

Tracks



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF LOUISE ERDRICH

Erdrich was the oldest of seven children born to a German American father and Chippewa mother, who both taught at a boarding school set up by the Bureau of Indian Affairs in North Dakota. Erdrich's grandfather was a tribal chairman for the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians. Erdrich was in the first class of women admitted to Dartmouth, where she earned an English degree in 1976. At school there, she met her future husband, Michael Dorris, the director of the new Native American Studies program, and began to examine her own ancestry. Two years later, she enrolled in Johns Hopkins University to earn an M.A. in the Writing Seminars. She remained in touch with Dorris and they began to collaborate remotely on stories together, winning the Nelson Algren Fiction Prize for a story they would later expand into the novel [Love Medicine](#) after marrying in 1981. They raised six children together, three of them adopted, until they separated in 1995 and Dorris committed suicide in 1997. Erdrich's novels are complexly interwoven with one another, set primarily on a single reservation and in the surrounding towns. For these novels she's received two National Book Critics Circle Awards, a National Book Award, and a Library of Congress Prize for American Fiction; she was also a finalist for a Pulitzer Prize. She lives in Minnesota, where she owns a Birchbark Books, an independent store that focuses on Native American culture and community.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Set between 1912 and 1924 in North Dakota, in the novel Native Americans are fighting both to keep ownership of their land and to remain strong in the face of the consumption (tuberculosis) epidemic. The characters struggle with whether they will assimilate to the white western culture flourishing in the towns surrounding the reservation, or continue living their native traditions secluded on the reservation land, despite diminishing resources. The character of Fleur is the clearest example of a person who attempts to remain firmly tied to her native roots, while Pauline is an example of the other extreme, leaving the reservation to join a convent, and eventually denying her native heritage. The Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians are a faction of the Anishinaabe people, and have likely inhabited the area in which the book is set since the late 17th century, when much of the land was covered in forest. In the early 19th century, the Chippewa battled with white fur trade companies to maintain their rights to their land and the animals on it. In 1882 the reservation was established, but the

United States greatly reduced the size of the reservation in 1884. By the time the book is set, the logging industry had taken over as the primary threat to the Chippewa land.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Most of Erdrich's novels are complexly interwoven with each other, sharing settings and characters, and *Tracks* is the third book in what's known as the Love Medicine series, following [Love Medicine](#) and [The Beet Queen](#), and preceding [The Bingo Palace](#), [Tales of Burning Love](#), [The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse](#), [Four Souls](#), and [The Painted Drum](#). Despite being the third in the series, *Tracks* takes place first chronologically in the world of the novels. Widely acclaimed as one of the most important writers of the second wave of the Native American Renaissance, Erdrich has also drawn criticism from other Native writers, such as Leslie Marmon Silko ([Ceremony](#)), who claimed that Erdrich concerns herself more with postmodern techniques than the struggles of Native people. The interwoven nature of Erdrich's novels also draws comparisons to William Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha novels (which include [The Sound and the Fury](#) and [As I Lay Dying](#)).

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Tracks
- **When Written:** 1980s
- **Where Written:** Minnesota
- **When Published:** 1988
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary, Native American Renaissance
- **Genre:** Literary Fiction, Magical Realism
- **Setting:** North Dakota
- **Climax:** Nanapush and Fleur find out that Margaret and Nector only had enough money to pay the taxes on Kashpaw land, so the others have lost their property.
- **Antagonist:** White oppression of Native Americans
- **Point of View:** Alternating first person, Nanapush and Pauline

EXTRA CREDIT

A nickel's worth of story. As a child, Louise Erdrich's father would pay his children five cents for every story they wrote. Perhaps as a result of this, two of Louise's six siblings are also writers: Heid E. Erdrich is a poet and Lise Erdrich writes children's books, fiction, and essays.

Team effort. Louise Erdrich and her husband Michael Dorris

collaborated on all their writing together, but you won't find both of their names on every book. When both wrote an approximately equal amount of a draft, they shared the credit, but if one of them wrote the entire first draft, then that person was deemed the author, but both of them worked on all of the writing they each produced in their time together.



PLOT SUMMARY

Nanapush, an older member of the Anishinabe tribe, speaks to his granddaughter, Lulu, telling her the history of her mother's life and explaining why her mother sent her away to boarding school. He provides context by saying that, at the time he met her mother, Fleur Pillager, the Indians were dying of consumption and the government was intruding, trying to take the Anishinabe land.

In the story, Nanapush's relatives have all passed away, and all of the Pillager family is thought to have died in their remote cabin on Lake **Matchimanito**, but when Nanapush goes there to seal the cabin with a policeman, they find young Fleur still barely alive inside. Nanapush brings Fleur back to his cabin where the two mourn their lost families together, growing weak with grief. One day, Father Damien, a young priest from town, appears and tells them that another Pillager has been found on an island alone in the woods—Moses Pillager, who seems to have gone “half-windigo” (become a kind of monster) in his attempt to survive the disease. Fleur and Nanapush welcome the priest and feed him, talking nonstop. After this, Nanapush asks Fleur to stay with him in her cabin, but Fleur believes she must return to her cabin to protect her land.

Pauline Puyat explains that she left her father on the reservation to live in the town of Argus so that she could embrace modern ways more fully, despite her father's protests. She lives with her Aunt Regina and young cousin Russell, and Pauline's companion Dutch James, who works at the butcher shop. Fleur has come to town to take work in the butcher shop, too, when Pauline begins doing odd jobs there as well. Pauline is interested in Fleur, watching her closely, but generally invisible to everyone around her. Over a series of nights, she watches Fleur winning exactly one dollar each night in card games with the men who work at the butcher shop. The men, skeptical that she could so consistently win the same amount, grow frustrated and attack her, raping her in a barn behind the shop. Pauline witnesses this attack, but does not try to stop it.

Fleur leaves town and, soon after, a storm destroys the shop, though the only men hurt are the men who harmed Fleur, found frozen dead in the meat locker. Fleur is believed to have caused the storm, but Pauline reveals it was she who locked the door to the freezer. It is discovered that Dutch James is still alive. Fleur has a baby and the town speculates about who the father might be.

Nanapush tells how Fleur returns to the reservation and people speculate about how she earned the money to pay off her land fees. Eli, a young man, seeks advice from Nanapush on how to seduce Fleur, and his mother Margaret is scandalized when a spy she's hired reports back their conspicuous coupling in the woods. Nanapush takes Margaret out to Fleur's cabin to confirm that she is indeed pregnant, though Margaret isn't convinced the father is Eli and not the lake monster or one of the men from the butcher shop. Fleur gives birth to a girl when a **bear**, drunk on reservation wine, wanders into her cabin. Nanapush tells the priest the baby's name is Lulu Nanapush, naming her after his own deceased daughter and continuing on his name despite being otherwise childless now.

Pauline dislikes her life with Regina and Dutch, whom her aunt nurses back to health after he is frostbitten in the meat locker. She goes to the Morrissey farm to convince Bernadette that she was beaten in her last home, and asks if she might live with the Morrisseys. Bernadette teaches Pauline to tend to the dying and prepare the dead for burial. She visits the Pillager cabin, interested in the attraction between Eli and Fleur, but they pay her little attention. Napoleon, Bernadette's drunk brother, makes some passes at her, but she demurs. Angry at the love that Eli and Fleur have for one another, she goes to Moses Pillager to attain a love medicine that might lure Eli to one of Bernadette's daughters, Sophie. Pauline later gives into Napoleon's advances. Eli takes day work on the Morrissey farm and slowly the potion works on him, until he eventually has sex with Sophie in the water on the edge of the farm. They are discovered, and Eli goes to hide in the woods, while Sophie is possessed by a spell Fleur has placed on her, kneeling outside the Pillager cabin, catatonic. Clarence Morrissey, Sophie's brother, steals a statue of the Virgin Mary from the church to shine on Sophie and break the spell, and Pauline sees a vision in which the Virgin cries. Pauline collects her frozen tears, but they melt in her pockets, so she has no evidence.

Eli comes to live with Nanapush for a time, until Nanapush teaches him how he might win Fleur back by humbling himself. Nanapush and Margaret discover a companionship between them. One night, on the way home from church, they are captured by Clarence and Boy Lazarre. The two men cut off Margaret's braids to humiliate her in the way her son, Eli, has humiliated their sister. After this, Fleur shaves her head in solidarity and casts a spell on Boy Lazarre, so he soon dies. Nanapush and Margaret's younger son Nector set a snare to kill Clarence, but Nanapush and Nector have mercy on him and he survives the trap.

Pauline discovers that she is pregnant with Napoleon's baby and tries to abort it, but Bernadette convinces her to keep it. During birth, Pauline decides she doesn't want to let the child out of her, and that it would be best for both of them to die together, but Bernadette wrenches the child out and adopts her, naming her Marie.

Pauline goes to the convent, begins having visions of Jesus visiting her at night, and comes up with unusual ways of punishing herself in the name of the Lord. She makes it her mission to go to the Pillager cabin in an attempt to convert them, but they ignore her or make fun of her strange brand of self-flagellation. Fleur becomes pregnant a second time, but again the baby's father is a mystery, as Eli believes that the lake monster might have fathered it.

Fleur begins to birth the child too early and Pauline is unable to prevent it. Lulu runs to get help while Fleur and Pauline travel to the land of the dead, where Fleur gambles for not just the newborn baby's life, but also Lulu's, who she learns is also in danger. She wins Lulu's life, but not that of the baby. Nanapush and Margaret find Lulu freezing in the snow, and Nanapush nurses her back to health.

The people living at the Pillager cabin have run out of food and hear that they owe great sums of taxes on their lands. Fleur seems weakened in mind and body, and overly attached to Lulu after the death of her baby, and Nanapush asks Moses Pillager to hold a ceremony to help heal her. Pauline also appears at the healing ceremony, and badly burns her hands trying to prove the supremacy of Christianity over the old native ways. The family finally gathers enough money to pay off the taxes on the Kashpaw and Pillager land, with Father Damien donating the last quarter, and Nector and Margaret take the money to town to make the payment to the Agent.

Pauline returns to the convent, where Sister Saint Anne nurses her back to health. She decides to make one more trip to Matchimanito in which she will spend forty days and nights on a boat in the middle of the lake, waiting for the devil in the form of the lake monster to appear to her. When she drifts to shore only a day later, she kills what she believes to be the lake monster with her rosary, but realizes afterwards that she has killed Napoleon. She drags him into the woods and returns to the convent. She takes her orders, takes the name Sister Leopolda, and is assigned to teach math at a Catholic school in Argus.

