has begun evaluating the women around him based on their sexual attractiveness. After talking with Linda, Joe is frustrated by Bazil's inaction, feeling that they should have pressed her harder.


A few days later, Linda arrives at the house, hoping to talk to Geraldine. Joe tells her that Geraldine is sleeping, and Linda waits in the living room for her to wake up. When Geraldine stirs upstairs, Linda walks into her room and Joe hears the muted sound of their voices as they talk. A few days later, Linda shows up again, carrying a small package of banana bread. Linda goes upstairs to talk with Geraldine and, while she is out of earshot, Bazil and Joe hatch a plan to try to gather information from Linda about the Lark family. When Linda comes back downstairs, they offer her ice cream. Linda accepts and they sit down in the kitchen to eat together. Joe asks Linda about her adoption. Although Joe initially only intended to get information, Joe realizes that he is actually very interested in Linda's response.

Although Joe was frustrated that his father did not ask Linda harder questions before, Bazil's strategy (which also may have been Bazil's genuine curiosity about Linda's well-being) has paid off, as Linda comes to the house to talk with Geraldine. When Linda returns again a few days later, Bazil decides it is time to actually ask Linda more pointed questions. Joe finds himself not only interested in the information Linda can provide, but also in her personal story, suggesting, perhaps, that Joe is becoming more drawn to storytelling and personal narratives in themselves.

Linda launches into her story, which is offset from the rest of the narrative by a title proclaiming "Linda's Story." Linda tells Joe and Bazil how she was born after Linden and she struggled to take their first breaths. As the nurse was about to clear out her airway, the doctor pointed out her deformed head and limbs and asked Grace Lark if he should try to save Linda. Grace said no, but the nurse cleared Linda's mouth anyway, against orders, saving Linda. After it was clear that Linda was going to live, the Larks decided that they would not care for her. The hospital put Linda in the nursery while they tried to figure out what to do with her.

Erdrich sets Linda's story apart from the rest of the narrative by titling it, suggesting that her first person narrative is separate from Joe's, and so perhaps is not filtered through Joe's viewpoint. As Linda talks about how Grace and her doctor left her to suffocate when they realized she was deformed, Grace's moral depravity, alluded to earlier, is cemented for the reader and made more powerful because of Linda's heartbreaking account.

That night, Betty Wishkob, a janitor at the hospital, held Linda, molding her deformed head with her hand as she did so. Betty later asked if she could take Linda home. She raised Linda on the reservation until she was three, when Linda was taken away by social workers. Linda was returned to Betty, then removed again when she was four. Linda was so upset that she screamed until she was brought back to Betty.

Betty's kindness and love for Linda, who is not even her biological child, contrasts sharply with Grace's abandonment. Betty is perhaps inclined to adopt Linda in part due to the pattern of informal adoption on the reservation, like in the earlier case of Mooshum and his family.

Linda describes how her adoptive parents reshaped her malformed limbs and head every night of her childhood—a kind of makeshift physical therapy. Linda remembers her childhood home as untidy but loving. Despite this, though, there were some problems: Linda's foster father was an alcoholic and Betty had a temper problem. Linda recounts how her sister Sheryl once accidentally broke one of Betty's beloved vases and blamed Linda for it. Betty began to cry. Linda asked Sheryl why she had blamed Linda, and Sheryl told her it was because Linda was white. Despite this bad childhood experience, Linda and Sheryl became close later on.

Betty and her husband were loving parents to Linda, providing her with a loving home. But although Linda was very much a part of the family, her whiteness caused resentment between Linda and her siblings, with Sheryl blaming things on Linda because Linda was white. It is unclear why Sheryl felt anger towards Linda over their racial difference—perhaps Sheryl resented Linda's privilege as a white person, or she just wanted an excuse to blame her.

After Betty and George Wishkob died, Linda lived in their house alone. One night, Linda received a phone call from Grace Lark. When Grace said her name, Linda immediately hung up. Linda had had no desire to know George and Grace Lark. After Grace called the first time, Linda felt intense resentment toward both Grace and Linden. Four days later, however, Grace called again and told Linda that she had always wanted to meet her. Grace asked Linda if she would like to meet up for dinner, and Linda agreed.

Although Grace had abandoned Linda as a child, Grace calls Linda again years later. Clearly, the idea of meeting up with her birth mother is extremely stressful to Linda, who immediately hangs up the first time Grace calls. Grace obviously did not consider Linda's feelings in asking to meet her, or that it could cause Linda pain.

When Linda and Grace sat down to dinner, Grace first expressed shocked that Linda was not mentally disabled because of her birth defect. Grace said that she had wanted to get in touch with Linda before, but she had not been able to find her. The women ordered and ate their entrees. During dessert, Grace started to cry, saying she wished she'd never given Linda up. Linda, trying to distract Grace, asked how Linden was, and Grace explained that Linden needed a kidney transplant and that Linda was his only hope for a donor. Linda immediately got up, threw money on the table, and left. Before she got to her car, Linda threw up in the parking lot. Linda felt someone stroking her back, and it turned out to be Grace, who had followed her out. Linda, knowing that Grace had been lying to her all night, and had always known where she lived, pushed Grace away.

When Grace expresses surprise that Linda is not mentally disabled, her shock comes across as mean-spirited, as if implying that Linda is more valuable as a human being because of her lack of a mental handicap. Of course, it later becomes clear that Grace only wanted to meet with Linda because she hoped that Linda would donate a kidney to Linden. Grace Lark's treatment of Linda, who she clearly does not care for or love, exemplifies the fact that blood relations are far from the most important aspect of being a family—especially when compared with Betty and George Wishkob's love for their adopted daughter.

When Linda called Sheryl to tell her about meeting with Grace, Sheryl insisted that Linda not give Linden the kidney, shocked that Linda was even considering it after Grace's abandonment her. Still, Linda decided to go through with it, traveling to South Dakota for the donation. Linda imagines that Grace may have been a bad mother to Linden because of the shame she harbored after abandoning Linda, and so she felt compassion for him. When Linda's doctor gave her the test results, she told Linda that she was a match, but also informed her that Linden had several restraining orders against him and he only had kidney failure because he tried to commit suicide with drugs and alcohol. The doctor told Linda to take those things into account.

In this section, both Sheryl and Linda's doctor tell Linda not to give Linden her kidney for different reasons. Sheryl feels that Grace does not deserve a favor from Linda, while the doctor seems to believe that Linden does not deserve to live because he is not a very good or responsible person. Over the course of the novel, Erdrich seems to endorse the idea that forgiveness is not always the best course of action, but also that the ends don't necessarily justify the means—killing Linden early would have spared Geraldine and her family much pain, but it could also be argued that Linda made the most moral decision at the time with the information she had.


Later, as Linda sat with Linden in the hospital, Linda asked Linden about his job as a mail carrier, and Linden said that he knew every detail of people's lives, so he "could have committed the perfect murder." This comment shocked Linda, who asked if Linden was married to change the subject. Linden told Linda that he had a very young girlfriend, but that a government official was paying her to be with him instead of Linden. Linden then told Linda nonchalantly that he did not want her kidney because he had "an aversion to ugly people" and Linda was "a disgusting woman." Then, Linden pretended to apologize and started to laugh. Linda left the room.

When Linda goes to visit Linden in the hospital, it is clear that Linden is both cruel and disturbed as he talks about committing murder and aggressively insults Linda, telling her she is ugly so he does not want her kidney. Linden also displays his violent tendencies in this scene, which surface again later. This scene is further proof that it is not necessarily blood ties that actually link people as family, as even Linda's biological twin treats her terribly.


Linda goes silent, and Joe, struggling to think of what to say, tries to comfort Linda. Bazil asks why Linda still gave Linden her kidney. Linda says that she did it for Grace. After the procedure, Linda got sick with an infection and realized she'd made a mistake giving her kidney. The Chippewa community helped Linda through her illness. Linda was relieved when Grace died and Linden moved back to South Dakota. Linda tells Bazil and Joe that when Linden moved back to South Dakota he "cracked" and "did things... he should have got caught for."

Ultimately, although Linda does everything she can to gain her biological family's love, it is her Chippewa family that supports her during her own illness and helps her heal after her painful experience with the Lark family. Again, Linda's story is evidence that true families are not actually centered around shared genes, but rather around mutual love and support.

CHAPTER SEVEN: ANGEL ONE

One morning, Joe rides to Edward and Clemence's house. When Joe arrives, he finds Mooshum outside, tangled in netting for the garden. Joe frees him and they go inside, where they find Clemence dressed for church. Clemence serves Mooshum tea as she and Mooshum bicker about Mooshum's care and his interest in young women. Once Clemence leave for mass, Joe tells Mooshum about the ghost he saw outside his window, which also appeared to Randall in the sweat lodge. Mooshum tells Joe that it is not a ghost; it is someone "throwing their spirit at [him]." Joe asks if it could be Geraldine's attacker, but Mooshum says no, since usually these spirits help people. Mooshum advises Joe to go to his doodem (the type of animal he is spiritually affiliated with), the crane, for luck. Mooshum finishes his tea and then falls asleep. Joe helps him to his daybed to rest.

Joe's grandfather Mooshum, who practices Chippewa medicine and from whom Randall gained most of his knowledge, is very elderly, but is still a valuable source of medicinal knowledge on the reservation. Erdrich presents Mooshum, sometimes a ridiculous figure thanks to his whiskey- and women-loving tendencies, very seriously in this moment, as he tells Joe about what the spirit he saw means in Chippewa culture and advises him to consult his doodem. Although Erdrich does poke fun at the pomp surrounding religion, she also seems to take the earnest practice of it seriously.

When Clemence comes back from mass, Joe bikes to the lake to look for cranes. Joe spots a heron. Suddenly, the heron takes flight to the other side of the lake. At first, Joe is disappointed. Then, when he looks down into the water in front of him, he sees a plastic doll. Joe fishes the doll from the lake. He pulls the doll's head off to dump out the water inside and finds that it is packed with money. Joe throws the doll in his pack and rides with it toward the gas station.

Again, although Erdrich pokes fun at religion, she obviously takes aspects of Chippewa religion very seriously. Her characters have real, unimpeachable religious experiences, as Joe seems to here, when the crane, Joe's doodem, appears right before Joe finds the doll in the lake.

When Joe gets to the gas station, he walks in with the doll hidden under his shirt. Sonja is busy with a customer, but when the customer leaves, Joe shows her the doll with all the money in it in the private office. Sonja is shocked. Together they unravel the money as Joe explains that he found the doll in the lake. Sonja calls Bazil and tells him that she is taking Joe on errands. They say goodbye to Whitey, who is pumping gas, and drive to Sonja and Whitey's house. Joe follows Sonja into her bedroom, where she sets up an ironing board and irons each hundred-dollar bill from the doll dry. Once they have put all the bills in envelopes, Sonja places the doll in a bag, and they put the envelopes of money into an aluminum box and bring it to the car. Sonja puts the doll in the trunk and tells Joe they are going to open a college savings account.

Joe immediately goes to Sonja when he finds the money, apparently feeling that he can trust her, since Sonja looks out for him throughout the book and treats him especially kindly. Sonja seems to have experience with the kinds of people she imagines would have hidden that much money, and she immediately realizes that they need to stash it to keep anyone from realizing that they are connected to it. Later, when Sonja tells Joe more about her history, it becomes clear why exactly Sonja has experience with the kind of dangerous men she imagines hid the money.

Sonja and Joe drive around the area together, opening several savings accounts in Joe's name at different banks. Sonja throws the doll in a garbage can at a rest stop. Finally, when all the money is in different accounts, Sonja takes Joe to get fast food takeout, and as they eat, Joe ogles Sonja's breasts. On their way home, Joe looks through the passbooks for the bank accounts, adding up the total to forty thousand dollars. Joe asks why they can't keep any cash, and Sonja tells Joe that whoever lost that money could be someone dangerous, making Joe swear not to tell anyone. Sonja and Joe then drive to a tree called the hanging tree, where several Chippewa men were once lynched, and they bury the passbooks fifty steps into the woods.

Joe is obviously extremely sexually interested in Sonja and leers at Sonja's breasts with gusto. Although Joe's desire for Sonja goes unspoken or acted upon, he certainly objectifies his aunt in a way that, although fairly innocuous given his age, would be highly inappropriate if he were an adult. Meanwhile, the hanging tree that Joe references shows how physically omnipresent reminders of the history of the violent oppression of the Chippewa people are throughout the reservation.

As they drive back home, Joe says that he wants to use the money to buy shoes like Cappy's and he will tell everyone he got the money by working at the gas station. Sonja asks if he wants a real job at the gas station, and Joe, excited to get out of his house, says yes. Sonja tells him he must behave because he will be representing reservation business to the white people watching them, like the Larks. Joe warns Sonja to watch out for Linden, and Sonja tells him she likes using Linden to make Whitey jealous because Whitey thinks he owns her.

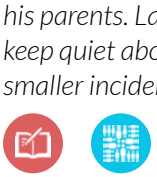
When Sonja tells Joe that he needs to act appropriately at the gas station, since white people will be watching him and he will be representing a Chippewa-owned business, Sonja alludes to the fact that, due to the pervasive racist stereotypes about Native people, Joe must work extra hard to represent himself totally irreproachably in order to keep from reinforcing prejudice.

When Joe gets home from putting away the money with Sonja, Bazil and Soren Bjerke, the FBI agent on Geraldine's case, are drinking coffee at their kitchen table. Joe explains that the FBI has some jurisdiction over reservations because of a series of laws that were passed in the first half of the 20th century limiting Native autonomy. Before Joe arrived, Geraldine had refused to speak with Soren. Joe walks past Soren into the living room, but he does not want to walk past Geraldine's room, so he goes back into the kitchen.

As Joe describes Bjerke, he notes that the FBI only has jurisdiction over the reservation due to laws limiting native autonomy, again linking legislative measures and case law that are far in the past to the present. The fact that Joe immediately links Bjerke with those laws suggests how Bjerke's very presence symbolizes a legacy of Native oppression.

Joe gets a glass of milk and a slice of cake. Feeling guilty about the doll, he decides to tell Bjerke about the gas can to alleviate some of his discomfort. Joe records and signs an affidavit about finding the can, then Bjerke makes small talk with him about school and his summer. Joe, still feeling guilty about the money, tells them about how Geraldine received a phone call and went to retrieve a file on the afternoon of her rape. Bazil pushes Joe for more information, but Joe, not wanting to talk about the money in order to protect Sonja, only tells them about finding a cooler full of beer, which he and his friends drank, and a pile of clothes on the day they found the gas can. Joe is horrified by how quickly he ratted out Cappy, Zack, and Angus in order to protect the money and Sonja. Feeling ill, he runs to the bathroom.

Although Joe is willfully defying his parents, he feels so guilty about his deception that he divulges some of the less incriminating things that he has done. Unlike earlier, when Joe told his father about finding the gas can immediately when pressed, Joe is a little more reticent this time. The reader sees Joe learning not only to act on his own, but also to keep certain incriminating information private from his parents. Later, when Joe finally actually kills Linden, he is able to keep quiet about it despite his profound guilt, perhaps thanks to smaller incidents like this one.



When Joe gets back from the bathroom, Bazil and Soren give Joe a citation for underage drinking, and they propose to cite Joe's friends as well. Joe lies and says he drank both six packs himself. Soren then tells Joe that the cooler and clothes did not belong to the attacker, but to a local vagrant named Bugger Pourier. Joe apologizes as he backs up, then climbs the stairs. In his room, Joe thinks about how, as Geraldine painted his room when she was pregnant, cranes kept flying by the window. Joe thinks about the money, and then about Sonja's breasts, and then about his family. Joe watches a crane fly past his window, bathed in evening light.

Joe discovers that his anxiety about having tampered with police evidence was unnecessary, since the beer they found did not belong to the killer. Later, when Joe is in his room, a crane (which is his lucky doodem, and supposed to help him in times of need) flies past his window. As Joe thinks of his various stressors, the crane seems to instill a sense of calm in him, reflected in Joe's beautiful descriptions of the light in the room.

CHAPTER EIGHT: HIDE AND Q

Joe discusses Geraldine's job as the tribe enrollment specialist, describing how she determines who qualifies for tribal enrollment. The morning after Joe talks with Bazil and Soren about his mother's phone call on the day of her rape, Soren returns to ask Geraldine about the file she went to fetch from her office that day. Joe brings a tray of breakfast upstairs for Geraldine, who pretends to be asleep as he sets it down. Joe feels guilty for betraying Geraldine's trust and telling his father about the file. Joe goes back downstairs to Bazil and Soren.

Joe's revelation of Geraldine's mysterious phone call and the file triggers Bjenke and Bazil's attempt to get Geraldine to talk about what happened on the afternoon of her rape. Although Geraldine did not ask Joe to keep the file a secret, Joe, who feels caught between Geraldine's request for silence and Bazil's demands for justice, feels that he has let his mother down by telling Bazil.

Joe, Bazil, and Soren then return upstairs. Bazil goes into the bedroom and says something inaudible to Geraldine, who loudly exclaims "no!" and knocks over the breakfast tray. Bazil tells Soren and Joe to come in, and they sit in folding chairs. Geraldine sits on her bed with her back to them, covering her ears. Bazil tries to appeal to Geraldine, telling her not to behave like that with Joe around. Geraldine tells Bazil to make Joe leave. Soren asks Geraldine about the phone call and the file, and Geraldine is totally silent in response. When it becomes clear that Geraldine will not respond, they all leave.

In this conflict-filled scene, Joe sees his mother's extremely upset reaction when Bjenke and Bazil ask her about the file. Bazil tries to use Joe to bargain with Geraldine and get her to cooperate. Obviously, the messy, unhealthy dynamic being played out between Geraldine, Bazil, and Joe is the result of each of their very different traumas—and their collective trauma—stemming from Geraldine's rape.

That evening, Bazil sets up a dining table in Geraldine's room, against her protests, so that they can all eat upstairs together. Over the course of several dinners, Bazil tries his best to make conversation. One night, Bazil tells Geraldine and Joe about a conversation with Father Travis in which he recounted his experience on the day that John F. Kennedy was assassinated. On another night, Bazil tells Geraldine and Joe about the Ojibwe idea of doodems, which are part of the system of Ojibwe law.

Again, although Bazil clearly wants to help Geraldine, he does not listen to what she says that she wants or needs. To fill the space in conversation, Bazil tells long stories, from anecdotes that Father Travis told him about his own experiences to long lectures about Ojibwe law, seemingly attempting to use these stories to restore a sense of normalcy to their strange situation.

Bazil recounts the story of Geraldine's great-aunt, who was left on an island by her family. Her parents had intended to come back and pick her up, but they never did. Eventually, Geraldine's great-aunt decided to swim to the mainland, but she got very tired and thought she would drown. When she could swim no longer, her doodem, a turtle, brought her to shore. Bazil associates this story with the many other stories throughout history about children rescued by animals. He goes on to tell the story of Arion, who was saved by a dolphin after sailors asked him to sing and then threw him overboard. Bazil then announces that he is going back to Bismarck to see a friend, who is going to help prepare legal matters for when Geraldine is ready to talk about the file and the phone call, so that they will be ready to prosecute.

Among the stories that Bazil tells is one about Geraldine's great-aunt being saved by her doodem. For readers outside of the Chippewa religious tradition, Bazil's stories help to contextualize the cultural significance of doodems and how they help the people who belong to their clan. As Bazil connects these Chippewa stories to stories in Greek and Roman mythology, he draws connections between cultures that are disparate culturally and geographically, showing the capacity of stories to link people who might otherwise have no point of connection.

Bazil tells Geraldine that he believes getting justice will help her heal. Bazil also intends to talk with the governor of Minnesota, who Bazil notes spoke with Curtis Yeltow, the governor of South Dakota, about the fact that he is trying to adopt a child. This sparks Geraldine's interest, and she asks which child he is trying to adopt. Bazil says that Yeltow, who is known for his bad legislative treatment of Native people, is trying to adopt a Native child, but is having trouble because of the Indian Child Welfare Act, which limits the number of adoptions of Native children to non-Native parents. Bazil tells her that the child's tribal background has not yet been determined, since her mother disappeared, but she is definitely at least part Sioux. Geraldine is profoundly affected by the story, vomiting and beginning to have an anxiety attack.

Bazil asserts that getting justice will help Geraldine heal—essentially arguing that recounting stories of trauma can provide catharsis. Meanwhile, when Bazil refers to Yeltow's attempt to adopt a Native child, he brings up the Indian Child Welfare Act, a legislative measure designed to protect Native families. This is one of the rare examples in the book of a United States law that actually advanced Native rights rather than eroding them by ensuring that Native children taken from their homes will be raised in Native households, thereby protecting their cultural ties.

Bazil tries to assure Geraldine that she is safe. Geraldine stops writhing, stares at Bazil, and harshly tells Bazil that she was raped. Bazil encourages Geraldine to tell him what she remembers. With Joe still present, Geraldine tells Bazil that the call she received on the day of her rape was from Mayla Wolfskin, who wanted to enroll her child. Bazil asks who the child's father was and Geraldine goes silent. Bazil encourages her to continue, so Geraldine says that Mayla called to ask Geraldine to meet her at the **round house**, saying that her life depended on it.

As Geraldine reacts viscerally and physically to Bazil's news about Curtis Yeltow adopting a Native child, Bazil tells her she is safe. Geraldine's harsh reaction to Bazil's words seems to reflect the fact that Geraldine feels Bazil is not actually acknowledging the level of violence that she faced. Perhaps wanting to finally be understood, Geraldine begins to tell her story at Bazil's encouragement.

Geraldine was attacked by a man when she arrived at the **round house**. He put a pillowcase over her head and tied her hands. The man kept asking Geraldine for "the file," but Geraldine did not know what he was talking about, so he marched Geraldine forward and then raped her. Bazil pushes Geraldine to remember something that will help them determine where the crime took place, but Geraldine becomes irritable, so Bazil backs off. Geraldine states that, after the rape, the man dragged her back to the round house, untied her, and took off the pillowcase. Inside, Geraldine saw Mayla Wolfskin and her baby. Mayla had just recently come into the office to file her enrollment.

As Geraldine tells her story, Bazil tries to push Geraldine to talk about anything that could help them determine where the crime took place, which would then help them establish who had jurisdiction over the case. Geraldine, however, is far more concerned with getting her story out than with worrying over those kinds of (notably very important) details. Geraldine tells her story more for personal catharsis than to convey information for her case.

With their attacker right outside, Mayla and Geraldine looked at each other, and Mayla kept looking at her baby, so Geraldine understood that Mayla wanted her to get the baby somewhere safe. The attacker came back inside, took off his pants, and told women about how he hates Ojibwe people and Ojibwe women in particular. The man started to scream at Mayla that he loved her but she had had another man's baby. The man continued to express bigoted and possessive thoughts, talking about how he loved Mayla and wanted to kill her. The man struck Mayla and Geraldine repeatedly and then asked Mayla where "the money" was.

As Geraldine describes her attacker's terrifying and violent diatribe, it is clear that the attacker's bigotry is inextricably linked to his misogyny as he describes his particular hatred for Ojibwe women, but also his obsession with Mayla. Although the attacker professes to love Mayla, he also threatens to kill her, suggesting how sex and intimacy, especially when paired with misogyny, can result in violence.

Strangely, the man began to calm down and then apologized profusely to Geraldine. As he apologized he uncapped a gas can and poured it all over Mayla and Geraldine. While the attacker was looking the other way, Geraldine peed on his pants, wetting the matches in his pocket. He tried to start a fire with those matches, but they would not light. The attacker left to get more matches and threatened to kill the baby if they left, saying that he was going to kill them both no matter what.

Strangely, immediately after delivering vitriolic insults and violent hate speech to Geraldine and Mayla, the attacker apologizes—all while dosing them in gasoline. Although the attacker's identity has not yet been definitively revealed, this bizarre pattern mirrors Linden Lark's speech when he insulted Linda in the hospital room and then apologized.

The narrative cuts to Joe eating cereal in his kitchen. He is going to work at the gas station when he runs into Bazil, who had stayed up with Geraldine all night. Bazil tells Joe that Geraldine refused to talk about what is in the file until she knows that Mayla and the baby are safe. Bazil explains that Mayla is s relative of Larose, a friend of Geraldine's. Joe asks if Mayla is still alive, and Bazil guesses that she is not. Joe asks why the attacker would kill her, and Bazil does not respond, but gives Joe a big hug.

As Geraldine describes the attacker pouring gasoline on her and Mayla, ready to burn them alive, the narrative cuts away to Joe eating cereal the next morning. Perhaps this reflects the fact that Joe, who is the narrator, cannot stand to dwell on the extreme violence his mother faced, even decades later when he is well into his adult life.

Joe goes to work at the gas station. When he gets back that night, Bazil tells Joe that he took Geraldine to the hospital to rest. Bazil also tells Joe that he believes Geraldine knows who raped her, and although Bazil has a suspect in mind, they need Geraldine cooperate to be sure. Bazil tells Joe he wishes that Joe had not been there to hear his mother's story, and although Joe says it was for the best, the story feels like "poison" to Joe. Bazil tells Joe that he is going to the hospital tomorrow to see Geraldine, and so Joe should stay with Whitey and Sonja.

Although Geraldine's story helps piece together the timeline of the crime, it is unclear whether telling it actually helped Geraldine, as it made her so upset that Bazil checked her into the hospital. Joe, meanwhile, feels that the story is "poison." Although Bazil had believed that telling the story would make everything better, that is not necessarily the case, at least in the short term.

After Joe works at the gas station the next day, Whitey and Sonja take Joe and Pearl home with them. As they drive home, Joe asks Whitey about Curtis Yeltow and Whitey lists the many ways that Yeltow has perpetuated the oppression of Native people in South Dakota. When they get to the house, Whitey starts to make dinner and Sonja and Joe do chores in the house and in the barn. They eat dinner together outside on lawn chairs. After Whitey goes to bed, Sonja sets up the couch for Joe to sleep on. They watch TV and then talk about the money they found. Sonja tells Joe he should use the money to go to college.

The references to Curtis Yeltow, who, although he is fairly significant in the book's plot, never actually appears in it, seem to be a commentary on Native issues among politicians in states with large Native populations. Yeltow, who pretends to care about Native people to get their votes, actually seems to disdain them and refuses to support their issues. Yeltow shows how Native people continue to be mistreated by the United States government.

Sonja gives Joe a pillow from her bed to sleep with, and Joe is turned on by the fact that it smells like Sonja. One night while Joe and Sonja are watching TV on the couch, Sonja rubs Joe's foot and Joe ejaculates, though it is unclear whether Sonja realizes it or not.

Again, Joe continues to experience inappropriate sexual attraction to Sonja that he cannot control whatsoever, even ejaculating one time when she touches his foot.

During one of the days that Joe is staying with Sonja and Whitey, Whitey notices at breakfast that Sonja is wearing earrings that he has never seen before. They get in the car to drive to the gas station. Sonja tries to turn on the music but Whitey smacks Sonja's hand away. When they arrive at the gas station, Whitey stalks off. Sonja unlocks the station and gives Joe the keys to the gas pumps so he can take care of a car that is waiting for them to open.

When Sonja appears one morning wearing diamond earrings, Whitey, who knows nothing about the money that Joe found, immediately suspects that Sonja is cheating on him. When Whitey swats Sonja's hand as she changes the station, Erdrich foreshadows Whitey's impending physical abuse.

Joe walks over to the car. The white man who is in the front seat tells Joe to fill up the tank. Joe pumps the gas and the man pays, then asks Joe how he is doing. Joe is caught off guard, since he does not know the man, but he responds politely. The man tells Joe that he hears he is a "good kid," and then talks about how, since Joe has a good family, he might even "draw even with a white kid…who doesn't have a loving family." Joe turns to walk away from the man, and the man calls to Joe that he is "the judge's son." Joe turns around and the man tells him that he has a twin sister who also has a loving family. He then drives off. Joe realizes that the man was Linden Lark.

In this bizarre encounter between Joe and Linden Lark, Linden expresses a disturbing interest in Joe's family. Linden also reveals his profound racism when he suggests that Joe might "draw even" with a white boy who has a bad family, implying the white supremacist view that white people are inherently better than Native people, but conceding that the conditions in which people are raised could impact their achievement slightly.

Angry, Joe wants to quit, but he must stay because Whitey is gone. Whitey returns at eleven, smelling like beer. Sonja makes sandwiches at lunchtime and Joe watches Whitey change a tire for Geraldine's childhood friend Larose, who is also Mayla's relative. While Whitey unscrews the tire, Larose takes Joe inside. Joe asks Larose how she is related to Mayla, and Larose tells Joe that they are cousins. Joe asks more questions, and Larose asks sarcastically if Joe is in the FBI. Nonetheless, Larose tells Joe that Mayla went to boarding school. She then enrolled in a program that places Native students in government jobs, and went to work for Curtis Yeltow.

Throughout the book, Erdrich refers to the phenomenon of Native children going to boarding school as Mayla did. These boarding schools, which were often run by Catholic priests and nuns, often attempted to erase the Native cultures and languages of the children who attended them. In other parts of the text, Erdrich refers to how, for some reservation residents, these boarding schools were traumatic, later making them avoiding Catholicism entirely.