Nanapush goes to the Agent to discover that Margaret and Nector had only had enough money to pay off one of the allotments with the imposed late fee, and so they paid only for the Kashpaw land—not the Pillager land—without telling the others. Eli asks Fleur to marry him so that they might live together on the Kashpaw land, but Fleur refuses. Eli promises to earn the money to buy back some of her plot.

Napoleon's body is found, and Fleur is assumed to be the killer. Lulu is sent away to school to protect her from all the threats facing the reservation. The men from the lumber company, including Eli, who has taken work with them, tell Fleur she must leave their land, but Fleur causes many of the trees to fall down around them, and then heads south, to town, on her own. Nanapush involves himself in government in an attempt to reclaim Lulu as his own, and he and Margaret eventually collect

Lulu from her boarding school.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Fleur Pillager – Fleur Pillager is a Native American woman who lives apart from the rest of her tribe on her family's land on the coast of Lake **Matchimanito**. She is stubborn and self-sufficient, unwilling to compromise her values or her allegiance to her family and culture. She is rumored to have magical powers, having survived drowning twice and supposedly responsible for the otherwise unexplained deaths of many men who have crossed her. When the novel begins, the rest of her family has died of consumption and she is rescued from the same fate by a tribe elder, Nanapush. She leaves the reservation for a short time to work in a butcher shop in the nearby town of Argus, where she gambles with the male workers. The men grow frustrated with her successes and attack her. She returns to the reservation, and shortly after a storm destroys the town, harming only the men who sought their revenge on her. When she returns to the reservation it is rumored she is pregnant with the child of one of those men, but it's also possible that she has returned with money stuffed into her dress for safekeeping. Other residents of the reservation speculate that the baby might also be that of the Lake Monster, Misshepesu, with whom they believe Fleur has a special relationship. Soon after, though, she becomes involved with Eli Kashpaw, giving birth to a daughter named Lulu, who Eli raises with Fleur as his own child. Fleur becomes pregnant again, but the baby is stillborn, and the effects of this occurrence, as well as the threat to Fleur's land, send Fleur into a deep depression. Fleur works hard to save her property, but is betrayed by Eli's mother Margaret, and loses the land. Fleur serves as the clearest example of a purely Native existence, having no involvement with the Catholic Church, but she does place her daughter Lulu in boarding school to protect her from the threats imposed on the reservation. Despite the fact that she has officially lost ownership of her land, she insists on living on the land illegally anyway.

Nanapush – Nanapush is an elder in the tribe, and has close ties to the trickster Nanabozho. He serves as one of the narrators in the book, and in his sections he addresses his adopted granddaughter Lulu, explaining to her why her mother (Fleur) has sent her away to school and warning her away from marrying into the Morrissey or Lazarre families. Nanapush sees Fleur as his daughter because they have both lost their families. Nanapush is also pressured to sell his land, but he wants to keep it. Nanapush was educated in the Catholic School, where he learned to read, a rarity in the people on the reservation. He remains tied to the ancient rituals by calling on his helpers and beating his drum, but he also attends Catholic mass to please his companion Margaret. After Lulu is born, Nanapush and

Margaret move in with Fleur and Eli to help, and they form a kind of a family unit. Nanapush is also betrayed by Margaret, forcing him to lose his land. Nanapush is a source of wisdom for many characters in the book, and he provides vital history of the tribe to Lulu and the reader. He teaches Eli how to hunt and satisfy Fleur romantically. He is proud of his heritage, but recognizes when he must work with the government to continue thriving.

Pauline Puyat – Pauline Puyat is a mixed-blood woman who is the other narrator of the book. She has also lost all of her family except her father. She rejects her father’s commitment to Native ways, and so she moves to Argus to live with her Aunt Regina and cousin Russell and work in the butcher shop with Fleur. Pauline watches Fleur from afar, curious about how she is able to win so consistently at the poker game, and then bearing witness to the men who attack Fleur for this success. The events of this night haunt her. After leaving the butcher shop, Pauline moves in with Bernadette Morrissey, learning how to prepare the dead for the afterlife. She begins attending Catholic mass and allows Napoleon Morrissey to seduce her, but feels no romance toward him. Instead, she envies the companionship between Fleur and Eli, and visits the medicine doctor to procure a love medicine to coax Eli into having an affair with Sophie, Bernadette’s young daughter. Pauline then discovers she is pregnant with Napoleon’s baby and attempts to abort the child, but Bernadette convinces her to keep it. Pauline keeps the pregnancy a secret and gives the baby, Marie, to Bernadette, so that she can join a nearby convent. At the convent, Pauline denies her Native heritage, believing herself to be fully white and committing herself to suffering in Christ’s name. She attempts to convert Fleur’s family, but they mock Pauline for these efforts. Pauline reveals that she is responsible for the men who died in the storm, having locked them in their freezer. She kills Napoleon for impregnating her, but this death is also blamed on Fleur. By the end of the book Pauline has changed her name to Sister Leopolda and has left to teach in a Catholic school. Pauline is the clearest example of the rejection of Native ways. She is known as a liar, and her sections of the story are to be read as possibly unreliable, either as a result of her dishonesty or because what she claims to be religious visions might instead be evidence of mental instability.

Margaret Kashpaw – Margaret Kashpaw is an older Native American woman who is devoted to her children, though we only meet two of them: Eli and Nector. She discourages Eli’s romantic interest in Fleur, but embraces Fleur as her family after Lulu is born. Margaret believes in the ancient Native ways, but she is also a practicing Catholic. She initially gives Nanapush a hard time, but they come to accept each other as companions. Margaret shows great strength when she is attacked by Clarence Morrissey and Boy Lazarre. They cut off her braids, but she frees herself and Nanapush from them. Ultimately, Margaret uses the money that their family has

raised to save only the Kashpaw land, when she was supposed to also save the Nanapush and Pillager allotments as well, causing Fleur to separate herself from Margaret, while Nanapush recognizes that he still needs Margaret so that he will have a place to live. Margaret serves as a balance of the old ways and new ways imposed by the whites. She values her land and her family, but recognizes when compromises must be made in regard to both.

Eli Kashpaw – Eli Kashpaw is a young Native American man who believes in the old ways of life and seeks to woo and marry Fleur Pillager, who shares his values. He is less industrious than his brother Nector, but a better hunter who is more dedicated to family and his Native culture. He is masculine, but willing to defer to Fleur’s authority in most cases. He serves as father to Lulu despite her unknown parentage. He hunts to provide for his family, but he cheats on Fleur with Sophie Morrissey, possibly as a result of the love medicine used on him by Pauline Puyat. When Fleur loses her land, she turns down Eli’s offer to marry him and move to his mother Margaret’s land, but Eli pledges to work hard enough that they will buy back Fleur’s land. It is then ironic that the way he attempts to earn back this money is by working for the lumber company.

Lulu Nanapush – Lulu Nanapush is Fleur’s daughter. It is unclear who Lulu’s father is, but Eli serves as her father throughout the story, with Nanapush as a grandfather and Margaret as a grandmother. Nanapush’s sections of the story are being told to Lulu as an adult in an attempt to explain to her why her mother has sent her away, and also to discourage her from marrying into the Morrissey family. Lulu is a child for the entirety of her role in the book, cheerful though foolish, as when she decides to wear her thin leather shoes in the snow, causing frostbite. Fleur sends Lulu to boarding school after her land is lost, but Lulu resents this decision, ultimately returning to Nanapush and Margaret.

Bernadette Morrissey – Bernadette Morrissey is a mixed-blood mother of four children: Clarence, Sophie, Philomena, and Marie. She is a widow who works on a farm with her brother, Napoleon. She works both as a midwife to help babies into the world and also as a preparer of the dead, a trade she teaches Pauline, who she allows to live with them. When Pauline becomes pregnant with Napoleon’s baby, Bernadette convinces Pauline to keep it and then adopts the child as her own once it is born. After her two eldest children marry, she moves to Argus to work as secretary to the Agent, denying the Indian ways in a similar way to Pauline.

Clarence Morrissey – Clarence Morrissey is the son of Bernadette and brother to Sophie. When the rumors spread that Eli has had sex with Sophie, he becomes angry and seeks revenge. He and Boy Lazarre seek to embarrass Margaret in exchange for the way Eli has embarrassed Sophie, and so they kidnap her and cut off her braids. In retaliation for this act, Nanapush sets a snare for Clarence, but when the snare

catches, they don't kill Clarence, instead disfiguring him. Clarence marries a Lazarre, taking over the family farm and causing its decline.

Sophie Morrissey Lazarre – Sophie Morrissey is Bernadette's eldest daughter. She helps out at the Pillager cabin, and Pauline uses love medicine to cause Eli to seduce the young woman. She is punished for her behavior and sent to live with an aunt, but she returns to the Pillager yard, seemingly possessed to stay forever. Eventually she marries a Lazarre and also lives on the family farm as it slowly fails.

Boy Lazarre – Boy Lazarre is another young half-blood man. His family is known for being paid to spy, and Boy is the first to confirm that Eli and Fleur are romantically involved. After he witnesses their coupling, his speech is twisted, evidence that Fleur has put a spell on him as punishment. He and Clarence kidnap Margaret and Nanapush in revenge for the damage they've done to Sophie Morrissey's reputation. He dies as a result of another spell put on him by Fleur.

Lily Vedder – A man who works at the butcher shop in Argus, who gambles with Fleur and then attacks her for her consistent winnings. Lily has a small dog that seems both intimidated by and frightened by Fleur, and, of the three shop employees, seems the most angry about Fleur's poker winnings, leading the attack on her. Lily dies in the storm soon after Fleur is attacked.

Dutch James – A man who works at the butcher shop in Argus, who gambles with Fleur and then attacks her for her consistent winnings. Dutch lives with Pauline's Aunt Regina, and is the only one of the three men to survive the storm after Fleur's attack, though he loses some extremities to frostbite.

Moses Pillager – Fleur's cousin, who goes "half-windigo" as a way of protecting himself from the consumption epidemic. He lives on an island in **Matchimanito** Lake and makes potions that tribes people trade him for, including the love medicine that cause Eli and Sophie to have a brief affair, and the medicine that allows Fleur to become less protective of Lulu.