Sonja interrupts by walking inside the store to ring Larose up for her purchases. Outside, Joe sees that Whitey has wandered off to the nearby bar, so Joe starts to fix Larose's tire in his place, but one of the nuts will not budge. Joe hears Cappy, Zack, and Angus ride up behind him. Cappy succeeds in taking the nut off after using WD-40. Sonja, who has taken out her new earrings, tells Joe to go fetch Whitey, who finishes fixing the tire.

Although they keep it under wraps, Whitey and Sonja are fighting about Sonja's earrings, causing Whitey to wander off to the bar (whereas normally he works fairly fastidiously) and Sonja to take out the offending jewelry. This fight precipitates in the domestic violence of the following scene.

When the day is over, Sonja, Whitey, and Joe all get in the car and head back to the house. Everything seems normal that evening, but after Joe has gone to sleep, he wakes up to a crash and the sounds of Whitey and Sonja arguing. Joe hears Whitey hit Sonja, who begs him not to hit her while Joe is there. Joe knocks on the door and tells Whitey to fight him. When Whitey opens the door, Joe punches him in the gut. Whitey pins Joe's arms and tells him that Sonja is cheating on him with a man who gave her diamond earrings. Whitey lets Joe go and promises not to touch Sonja again, but tells Joe that Sonja is "dirty." Joe, however, knows that Sonja bought the earrings herself with the money from the doll. Joe tells Whitey that he gave Sonja the earrings for her birthday after finding them in the gas station bathroom. Sonja then hits Whitey on the head with a glass bottle, knocking him out. Sonja kicks him out into the living room, brings Joe in the bedroom, and locks the door.

In this disturbing scene, Whitey attacks Sonja because he believes she is cheating on him. The inclusion of this scene of domestic violence, in which Whitey, Joe's beloved uncle, is the perpetrator, suggests that violence against women is part of a pattern of behavior among both Native and white men, rather than an isolated incident perpetrated by Linden, who is both racist and clearly disturbed. By opening up the capacity for violence to people like Whitey, who is a respected member of the Chippewa community, Erdrich makes it clear that violence against women is not only committed by one-off outliers or white bigots, but rather is part of a disturbingly large trend.

Sonja instructs Joe to go to sleep in the bed. Joe tells Sonja he knows she used the doll money to buy the earrings and Sonja starts to cry. Joe tells her not to touch the money. The next morning, Sonja and Joe leave the house early for the gas station. Sonja tells Joe that he should stay with Clemence that night. Joe tells her he is quitting his gas station job. He feels that Sonja has betrayed him by using the doll money, but he also thinks he is still in love with her. Joe gets out of the car and walks to Clemence's house.

In the aftermath of the previous night, when Whitey attacked Sonja, Joe is angry about the fact that Sonja has deceived him, taking money from the accounts that Sonja had told him she had set aside for his college. Joe perhaps feels too overwhelmed by Whitey's actions the previous night to address them, and instead distances himself from Sonja.

When Joe arrives at Clemence's, he tells Clemence that he quit his job at the station. Clemence realizes that Sonja and Whitey are fighting again. Joe helps Clemence with chores. After dinner, Joe goes into the sewing room to sleep, but it makes him think about Bazil sleeping in the sewing room at their house instead of with Geraldine. Joe asks if he can sleep in the extra bed in Mooshum's room, and Clemence says yes, but warns Joe that Mooshum talks in his sleep. Joe wakes in the middle of the night to the sound of Mooshum, who is fast asleep, telling a story.

When Clemence recognizes that Joe must have quit because Sonja and Whitey have been fighting, Erdrich reveals that Whitey's domestic abuse is not a secret—or at the very least, Clemence seems to know about it. That Clemence accepts this abuse suggests that many adults in Joe's community may be aware and tolerant of Whitey's physical violence towards Sonja.

Mooshum's story is offset from the rest of the narrative by a title, "Akii." The story begins by introducing Akiikwe (Akii), the Earth Woman, and her husband Mirage. Akii would help her husband find food by using her dreams to determine where the animals were. They always had lots of food until the Chippewa people were forced onto the reservation, where the farms they started were not high yielding and there were no animals left to hunt. The government promised supplies that never came, and everyone went hungry.

Mooshum's story, like Linda's, is offset from the rest of Joe's narrative, suggesting that it is relatively unaffected by Joe's narrative choices. The story seems to be set early on in the history of the Chippewa reservation, but the characters (Akii, Mirage, and Nanapush) recur in various stories in the Chippewa storytelling tradition, cropping up in different places and times.

In order to feed their children, Akii and Mirage went ice fishing. One day, however, a fish told them that the fish were going to sleep, so they would starve. Tensions rose in Akii and Mirage's household. Mirage started to think Akii had been possessed by a wiindigoo, giving Akii a craving for human flesh. Mirage believed he had to kill Akii, so he gathered a group of men and persuaded them all that Akii was a wiindigo. The men tied Akii up and a woman took away her children except for her oldest son. The group told the boy, Nanapush, to kill Akiii, but he refused. Instead, Nanapush stabbed one of the men holding Akii.

In the story, Mooshum introduces the idea of wiindigoo justice, a traditional justice system in Chippewa culture wherein a person can become possessed by a wiindigoo, making them kill others, and therefore they must be put to death. Although this system is actually used by Joe later in the book, the example that Mooshum gives in this story suggests the possibility of the wiindigoo justice system being used wrongly, with a kind of mob mentality.

The men tied Akii to a tree and left her to starve or freeze, but Akii got loose and had to be tied up again. The men then decided to drown Akii in the hole she used to ice fish. After they submerged her in the freezing water, Mirage gave Nanapush a gun to shoot his mother if she emerged again. After the men left, Akii surfaced again and Nanapush helped her out. The mother and son went into the woods and walked as far away as they could, then made a shelter. Akii told Nanapush that the fish taught Akii a buffalo song, despite the fact that the buffalo had been gone for years. After a few days of camping, Akii instructed Nanapush to go find the buffalo.

Mirage's willingness to have Akii killed because he believes that she is a wiindigoo seems to exemplify the same kind of violence against women that drives the novel's plot in the modern day. As could be read into Whitey's jealousy or Linden's possessiveness, Mirage seems frustrated by his own failings, inadequacies, and perceived victimization, which he then takes out on Akii. This story, which allies itself with Akii and Nanapush rather than Mirage, condemns that kind of violence.

Mooshum suddenly stops talking, and Joe is upset that he has not heard the story's ending. Soon, however, Joe falls back asleep. When he wakes the next morning and sees Mooshum in the kitchen, Joe asks who Nanapush is, and Mooshum tells him that Nanapush was a greedy but good healer to whom Mooshum went for advice when he was young. Joe asks about Akii and Mooshum says he has no idea what he is talking about. Joe hopes that the next night Mooshum will finish the story and, sure enough, Joe wakes up in the night to Mooshum's voice.

When Mooshum tells Joe that he knew Nanapush when he was young, but does not know who Akii is, his comments add to the mystery of his midnight storytelling, and seem to imply that, although Mooshum may have been the mystical mouthpiece for the story, it is not actually his own, and rather belongs to the Chippewa people communally as a part of their culture and religious belief.

Mooshum returns to Nanapush, who had just begun his journey to look for the buffalo. Nanapush sang the buffalo song that his mother told him about and it made him cry with sadness over their loss. Nanapush continued to sing the buffalo song and suddenly he saw buffalo tracks, which he followed for a long time through the snow. Nanapush eventually saw a buffalo ahead of him, and the buffalo stopped to listen to his song. The buffalo was old and thin. Nanapush spoke to her, telling her that he hated to kill her, but he had to for his family. Nanapush sang the song again. When he finished, he shot and killed the buffalo.

As Mooshum discusses Nanapush killing the buffalo, his story alludes to the preeminent place of buffalo in Chippewa culture and religion prior to the dramatic decrease in buffalo populations in the 1800s and 1900s. Mooshum describes Nanapush's interactions with the buffalo, making it clear how much of Chippewa religion was linked to practices (such as buffalo hunting) that are much less common in the modern day.

Nanapush was cleaning out the chest cavity when a blizzard started. Nanapush crawled inside the buffalo and fell asleep. When he woke up, Nanapush was frozen to the buffalo's ribs and unable to move. He began to sing the buffalo song again. Meanwhile, Akii went out to find Nanapush. When Akii reached the buffalo, she heard Nanapush singing the buffalo song and cut him out of the animal's body. Akii and Nanapush brought the buffalo meat back to the community, including to the men who tried to kill Akii. Akii then left Mirage for good. The old buffalo woman, whose spirit revisited Nanapush throughout his life, warned him that wiindigoo justice must be carried out with care.

Akii and Nanapush's loving mother-son relationship, in which Akii and Nanapush both support and help each other equally, serves as a foil to Joe and Geraldine's relationship, which, at this point in the book, is full of tension and has see-sawed from one-sided care on Geraldine's part to one-sided care on Joe's. This story, which teaches Joe about the history of the round house, also plants the idea of wiindigoo justice in Joe's head, while warning of the ways that it can be easily abused.

With the story finished, Mooshum goes back to sleep. Joe also falls asleep and forgets the story until the next day, when Bazil comes to pick Joe up. Bazil talks with Edward when he arrives and tells him that they have Geraldine's rapist in custody. Joe asks who it is, but Bazil will not tell him. At home, Geraldine is buzzing around the house, completing chores and full of energy. Joe leaves and convenes with Cappy, Zack, and Angus. The boys decide to go to the lake beach near the church.

With Geraldine's rapist in custody, Geraldine has a sudden jolt of energy, rushing around doing household tasks. This revival marks a complete reversal of Geraldine's previous behavior, perhaps suggesting that justice, or at least the removal of her rapist from her community (which would mean that she's not at risk of being attacked by him again), is what Geraldine needs in order to heal.

On the road to the beach, the boys pass the church's youth group—a mix of reservation kids and summer volunteers—sitting on the ground in a circle. The boys get to them, leave their bikes by the dock, and strip down before they go swimming. After a half an hour, an older boy and a very beautiful girl around Joe's age approach them. The boy asks them to leave because the beach is reserved for church activities. Cappy refuses. When the beautiful girl tells them to go, Cappy walks out of the water naked and the boy screams, then tries to fight Cappy.

In this scene, the reader sees Cappy, who Joe acknowledges to be the best looking and most charming of their friend group, showing off in front of the beautiful girl from the youth group, walking naked in front of her in a show of his confidence. Cappy displays both his youthful sexual interest in the girl and his sexual and emotional immaturity as he mocks the boy who is with her.

Cappy dunks the boy and then lets him go, but the boy vomits in the water. Cappy apologizes, but the boy begins to have a seizure. The boys bring him onshore and send Angus to fetch Father Travis. The boy (whose name turns out to be Neal) begins to come to and Cappy, Joe, and Zack pretend that he has converted them. They put their clothes back on, and then continue acting as if they have found God when Father Travis returns with Angus. Joe looks over at the beautiful girl, Zelia, who is looking at Cappy. Joe thinks that she has fallen in love with Cappy.

Again, Cappy, Joe, Zack, and Angus clearly have very flippant attitudes toward religion, as evidenced here when they try to avoid getting in trouble with Father Travis by pretending that Neal converted them to Catholicism. For the boys, Catholicism seems to be something that they engage in when it is opportune, rather than out of any kind of genuine religious feeling.

Later that afternoon, the boys join the youth group in order to hang out with Zelia. Joe, Angus, and Zack watch Cappy and Zelia flirt, knowing that they have no chance with her. The next day, the boys go to the youth group again, where they sing group songs and do reflection exercises. During one of the reflection exercises, one girl talks about being delivered from a "serpent," and Cappy, Joe, Zack and Angus make a series of comments with sexual innuendos. After the girl explains her experience, Father Travis talks about the difference between temptation and instinct, saying that temptation is a "slower process." Travis's description inspires Joe to panic, though he isn't sure why. The group holds hands and says a Hail Mary, and the rest of the day continues with similar exercises and discussions.

The boys continue to use Catholicism for their own means when they join the church youth group—this time, not to avoid trouble, but in order to allow Cappy to flirt with Zelia. The boys' immaturity and over-interest in sex becomes apparent as they cannot take the exercises seriously, instead drawing attention to any sexual double meanings. But although Joe mocks Catholicism and uses it for his own means, he is very affected by Father Travis's comments on temptation, perhaps because of Joe's turbulent emotions due to all the unrest in his life.

When Joe gets home, Geraldine is more subdued than she had been before, and is resting upstairs. Joe sits outside with Bazil and asks him who the rapist was. Bazil refuses to tell him, explaining that, although there will be an arraignment, they need more evidence and to know whether the rape occurred on reservation land in order to make a better case. Bazil draws Joe a map, explaining the different places it could have happened and the different jurisdictions that would entail depending on the location. Both Bazil and Joe believe, however, that it happened on reservation land.

As Bazil describes the problems they are having building the case against Geraldine's rapist, he draws attention to how the question of who controls the land affects the delivery of justice on the reservation. Obviously, the issue of land control, which was historically prominent in Native oppression, continues to hinder Native people in various ways, including in the court system.

Joe, Cappy and Angus discover a search-and-rescue unit a few days later while biking. At the lake, policemen and search teams with dogs are out on the water in boats. Zack hypothesizes that they are looking for a car, and Joe knows it is Mayla's, which Geraldine said the attacker sent to the bottom of the lake. He also knows that they are looking for Mayla's body. The boys watch the searchers until dark. The next day, the boys go back to the lake, set themselves up on a cliff above, and watch all day. Just as they are getting hungry, a tow truck pulls a Chevy Nova out of the water. There is no body in the car. There are, though, many toys in the back window, and cloth with the same fabric as the outfit of the doll that Joe had found stuffed with money.

While Joe and his friends watch the activity on the lake, Joe acknowledges that the searchers probably are hoping to find Mayla's body, as they now believe that the attacker killed Mayla. As Mayla's car is pulled from the lake, Joe realizes that the money he found is linked to Mayla's disappearance, when he sees the cloth that was on the doll is also inside the car.

CHAPTER NINE: THE BIG GOOD-BYE

Joe describes Mooshum's childhood, beginning with his conception during a berry-picking camp and his birth during the 1885 siege of Batoche. As a child, Mooshum and his Métis family had to leave behind their home and their lands after Louis Riel, a leader of the Métis resistance movement in Canada, was sentenced to death. Mooshum and his family crossed the border into the United States, where the Chippewa community took them in. As Mooshum grew up in Minnesota, he lost his Métis characteristics and wholeheartedly adopted Chippewa culture. In the early days on the reservation, food was scarce, so Mooshum now celebrates his birthday every year lavishly.