Father Damien – The Catholic priest who attempts to help the tribes people navigate their relationships with the Agent. He is an understanding figure who tries to help the Nanapush, Kashpaws, and Pillagers understand the threats they face, helps them attain rations when absolutely necessary, and brings a western doctor when Lulu is frostbitten. He is a good friend of Nanapush, despite Nanapush's skepticism about the church.

Misshepeshu – The lake monster said to guard **Matchimanito**. He is feared by the villagers and assumed to be evil because of the way the lake has proven inhospitable to anyone but the Pillager family. Fleur seems to have a more amicable relationship with the spirit, though, and some people believe she has a romantic relationship with the monster that keeps it at bay. Villagers even speculate as to whether Misshepeshu might be the father of Fleur's children. When Pauline loses her

mind near the end of the book, she conflates Misshepeshu with the devil, and believes she is attacking the monster, when in fact it is Napoleon she kills.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Nector Kashpaw – Nector Kashpaw is Eli's brother and Margaret's son. Nector is more interested in the modern ways of white civilization than his more traditional brother. Nector helps Nanapush set up the snare to catch Clarence Morrissey after he attacked Margaret and Nanapush. Nector eventually goes away to school.

Napoleon Morrissey – Napoleon Morrissey is Bernadette's brother. He lives with her family on a farm. He has a drinking problem and impregnates Pauline. He is later killed by Pauline, who hallucinates that he is the lake monster, but Fleur is blamed for his death instead.

Marie Morrissey – Marie Morrissey is the biological daughter of Pauline and Napoleon, but she is raised by Bernadette. Despite being named after the Virgin Mary, Pauline cannot see the child as holy.

Tor Grunewald – A man who works at the butcher shop in Argus, who gambles with Fleur and then attacks her for her consistent winnings. Tor dies in the storm soon after the attack on Fleur.

Pete Kozka – Pete owns the butcher shop where Fleur and Pauline work in Argus. He is the most civilized of the men who work at the shop, and is away when Fleur is attacked. Though the shop is destroyed by the storm after Fleur's attack, his lodgings remain unharmed.

Fritzie Kozka – Pete's female companion, who also works at the butcher shop. Fritzie is charitable to Fleur, providing her secret lodging in the unused smokehouse and giving her the **umbrella**.

Regina Puyat – Russell's mother and Pauline Puyat's aunt, who takes her in when Pauline refuses to live with her father on the reservation. Regina lives with the butcher shop worker Dutch James, and nurses him back to health after the storm that kills the other workers.

Russell Puyat – Russell is Regina's son and Pauline's young cousin. He spies on the butcher shop workers with Pauline and attempts to convince Dutch not to harm Fleur.

Agent – The government representative with whom the Native Americans work to attain their rations and to pay their taxes. The Agent is a nameless, faceless figure who represents the interactions with white men that are necessary even for those most closely tied to native ways.

Sister Saint Anne – Pauline's superior at the convent who discourages Pauline's unusual ways of humiliating herself as offering to God.

Philomena Morrissey Bernadette's younger daughter.

TERMS

Manitou Manitou is the Algonquin word for the spiritual and fundamental life force. This force runs through creatures, plants, the environment in general, and events in the natural world, and it is often pluralized to indicate the individual force of each life that goes up to make the whole. **Fleur**, **Nanapush**, and **Margaret** all pray to their Manitous throughout *Tracks*, in the hopes of appealing to these spirits to protect and guide them, especially when threatened by some element of the natural world.

Odjib When **Fleur** returns to the reservation from Argus, an “odjib” guards the road to **Matchimanito**, keeping away anyone who might try to visit her. Described as a dog and a “thing of smoke,” the odjib seems to be a kind of spirit, but its etymology is unclear. “Ojibwe” is the more common name used in Canada for the tribe referred to in the United States as the “Chippewa.” The term “odjib” is probably related to this tribe, but there are several potential origins even for the word “Ojibwe”—the one that seems most connected to the odjib of *Tracks* is “those who keep records [of a Vision].”

Windigo A windigo is a mythical cannibal monster or evil spirit from Algonquian folklore. The monster is known have at least some characteristics of a human, or it could be merely a spirit that inhabits the body of a human, making them monstrous and causing them to murder and/or eat other humans. In the context of *Tracks*, the transformation is milder. **Moses Pillager**, **Fleur**’s only relative who also survives the consumption plague, is said to have gone windigo, suggesting he possibly ate the bodies of his dead family members to survive. Later, though, he becomes primarily a medicine man to the other Native Americans on the reservations. When Fleur and **Nanapush** grieve their loved ones, they are said to go “half-windigo,” which in this case means that they lose their tie to the physical world, ignoring their bodily needs, a condition that looks very much like modern depression.

all of the characters show some balance of these two ways of life, the native ways are clearly far more endangered as white culture invades and takes over. The book asks whether it is possible for these characters to survive and participate in broader (that is, white American) society while still maintaining the traditions that have been passed down through their culture. Perhaps the most salient expression of this conflict is in the depiction of religion and spirituality, as tensions between traditional Anishinabe beliefs and Christianity abound throughout *Tracks*. Christianity threatens to eliminate the traditional beliefs, but misunderstandings of the most important aspects of both systems of belief and misplaced priorities cause the greatest amount of trouble in the book.

Fleur Pillager is the best example of a character who remains closely tied to her Anishinabe roots and spirituality. Despite having lost all of her family to consumption, Fleur continues to live far from the rest of the people on the reservation, providing for herself by hunting and foraging. The tribe believes she has a close relationship with Misshepesu, the lake spirit. Fleur does venture off the reservation for a short time, moving to nearby Argus, North Dakota, but when she beats the other (white and male) workers regularly at poker, they retaliate by raping and beating her, driving her back to the reservation. Fleur’s attempts to participate in the white civilization of Argus are clearly punished, though it is important to note that, specifically, Fleur’s ability to win the same amount so consistently might have been the result of her using some kind of magic or ritual to help her. If we view her punishment as specifically tied to her use of these old ways, then the question stands whether it might have been possible for Fleur to thrive in Argus if she committed more fully to the ways of the white people around her—but that would also mean giving up a crucial part of herself. When Fleur’s land is sold to the lumber company, she ends her battle with them on her own terms, magically felling the trees of her land herself as a threat to the white men, rather than allowing them to use their violent tools to do the same. Even landless, Fleur’s native power and strength is seen as both valuable and impressive until the very end. Had Fleur’s way of life not been threatened by the government, she might have continued peacefully according to the Anishinabe way of life, but because the threat is imminent and she is inflexible in her beliefs, she suffers the direst consequences of white culture’s influence.

Most of the characters show a more even balance between assimilating to the culture of the Westerners and maintaining old traditions. Nanapush, a tribal elder, considers Fleur his daughter after he rescues her from the threat of a severe winter and consumption. It is Nanapush who teaches Eli to hunt so that he might attract Fleur. But Nanapush also accepts the friendship of Father Damien, the young white priest who seeks to help the tribe members understand government documents. Nanapush begins to attend Catholic mass with



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.



TRADITION, ASSIMILATION, AND RELIGION

Throughout *Tracks*, the four Anishinabe families (Kashpaw, Pillager, Nanapush, and Puyat) struggle to find a balance of the old ways of their people and the aggressively encroaching influence of white civilization. While

Margaret to stay in her good favor, and he agrees to live on her land when his own land goes into foreclosure. Eventually, Nanapush deigns to use his writing and reading skills to involve himself in government so he can regain custody of Lulu, Fleur's daughter. He is willing to make a concession and work with the white bureaucracy so that he might restore his family and uphold his tribe's traditions.

Pauline Puyat, a young woman of mixed heritage, is an example of the detrimental effects of leaving behind all traditional values in favor of the life and religion of white culture. After being rejected by Fleur and Eli, Pauline lives with the Morrissey family, having a child with Napoleon Morrissey that she bequeaths to Bernadette Morrissey. She then joins a convent in an effort to reject her own sin, attempting to convert the other families on the reservation. By the end of the book, Pauline believes that Jesus has appeared to her to tell her that she is not native at all, but white. She rejects what she now sees as the shameful Anishinabe half of her heritage, and follows the orders she is given by the convent to teach in a Catholic school, an assignment she does not enjoy, but accepts as her way of offering her suffering to God. Pauline's rejection of her indigenous roots is so extreme that it seems to drive her crazy. This suggests that losing one's connection to tradition and embracing a culture that actively oppresses one's own can cause a psychological break severe enough to disconnect a person from reality entirely.

Fleur's connection to Manitou, or the life force of all things, is portrayed as the strongest supernatural force in the book in the sections narrated by Nanapush. When Fleur and Nanapush suffer the loss of their families to consumption, they believe themselves to have gone "half windigo" or half monster/cannibal, rather than identifying their state of being as depression or grief. After Fleur is beaten and raped by the men from the butcher shop, a tornado descends on the town of Argus, injuring only the three men who attacked her, a storm the townspeople believe Fleur has caused. When people threaten her or her livelihood, they tend to suffer a grim fate soon after, the cause believed to be Fleur's shamanistic connection to Misshepesu, the lake monster. And when Napoleon dies, the townspeople assume it is because he stepped in the shadow of the bewitched **umbrella** Fleur has placed to protect her land. All of these events are seen as negative happenings, punishments imposed by the traditional beliefs that the tribe members and townspeople have turned against. In reality, many of these events were caused deliberately by Pauline, though she fails to take ownership of them. The town's fear of Fleur and rejection of her ways is an example of the way they reject the native traditions, and wrongly project a malevolence on Fleur as the clearest practitioner of Anishinabe ways.

Pauline, on the other hand, regularly acts without ethics, mistakenly believing that her actions are sanctioned because of

her chosen status with the Catholic God. She condemns others' sexuality, but gives birth to a child out of wedlock herself, which she attempts to abort despite it being a mortal sin. She has abandoned the Anishinabe ways, joining a Catholic convent where she becomes addicted to inflicting harm on herself as an offering to Christ, focusing on her own suffering rather than performing good deeds. The Mother Superior at the convent recognizes these actions as selfish rather than pious and forbids Pauline from continuing them, eventually sending her away to teach at a Catholic school. Thus her commitment to her faith ultimately moves her away from her roots, rather than allowing her to thrive in her homeland.