As Joe describes Mooshum's family story, it is clear how profoundly Mooshum's life was affected by oppressive governmental acts against Native people. The fact that the Chippewa community took Mooshum's family in gives another, much older example of how the Chippewa community has a fluid attitude towards who belongs in their community, and how they are likely to adopt stray people into their families and lives.

This year, at his annual party, Mooshum sits outside with Grandma Ignatia and Joe. Mooshum and Grandma Ignatia banter raunchily about sex and their former lovers. Grandma Ignatia asks Mooshum if he was faithful to his wife, and Mooshum says he was, "to a point." Ignatia then remembers that Mooshum had a son out of wedlock. Joe is surprised, realizing that this means that Joe has another uncle. Grandma Ignatia names the son, who Joe only ever knew as a friend of Whitey's. Joe remarks that this story always surprises white people but that other Native people have similar stories.

As Joe becomes accidentally privy to the fact that he has a half-uncle because of Mooshum's infidelity, Grandma Ignatia's revelation shows another example of how families on the reservation, rather than being primarily nuclear, are often much more complicated, giving the people in the community a fluid sense of who belongs to and is responsible to whom—a marked difference from most white Americans.

More people join them outside. Clemence and Edward take pictures as Joe's cousins Joseph and Evey carry the cake to Mooshum. Mooshum tries to blow out the candles, but cake catches fire, which then catches onto Mooshum's hair. Edward, thinking fast, dumps a pitcher of lemonade onto Mooshum's head, extinguishing the flames. Joe takes Mooshum inside, where Clemence cuts away the burnt hair.

In this humorous moment, Mooshum, who is extremely elderly and disoriented, fails to blow out his candles before they catch the cake on fire. As the plot of the book has become more and more dire with the implication of Mayla's death, this moment provides some well-timed comic relief.

Joe sits with Mooshum, who is smiling widely at the excitement. Joe knows that the party will go on into the night and that his friends will be there soon. Mooshum falls asleep but wakes up immediately when Sonja enters the room. She is wearing a new outfit that Joe finds extremely attractive, and which Joe knows she bought with the doll money. As Sonja and Mooshum whisper and laugh, Joe goes outside.

In retrospect, Sonja and Mooshum are obviously plotting Sonja's birthday-gift strip dance. Joe leaves, seeming to be angry at Sonja for using the doll money to buy clothes, and also presumably still uncomfortable about the abuse that happened at Whitey's house.

Joe sees his parents and his friends' parents sitting outside, but does not see Zack, Angus, or Cappy, so he gets on his bike and leaves to find them. Near the church, Joe finds Zack and Angus, who tell him that Cappy and Zelia have a date in the graveyard that night. Joe, Zack, and Angus all ride back to the party, where people have started to dance. The boys sneakily drink beers until late, when Joe rides his bike home. Joe hears his parents come in after him and go into their bedroom together, making Joe feel that everything is "safe and good."

Joe, Zack, and Angus discuss Cappy's date with Zelia, seeming to feel both happy for Cappy and jealous of his romantic success. Joe enjoys the party, which almost the entire community partakes in. Perhaps due to the fact that Geraldine's attacker is in custody, Geraldine feels comfortable with Bazil sleeping in their bed, making Joe happy and relieved.

The next morning, Joe is preoccupied with making sure that Geraldine's attacker will be brought to justice so that everything can go back to normal in his life. Joe asks Bazil again who the attacker is, and Bazil again refuses to answer. Joe asks if Geraldine knows there is a possibility that the attacker will walk free. Bazil says no, and tells Joe not to say anything for fear of setting Geraldine back. Joe asks one more time who the attacker is. Finally, Bazil opens a drawer in his desk and pulls out a mug shot of Linden Lark. Joe tells Bazil that he saw Linden at Whitey's before he was taken into custody.

After the party, Joe feels even more committed to ensuring that Geraldine's attacker is locked up for good. Finally, Bazil actually reveals to Joe that, as he suspected, Linden Lark was the perpetrator. Geraldine's marked change in behavior with her attacker in custody suggests the real affect that the justice system can have in protecting victims and allowing them to resume relatively normal lives.

Bazil puts the mug shot away again and says he thinks Linden is aware that they will not have a strong case against him. Bazil compares Linden to his great-uncle, who Bazil tells Joe was among the men who lynched Chippewa men several generations ago, giving the Hanging Tree its name. Joe tells Bazil that they will bring Linden to justice no matter what, but Bazil does not respond.

When Bazil mentions how one of Linden Lark's ancestors lynched several Chippewa men several generations ago, his comments suggest that Linden's violence is part of a larger legacy of white violence against the Chippewa community that has gone unchanged over generations.

Bazil tells Joe that since Grace's death Linden has been living in her house, which was searched after he was arrested. Nothing significant was found. The police connected that the child that Curtis Yeltow wanted to adopt was Mayla's child. Social workers claimed to have found the baby in a Goodwill with a note pinned to its jacket saying that the baby's parents were dead. Geraldine then identified her as Mayla's baby. Following Geraldine's identification of the child, she returns to work, swamped with new applications and satisfied that the baby is safe. The child is placed with Mayla's parents. Geraldine finally shows law enforcement the file that Mayla had asked for. Bazil and Geraldine go to Bismarck to work on the case, so Joe stays with Clemence and Edward.

As Bazil describes the connections that have been made in the case between Curtis Yeltow, Mayla's former employer, and Mayla's child, Yeltow's involvement becomes even more suspicious. Again, although Yeltow does not actually appear in the book, Erdrich uses him to explore the politics of outside adoption of Native children, which is a very touchy issue in many Native communities, and to explore the ways in which white politicians interact with and often knowingly disadvantage Native communities.

Joe sleeps in the same room as Mooshum. He wakes up in the middle of the night to Mooshum telling a new story. It is titled "The Round House," and it resumes where the story entitled "Akii" left off. Mooshum begins by explaining that wiindigoos can sometimes by cured without murder. After Nanapush saw how easily his relatives would have killed his mother, he resolved to be nothing like them. The buffalo woman told Nanapush that people would one day think of him as a wise man. Nanapush looks into his mind and sees the image of the **round house**. The buffalo woman tells him that Chippewa people formed their communities around buffalo and doodem in the past, and now the round house will serve the same function as the buffalo did by representing the buffalo's body. Mooshum says that he was young when the round house was built according to Nanapush's instructions. Mooshum suddenly stops talking, rolls over, and snores. Joe thinks about the round house, poring over what it represents and how he can only see "a shadow of that way of life."

Although Mooshum's stories plant the idea of wiindigoo justice in Joe's head, they also suggest multiple problems with it, including the danger of carrying wiindigoo justice out rashly and without having fully considered the consequences. Mooshum also suggests ways to rid a community of a wiindigoo without murdering someone. All this casts doubt on Joe's later choice to kill Linden Lark, since it suggests that Joe may have had other options, even within the wiindigoo justice system. Meanwhile, Joe's comment about the round house representing "a shadow" of an older way of life suggests that, although Joe participates in cultural activities, he feels somewhat disconnected from older Chippewa tradition.


After Joe has been at Clemence and Edward's house for a few days, his aunt and uncle take a trip to get a new freezer. When Joe wakes up, only Mooshum is in the house. Joe asks Mooshum what he wants to do that day, and Mooshum tells Joe to go off on his own. Joe, suspecting something is up, refuses to go. Mooshum, exasperated, tells Joe to go fetch him his whiskey from where Clemence keeps it in the kitchen cabinet. Joe is reaching into the cabinet when Sonja appears at the door. Joe, thinking Sonja has been spending more of the doll money, tells Sonja assertively that they are going to give back the money. Sonja brushes Joe off. Mooshum stumbles into the room, takes the whiskey from Joe, and steers Sonja toward the bedroom. Joe follows them into the bedroom. Sonja tells Joe that he has to leave because she is there to give Mooshum a "grown-up gift." Joe hesitates. Sonja asks him again to leave as she takes her stripping costume out of her bag. Joe tells Sonja he is not leaving and sits on the bed with Mooshum.

In this scene, it quickly becomes clear that Sonja and Mooshum have been plotting for Sonja to give Mooshum a lap dance as a birthday gift, which seems to have been discussed during the party when Mooshum and Sonja were whispering and giggling. Joe, whose sexual interest in Sonja has been made abundantly clear, insists on staying for the strip tease. This choice marks a change in Joe's maturity level. Whereas until this point Joe has only entertained sexual fantasies and masturbated, watching Sonja's strip dance is Joe's first real sexual encounter, even though it is a contactless and coerced one. This shift marks part of Joe's transition from childhood to adult manhood.


Sonja gets angry, and Joe tells Sonja that if she doesn't let him stay, he will tell Whitey about the money they hid. Sonja is shocked and then becomes extremely sad. She asks Joe "really?" Joe grabs Mooshum's whiskey bottle and takes a swig. Sonja tells Joe that if he says anything about this she will cut off his genitals, and that she's not "momming" him anymore. Sonja puts a tape player on the floor and instructs them to turn the music on when she comes back, then goes to dress in the bathroom. When Sonja reemerges in her costume, Joe hits play. Joe admires Sonja as she dances. She slowly removes her clothes as Joe and Mooshum pass the whiskey bottle back and forth. When Sonja gets the opportunity, she kicks Joe or whips him with her belt. Sonja removes her bra to reveal her breasts, her nipples covered in tassels. She straddles Mooshum and tells him happy birthday.

Sonja, however, vehemently disagrees that Joe should stay and watch the strip tease. When Joe threatens to blackmail her if she does not let him stay, Sonja becomes extremely angry. Sonja's comment that she will no longer be "momming" Joe reflects the fact that, thanks to the fluidity of Chippewa families, Sonja essentially acted as Joe's surrogate mother during the height of Geraldine's mental distress. As Sonja dances, she clearly does not forget her anger towards Joe, trying to hurt Joe throughout the dance in order to express her upset and anger.


Mooshum, thrilled and overwhelmed, stops breathing. Sonja lifts him onto his cot and checks for his heartbeat. Once it is clear that Mooshum is alive, Sonja dresses. When she comes out of the bathroom, she drops the bag with her stripper outfit at Joe's feet and tells him angrily to masturbate in it, then throws a tassel at his face. Joe apologizes, but Sonja tells him she doesn't care about his apology. Sonja tells Joe about her upbringing, saying that her mother was a prostitute who got beat up and took drugs. Sonja says that she got stuck in stripping, and then when Whitey fell in love with her, she knew he would never marry her because she was not worth marrying. Joe had thought that Whitey and Sonja were married, and Sonja tells him that they actually are not.

After Joe's insincere apology, Sonja describes her life story in brief, discussing a childhood and young adulthood that was intensely colored by her own mother's abuse by men. The fact that Sonja's mother was also abused implies that patterns of domestic violence can be trans-generational, rather than just problems centered on individuals. Sonja's story shows how, while there are extreme examples of gendered violence like Geraldine's rape, many women also experience other forms of mistreatment throughout their lives.

Sonja asks angrily if she treated Joe well, and he says yes. Sonja says that she knew all along he was looking at her breasts, and then tells him to look at them up close, where Joe sees a white scar. Sonja says that her manager gave her that scar with a razor. Joe starts to cry, and Sonja tells him to cry all he wants because "lots of men cry after they do something nasty to a woman." Sonja says she thought of him as a son, but now knows he is just another bad man. Sonja leaves and Joe sits with Mooshum for a long time. Joe feels guilty about his choice to blackmail Sonja and watch her strip, but he also enjoyed it.

Joe's insistence on staying for the strip tease signals his desire for sexual maturity, and his manipulation of Sonja in order to do so signifies his initiation into adult manhood specifically, which is defined in part (at least according to Sonja) by the manipulation and mistreatment of women. Sonja clearly sees Joe, who has revealed his lack of respect for Sonja in this moment, as similar to the many men who have hurt her over the years.

Joe sees one of the tassels that Sonja wore on the floor, picks it up, and puts it in his pocket. Joe, narrating from the present, says that as a married adult, he still keeps Sonja's tassel in his dresser drawer and his wife has never noticed. Her tassel serves as a reminder of how poorly he treated Sonja and how he wants to be better than that.

Joe, meanwhile, seems to take Sonja's comments to heart, and says he kept Sonja's tassel as a reminder of the cruelty towards women that he is capable of and does not want to ever again act on.

Joe goes to Cappy's house, where he finds Cappy slumped in a lawn chair. When Joe greets Cappy, Cappy tells Joe that Zelia returned to her hometown. Cappy then divulges that they did "everything" in the graveyard the night of Mooshum's birthday, and now he is heartbroken that she is gone. Cappy tells Joe that he wants to get Zelia's name tattooed to his chest, but Joe talks him into waiting until he gains more chest muscle. Joe leaves when Doe comes out and tells Cappy to chop wood.

Cappy's description of his pining for Zelia contrasts sharply with Joe's manipulation of Sonja in the prior scene, as Cappy describes a mutually loving (albeit comically immature) relationship rather than a coercive one. By putting the scenes successively, Erdrich highlights how Joe's pursuit of Sonja is both inappropriate and unusual.

Joe heads toward home, hoping to avoid Sonja, but then decides to take his bike to the hills behind the hospital, where he rides fast down the hill over and over. When Joe finally goes home, he is standing outside when he hears Geraldine scream. Bazil comes outside to smoke a cigarette and sees Joe standing there. Joe guesses that law enforcement was not able to charge Linden Lark with the crime. Bazil says nothing, and Joe becomes furious, mocking his father and telling him he has no authority as a judge. Joe goes inside to see Geraldine, who greets him in an empty voice.

As Joe reacts to the news that Linden Lark has not been charged, he becomes extremely angry at his father, despite the fact that Bazil is not actually in control of the decision. Bazil seems, in Joe's mind, to be standing in for the entire justice system and the injustices within it. Joe's rage toward his father represents an adolescent impulse to imagine one's parents as the ultimate authorities, and a desire to separate oneself from them when it's revealed that their power is actually limited.

Bazil comes back inside and leads Geraldine upstairs. When he comes back down, Joe implores Bazil not to leave her alone, but Bazil ignores him. Joe asks Bazil why he "bothers," presumably in reference to Bazil's commitment to justice on the reservation. In response, Bazil takes a moldy casserole out of the back of the fridge and tells Joe he will illustrate it for him. Bazil stacks silverware on top of the casserole in a precariously balanced sculpture, and tells him it is "Indian Law." He points to the rotting casserole at the bottom and tells Joe that Indian Law is based on the United States stealing Native land, a tradition rooted in one old court decision that framed Native people as inferior savages.

In this memorable response to Joe's outburst, Bazil demonstrates why he is so committed to the justice system even though it is often such frustrating, unfruitful work. Bazil uses a rotting, half-frozen casserole to represent the case law affecting Native sovereignty, reflecting the fact that most of those decisions, as Bazil states, were "rotten," highly discriminatory, and racist. Bazil links all of these to one land control decision, showing how closely linked land is to Native oppression.

Joe realizes that each utensil represents a separate court decision that monumentally impacted Native rights. Bazil tells Joe that the rotten decision he most wants to get rid of is *Oliphant v. Suquamish*, which took away the right to prosecute non-Native people for crimes on reservation land. When Joe asks again why Bazil continues to work in law, Bazil rearranges the cutlery into a separate solid structure. Bazil explains that they represent the decisions that he and other tribal judges try to make to "build a solid base for their sovereignty." Bazil feels that one day the decisions he made, however small, will allow for important steps toward Native autonomy.

Notably, even though some of these cases, like Oliphant v. Suquamish *(1978), were decided long after the original land grabs and relegations that shaped Native reservations in the first place, they are still focused on land jurisdiction disputes. As Bazil describes his intention to build a basis for Native sovereignty through a series of smaller decisions, Erdrich brings up the possibility of using the system in order to reform the system, rather than reforming it from the outside.*

The narrative cuts to Joe and Cappy biking over the hills behind the hospital, both trying to blow off steam. Cappy tells Joe about a letter he received from Zelia and says that he needs to get a stamp for the letter he wrote in response. The boys bike to the post office, where Linda is working. Linda tells Joe she made him banana bread, but Joe turns his back on her and walks out. When Cappy emerges from the office, he is holding banana bread for Joe from Linda. The boys go to Angus's house, where Angus tells them his aunt is making them go to confession. Joe gives Angus the banana bread to eat. The three boys bike to the church, where Joe assumes that he and Cappy will wait for Angus outside. Cappy, however decides to confess too. This disturbs Joe and Angus. Angus tries to get Cappy to go swim instead, but Cappy insists on going. Joe goes in with them and finds that the church is nearly empty. Cappy and Angus sit in a pew and pray, then Angus confesses first.

When Joe turns his back on Linda, who has done nothing wrong, the reader gets a sense of how Joe displaces the anger he harbors over what happened to his mother onto other people, like Bazil or Linda, because he is furious that Linden is not being punished. Next, in a highly humorous episode, Cappy decides to confess, to Angus and Joe's surprise and horror. Throughout the book's beginning, Cappy maintains a snarky, skeptical attitude towards both Chippewa religious practices and Catholicism, so it is surprising to everyone, including the reader, to see Cappy so earnestly determined to go to confession (and suggests that his youthful love for Zelia is also bound up in a new appreciation for her religion).

Cappy goes into the confession booth after Angus, and at first all is well, but then Father Travis and Cappy both burst out of the booth. Cappy runs and Father Travis tries to catch him, chasing him around the church. Cappy makes it outside and runs down the dirt road with Father Travis in hot pursuit. Father Travis chases Cappy around Whitey's gas station, the grocery store, through the graveyard, and back to the church playground. Cappy starts to run toward Angus and Joe, ready to jump on his bike, when Father Travis grabs Cappy and lifts him up. The boys assume that Cappy confessed to having sex with Zelia in the church basement. Joe implores Father Travis to let Cappy down, telling him Cappy came to him for help. Father Travis throws Cappy to the ground and the boys jump on their bikes and speed off.

Although Cappy seems to have taken confession seriously, his honesty does not go over well, ending with a furious Father Travis chasing Cappy around town for having had sex with Zelia on the church's sacred ground. Although Cappy wants to take religion more seriously for Zelia's sake (since Zelia is highly religious), he lacks any understanding of how offensive it is that he had sex in a church. On the other hand, Father Travis is a priest, but he clearly has a very unpriestly temper problem. Erdrich parodies the entire confession process in this hilarious moment.

Later, at Clemence's house, Joe asks what Cappy was thinking when he told Father Travis about having sex in the church basement. Cappy says he was remembering their conversation with Father Travis about girls on the night he caught them spying. Joe says he could have talked to his dad or to Randall, but Cappy grins. Mooshum, having heard the story, compliments Father Travis's running abilities as he eats lunch.

When asked about why he told Father Travis about Zelia, Cappy refers to their earlier conversation with Father Travis, in which Father Travis told them not to date "sluts." Cappy seems to have genuinely wanted to talk with someone about Zelia, but his grin suggests that he also wanted to push Father Travis's buttons.

Mooshum then tells the boys about when he outran a wiindigoo named Liver-Eating Johnson. Some Blackfeet warriors had caught Liver-Eating Johnson and planned to take him to the Crow Indians to be brought to justice. Mooshum, who was there when it happened, threatened the prisoner, and then Mooshum and the Blackfeet men left Liver-Eating Johnson bound to a tree with rawhide while they sat by the fire. Liver-Eating Johnson tried to bite through the ties but failed and went to sleep. While he slept, the men dabbed something on his eyes to make them cross and went searching for a centipede to sting him and make his hands swell. When the men returned, Liver-Eating Johnson's rawhide binds had been chewed through and he had escaped.

Mooshum again tells a story about a wiindigoo, though this time it is not in his sleep. Although it is not made explicit why Liver-Eating Johnson was punished as a wiindigoo, Mooshum describes some profoundly cruel treatment on the part of the man's Native imprisoners. Unlike in the Nanapush story, which takes the question of who deserves punishment and what that punishment should be very seriously, Mooshum seems to be unconcerned by the extremely cruel punishments that he and his friends inflicted.

When Mooshum finishes his story, he changes the subject to Sonja. Clemence tells Joe that Sonja left Whitey yesterday while he was at the gas station, with a note that said she would never come back. Joe is overwhelmed by this news and tells Cappy they need to leave. They say goodbye and bike away. After riding for a while, they arrive at the Hanging Tree where Sonja had buried the bank passbooks. Joe tells Cappy about finding the money and hiding it, and then about how Whitey beat Sonja up. Cappy suggests that they dig up the passbooks, and when they do, the boys find two hundred dollars, a note stating that the cash is for Joe to get the shoes he wanted, and a passbook for a ten thousand dollar savings account for college. The note also tells Joe to treat his mother well and informs him that Sonja is going to start a new life with the money she took. Cappy and Joe ride back to Joe's house, where Cappy says goodbye. In the kitchen, Joe, Geraldine, and Bazil all eat together, not speaking about Linden.

When Joe finds out that Sonja left Whitey, he feels a burst of complicated emotions. Notably, although Sonja says that she is going to start a new life with the money, it seems unlikely that she will actually be able to do that, because since Joe found the doll money, Sonja has been using it to buy things like diamond earrings and new jeans rather than saving for a new life away men who abuse her. Still, the fact that the money allows Sonja to at least take some time away from Whitey speaks to the importance of financial independence in allowing women to escape toxic situations.

CHAPTER TEN: SKIN OF EVIL

Linda arrives at the house and Bazil lets her in. Joe, who has sorted out his feelings toward Linda, decides he resents her because Linden is alive thanks to her kidney donation. Joe takes Pearl out to play in order to avoid her, but he later finds out that Linda gave Bazil information on Linden that provoked Bazil take extra steps to keep Geraldine safe, like accompanying her to her office. When they need groceries later that week, Bazil and Joe go instead of Geraldine.

Joe's harshness towards Linda reflects that Joe is still too immature to fully understand Linda's ethical dilemma and the difficulties that influenced her decision to save Linden. At the same time, his attitude toward Linda changes quickly when he learns that Linda is trying to help keep Geraldine safe.

Together, Bazil and Joe pick up the things on Geraldine's grocery list. As they turn into the meat aisle, Bazil and Joe see Linden Lark looking in one of the cases. Bazil throws the carton of cream he is holding and attacks Linden, trying to choke him and knocking him down. As Linden struggles underneath Bazil, Linden appears to be smiling. Joe smashes a can on Linden's forehead. Bazil lets go of Linden's throat and Linden pushes him off and runs away.

As it turns out, Linda was right to suspect that Geraldine should not go to the grocery store alone. Although Bazil is interested in trying to get justice through the legal system, he instinctually attacks Linden on sight and Joe joins in, together violently punishing Linden for the violence he inflicted on Geraldine.

Bazil then has a heart attack; he lies on the floor of the grocery aisle and struggles to breathe. Joe calls an ambulance and Joe rides with him to the hospital. Joe and Geraldine stay in Fargo while Bazil has surgery and recovers in the Fargo hospital. At night, Geraldine and Joe sleep in a hotel room. Geraldine sleeps in Bazil's bathroom, and Joe wishes that he had something of Bazil's to wear too, so Geraldine gives Joe a shirt she packed for Bazil. Joe talks about how, as an adult, Joe still has many of his father's shirts.

When Bazil has a heart attack after attacking Linden, it leads Joe, who is narrating from far in the future, to think about how he asked to wear Bazil's shirt, and how, as an adult, he still owns lots of Bazil's clothes. This story seems to remind Joe of Bazil's second heart attack, which kills him after the events of the book and still clearly pains Joe.

The second-to-last day that they are in Fargo, Geraldine goes to get coffee and Bazil asks Joe about Linden's whereabouts. Joe doesn't know, but later that night, while Geraldine is out of the room, Cappy calls Joe and tells him that some of his family (Joe presumes Doe, Randall, and Whitey) "paid a visit" to Linden and "messed him up good." Geraldine comes back, and then the phone rings again. Geraldine picks up and asks if something is wrong at the office. When she hangs up, she curls up on the bed and doesn't respond when Joe says her name. Finally, Geraldine says that Bazil's secretary, Opichi, called to say that Linden got beat up. Afterward, he drove to Whitey's gas station and antagonized him about the fact that Sonja, his "rich" girlfriend, left him.

In order to finish Bazil's attempted attack, a group of Joe and Bazil's friends and relatives beat Linden up. However, rather than making Geraldine feel better and more safe, Geraldine seems even more upset than she was before. It is unclear whether Bazil and Joe told Geraldine that they had seen Linden at the store, so it is possible that Geraldine is just reacting to the news that Linden is in the area. Still, beating Linden up does nothing to make Geraldine feel safer.

Geraldine is confused about why Linden would call Sonja "rich." Joe, upset, puts a pillow over his head. They lie there a while, then go to a diner. As they eat, Geraldine has a thought that disturbs her, and she wonders to Joe whether Linden is a wiindigoo that is trying to eat all of them. Geraldine promises to stop him and then finishes all her food for the first time since the attack. After dinner they go back to the hotel and go to bed, but Joe lies awake, afraid that Linden will kill Geraldine if she tries to find him.

When Geraldine articulates her belief that Linden might be a wiindigoo, she seems to be hitting upon an idea that Joe has been circling for quite a while. When Geraldine vows to stop him, she feels better by imagining taking justice into her own hands. Joe, however, worries about Geraldine's safety in yet another parent-child role reversal.

Joe wakes up early on the rainy day they leave Fargo. Geraldine, Bazil, and Joe drive home peacefully, with Joe dozing in the backseat. As Joe enjoys the ride, observing his parents' comfortable intimacy, he has a thought that unnerves him (which turns out to be the idea that he has to kill Linden Lark). When they get back to their house, Joe thinks back on the fight in the grocery store and imagines himself killing Linden. Joe decides to visit Father Travis the next morning under the guise of wanting to join catechism class, but really hoping the priest will teach him to shoot, since Father Travis is well known for shooting gophers.

Joe observes Geraldine and Bazil's loving gestures and thinks about the family that he wants so badly to preserve. This thought leads him to conceive of the idea of killing Linden. Joe, who cannot shoot, then decides to go to Father Travis to learn. That Father Travis was Joe's first choice seems strange, since Whitey could also teach Joe, suggesting that Joe may subconsciously be craving spiritual guidance (or trying to distance his violent act from those he cares about).

Joe describes how many people on the reservation have experience with Catholicism because of boarding school, and many, like Clemence, are actively devout. On Saturday, Joe sits with Bugger Pourier, an alcoholic and drifter, the only other person in the catechism class. Afterward, Joe asks Father Travis for personal instruction in order to be confirmed by the fall. Father Travis asks what the rush is, and Joe tells him he wants to be able to pray. Father Travis says he doesn't need to be confirmed to pray. Joe then asks Father Travis what the sins that require vengeance are, and Father Travis lists a few, including sodomy, which Joe thinks includes rape. Joe thanks Father Travis and says goodbye.

Although Joe often mocks Catholicism, the preeminence of Catholicism on the reservation suggests that Joe must have absorbed certain teachings. This becomes clear in this moment, since, although Joe stated that he wanted to go to learn to shoot from Father Travis, Joe also asks questions about "sins that require vengeance," implying that Joe does care about the morality of killing Linden within a Catholic framework.

On Sunday Joe goes to mass with Angus. Joe is the only one who stays for catechism class afterward. Father Travis gives Joe a book called *Dune* and they review some catechism basics. Father Travis suggests that they do the class outside, so they go for a walk and Father Travis explains more Catholic ideology. Father Travis asks about the state of Joe's soul and Joe suggests that they shoot gophers. Father Travis then starts to talk about evil, saying that there are different kinds of evil, material (like poverty) and moral (when human beings cause intentional pain). Father Travis tells Joe that God gave people free will, so he cannot intervene too often. What God can do, however, is make good out of evil. Joe panics internally and Father Travis continues expounding on moral evil. Joe suggests again that they shoot gophers, and Father Travis states that they won't be doing that.

Again, although Joe often mocks the Catholic religion and people who follow it extremely devoutly, he reveals in this moment that Catholicism's moral system and Father Travis's Catholic authority both matter to him. When Father Travis talks about evil, he states that God tries to make good out of it, causing Joe to panic. It is unclear exactly why Joe is panicking (perhaps Joe worries that he will soon be the one committing an evil act that God will have to make up for), but Joe's reaction suggests that Joe worries about how he will be judged according to Catholic theology.

Later, Joe rides his bike to the Lafournais house, where he finds Cappy weight lifting. Cappy stops exercising and pulls out a joint and beer. The boys leave Cappy's house and go up to a hill overlooking the golf course to smoke and drink. As they watch the golfers, Cappy asks Joe why he went to mass. Joe tries to tell Cappy that he needs spiritual help, but Cappy doesn't buy it. Joe tells Cappy that he needed to practice shooting, but that Father Travis had not helped him. Cappy say that if he wants to learn to shoot he should have come to him, since Cappy has been hunting since childhood.