In contrast, Father Damien is an example of a character who practices Catholicism in a more charitable way. He attempts to help the Native Americans and doesn't sneer at or judge them for practicing a balance of the old ways and the new, while not believing that the bad things that happen are purely the result of Fleur's rejection of Catholicism. The ways in which Margaret and Nanapush pray to both Christian and Manitou gods also shows a clearer understanding of the benefits both faiths might provide without believing either to be wholly good or evil.

Overall, while the ideal situation would allow the Anishinabe people to maintain their way of life without the influence of an invasive, oppressive white culture and government, Erdrich suggests that the practical solution requires finding a balance between white culture and native tradition to ensure survival. In the face of cultural genocide, there is no "right" decision of how to endure such threats, but each character attempts to sustain themselves with actions based on their individual hierarchy of values, some more successfully than others.



GENDER ROLES

Tracks inverts traditional white American gender roles by showing the important position of women in reservation life, even allowing the female

characters to take on the bulk of the responsibility for survival. The strength of these female characters threatens the supremacy of males both on and off the reservation, prompting men to either adjust their actions and expectations to correspond with shifting gender roles or to lash out against the power women stake out for themselves.

Fleur Pillager is the strongest and most independent female character, embodying the way Anishinabe culture allows and honors women who take on what white American culture sees as "masculine" responsibilities and hobbies. Fleur fends for herself in the wilderness before finding work at the butcher shop in Argus and discovering her talent for gambling—all of these things are traditionally associated with men in Western culture. The white men in Argus, however, cannot abide Fleur's nontraditional femininity. To punish her for transgressing her gender roles (specifically for humiliating them in a game of poker), they beat and rape her. While this was certainly an

attempt to intimidate Fleur and put her in her place, she maintains her independence.

Unlike the men at the butcher shop who react violently to Fleur's embrace of masculine roles, Eli Kashpaw is willing to be subservient to the strong Fleur Pillager. Fleur meets Eli while **tracking** a deer through the woods. She traps it and butchers it, confidently telling Eli that he has minimal claim to the animal. Instead of being angry or discouraged by Fleur's strength, he is attracted to her. In fact, he is so drawn to Fleur for being exactly who she is that he accepts responsibility for the child she bears without proof that he is its father. Under traditional Western norms of masculinity, this would be humiliating and emasculating, but Eli takes responsibility for the child readily.

In contrast to Fleur, Pauline Puyat embodies a femininity more traditional to white Americans and Christianity, adhering to the demeanor and behavior expected of her in town. This is most apparent in Pauline's embarrassment about her own sexual desire. Like Fleur, Pauline becomes pregnant under dubious circumstances, but unlike Fleur, she hides her pregnancy and then tries to induce a miscarriage. After turning the child over to Bernadette Morrissey, Pauline has a "vision" that causes her to enter the convent, where she engages in extreme self-flagellation, wearing uncomfortable potato sack underwear, sewing nettles into her clothes and denying herself even the simple act of urinating more than twice a day. This is meant as some sort of display of humility and penance, apparently for the sin of female sexual desire, in submission to her betrothed, Jesus Christ.

While Fleur and Pauline are extremes, Nanapush and Margaret Kashpaw are an example of a slightly more balanced domestic relationship. While Margaret initially rejects the presence of Nanapush, pushing back on his overconfident ways, she easily holds her own, returning his barbs in equal measure. When Margaret and Nanapush are captured by the Morrisseys, Nanapush proves ineffective at defending them and Margaret frees them from captivity, showing, again, the triumph of female will over that of males. When Margaret attempts to convince Nanapush to live in her cabin early in the story, Nanapush refuses, insisting on remaining in his own cabin. Nanapush displays feminine characteristics in his nurturing nature, nursing both Fleur and Lulu back to health after they nearly die. When Nanapush eventually loses his land to the bank, he is not too proud to accept living with Margaret on her own land, even after she has cheated the closest thing he has to kin, Fleur, out of the money for her own allotment. While Margaret is still clearly the more dominant between the two, Nanapush holds his ground on the elements of his masculinity that remain important to him.

Importantly, Erdrich is not black-and-white about gender roles. The story pushes back against the harmful, suffocating effect of traditional white American gender roles by showing the way many Native families embrace and honor women who are

allowed to own their physical power and authoritative influence. Still, she acknowledges the way that traditional white society is threatened by the Native or half-blood women who exert their own independence, and how it seeks to punish the women for these actions, leaving them vulnerable to a different variety of threat than if they'd attempted to inhabit the rules of white femininity. Either expression of femininity, however, comes with its disadvantages and dangers, and Erdrich offers no clear-cut answers on how to navigate a world of complex and often harmful gender roles.



SELF-DESTRUCTION VS. OUTSIDE INFLUENCES

Tracks is set at a crucial time in the history of the Anishinabe people. From 1912 to 1924, this tribe of Native Americans was under extreme threat by the invading influence of white culture. Logging and unreasonable taxes resulted in the loss of the land they needed for both farming and hunting, leaving them without the ability to feed themselves and survive. Furthermore, their religion was threatened by the encroachment of Christianity, and consumption (tuberculosis) spread rampantly from white people to native communities, killing many indigenous people. While much of the threat to the Anishinabe appears to come from white people, Erdrich also shows how the self-destructive impulses of the tribe members themselves threaten their ability to prevail in the face of external threats. Overall Erdrich suggests that the white focus on individualism, a foreign concept to the Native culture she presents in the book, ultimately weakens the Anishinabe's ability to survive.

The Agent, as the government liaison to the Anishinabe people is called, is a looming threat throughout the book. In times of famine, many of the tribe have sold their land in exchange for only a measure of flour, a trade that is clearly unfair and shortsighted. In a somewhat fairer exchange, others of the tribe have sold their land to the lumber companies, moving off the reservation to town, where they are forced to take on new trades and provide for themselves in unfamiliar ways. The documents provided by the government often prove incomprehensible to the book's Native characters, who are commonly unable to read or write. Only those who have been educated can fully understand the threats that the documents impose, and even then sometimes they are misunderstood, as when Nanapush believes that his land cannot be taken away just because he hasn't paid his taxes, when in truth, the government is authorized to auction off that land when it would be the better financial situation. In all cases, the imposition of a governmental system of money, rather than the trading that the tribe is used to, poses the biggest threat to the dwindling population of Anishinabe and their land.

Second to the threat of the Agent's sanctions, the charity and refuge provided by the Catholic Church causes many Indians to

abandon their traditional beliefs for the material support of the Church. Convents provide homes for women who have no other place to go or provide for themselves. The Church provides resources and assistance in dealing with the government agents. The tradition of the old Manitou spirits is unfortunately slowly lost as the Native Americans seek the support the Church is able to provide, and the missionary aspect of the Church appears well aware of this literal and figurative sanctuary it can provide suffering people.

Though many of the threats to the Anishinabe way of life are imposed by outside forces, the tribe members often become complicit in exaggerating the impact of these threats. Despite their best efforts to protect their land and their way of life, the characters are ultimately unable to shut themselves off from all outside influence, and they struggle to find a way to thrive in the face of growing threats. They often resort to selfish attempts to protect only themselves, rather than focusing on the strength of the community as a whole, which would be a more effective method of ensuring the survival of native people and culture. Thus the individualism suggested by Western influence is the true force that weakens the Anishinabe's ability to survive in their environment.

Perhaps the best example of the harm caused by selfish backstabbing is in the attempt of Margaret, Nanapush, Fleur, and Eli to save the Pillager and Kashpaw land allotments at the end of the book. While the loss of the land is a threat imposed by white people, the inhabitants of **Matchimanito** believe they have worked together to save enough money to pay for the two remaining plots of land: Kashpaw and Pillager. When Margaret and her son Nector take the money to town to pay off the tax debt, however, they find out that there is a late fee, meaning they have only enough money to pay for the Kashpaw land, but not the Pillager allotment. Instead of telling Fleur outright, or choosing to save her land, which they know means a great deal to her, they save only their own land and keep it a secret from Fleur until the lumber company has already cut down most of the trees approaching her cabin, forcing her to vacate her land at the last minute. If Margaret and Nector had been fair, they might have returned to Matchimanito to discuss which of the land allotments to save, but their desperate attempt to look out only for themselves maintains their land, but causes their relationships with others to weaken.

Another, more literal cause of the failing vitality of the tribe is the introduction of consumption (tuberculosis) into the tribe population. When Native Americans signed up to fight in World War I in an effort to support their families, the soldiers who returned at all carried the strains of consumption, to which the tribal population was not at all immune, causing the death of the majority of the community. The steep decrease in numbers caused the families to no longer be able to provide for themselves sufficiently, with fewer people to hunt and farm the land that was slowly going into foreclosure in the lean financial

times.

Alcohol use is also a clear threat to native livelihood, and another danger that is both external and internal. While introduced to the tribe by white whiskey dealers at the edge of the reservation, the Natives' predilection for addiction makes alcohol particularly self-destructive. When Fleur is about to give birth, for example, Eli Kashpaw gets drunk to drown out his concerns over her labor, and then he slashes his own arm open and runs into the woods to hide, both clearly self-destructive acts. In injuring himself and diminishing his capacity with alcohol, he removes himself from the responsibility of supporting his wife and newborn baby, focusing instead on consoling his worry in the short-term. When a drunken **bear** wanders onto Matchimanito, it is the threat of the disoriented animal that gives Fleur the strength to rise up and birth her child. The bear is a symbol of Fleur's need to continue her family line, as bears are one of her clan's markers, but the drunkenness of the bear shows that her family line is threatened by not only hunters, but also its own propensity for short-term gratification rather than long-term planning.

Pauline Puyat's obsession with self-punishment also shows a response to outside threats that tends towards self-destruction. She pursues this through the frame of Christianity (a religion introduced from white culture), and insists on refusing herself simple pleasures, going further and further to punish herself at all times and deny her earthly needs and desires. While Pauline's shift to Christianity from the old ways could focus on how she might provide charity and support to others, especially the other members of her tribe, instead she focuses on her own personally destructive interests. On the other hand, Pauline's shame at being a half-blood, rather than pride at her Indian heritage, is another example of the influence of white culture overpowering the values of her upbringing.