Again, although Cappy does not believe that Joe went to seek out spiritual advice from Father Travis, and although Joe says that he only went to Father Travis so he would not implicate anyone else, Joe seemed especially susceptible to Father Travis's moral musing during their walk. This suggests that spiritual advice may in fact have been part of Joe's reason for choosing Father Travis to teach him to shoot.

Joe hints that he is not just planning on shooting gophers, and Cappy understands that Joe intends to kill Linden Lark. Joe explains that he would not want to implicate anyone else, but Cappy insists he wants to help. Cappy tells Joe that they could take Doe's rifle out to practice, but Joe is afraid of implicating the Lafournais family. Cappy proposes that they stage a house robbery so that Joe can use the gun to kill Linden without anyone suspecting anything, but still Joe says no. Joe and Cappy then notice that they could be looking for Linden from their overlook, since Linden is a golfer.

When Joe reveals his intentions, Cappy, rather than being astonished or taken aback, is completely on board. Although Joe tries to keep Cappy out of his plans to kill Linden, Cappy insists on helping him. In comparison to how they acted at the beginning of the book, both Cappy and Joe have grown much more secretive and independent, taking more action without parental permission.

Joe and Cappy ride back to Cappy's house to practice shooting. The boys set up cans on a fence and shoot them off over and over again. Cappy hits the cans easily, but Joe misses every shot. Joe surmises that he is the worst shot on the reservation. Joe tries shooting the cans with both eyes closed and fares marginally better. Cappy suggests that they practice somewhere more remote, but the boys are out of ammo.

Against Joe's better judgment, Cappy convinces Joe to practice shooting with him even though Joe does not want to implicate him. Although the boys are preparing for a murder, this moment is fairly humorous because of how profoundly bad Joe is at shooting the target.

Eventually, Joe, who has a strict curfew, has to go home. He plans to use some of the money Sonja gave him to buy more ammo alone, but he needs a ride to the ammo store. Joe asks Geraldine to take him to the shoe store, and then Joe makes an excuse to go into the sporting goods store while she waits outside. Joe buys forty dollars worth of ammo and a spinner for bass fishing (to pretend it was his reason for going into the store). Joe feels guilty for his deceit but he tells himself that his lies are for the sake of justice.

Unlike earlier in the book, when Joe was completely incapable of deceiving anyone and divulged everything to Bazil, Joe lies to his mother easily, then quickly excuses himself for it. Through this moment, Erdrich highlights how much Joe has grown and changed over the course of the plot, becoming much more individualistic and private.

Joe thinks how his mother, even though she is doing reasonably better, has changed since her attack. Geraldine is jumpy and she now treats Joe more like an adult than she did previously. Joe thinks that she acts like he no longer needs her, when, in fact, he does. In the car on the way home, Joe asks his mother why she did not lie about where the rape had happened so that they could prosecute Linden. Geraldine says she isn't sure, but that she wishes she had lied and it's too late now to change her story. Joe understands, but he secretly still wishes that she had lied so that they could put Linden in jail and Joe wouldn't have to be the one lying about buying ammo.

Although Joe has been making more and more adult decisions on his own, Joe still feels his mother's absence acutely and regrets that Geraldine does not feel responsible for Joe all the time like she used to. Geraldine's absence frustrates Joe, especially since Joe feels very lost and afraid at this point in the story. Joe hopes to be able to stop lying one day, suggesting that, although he is finally good at it, lying harms Joe emotionally and reminds him of his own lost innocence.

Joe tries not to face the entire reality of what he is about to do because he finds it overwhelming. He realizes that the next step is to talk to Linda and find out Linden's golf schedule. Three days later, Joe goes to the post office where Linda works, and gives Linda a bag of bananas to make banana bread. Linda is touched. Joe leaves, biding his time so his politeness is not suspicious. The next day around five o'clock, Linda pulls into the driveway. Geraldine opens the door and accepts banana bread from Linda, then invites her into the living room. Linda gives another loaf to Joe and talks with Bazil about the weather. Geraldine goes into the kitchen to make tea, leaving Joe, Bazil, and Linda alone. Joe falls fast asleep and wakes up later, having missed dinner. He thinks intensely about the murder he is preparing to commit and lets out a sob, terrified, and then lies on the floor. After about a half hour he gets up and goes to bed, feeling stronger than he did before.

Although Joe has committed emotionally and financially to killing Linden and acting out wiindigoo justice, he is still so overwhelmed by the idea of killing someone that he cannot fullly face the reality of the crime he is about to commit and the moral questions that it entails, so he avoids thinking about it in its entirety. When Joe finally does confront it, he is so overwhelmed that he curls up on the floor for half an hour. As Erdrich portrays Joe confronting his decision to murder Linden, the reader can already see the terrifying effects that this choice is having on Joe's mental health—which only worsen after Joe actually commits the murder.

Joe orchestrates running into Linda during her lunch. He goes to the sandwich bar that Linda frequents daily, checking for Linda, and on the third day he sees Linda walk in. Joe follows her in and sits down. When Linda notices Joe, she invites him to sit with her. Linda orders two shrimp baskets. Joe asks if Linda always gets the shrimp (the most expensive item on the menu), so Linda explains that it is her birthday. Joe wishes Linda happy birthday, and then, trying to steer the conversation toward Linden, says that he thought that Linda was born in the winter.

In contrast to Joe's earlier investigation attempts, which he generally botched by losing focus or becoming afraid of getting in trouble, this effort to get information from Linda goes smoothly, as a more mature, purposeful Joe concentrates on getting Linda to talk about Linden's golf habits. Again, this change shows how much Joe has matured over the course of the novel.

Linda explains that she decided to celebrate the day that Betty was given custody of her after she was taken away by social workers for the second time, rather than celebrate her date of birth. The shrimp arrives and Joe forgets that he had decided to hate Linda because, in fact, he really likes her. Unexpectedly, Linda tells Joe that she is sorry she saved Linden. She then says that Linden left her a voicemail saying that he was going to become rich. Joe immediately thinks of Sonja and worries that Linden is going after her, but calms down after realizing that Sonja can hold her own. Joe and Linda finally eat. Joe, unnerved by talk of Linden, tries to change the subject to the weather, but Linda doesn't seem interested in talking about it.

As Linda talks about how she celebrates her second reunion with Betty rather than her birth date, Joe seems to allow himself to warm up to Linda as he realizes that, although Linda is biologically related to Linden and the Lark family, she is really not one of them, and is instead a Wishkob at heart. By tracing Joe's shifting feelings towards Linda, Erdrich seems to be guiding the reader toward an understanding that, although Linda is biologically related to Linden, she is not responsible for his actions.

Joe then asks Linda if Linden plays golf, and Linda looks at Joe and blinks. Joe, thinking fast, tells Linda that he wants to know so that Bazil can avoid Linden if he ever wants to go golfing. Linda tells Joe that Linden usually golfs around seven am, and proposes to talk to Bazil about it. Joe empathically says no and tells her he wanted to surprise Bazil with a father-son golf outing. Joe eats the rest of his food quickly, knowing he has the information he needs.

Again, whereas earlier in the novel Joe would have likely caved under the pressure of Linda's questioning, a more mature Joe is able to lie more smoothly, inventing his desire to take Bazil on a golf outing. Joe's changing investigatory abilities help mark his increasing self-sufficiency.

Joe looks out the window and sees Bugger Pourier stealing his bicycle. He excuses himself from Linda's company and catches up to Bugger, then walks beside him while Bugger rides. After a while, Joe asks for his bike back. Bugger tells him that he needs it to go investigate something he saw that he thought might have been a dream, but Joe convinces Bugger to stop by Grandma Ignatia's house for food, where Bugger returns the bike. Joe then rides to Cappy's house, where he boys had planned to practice shooting, but when he arrives Randall is at the house, wearing full powwow regalia to prepare for the annual summer powwow.

Although Joe's interaction with Bugger Pourier seems fairly inconsequential at this point, it later becomes a somewhat important plot point in the novel. Bugger refers to wondering if he saw something in a dream, and dreams are religiously and culturally significant in Chippewa culture and throughout the book, as Mooshum tells stories as he dreams, Akii dreams the real locations of game animals, etc.

Cappy suggests that they look for rocks for Randall's sweat lodge, so Cappy and Joe go out into the woods with a plastic sled and collect large stones. As they work, Joe tells Cappy about his conversation with Linda about Linden's golf habits. Cappy tells Joe that they have to start putting Joe's plan to action, saying that Joe should take Doe's rifle during the powwow that weekend. Joe feels horribly guilty at the idea of stealing from Doe, but he knows Cappy is right. Cappy tells him that the safest time would be on Saturday night, since both Doe and Randall will be busy at the powwow. He tells Joe to make a mess so it looks like a break in, hide the gun at the golf course overlook behind an oak tree, and then return to the powwow grounds to camp with Cappy's family.

Cappy and Joe go search for rocks for Randall's sweat lodge, presumably only in order to get some alone time to talk about Joe's plans to kill Linden. As he is throughout the book, Cappy is extremely supportive of Joe and generous to him in this endeavor, even suggesting that Joe steal his father's gun to kill Linden. As Cappy and Joe formulate their plan, it becomes clear that they will have to carry it out during the annual summer powwow, one of the very important religious and cultural events on the reservation.

For the rest of the week, Joe feels sick from the shrimp he ate with Linda. While he is resting in bed, he tries to read *Dune*, the book that Father Travis gave him, but instead ends up flinging it across the room. A long time later, Joe says, he ended up reading the book repeatedly. The week passes and then it is powwow weekend. Joe goes with Randall and Cappy to the powwow grounds and helps set up in the family's usual spot. They dig a fire pit and place lawn chairs and set out coolers of food and drinks. When the powwow starts, Doe, as the MC, welcomes the crowd, makes bad jokes, and reminds the dancers of the time of the Grand Entry contest.

As Joe describes reading the book Dune and not connecting with it whatsoever, but then later in life reading it multiple times, Erdrich draws attention to the fact that connecting to stories can be circumstantial. Dune, which tells the story of a man who finally succeeds in overthrowing one political regime only to discover that he has created an equally bad one, seems to speak to Joe more after he processes his ambivalent feelings about having killed Linden.

People start to fill the bleachers to watch the dances. Cappy and Joe set up a tent for Randall to prep himself in, and Cappy teases Randall as he dresses and paints his face. Randall, Joe, and Cappy exit the tent and observe as a girl watches Randall stretch, smitten. Randall farts while stretching and the girl laughs. Cappy and Joe then go find Angus and Zack. The four boys walk to the food stands and buy frybread. Several girls from their school approach them to flirt with Cappy. Joe observes how effortlessly Cappy attracts the girls, asking them about their lives as they walk around. Inside the arena, the Grand Entry dancers line up to dance and Joe, realizing it is time, heads to the Lafournais house to steal Doe's gun.

As usual, although Randall is an excellent dancer and well schooled in Chippewa medicine, he comes across as a rather appearance-driven figure who is rendered ridiculous when his façade breaks, as it does when he farts as he stretches while an admiring girl watches. Randall is similar to Father Travis in that both are important religious men who act in ways that are often undignified, and so reveal that the idea of religious authority or moral superiority is mostly a farce.

When Joe arrives at the house, he waits until dark, then puts on gloves and walks to the front door with the crowbar that Cappy left out for him. Joe enters and walks to the gun cabinet, where he shatters the glass and takes out the gun. He then puts ammo in his backpack, scatters Doe's toolbox, and adjusts the TV so it looks like he tried to steal it. Joe walks out and takes a path to the overlook, where he and Cappy had already dug a hole. Joe buries the gun and the ammo and then walks back to the powwow. When Joe gets back, Cappy is in the tent alone. Joe tells Cappy that everything went smoothly. As they lie there, Joe thinks about Doe arriving home to discover that the house was broken into, and he feels intensely guilty.

Joe successfully carries out his mission to steal Doe's gun, following Cappy's instructions exactly and without issue. However, as Joe thinks about his betrayal and deception of Doe, his best friend's father and his good family friend, Joe feels extremely guilty. Although Joe has not yet killed Linden, the steps he must take even before actually committing the murder require him to deceive people he loves, inspiring profound feelings of guilt that hint at the personal consequences of carrying out wiindigoo justice.

The next morning, Joe and Cappy wake up at the campground and eat breakfast that Cappy's relatives Suzette and Josey make for them. Suzette and Josey feed Joe and Cappy all day and then go prepare for the Grand Entry. Suzette and Josey take their clothing seriously, emerging from their RV with braided hair and perfect clothes. They join the rest of the dancers, moving with grace. Doe makes jokes over the loudspeaker.

Although the annual summer powwow serves mainly as a backdrop to Joe's expedition to steal Doe's gun, Erdrich takes her time to thoroughly describe the scene. As she focuses on Suzette and Josey, she makes it clear how important this celebration is to them by emphasizing the care with which they dress themselves.

Randall approaches Joe and Cappy as they watch the dancers and informs them that the house was broken and the rifle was stolen. Randall thinks it was strange that the dogs did not fend off the intruders, and Joe and Cappy pretend to agree. Joe feels extremely guilty. Randall tells them that he is going to sleep at home that night with his shotgun to fend off any more burglars. Then Randall walks off. Cappy compliments Joe's work stealing the gun and tells him that Doe would understand why he did it. Joe tells Cappy firmly that he is carrying out the rest of the plan, emphasizing that he is about to commit murder, even though it's for justice. Cappy implies that Joe is not a good enough shot to do it alone and insists that he should be there to steady Joe's aim. Joe agrees, but secretly intends not to tell Cappy when he will carry out the plan.

After Randall approaches Joe and Cappy to tell them about the break-in, Joe once again feels extremely guilty, foreshadowing the even more intense guilt that he will feel after he has actually committed murder. Joe, not wanting Cappy to be liable for arrest or to harbor the guilt that Joe does, tells Cappy that he wants to do the rest of the plan alone. When Joe emphasizes that even though the murder is just, it is still murder, he seems to be hitting on the fact that even if a punishment is morally justifiable, it can negatively affect the person giving out the punishment.

The next week, Joe wakes up at sunrise and tells his parents he is going for a run. Joe takes an empty pickle jar full of water and the stone that Cappy gave him to the overlook and digs up the ammo and the rifle. Joe loads the rifle and brings it to the oak tree, where he has a clear view of the golf course. Joe waits to see if Linden shows up for hours, but Linden never does, so Joe buries the rifle again and goes home. Joe, relieved of his burden for the day, is ecstatic. He talks with Geraldine and then goes upstairs and takes a nap. When he wakes he feels dread, knowing that he will have to try to kill Linden the next day, but when he remembers seeing his mother after her attack he has a renewed sense of purpose. Joe goes back to the overlook the next two days, but Linden doesn't show.