Erdrich shows that, while there is seemingly no way for the characters to avoid the destruction caused by white invasion and oppression, they each react in different ways, some lashing out against others, some pursuing self-destructive habits, and some more readily bowing to outside influences, resulting in a variety of outcomes. Erdrich is careful not to propose any one "right" way to deal with the impact of the imposition of white culture, but shows the full range of response to a tragic situation.



BIRTH, DEATH, AND SURVIVAL

The contrast between birth and death is at the forefront of *Tracks*. The book begins at a point when many of the Anishinabe people have died, and Nanapush saves the life of Fleur Pillager. While the tribe is under existential threat, new people are constantly being born. Instead of making the tribe feel more hopeful for the future, however, births are seen as being inextricably tied to death, and therefore they remind the characters of the tribe's hardships

and the threat to the survival of both their literal lives and their culture.

After Fleur leaves the reservation, attempting to make a living for herself among the white men in town, she is brutally punished by the men for her efforts. Soon after, it is revealed that Fleur is pregnant, though it is never confirmed whether the pregnancy is a result of the rape, whether the child is mystically fathered by Misshepesu the lake monster, or whether it happens later when she begins a relationship with Eli Kashpaw. In any case, the consequence of this threat to her survival and her return to the reservation is pregnancy, an opportunity for new life. The new life, however, could well be a constant reminder of the threat of the white men outside the reservation or the threat of the natural forces at play on the reservation. Furthermore, when Fleur goes into labor, her life is threatened by the appearance of a **bear** that has broken into the tribe's barrels of wine. It is the threat of this bear entering her cabin that gives her the strength to push her daughter Lulu into the world. Only when a clear danger menaces Fleur is she able to create new life—when a representation of her family's clan, a bear, appears to remind Fleur of the necessity of continuing her family's bloodline. In this single image, the simultaneous life of her family and the threats to it exist side by side.

When Pauline Puyat lives with Bernadette Morrissey, Pauline learns the ways of ushering the sick into the afterlife. She learns how to ease the minds of the dying and prepare bodies for burial. While Bernadette's specialty is easing the death of people in the community, it is Bernadette who insists on Pauline carrying her own illegitimate child to term, and then raises the child once it is born, when Pauline is too ashamed to do so. In this way Bernadette is responsible for both life and death in the book. This relationship calls attention to the way in which death can be a sort of birth of its own, ushering a soul into an afterlife, rather than an absence of life.

When Fleur becomes pregnant a second time, she goes into labor too early and attempts to delay the birth, but the baby is insistent on being born. Fleur births the child, but it becomes immediately clear that both Fleur and the new baby's lives are in danger. In a dreamlike sequence, Fleur travels to the spirit world to gamble for her life and that of her baby. She discovers that it is not just the baby she must save, but also Lulu, whose life has been endangered by the winter storm. Fleur wins only the hand responsible for Lulu's life. Whereas Fleur's first rounds of gambling resulted in both a threat to her life and the birth of her daughter Lulu, this second round in the land of the dead results in the death of one of her children and the survival of another. After this experience, Fleur feels far more aware of the threats the world poses to her and her family, and acts with more timidity. In this case, life introduced too quickly into the world resulted in death.

Similar to this, the invasion of white culture presents an

opportunity for a new way of life, but one that requires the death or dilution of the native culture. While the Pillager, Kashpaw, and Nanapush families persist at the end of the book, it is through a new means of survival, rather than through the ancestral methods their families have relied upon for centuries. The swift and dangerous "birth" of white civilization on the reservation has caused the death of much of the Native American culture.



THE IMPORTANCE OF NATURE IN INDIGENOUS LIFE

As the threat of the logging industry and Western culture encroaches on the Anishinabe reservation, the Native American traditions most closely tied to the landscape are also threatened. Without the land and wildlife that the Manitou spirits (or fundamental life force) are said to inhabit, the culture of their tribe is similarly endangered. Detached from the natural world that used to provide the tribe its sustenance in the form of animals to hunt and vegetation to be picked, the tribe is forced to participate in monetary exchange with the Agent for what they need. As their land is sold and harvested by the bank and the lumber companies, the tribespeople lose their tether to the way they know how to live, their cultural traditions, and the gods that have sustained their hope in times of trouble.

Nanapush is old enough to remember a reservation that was much bigger and more vibrant, with a herd of wild buffalo that provided well for the tribe before the arrival of white civilization. This is no longer the case, as the buffalo have long been killed off, their last remnants decimated by a single hunting expedition of white men who took only the buffalo's hides and tongues, leaving the rest of the pieces to rot. This indifference towards the limits of the natural resources shows a crucial disregard for how much the tribes rely on the natural world for their survival. The last of the **bears**, too, has been shot. The only animals left to be hunted are moose and deer, and even those are harder to find in the shrinking forest, forcing the people to eat animals like gophers, despite their poor taste. If white men had not appeared in the area, the animal populations would not have diminished so rapidly with such a high percentage of waste, and the deforestation would not have resulted in the lack of habitat for the animals (as well as the people), allowing the Natives to survive using their old ways of life for longer. Secondary to this, the physical animals and trees are necessary carriers of the Manitou spirits, and so without those creatures, the strength of the Native spirituality is also diminished.

Despite the fact that Fleur's cabin is so far removed from the other members of the tribe, she insists on living on the land that was home to her ancestors, where the lost members of her family are buried, showing the strong ties that Fleur has to the natural environment, even over interpersonal relationships.

The location of the cabin on the shores of **Matchimanito** is important because of Fleur's supposed relationship with Misshepesu, the lake spirit who protects her. It is assumed that Misshepesu is the one who harms the loggers that visit Fleur's land, and that her union with Misshepesu is what ensures her survival, even when living alone in such a hostile environment. While Misshepesu is believed to be a literal spirit, the lake also provides a physical barrier between the Pillager cabin and not just white civilization, but also the other Natives who are assimilating to the white culture more quickly than she is. Thus, it is all the more threatening when Fleur is forced to leave the land, separating herself from the spiritual and physical protection of the lake.

The threat of the loggers indicates the destructive nature of white America's relationship to the earth. Rather than living off what is available in one's immediate surroundings and carefully choosing one's resources so that those resources might regenerate, the book's white characters foolishly clear-cut these trees, changing the essential nature of the landscape and reducing the likelihood that the land can continue to be used for the same purposes. This destruction of nature forces the tribe members to take drastic action to ensure their survival, now that they can no longer rely on the land. Many Natives sell off their land at a low price in a frantic bid for immediate survival, and even Eli, an Indian who is more closely tied to traditional Anishinabe culture, takes a job with the loggers so he can earn the money he needs to survive. It is also important to note that the loggers approach Matchimanito from the West, the direction the Anishinabe associate with death. The approach of the loggers then stands as a symbol of the way that removing the natural world contributes to the destruction of the Anishinabe people.



SYMBOLS

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



THE UMBRELLA

Fritzie, the companion of the butcher shop's owner, gives Fleur a black umbrella and a place to stay in the unused smokehouse. As Fleur returns to her cabin, she twirls the umbrella above her. When Fleur's baby dies soon after birth, Eli buries the child in the branches of a tree, and Fleur climbs the tree to shelter the tiny box from the weather with the umbrella. It is said that anything that falls under the shadow of the umbrella will be cursed by the Pillagers and the lake monster as a threat to **Matchimanito**, and this is rumored to be cause of Napoleon Morrissey's death. When Fleur leaves her land, it is one of the only things she takes with her.

The umbrella is a symbol of the successful ways in which

Western objects might be used to the advantage of natives when they are attained without blemish or ulterior motive of the white person gifting it. Fleur is able to shade herself from the weather of the storm on her return to Matchimanito with the gift from her true friend Fritzie, and then she is able to use it to protect her dead child from the elements. Though the rest of the townspeople see the umbrella as something sinister that causes harm to those who encounter it, the umbrella is instead truly a form of unfettered protection that is provided to Fleur and those she loves, in contrast to the way the government Agent and lumber companies seek to trick Fleur into giving up her land and power to serve their own needs.



MATCHIMANITO

Matchimanito is seen as the purest area on the reservation, the lake on which the Pillager cabin sits. Tribe members and villagers alike are afraid of this area, though drawn to it for its vibrant resources. A lake monster named Misshepesu is rumored to live in the water, conjured by one of Fleur's ancestors to protect the Pillager land. While Fleur "drowns" in the lake at three points in her life, she is saved each time, and the reason is rumored to be that she has a special, perhaps romantic, relationship with the monster. The people believe Fleur is able to evoke the lake monster to cause harm to those who threaten her livelihood. Matchimanito is situated at the western edge of the reservation, the direction in which it is believed the land of the dead exists. When people in their culture die, they face west, and at the western edge of the woods, spirits are sometimes heard talking to one another. The western edge of the land is also the direction from which the lumbering companies approach Fleur's land allotment. While the threats of government intrusion and white influence menace the reservation, as tribe members sell off their land, accept Catholicism in place of the old traditions, and accept the government rations when their resources dwindle, Matchimanito stands as a symbol of the old way of life, free of the influence of white civilization.



BEARS

A bear is one of the clan markers of the Pillagers. Bears stand as symbols for Fleur specifically, and for the ailing Anishinabe people more generally. Nanapush tells Lulu that she was born on the day the last bear was shot on the reservation, an echo of the dwindling population of native people in addition to the diminishing natural resources of the land. This bear appears drunk at the Pillager cabin as Fleur is giving birth, in another symbol of the threat of alcohol to the native people. When the bear enters her cabin, Fleur finds the strength to push out her child. In that moment, the bear serving as a symbol of her clan and of her need to continue her family line. The shot the bear suffers only gives the bear strength,

indicating the way that Fleur grows strong in the face of a threat. When the bear runs away, it leaves no **tracks**, and so is thought to have possibly been a spirit bear, another symbol of the way the spirit world is actively in conversation with Fleur.



TRACKS/TRAILS

Tracks and trails, how they're used and what they indicate, are an important symbol of the journey of the Anishinabe people. Clearly the book has been named after this symbol, and we see the concept returned to again and again throughout. Fleur's tracks look like those of a **bear**, indicating her connection to the spirit world, and Pauline's tracks show that she wears her shoes on the wrong feet, in an offering to God (and as a sign of her cultural and spiritual confusion). In general, footsteps reveal some symbolic meaning about the nature of who they belong to. For Nanapush, Eli, and Fleur, hunting requires following an animal's tracks until it can be killed. Pauline follows in Bernadette's "tracks," learning how to prepare the dying.