Although up until this moment Joe and Cappy have been planning Linden's murder, it does not really come together until now, when Joe is completely positioned and ready to kill Linden in order to enact wiindigoo justice. Although Joe is prepared for his role, he is also hugely relieved when Linden does not show up, suggesting that Joe is afraid of what will actually happen once he kills Linden, and is perhaps nervous about the emotional effect it could have on him.

On Thursday Joe goes to the overlook again, even though it is raining. After an hour, Linden shows up. Joe walks down the hill and finds a spot to stand where he can see Linden. Joe removes the rifle's safety, holds the gun as he was taught, and takes aim. Linden taps his ball into the hole and Joe shoots as Linden walks toward the ball, hitting him in the stomach. Linden collapses and Joe lowers the rifle. Linden begins to scream. Joe reloads the rifle and shoots at Linden again, but misses entirely, then freezes. Linden starts to get up and Joe begins to panic when Cappy appears, takes the rifle from Joe, and shoots Linden dead. Cappy picks up the ejected casings and leads Joe up the hill away from Linden's body.

Although Joe worries later that he has become as cold-blooded a killer as Linden, Joe obviously falters in the book's climax, unable to deal the death shot to Linden. Despite the fact that Joe did not tell Cappy he was going to the golf course, Cappy appears and saves Joe, killing Linden in his stead. The fact that killing Linden was a group effort aligns his murder more closely with the principles of wiindigoo justice, which is meant to be carried out with community consent by a group, not by lone individuals seeking vengeance.

CHAPTER ELEVEN: THE CHILD

When Cappy and Joe reach the oak tree, they turn and look down at Linden's body. Cappy drops to his knees and touches his head to the ground. After a few minutes the boys fill the hole where the gun was buried. Then, Joe and Cappy go to Cappy's house to figure out where to hide the rifle. Once they get there, Cappy grabs the keys to Randall's old car and they put the gun in the trunk. After some difficulty, Cappy starts the car and they drive to Linda's house.

After killing Linden, Cappy takes a moment to process his actions, dropping to his knees. Although Cappy shot Linden with relative ease and in an attempt to fulfill justice, he obviously is profoundly affected by his crime. After a few minutes, the boys recollect themselves in order to hide the gun.

When they arrive at Linda's house, no one is home. The boys hide the gun under Linda's front porch and then get back in the car and drive to Joe's house. Cappy pulls over to let Joe out on the road to his house when they see the tribal police car drive by with its lights going. The boys feel certain that Linden is dead, since no sirens are on. As the boys sit in the idling car, Joe tells Cappy that he saved him, and Cappy denies it. Joe clarifies that Linden's death was on himself, not Cappy, and Cappy agrees half-heartedly. Joe starts to choke up and tells Cappy that they can never talk about it again. Cappy agrees.

Throughout the book, Erdrich seems to imply that, while some violence is justified, or perhaps even necessary, that violence will always also harm the person committing it. This certainly seems to apply in Cappy's case. Although he was acting out of love for his best friend and in what did seem to be in the best interest of their community, he obviously feels the consequences of his murder quite strongly.

The boys, wanting to get drunk, decide to meet at Whitey's gas station after Cappy drops the car off. After Cappy drives away, Joe walks to the station and finds Whitey standing in the doorway of the garage. He brings Joe, who is feeling sick, soda and bread to settle his stomach. Whitey then tells Joe that someone killed Linden on the golf course. Joe leaps up, runs to the back of the gas station and vomits.

Joe is obviously also deeply affected by the murder, feeling physically ill and even vomiting after Whitey tells him definitively that Linden is dead. As Whitey talks about the murder, his lack of commentary on Joe's illness suggests that he may suspect Joe's involvement.

When Joe comes back, he says that he has the summer flu. Whitey continues to talk about Linden's murder, saying that there is no evidence because of the rain. Whitey then tells Joe that Sonja had called to say she was coming home, and that, after everything, he's still in love with her. Joe then goes and lies down on the cot in the gas station office for a half hour. After resting, he asks Whitey for a sandwich. Just as Whitey finishes making the sandwiches, Cappy arrives, and the three of them sit outside and eat. Whitey gives the boys a bottle of liquor, telling them to drink it in the back, before leaving to pump gas.

When Whitey reveals that Sonja is coming back to live with him, this moment, which Whitey presents as a happy triumph, is actually much more ambivalent given the fact of Whitey's abuse, which Whitey has given no indication that he plans to stop. Sonja's return to Whitey is bittersweet because it shows that Sonja was unable to use Joe's money to escape her cycle of abuse for good.

As the boys head out back, Cappy asks Joe if Whitey knows they killed Linden. Joe says that he thinks so, since he threw up after Whitey told him about Linden's death. Cappy says that he also threw up, and Joe and Cappy try to smile, but they are too upset. Joe and Cappy drink from Whitey's bottle until they finish all of it. Afterward, the boys lay down on the ground and Joe asks Cappy why he went to the overlook that morning. Cappy tells Joe that he was there every morning because he always "had [Joe's] back." The boys fall asleep.

Again, although Joe and Cappy try to act normal, they are clearly both profoundly affected by their act of violence, as evidenced by their vomiting and the fact that they cannot even smile at one another. Erdrich also reveals the extent of Cappy's devotion to his friend when Cappy tells Joe that Cappy went to the overlook every day in case Joe went without him.

When Joe and Cappy wake up, Whitey tells them to eat another sandwich and to touch the whiskey bottle again. He also makes them give him their shirts. Afterward, Joe and Cappy walk to their respective homes. When Joe arrives, Geraldine asks him where he has been, and Joe says that he was running and then went to Whitey's. Joe can tell that Geraldine and Bazil very badly want to believe him.

Whitey asks Joe and Cappy to touch the whiskey bottle again and give him their shirts, clearly trying to establish a stronger alibi for the boys should they be questioned. Suddenly it is Joe and Cappy, not Linden, who are gaming the justice system.

Bazil tells Joe to sit down and says that Linden is dead. Joe says he thinks that's good. Bazil asks Joe if he knows anything about it, and Joe, who practiced his response to this question, responds "childishly," "the way the old Joe…would answer." Joe tells Bazil that he is happy that Linden is dead and that he deserved it. Geraldine looks at Joe in a way that makes Joe think that she believes he is the murderer. Joe goes upstairs and thinks about his mother and his crime, feeling that there is no going back on what he has done and the consequences.

When Bazil confronts Joe and Joe responds "childishly," "the way the old Joe would answer," it becomes clear to the reader not only how much Joe has grown up in the past several months, but also that Joe is aware enough of his own transformation that he himself can thoroughly distinguish his past self from his current one. Joe is able to deceive his parents thanks to this new self-awareness.

During the next week, Joe actually does contract the flu. During the police investigation, Whitey attests to Joe and Cappy's presence at the gas station on the morning of the murder, saying that Joe and Cappy had found his booze. Whitey shows them all the evidence: their shirts, the bottle with fingerprints, etc. While Joe is sick in bed, he worries about the possibility of someone finding the rifle. In his feverish state, he thinks that after killing Linden he might become a wiindigoo himself. Joe thinks back to when he was pulling **trees** out of the yard a few months before, and remembers how happy and ignorant he was. Joe asks his father if Linda knows about Linden's death, and Bazil says that he has not been able to get in touch with her. Joe falls asleep and wakes up later feeling much better. He then dresses and goes downstairs to watch his mother garden. Geraldine stops what she's doing to feel his forehead, then proclaims that his fever is gone. Geraldine wants Joe to stay home, but he insists on going out to see Angus and Cappy.

Again, Whitey obviously suspects that Joe and Cappy killed Linden, but instead of confronting them, he goes out of his way to help Joe and Cappy get off. As Joe, sick with a fever, imagines that he has become a wiindigoo himself, he seems to think that by murdering Linden and committing a similarly violent crimes to Linden's murder of Mayla, Joe has become no different from him, even if in Joe's case that crime was much more justifiable. As Joe thinks back on the trees he uprooted from the house's foundation, perhaps remembering his profound sense of guilt at the time, Joe obviously comes to understand that memory differently, and feels that so much, including himself, has since changed.

Joe sees an empty pickle jar in the kitchen and he freezes, remembering that he had brought a pickle jar of water with him to the overlook and had forgotten it there. Geraldine sees Joe looking at it and explains that Vince Madwesin, the tribal policeman, came by and gave her the jar and told her to wash it out. Geraldine looks at Joe and says she is worried about him. They both say "I love you," and then Joe asks if Geraldine is better now that Linden is dead. Geraldine tries to persuade Joe that the answer to that question is yes. After this conversation with his mother, Joe gets on his bike and rides away.

When Geraldine describes how Vince Madwesin, the tribal policeman, brought her the pickle jar and told her to wash it out, it is clear that not only Whitey, but the entire community is conspiring to keep Joe and Cappy from being arrested for the murder. When Joe then asks Geraldine if she is better now that Linden is dead, Geraldine hesitates, suggesting that although Linden's murder can protect Geraldine from future violence at Linden's hands, it cannot undo her past trauma.

First Joe rides to the post office. The other postal workers tell Joe that Linda has taken sick leave, so Joe goes to Linda's house. There Linda invites Joe into the kitchen, where she offers him a fried egg sandwich. While she fries the eggs, Joe looks at her apartment. As they both eat, Linda asks if it is morally wrong to enjoy a sandwich when her twin brother is dead, though she does not seem too concerned. She tells Joe that she did not take time off work to mourn Linden, but for "other reasons," which she will tell Joe about if he tells her why he came to see her. As Joe puts down his sandwich, Linda says he should finish eating before they talk.

As Linda greets Joe and welcomes him into her home, she does not seem fazed whatsoever by the fact that her biological twin brother has just died, and even jokingly asks the egg sandwich she is eating whether it is okay to enjoy herself. Again, it has become clear by this point in the book that Linda's loyalties lie not with her biological family, but rather with the Wishkob family and the Chippewa community she belongs to, which includes Joe's family.

Once they finish their sandwiches, Linda tells Joe that she realizes that he got his information about the golf course from her, leading to Linden's murder. Linda, however, tells him that she thinks Joe was not actually the murderer and that he told someone older about the golf course so they could shoot him. Linda asks Joe why he came to see her again. Joe asks if he can trust her, and Linda says that, if he has to ask her that, the answer is no. Linda then leans in and tells Joe that she would do "anything in the world" for his family, and then asks him again why he came to see her.

Linda reveals that she knows that Joe is linked to Linden's murder because whoever killed Linden also knew he would be on the golf course, but she also states that she thinks Joe is too young to actually have killed Linden himself. Despite Joe's newfound maturity, he still is perceived as innocent, perhaps reflecting the fact that Joe is still in reality very young, and has just grown up very fast because of outside circumstances.

Joe surprises both Linda and himself by asking why Linden raped Geraldine. Linda replies that Linden hated Joe's entire family, but proceeds to say that the attack was really about Linden's obsession with Mayla. When Geraldine filed Mayla's daughter's tribal enrollment form, Mayla named Curtis Yeltow, not Linden, as the father. This meant that Mayla had gotten pregnant while she was working for Yeltow as a high schooler. Yeltow paid Mayla to keep the baby a secret, but Mayla insisted on enrolling her in the tribe. Linden, who also had worked for Yeltow, was infatuated with Mayla and tried to convince her to run away with him with the money Yeltow had given her, but Mayla instead filed for her daughter's enrollment.

When Joe asks Linda why Linden raped Geraldine, he shows a strange interest in actually understanding Linden's motives. As Linda explains Linden's hatred, jealousy, and possessiveness towards women, it is clear that Linden's violence is the culmination of his generally racist and misogynistic attitude, but also that his misogyny was particularly channeled into his relationship with Mayla. When Yeltow pays Mayla to keep quiet, Linden became furiously jealous.


Linda imagines that Linden wanted to find the enrollment form in order to blackmail Yeltow, and that Geraldine would not give it to him. Linda says that Linden raping Geraldine had more to do with his inner evil, his "monster," than with any rational intention. Linda talks about how she recognized this evil in Linden when she met him at the hospital, and how she thinks that what corrupted both Linden and their mother Grace was Linda's absence from their lives after her abandonment. Linda also hypothesizes that Linden kept hanging around the reservation to make sure that no one found Mayla's body.

As Linda talks about the "monster" inside Linden, she seems to be suggesting that some people possess certain traumas or innate qualities that make them particularly susceptible to becoming violent. Linda's hypothesis follows that, although some people (those with "monsters") are more likely to be violent, the onus to control one's impulses and not commit violence rests on the individual.

Joe suddenly is filled with dread, and he asks Linda if he (Joe) is "like" Linden. Linda tells him that while the murder will get to him—or "whoever" (Linda backtracks, still pretending that she does not think that Joe killed him)—he can't let it wreck him. Linda then tells Joe that *she* should have shot Linden. Joe finally tells Linda that the rifle used to kill Linden is hidden under her porch. Joe asks if she can get rid of it, and Linda smiles. She explains that her dog already found it. When Joe starts to panic, Linda tells him not to worry, stating that she took a sick day in order to get rid of the rifle, which she disassembled with the help of her adopted brother. The two of them then threw it into the Missouri river.

Joe is obviously plagued by the possibility that he has become in any way similar to Linden through his own violent act of killing Linden. The fact that Joe asks this question right after Linda talks about how Linden's misogyny leads to his violence makes the reader wonder whether Joe is also considering how his own treatment of women like Sonja may be increasing or igniting his capacity for violence. Meanwhile, Linda's comments make it seem like, despite her earlier comments, she, too, suspects Joe is the murderer.

Lastly, Linda tells Joe to tell "whoever did it" to "rest easy." Linda then changes the subject and asks how Geraldine is doing. Joe says that his mother said she was fine, but she seemed a little too insistent. Linda pulls a black screw out of her pocket, saying that she wants to give it to Geraldine. Joe puts it in his pocket, takes a loaf of Linda's banana bread, and heads home. When he is halfway home, he realizes that the screw is from the rifle, so he throws it in a ditch.

It's unclear why Linda gives Joe the screw, and many interpretations are possible, but it could be to convey to Geraldine that Joe is safe from arrest because the gun is destroyed. However, Joe, perhaps wanting to believe that his mother does not know that he is the one who killed Linden, throws the screw away.

The narrative jumps forward to Joe, Angus, Cappy, and Zack hanging out together at the edge of the construction site on the reservation one afternoon. The boys drink whiskey and beer and take valium. Cappy swallows a pill and takes out a photo of Zelia and holds it to his forehead, then tells the photo "I miss you too, baby." Joe says their love is beautiful, and Cappy hands him a letter that Zelia wrote to him about the rapture. Joe reads it slowly in his drunk and high state as Cappy explains that the rapture is a religious doomsday prophecy where the good are transported to heaven, and that Zelia's family is thinking of converting because of it. Angus says of the rapture "I don't think you'll make it, you two," because of their "mortal stain." Joe assumes that Angus is talking to him and Cappy, and that he is referring to Linden's murder. Cappy tells Angus that none of them will go to heaven since they drink and do drugs.

Cappy's love for Zelia, in classic adolescent fashion, is way over-the-top as Cappy kisses and talks to Zelia's photo. Zelia's religious devotion continues to rub off on Cappy, who tells the other boys about the rapture. The idea of the rapture seems to loosely connect to Cappy's fate later in the novel, as the rapture promises the sudden transportation of the good to heaven—and Cappy, one of the novel's most likable, loyal characters, dies suddenly. However, as Angus brings up Joe and Cappy's participation in Linden's murder (despite never having been told by Joe or Cappy about it), he casts Cappy's moral status into doubt.

Zack tells them that they don't need the rapture anyway, since they have confession. The boys then reminisce about how Father Travis chased Cappy around after his confession about having sex with Zelia. Joe brings up the possibly of Zelia having gotten pregnant, and Cappy says that he wished she had so they could get married. Joe reminds him that he is thirteen, and Cappy reminds Joe that so were Romeo and Juliet.

As Zack tells the other boys that the rapture isn't relevant to them since they can instead confess and go to heaven, it is clear that the boys view different religions not as individual, unchangeable ideologies, but rather as different toolkits that can be mixed and matched for religious salvation.

Joe suggests that they get food, but Zack, Cappy, and Angus have fallen asleep. After a while, Joe hears someone crying and realizes that Cappy is sobbing in his sleep. Joe leaves the other boys where they're sleeping and rides his bike home, then falls asleep in the bushes in front of his house. Joe wakes up again after sunset and goes into his kitchen. Geraldine calls into the kitchen from the other room to ask where Joe has been and to tell him that he missed dinner. Joe says that he was biking. He takes a container of spaghetti from the fridge and eats it out of the container.

When Cappy cries in his sleep and Joe slips away, Joe proves himself incapable of emotionally supporting his friend. Notably, as the scene of Joe and his friends getting high at the construction site conveys, the boy's drug use in the novel has steadily increased and become more dangerous, later culminating in the drunk driving accident that kills Cappy.

Geraldine tells Joe to put the spaghetti on a plate, then she asks if he was smoking cigarettes. Joe assures her that the other boys were, but not him. Geraldine sits down and tells Joe that he yelled Cappy's name twice in his sleep the previous night. Joe thinks about Cappy crying in his sleep and feels guilty for having left him and the others at the construction site. Bazil comes out of his study and sits down at the table with Geraldine and Joe. Joe is still thinking about Cappy while Geraldine holds Bazil's hand and Bazil touches Geraldine's wedding ring. As Joe watches their loving gesture, he gets angry and feels that they have switched roles, and he is now the adult and they are the children. They have no idea, Joe thinks, what he and Cappy did for them.

After Joe's torturous nightmares and his feelings of his profound guilt, he is now frustrated by his parents' loving, intimate gestures. Joe seems to think that their happiness represents a kind of innocent blissfulness that he has lost since murdering Linden. When he talks about feeling as if they have switched places, with Joe as the parent and Geraldine and Bazil as children, Joe articulates the culmination of coming of age— becoming a caregiver rather than care-receiver.


Bazil addresses Joe and brings up Linden's death, saying that he was at first felt relieved to know that Linden was no longer a safety threat. Joe tries to get up from the table, but Bazil keeps speaking, saying that there's still the question of who killed Linden. Joe says that Linden got what he deserved, and Bazil agrees. Bazil then tells Joe that Bjerke, the FBI agent, will interview them tomorrow to get their alibis.

The fact that Bazil addresses Joe as he discusses Linden's death makes it seem that Bazil suspects Joe's involvement in Linden's murder. Although Bazil is relieved that Linden is dead, his relief focuses on the end of Linden as a safety threat rather than the fact that abstract justice was achieved.

Bazil says that he thought about what he, as a judge, would say if he knew anything about the murderer's identity. He tells Joe that he ultimately decided that he would not say anything, because there are "many kinds of justice," including both "ideal justice" and "best-we-can-do-justice." Bazil comforts himself with knowing that Linden was unquestionably guilty and that it resolves a legal problem created by the questions of land jurisdiction. Bazil decides to say nothing, since the murderer will have to live with the emotional burden of murder, and he even resolves to protect anyone who would be prosecuted for killing Linden. When Joe expresses confusion at this, Bazil tells him that he could plausibly argue as a judge that Linden met the definition of a wiindigoo, and that killing him fulfilled a law that predates the United States Government's legal system. Joe looks at both of his parents and then thinks about the books in Bazil's study "as if they could help" the three of them. However, Joe thinks, they are now way past the domain of stories and books. Joe thinks that, although Bazil's words are a relief, he is also wrong about them being safe from Linden, because he haunts Joe and Cappy's dreams.

When Bazil suggests that he could argue in the courtroom that Linden's murderer was carrying out the old, established law of wiindigoo justice, he essentially imagines reconciling the Chippewa legal system with the United States one. Joe, on the other hand, seems more skeptical—perhaps because, with his guilt from implementing wiindigoo justice and his frustrations with the court of law, he is now questioning the morality of both systems. Joe goes on to think of Bazil's bookshelf, but then thinks they are beyond the help of books. While books generally serve to give characters in the book models of behavior, this comment implies that there is a limit to what reading books can do, perhaps in part due to the gravity of Joe's emotional burden as a murderer or the specificity of his situation, which may not be addressed in any of the books Bazil owns (or in any books at all).



There is a break in the narrative as Joe describes the two dreams he has after the murder: one in which he and Cappy are at the golf course and they shoot Linden, but then Joe and Linden switch bodies and Joe's spirit is the one dying, while Linden's spirit in Joe's body runs up the hill with Cappy. Joe knows that Linden will kill Cappy, but he dies before he can warn him. In the second dream, the ghost Joe saw out his window leans over him and talks to him. Joe says that he knows that the ghost is "the police."

In Joe's dream, he imagines himself switching spirits with Linden just before Linden's death, so that while Joe's spirit dies, Linden's lives on in Joe's body. This dream seems to reflect Joe's concern that he himself has become a wiindigoo, and that by killing Linden, he has internalized some of the evil that Linden represents.

Several nights later, Joe wakes up again as he's shouting Cappy's name. Joe get up and looks around the hallway, hoping no one has heard him. When he sees that no one else is upstairs, he lies down and tries to calm himself. Out loud, Joe says that he needs Ojibwe medicine. Joe would like to talk to Mooshum about it, but Mooshum is now so old that he's hardly conscious. Joe thinks he could go see Grandma Thunder instead, but Joe then thinks of Bugger Pourier and remembers the last time he saw Bugger, when Bugger stole his bike outside of the diner where Joe was talking with Linda. Bugger had told Joe that he had seen something strange and was unsure whether it was a dream.

After Joe's nightmares, he begins to think of seeking out help from a Chippewa medicine person in order to figure out his dreams. Before Joe can actually do that, though, Joe thinks of another person who talked about disturbed dreams, taking the reader back to Joe's brief encounter with Bugger Pourier. Throughout the book, dreams are not simply hallucinations, and instead are often caught between reality and fiction, as in the case of Bugger's.

Joe decides to look for Bugger to ask what he saw. At the post office, Linda tells Joe that Bugger is in the hospital due to a foot injury. Joe rides his bike to the hospital, where Bugger is excited to see Joe, but disappointed that Joe has not brought him anything. Bugger explains that he has a craving for pancakes. Joe reminds Bugger of when Bugger stole his bike and, as Bugger begins to remember that day, Joe sees a look of terror on Bugger's face as he exclaims "poor girl!", sobs, and mumbles about the construction site. Joe realizes that Bugger must have stumbled upon Mayla's body in the construction site and that even if he and Cappy had not killed Linden, Linden would go to jail for murdering Mayla as soon as the body was found. Joe wants to tell the police about the location of Mayla's corpse, but he worries that they will then begin to suspect his involvement in Linden's death. Joe thinks how different everything would be if he had asked Bugger earlier about his dream.

Joe goes to talk to Bugger and discovers that, had he not killed Linden, Linden probably would have gone to jail anyway. Mooshum's storytelling about the potential dangers of executing wiindigoo justice thus become reality, as Joe realizes that he jumped to an extreme, probably unnecessary, and violent course of action with major consequences. The reader sees also in this moment how Joe's fear of being caught for his own crimes hinders him from acting morally, as he decides not to tell the police about Mayla's body in order to keep himself out of suspicion, even though he could plausibly end Mayla's family's heartache as they agonize over what happened to her.

Joe decides to find Cappy and get drunk. As he rides toward the Lafournais house, he sees Zack and Angus in the grocery store parking lot, sitting in Zack's cousin's car. They tell Joe that Cappy has gone into the post office to get a letter from Zelia. Joe goes inside and finds Cappy sitting in the back, looking downtrodden and smoking. Cappy hands Joe a letter from Zelia's parents saying that they had found Cappy's letters and that Cappy is no longer allowed to speak to Zelia or they will sue. Cappy is upset and asks why Zelia's parents think that he would ever wreck Zelia's life, as the letter said, when he loves her so much and they were made for each other by God. Cappy sets the letter on fire with his cigarette and then tells Joe that he is going to get some money and Randall's car and then he will pick Joe up from his house so they can go find Zelia.

Cappy describes his love for Zelia in religious terms, as a divine gift that it would be an insult to God not to pursue, despite the fact that Catholicism explicitly condemns premarital sex. Interestingly, Cappy seems to have adopted the language of Christianity without actually internalizing the concrete practices or beliefs that devout Catholics hold. He then uses the language of religion against itself, to attack Zelia's parents' desire to keep their daughter chaste. Cappy demonstrates how religious ideas can be manipulated to serve personal interests and beliefs.

Joe and Cappy say goodbye to Zack and Angus and then each go home. Joe packs a bag of clothing, money, and a dozen sandwiches. As Joe waits for Cappy to show up, he goes into Bazil's office and looks in his desk drawers, where he finds a manila folder. Inside, Joe sees Mayla's enrollment form for her daughter, with Curtis Yeltow listed as the father. Joe puts it back. Then he writes a note to his parents telling them that he is going on a camping trip with Cappy for a few days.

Although Geraldine is now safe, this moment in which Joe looks at the enrollment form for Mayla's daughter serves to remind the reader that not everything has been happily resolved. Erdrich seems to indicate that, although parts of the case are wrapped up, the violence that Linden committed is irrevocable, forever changing Mayla's child's life (and ending Mayla's).

Angus and Zack show up at Joe's house and Joe tells them that Cappy is going to pick them up in Randall's car. Cappy then pulls into Joe's driveway, and the boys pile in. Zack asks where they are going, and Cappy says "Montana." Joe and the other boys drive on the highway, stopping twice to fill up on gas and again at a liquor store to buy beer. Zack, who brought his guitar, plays and sings in the back. At a gas station, Zack and Angus call home to say where they've gone. The car struggles to start after one stop, so the boys push it down a hill and jump in while it's rolling. At night, Zack and Angus fall asleep, but Joe and Cappy stay up in the front seats talking.

As Joe describes the road trip with his friends, even after all that has happened, the idyllic road trip seems to have a kind of innocence or light-heartedness about it—Zack sings and the boys bond, drinking beer. At the same time, however, as Joe describes the alcohol that they buy and drink, the reader may already be able to predict the horrible car crash to come, which thoroughly snuffs out Joe's childhood forever when Cappy dies.

Joe tells Cappy about finding Mayla's file in Bazil's desk and how Mayla's baby's father was Curtis Yeltow. Joe surmises that Mayla stored the money that Yeltow had given her in her daughter's doll, which Joe later found. Joe guesses that Yeltow will get in trouble for his affair with Mayla, an underage girl, but, in retrospect, Joe states that Yeltow never did. As they drive, Joe thinks about the **round house** and the story of Nanapush. Joe suggests that they drive all night, so they keep going, switching drivers on and off. During his off-shift, Joe falls asleep in the back while the boys talk and drink.

The fact that Curtis Yeltow, South Dakota's governor, never gets in trouble for having sex with the under-aged Mayla seems to be a commentary on Erdrich's part on how politicians are relatively or completely protected from persecution—especially when their crimes hurt the Native community. Although justice was served to Linden through the wiindigoo justice system, it was not served to Yeltow by any means.

Joe is jolted awake as the car hurtles off the road, flips, and lands in a field. Joe opens his eyes and calls for Cappy, but he receives no answer. Joe unbuckles himself and crawls out of the car. He hears Angus and Zack making noise and getting up. Joe searches the car for Cappy and when he cannot find him, Joe thinks that Cappy must have gone to get help. Joe gets on his hands and knees and crawls through the grass. When he finds Cappy's body, he cries out.

In a shocking turn of events, the car flies off of the road and crashes. The car crash, which seems likely to have occurred because the boys have been drinking and because they are inexperienced drivers, suggests how physically dangerous it can be when children who are too young experiment with adult activities.

After the accident, Joe sits in the police station while Zack and Angus are in the hospital. Cappy's body is in a funeral home. Joe remembers how, when he found Cappy, Joe held him and felt the ghost that he saw outside his window shake him. The ghost, who was actually a police officer, mouthed the words "let go" to Joe, but he refused. In the police station, Joe falls asleep and wakes up again in his chair. He looks over and over again at the stone that Cappy gave him. Eventually, Geraldine and Bazil walk in, looking old, Joe thinks. Joe himself feels old. They get in the car and start driving home.

As it turns out, Mooshum was correct that the ghost that Joe had seen out his window was a spirit from his future, since it seems to have been the spirit of the policeman who arrives on the scene after the car crash and tells Joe to let go of Cappy's body. The description of Joe holding Cappy's body is incredibly poignant, and when Joe says that he feels "old," it is clear to the reader that Cappy's death gives Joe his final, bitter push into adulthood.

No one speaks on the drive back and Joe knows that his parents know everything that happened already. Geraldine and Bazil switch driving on and off. On the way back they pass a café that they used to stop at on road trips when Joe was a child to get ice cream. This time, however, they do not stop, passing by "in a sweep of sorrow that would persist into [their] small forever."

The fact that Cappy's death constituted the ultimate loss of childhood and innocence for Joe is painfully implied in the last sentences of the novel, as Joe describes how, unlike when he was a kid, they do not stop for ice cream, too weighed down by their collective and now constant sadness.

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