All of these are examples of the way the characters travel through their lives, looking for clues as to how to live. At times in the book, pathways are trackless, showing that the place being traveled to has not been visited before. Other times, when human and creatures fail to leave tracks, it could be out of foolishness, growing fatigued and forgetting to provide themselves a way back, or because they are able to hide evidence of their journeys, possibly because they are spirits or as a way of preserving themselves. A trackless world, as when Fleur travels to the land of the dead, is a world unmarred by the effect of the imposing white population surrounding the reservation. At the end of the book, it is said that Fleur is able to leave no tracks because she has performed a ritual in taking Napoleon's tongue that allows her this skill. Leaving no tracks, in this case, is a symbol of the advantages Fleur has in staying closely tied to the old ways.




QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Harper Perennial edition of *Tracks* published in 2011.

Chapter 1 Quotes

☞ Within us, like ice shards, their names bobbed and shifted. Then the slivers of ice began to collect and cover us. We became so heavy, weighted down with the lead, gray frost, that we could not move. Our hands lay on the table like cloudy blocks. The blood with us grew thick. We needed no food. And little warmth. Days passed, weeks and we didn't leave the cabin for fear we'd crack our cold fragile bodies. We had gone half windigo. I learned later that this was common, that there were many of our people who died in this manner, of the invisible sickness. There were those who could not swallow another bite of food. Because the names of their dead anchored their tongues. There were those who let their blood stop, who took the road west after all.

Related Characters: Nanapush (speaker), Fleur Pillager

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 6

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Nanapush describes how he and Fleur grieved the loss of their family members to the consumption epidemic. The names haunting them are the names of their family members, indicating the way they hold the memories of those people within them even after they've passed. Nanapush and Fleur disconnect from their physical needs, and in this way their grief threatens their own livelihood like a different kind of "consumption." The idea of a windigo, or cannibalistic monster or spirit, is stretched here to imply that one might begin to devour oneself spiritually under enough duress. The road west is a symbol of the afterlife.

Chapter 2 Quotes

☞ But he scorned me when I would not bead, when I refused to prick my fingers with quills, or hid rather than rub brains on the stiff skins of animals. "I was made for better," I told him. "Send me down to your sister."

Related Characters: Pauline Puyat (speaker), Regina Puyat

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 14


Explanation and Analysis

Pauline explains here how her father tried to encourage her to participate in Native customs, but she refused. Her

father's commitment to Native life was one of the reasons she wanted to move away from him to live with her aunt in Argus. This quote shows how, from the beginning, Pauline thought that Native ways were inferior to the habits of white civilization, a belief that intensifies over the course of the novel until Pauline completely denies her Native heritage. While Pauline's father wants her to bead, she believes that the lace the nuns make in the convent is superior, even though the two types of handwork are analogous.

It wasn't that Fleur won that hooked them in so, because she lost hands, too. It was rather that she never had a freak deal or even anything above a straight. She only took on her low cards, which didn't sit right. By chance, Fleur should have gotten a full or a flush by now. The irritating thing was she beat with pairs and never bluffed, because she couldn't, and still she ended each night with exactly one dollar. Lily couldn't believe, first of all, that a woman could be smart enough to play cards, but even if she was, that she would then be stupid enough to cheat for a dollar a night.

Related Characters: Pauline Puyat (speaker), Lily Vedder, Fleur Pillager

Related Themes: 



Page Number: 21

Explanation and Analysis

Fleur invites herself to participate in the nightly card game played by the men from the butcher shop. Fleur's skill lies in playing conservatively, and the fact that she always wins the same small amount of money draws the men's suspicion. They don't believe a woman could be smart enough to win in this way without cheating, but they wonder why she would cheat for such a small amount of money. It is implied that they believe Fleur is using some sort of magic to win the game. In reality, Fleur's conservative bets and low but consistent winnings are likely the product of her intelligence and an attempt not to anger the men and to hold their interest so that she can continue playing the game with them, earning the money she needs to save her land.

That spring, I went to help out in her cabin when she bore the child, whose green eyes and skin the color of an old penny have made more talk, as no one can decide if the child is mixed blood or what, fathered in a smokehouse, or by a man with brass scales, or by the lake. The girl is bold, smiling in her sleep, as if she knows what people wonder, as if she hears the old men talk, turning the story over. It comes up different every time, and has no ending, no beginning. They get the middle wrong too. They only know they don't know anything.

Related Characters: Pauline Puyat (speaker), Fleur Pillager, Lulu Nanapush

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 31

Explanation and Analysis

Pauline arrives to help deliver Lulu, perhaps driven by her curiosity to see if the child is that of one of the men in the butcher shop, the lake monster, or Eli—though she doesn't admit to this curiosity being the reason for her visit. The child's appearance provides no definite answers, and this ambiguity seems to give the child power. The story gets told a little differently each time, showing the primacy of oral story telling for the tribe. Rather than being concerned with knowing the origin of the child for sure, the recognition that one is ignorant and will never entirely transcend that ignorance is the most important lesson.

Chapter 3 Quotes

Land is the only thing that lasts life to life. Money burns like tinder, flows off like water. And as for government promises, the wind is steadier.

Related Characters: Nanapush (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 33

Explanation and Analysis

Nanapush talks about the importance of the reservation land as the government and lumber companies threaten to clear-cut it and tax it so steeply that the Native Americans will not be able to afford to keep it. Nanapush knows that the land is of the utmost importance not only because it provides a disenfranchised people a place to exist peacefully, but because of its history. He knows that, when looked after and respected, the land can provide all you

need. The things being offered in exchange for the land here do not constitute a fair deal. Money will run out and government promises change all the time, but land is a tangible thing that—unlike money and words—cannot be wasted or disproved.

☞ Talk is an old man's last vice. I opened my mouth and wore out the boy's ears, but that is not my fault. I shouldn't have been caused to live so long, shown so much death, had to squeeze so many stories in the corners of my brain. They're all attached, and once I start there is no end to telling because they're hooked from one side to the other, mouth to tail.

Related Characters: Nanapush (speaker)

Related Themes:   


Page Number: 46


Explanation and Analysis

Here, Nanapush is telling Eli about the way he pleased three different wives to teach Eli how he might seduce Fleur, but all of his stories are interconnected so he goes off on tangents, telling Eli all sorts of stories rather than limiting himself to the information Eli has asked for. Nanapush, as the tribe elder, has lived the longest, and sees it as his duty to pass stories on to the next generation. The metaphor of the stories being connected, “mouth to tail,” suggests the “living” nature of the stories, possibly changing and growing as they move from telling to telling.

☞ The thing I've found about women is that you must use every instinct to confuse. “Look here,” I told Eli before he went out my door, “it's like you're a log in a stream. Along comes this bear. She jumps on. Don't let her dig in her claws.” So keeping Fleur off balance was what I presumed Eli was doing.

Related Characters: Nanapush (speaker), Fleur Pillager, Eli Kashpaw

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 46

Explanation and Analysis

Nanapush delivers this information just before sending Eli off to pursue Fleur. Unlike the information before, which was mostly sexual and romantic in nature, Nanapush explains a psychological concept to Eli, comparing Fleur to a bear, which is indeed one of her clan markers, symbolizing her strength and protectiveness. Nanapush thinks of women as a burden to be carried—one that threatens to destroy a man's livelihood if he allows her to. He tells Eli he must keep Fleur on her toes, uncertain of his devotion to her, and then their relationship will be a success. When Eli doesn't return for some time after, Nanapush assumes it was because Eli followed his advice, though it seems clear, as the story proceeds, that Eli in fact allows Fleur to “dig in her claws.”

☞ It didn't occur to me till later to wonder if it didn't go both ways, though, if Fleur had wound her private hairs around the buttons of Eli's shirt, if she had stirred smoky powders or crushed snakeroot into his tea. Perhaps she had bitten his nails in her sleep, swallowed the ends, snipped threads from his clothing and made a doll to wear between her legs.

Related Characters: Nanapush (speaker), Eli Kashpaw, Fleur Pillager

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 49



Explanation and Analysis

When Eli doesn't return, Nanapush at first assumes that he has successfully seduced the woman he desires, but Nanapush realizes that Fleur has just enough reason to seduce Eli. It's easier to live in the wilderness with help than without, and if Fleur finds a husband, she can continue the Pillager family line. These are traits that Nanapush originally identified as masculine, but which he realizes are, in fact, not gendered. While Eli used romance and his hunting skills to prove himself a worthy partner, Nanapush imagines Fleur using ancient medicines and spells to control Eli and keep him devoted to her.

“ I am a man so I don’t know exactly what happened when the bear came into the birth house, but they talk among themselves, the women, and sometimes they forget I’m listening. So I know that when Fleur saw the bear in the house she was filled with such fear and power that she raised herself on the mound of blankets and gave birth. Then Pauline took down the gun and shot point-blank, filling the bear’s heart. She says so anyway. But she says that the lead only gave the bear strength, and I’ll support that. For I heard the gun go off and then saw the creature whirl and roar from the house. It barreled past me, crashed through the brush into the woods, and was not seen after. It left no trail either, so it could have been a spirit bear. I don’t know.

Related Characters: Nanapush (speaker), Pauline Puyat, Fleur Pillager

Related Themes:     

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 60

Explanation and Analysis

Nanapush relays this information despite not having been there himself. He knows only the stories that get spoken about between women, suggesting a level of skepticism about how the story may have been stretched or altered. The bear that appears to Fleur is a symbol of her clan. It reminds Fleur of the necessity of continuing her family line while also showing that, when faced with trouble, Fleur can show great bravery. The fact that the bear is drunk perhaps symbolizes the ways in which outside influences are threatening the tribe, while also showing that the bear does not resist the temptation of this outside influence. Fleur’s connection with the Manitous, or life force spirits, suggests that she might have summoned this bear to provide her the impetus she needed to birth her child. The bear is thought not to be real because it left no trail that would allow it to be tracked.

Chapter 4 Quotes

“ In the morning, before they washed in Matchimanito, they smelled like animals, wild and heady, and sometimes in the dusk their fingers left tracks like snails, glistening and wet. They made my head hurt. A heaviness spread between my legs and ached. The tips of my breasts chafed and wore themselves to points and a yawning eagerness gripped me.

Related Characters: Pauline Puyat (speaker), Eli Kashpaw, Fleur Pillager

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 72

Explanation and Analysis

Pauline visits Matchimanito regularly perhaps because she is so interested in the strong bond between Fleur and Eli. There is obvious sexual tension between them, and Pauline is fascinated by two beings who are so closely connected to their bodies, while she is completely detached from her bodily needs because of the intense shame she has internalized as a result of her exposure to Catholicism. She describes her physical reaction to this attraction as though it is foreign and unexplainable, rather than openly acknowledging her desire. All the comparisons Pauline makes are to animal nature, something that she turns away from in her shift from the traditions of the tribe to those of white American culture.

“ The Virgin stared down. Her brow was clear, Her cheeks bone-pale, Her lips urgently forming a secret syllable, all of a sudden trembled. That’s when I saw the first tear. There were more. Although Her expression never changed, She wept a hail of rain from Her wide brown eyes. Her tears froze to hard drops, stuck invisibly in the corners of Her mouth, formed a transparent glaze along her column throat, rolled down the stiff folds of Her gown and struck the poised snake.

Related Characters: Pauline Puyat (speaker), Sophie Morrissey Lazarre

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 94

Explanation and Analysis


While holding the spellbound Sophie at Matchimanito, the two stare at the statue of the Virgin Mary Clarence has stolen from the Catholic Church in the hopes of breaking Sophie’s trance. Pauline has a vision of the Virgin Mary crying, which she believes is meant for Sophie. Pauline interprets this as a sign of the desire that both Pauline and Sophie feel, though the Virgin’s desire is in relation to God, not man. The snake referred to is the snake of temptation woven through the statue’s feet, and the tears, having

hardened, hit the snake like a punishment. While Pauline tries to gather these tears as proof of what she has witnessed, they melt away in her pocket. Thus, she holds another story that she knows no one will believe, similar to what people claim to be the lies she tells.

Chapter 5 Quotes

“It’s like this. You’ve got to start all over. The first time you pursued Fleur you had to make her think you were a knowledgeable, capable man, but now it is the opposite. She has to pity you as I do, only more. You have to cut yourself down in her eyes until you’re nothing, a dog, so low it won’t matter if she lets you crawl back.”

Related Characters: Nanapush (speaker), Eli Kashpaw

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 108

Explanation and Analysis

After Eli has the affair with Sophie, he must win back Fleur’s trust. Nanapush tells him how he must do this, employing methods that are nearly opposite to what he did before, making her pity him rather than respect him. Though Nanapush makes it seem as if this is a complete reversal for Eli, it is likely that Eli was also deferring to Fleur earlier, as she is the clearly dominant figure in the relationship between them. Even so, Eli’s affair with Sophie is an example of the ways in which he abused his power and disrespected Fleur, causing her to reject his affections and prefer her solitary life, where her power goes unchallenged.

I didn’t understand until Lazarre slouched and Clarence stood before Margaret, that this had to do with everything. The land purchase. Politics. Eli and Sophie. It was like seeing an ugly design of bruises come clear for a moment and reconstructing the evil blows that made them. Clarence would take revenge for Eli’s treatment of his sister by treating Eli’s mother in similar fashion.

Related Characters: Nanapush (speaker), Clarence Morrissey, Boy Lazarre, Margaret Kashpaw

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 113

Explanation and Analysis

At this point in the story, Margaret and Nanapush are being held captive by Boy Lazarre and Clarence Morrissey. While Nanapush had originally assumed the men only sought revenge against Eli for seducing Clarence’s little sister, Sophie, it doesn’t take long to realize that the situation is far more complex than that, as it encompasses all the differing opinions between these two factions of the tribe. The Morrisseys and Lazarres are more closely integrated with white civilization and want the money for the land, whereas the Pillagers, Kashpaws and Nanapush want to keep their land. Eli’s seduction of Sophie is but one item in a laundry list of disagreements between these two sides of the tribe’s members.

“I’ll take my twenty-two,” he said. I told him that was too much of a store-bought revenge to satisfy an oldtime Anishinabe warrior, a man, which he would become when this business was finished. We’d find a method.

Related Characters: Nanapush (speaker), Nector Kashpaw

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 116

Explanation and Analysis

When Margaret and Nanapush return home from the attack by Clarence and Boy, Nector wants to seek immediate revenge for his mother, but Nanapush stops him. Nanapush wants to take his time thinking about a more traditional way to get back at the men, believing that they will benefit from staying true to their roots rather than taking the white man’s easy way out. Maintaining this commitment to their heritage will also, Nanapush believes, draw Nector closer to the Anishinabe ways, which he can sense the boy drifting away from. Instead, Nanapush wants to demonstrate the cunning, patience and respect a good warrior shows in all his actions.

Chapter 6 Quotes

After that we made a plan together to hide the fact of my condition. We were both clever with materials and scissors, and between us we devised a concealing dress that would allow me to accompany Bernadette until I became too advanced. Once that happened, I would not venture off the farm. She would deliver me, having knowledge in her hands of birth as well as death.

Related Characters: Pauline Puyat (speaker), Bernadette Morrissey

Related Themes:    



Page Number: 132

Explanation and Analysis

Bernadette convinces Pauline not to terminate her pregnancy, promising to keep it a secret and to take care of the child after it is born. Pauline, despite having willingly had sex with Napoleon and being very Catholic, does not want the child, demonstrating a clear contradiction between her faith and the actions she takes. Bernadette does not draw as much attention to her faith, but her actions and her beliefs coincide more fully. The circular nature of life is also emphasized in the fact that Bernadette, a woman who specializes in assisting the dying, also knows how to assist in labor.

“Accept this,” I asked Him when night after night the cold gripped me in tight claws and I shook so hard I could not sleep. “And this,” every time I sat to eat and halved my bread. When my stomach pinched, “This also, my Lord.” When the blood rushed back into my frozen hands after taking the sheets off the line, “This too. This. And this.”

Related Characters: Pauline Puyat (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 136

Explanation and Analysis

Pauline offers physical suffering to God as a demonstration of her faith, but sometimes she goes too far, and the Mother Superior asks her to cease her unusual acts of self-harm. While Pauline dreams up new ways of humbling herself to the Lord, she also contradicts these efforts regularly. She halves her bread at the convent, but asks Fleur to feed her at the Pillager cabin. She accepts an extra blanket from Mother Superior, but believes that Mother Superior is still warmer than her at night. Pauline takes actions that suggest humility, but, in fact she is incredibly proud, even going so far as to believe she is stronger than Jesus Christ himself.

As a young man, he had guided a buffalo expedition for whites. He said the animals understood what was happening, how they were dwindling. He said that when the smoke cleared and hulks lay scattered everywhere, a day's worth of shooting for only the tongues and the hides, the beasts that survived grew strange and unusual. They lost their minds. They bucked, screamed and stamped, tossed the carcasses and grazed on flesh. They tried their best to cripple one another, to fall or die. They tried suicide. They tried to do away with their young. They knew they were going, saw their end.

Related Characters: Pauline Puyat (speaker), Nanapush

Related Themes:    


Page Number: 139

Explanation and Analysis

Pauline tells this story of Nanapush guiding a hunting expedition and relates the dwindling buffalo population to the diminishing population of the tribe on the reservation. The fear and stress pushes the remaining members of such a group to act irrationally, trying to ensure their own personal survival rather than thinking about the strength of the group. The way she talks about the buffalo grazing on flesh is connected to the danger of turning “windigo” or cannibalistic, both a literal threat in times of extreme hunger, and a spiritual one. Having the end in sight pushes creatures to behavioral extremes. The cause of the death of the buffalo was the white man who was not skilled at making the most of each death, taking, instead only the choicest bits.

He also wanted to see my hairshirt, insisted on it no matter how many times I denied I wore one. But at last, in a distracted moment, I confessed that I had made a set of underwear from potato sacks, and when I wore it the chafing reminded me of Christ's sacrifice. This delighted him, encouraged him. He was curious to know how the undergarments were sewed, if I had to take them off to perform the low functions. He suggested after mock-serious thought that I might secretly enjoy the scratch of the rough material against my thighs.

Related Characters: Pauline Puyat (speaker), Nanapush

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 143

Explanation and Analysis

When Pauline visits the Pillager cabin in an attempt to convert them to Catholicism, Nanapush cannot help but poke fun at Pauline's demonstrative displays of virtue. Nanapush knows that Pauline has selfish reasons for her actions, and thus he suggests that she likes the scratch of her potato sack underwear. Though Pauline could have easily kept her rough underwear a secret, she only manages to resist talking about it for a very short time, wanting her sacrifice of comfort to be known, in addition to the more outward displays of her devotion, like wearing her shoes on the wrong feet and denying herself the opportunity to urinate more than twice a day.

Then Fleur washed me, but I warned myself not to experience any pleasure. I sat down in the water, felt its heat as a sharp danger, but then I forgot. The child soaped my back with a slick plant, and scrubbed the agonizing itch of rough twine and harsh woolens. I gave her my hand. She washed each finger, then each toe. Fleur pared the overgrown nails with a knife. The girl rinsed away the sting of nettles, aggravation of hooked burrs. She dislodged the invisible strands of screwgrass that had woven into my skin. Fleur poured a pitcher of warm water over me and then began to shampoo my head and hair. It was so terrible, so pleasant, that I abandoned my Lord and all His rules and special requirements.

Related Characters: Pauline Puyat (speaker), Lulu Nanapush, Fleur Pillager

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 154

Explanation and Analysis

After Nanapush refuses to allow Pauline to enter the cabin because she smells so bad, Pauline allows Fleur to bathe her and wash her clothes. Pauline has vowed not to wash herself, but she permits another person to wash her, ultimately just making more work for the other person than if she would just performing this task herself. She vows not to feel the pleasure of these sensations, but it's not as though the pleasure of touch is a voluntary feeling, and eventually Pauline allows herself to enjoy the feeling of Fleur shampooing her scalp, even though it's against her beliefs. It appears as though Pauline enjoys both the agony of her self-imposed suffering and also the relief of it.

Chapter 7 Quotes

Power dies, power goes under and gutters out, ungraspable. It is momentary, quick of flight and liable to deceive. As soon as you rely on the possession it is gone. Forget that it ever existed, and it returns. I never made the mistake of thinking that I owned my strength, that was my secret. And so I never was alone in my failures. I was never to blame entirely when all was lost, when my desperate cures had no effect on the suffering of those I loved. For who can blame a man waiting, the doors open, the windows open, food offered, arms stretched wide? Who can blame him if the visitor does not arrive?

Related Characters: Nanapush (speaker)

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 177

Explanation and Analysis

Nanapush senses that Fleur is too hard on herself for not being able to save her dead child and struggling to protect the land that has meant so much to her family. Nanapush tries to share advice with her about how he has persevered, but she is uninterested in hearing it. For Fleur, strength is all or nothing. Nanapush tried as hard as he could, but he recognizes that some things are out of his control. Fleur wants to believe that she can turn all bad luck around, and that she can hold Lulu close enough to her to prevent any harm from coming to her.

I mixed and crushed the ingredients. The paste must be rubbed on the hands a certain way, then up to the elbows, with exact words said. When I first dreamed the method of doing this, I got rude laughter. I got jokes about little boys playing with fire. But the person who visited my dream told me what plants to spread so that I could plunge my arms into a boiling stew kettle, pull meat from the bottom, or reach into the body itself and remove, as I did so long ago with Moses, the name that burned, the sickness.

Related Characters: Nanapush (speaker), Moses Pillager

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 188

Explanation and Analysis

Nanapush believes that Fleur needs to loosen her control over Lulu or the child will be suffocated, and so he visits

Moses Pillager to help enact the solution which Nanapush has dreamed. Nanapush will perform a miracle of sorts to earn Fleur's trust, by applying a natural substance to his hands and arms that will protect them from boiling water. Nanapush compares this ritual to the same way he was able to pluck the names of the grieved from the grieving to relieve them of their depression, without being touched by death himself. Nanapush's cure proves especially effective when Pauline attempts to prove the superiority of Catholicism and her own powers by performing the same action and badly burning herself.

Chapter 8 Quotes

☝☝ What I told them to do, then, they accomplished. My fingers closed like hasps of iron, locked on the strong rosary chain, wrenched and twisted the beads close about his neck until his face darkened and he lunged away. I hung on while he bucked and gagged and finally fell, his long tongue dragging down my thighs. I kicked and kicked away the husk, drove it before me with the blows of my feet. A light began to open in the sky and the thing grew a human shape, one that I recognized in gradual stages. Eventually, it took on the physical form of Napoleon Morrissey.

Related Characters: Pauline Puyat (speaker), Napoleon Morrissey

Related Themes:     

Page Number: 202

Explanation and Analysis

Pauline's boat has washed ashore and she believes she has sighted the devil. She speaks about her hands as though they are separate from her, not body parts but instruments under her control. She uses a symbol of her faith to perform this act of strangling the devil, believing her actions justified. The conflation of the devil and the lake monster shows how Pauline is still tied to her Native beliefs, even if she has denied them in favor of Catholicism. Her further conflation of the devil with Napoleon Morrissey shows the extreme way in which she views the carnal relations she had with him, blaming him for her own desire. Pauline's visions and ability to lie to herself throughout the book reach a climax here, where she forcefully murders someone and justifies it as an act of faith.

☝☝ For Christ's purpose is not for us to fathom. His love is a hook sunk deep into our flesh, a question mark that pulls with every breath. Some can dull themselves to the barb's presence. I cannot. I answer with the ring of fidelity, with the veil. I will pray while my hair is chopped from my head with a pair of shears. I will pray as I put on my camphor-smelling robes, and thereafter I'll answer to the name I drew from Superior's hand.

Related Characters: Pauline Puyat (speaker), Sister Saint Anne

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 205



Explanation and Analysis

Pauline is about to take her vows securing her status as a nun and taking on a new name for herself, leaving her old life behind in favor of her marriage to God. Pauline's faith remains unexamined, blindly interpreting and trusting what she believes to be God's will at any given point. She doesn't try to reason through her actions, seeming to do as she pleases and then, often falsely, claim that whatever happened was God's will rather than her own. However, Pauline does not seem to realize this. Because she pays constant lip service to God, she believes she is the most faithful of his servants.

Chapter 9 Quotes

☝☝ "Go to her. She saved my life twice and now she's taken it twice back, so there are no more debts. But you, whom I consider my father, I still owe. I will not harm your wife. But I never will go to Kashpaw land."

Related Characters: Fleur Pillager (speaker), Margaret Kashpaw, Nanapush

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 214



Explanation and Analysis

Fleur has been saved from drowning a third time—this time by Eli. Here, Fleur tells Nanapush that he should return to Margaret despite the fact that she has secretly allowed the Pillager land to go into foreclosure. While Margaret has shown kindness to Fleur twice, she has also done her harm twice, so (by Fleur's reasoning) those debts are cancelled out. Thus, Fleur is free to punish Margaret if she so wishes,

but her allegiance to Nanapush is strong, so she promises not to do him any harm. It is unclear whether Fleur was actually the cause of the harm that was done to the men who had saved her from drowning in the past.

☞ She sent you to the government school, it is true, but you must understand there were reasons: there would be no place for you, no safety on this reservation, no hiding from government papers, or from Morrisseys who shaved heads or the Turcot Company, leveler of the whole forest. There was also no predicting what would happen to Fleur herself. So you were sent away, another piece cut from my heart.

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

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 219

Explanation and Analysis

Nanapush explains to Lulu why Fleur sent Lulu to the government school. At the time when the story is being told, Lulu is assumed to be almost an adult, and won't talk to Fleur because she feels her mother abandoned her, but Nanapush believes that the choice Fleur made was out of a sense of protectiveness more than anything else, seeing the threats that existed on the reservation, and realizing that, without their land, Fleur could no longer adequately provide for Lulu or allow her to have the Native upbringing she wanted for her daughter. Nanapush's own connection to Lulu, as a "piece cut from [his] heart," reminds readers that Nanapush has lost all his own blood relations, including the daughter after whom he named Lulu.

☞ The moment I entered, I heard the hum of a thousand conversations. Not only the birds and small animals, but the spirits in the western stands had been forced together. The shadows of the trees were crowded with their forms. The twigs spun independently of wind, vibrating like small voices. I stopped, stood among these trees whose flesh was so much older than ours, and it was then that my relatives and friends took final leave, abandoned me to the living.

Related Characters: Nanapush (speaker)

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 220

Explanation and Analysis

Nanapush is visiting Fleur's cabin as he hears the Lumber company approaching. The forest has been shrunk down so small that all the spirits now live in the sparse stand of trees remaining closest to the Pillager cabin. Nanapush has compared his own life within the tribe to that of the trees that are being cut down one by one. The trees stand to the west, the direction of death in tribal belief. Though Nanapush, old and weakened, hears the call of his tribe, he decides against following their voices so that he may continue to live and stand for what he believes in, compromised as those beliefs might be. The quieting of the voices is the spirits acknowledging that Nanapush has recommitted to his life.

☞ Margaret and Father Damien begged and threatened the government, but once the bureaucrats sink their barbed pens into the lives of Indians, the paper starts flying, a blizzard of legal forms, a waste of ink by the gallon, a correspondence to which there is no end or reason. That's when I began to see what we were becoming, and the years have borne me out: a tribe of file cabinets and triplicates, a tribe of single-space documents, directives, policy. A tribe of pressed trees. A tribe of chicken-scratch that can be scattered by the wind, diminished to ashes by one struck match.

Related Characters: Nanapush (speaker)

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 225

Explanation and Analysis

Nanapush and Margaret try to get Lulu back from the boarding school where Fleur sent her, but they struggle against a host of bureaucratic barriers. As Nanapush resisted giving them either his tribal name or his white man's name in the beginning of the story, he knows that once someone is being controlled by the government, there is no reversing that course. He grieves the fact that the tribe, which was once linked to living, growing trees, is now tied more closely to the paper that has been made out of them. His belief that land is power is again brought up in the quick destruction that could be made of all these policies and agreements with a tiny amount of fire.



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 1: WINTER 1912, MANITOU-GEEZISOHNS, LITTLE SPIRIT SUN

Nanapush tells his granddaughter (Lulu) of the slow decline of his Anishinabe tribe due to consumption. By the end of the epidemic, Nanapush, just fifty years old, is considered an elder. He lists all the “lasts” he witnessed in the tribe—the last buffalo hunt, the last **bear** shot—and mentions that he refused to sign the settlement papers from the government that would have taken away their woods and lake. He also saved “the last Pillager,” Fleur, Lulu’s mother.

Nanapush says he found Fleur in her family’s cabin on **Matchimanito** Lake, where he and his companion in the tribal police fear that the retaliation of Pillager spirits (Pillager is the family’s name) might turn them “windigo.” Inside the cabin, Nanapush finds the dead bodies of an old man and woman (Lulu’s grandparents), a little boy, and two little girls, all facing west. In the corner he finds seventeen-year-old Fleur alive.

Nanapush straps the sick Fleur to their sled of supplies. The tribal policeman wants to burn the cabin down, as recommended by the Agency, but no amount of kerosene will allow the cabin to burn. Rumors say that leaving behind those five bodies unburied put a curse on the tribe, but Nanapush believes the tribe suffers only from the shortsightedness of not realizing the dangers of the government bait being offered them: liquor, money, and the way their land is slowly shrinking from their control.

The two arrive at Nanapush’s cabin and Nanapush unties the girl from the sled, but his companion is too afraid to touch her, and he leaves with the sled of their supplies, dying soon after he arrives home. Fleur, however, improves slowly, and she and Nanapush grieve the losses of their families together.

Though he doesn’t often explicitly address her, it’s important to note that Nanapush is telling this story to his adopted granddaughter, presumably for the purpose of educating Lulu and helping her understand the tribe’s history and why her mother sent her to a government school. The nature of the story Nanapush shares is oral rather than written.



Matchimanito is far removed from the rest of the tribe on the reservation, located on the other side of a lake, and it retains a wildness and spiritual nature that doesn’t seem to exist elsewhere, as if it still exists outside the idea of a “reservation” and the invasion of white American culture. The importance of west as the direction of death is revisited throughout the book.



The Agency wants to burn the cabin to diminish the likelihood of the spread of consumption (tuberculosis) through the bodies left inside the cabin. Nanapush’s opinion of what has caused the tribe’s trouble differs from the opinions of other tribe members, which is crucial to understanding the logic with which Nanapush approaches his problems and attempts to address them.



While the policeman claims he doesn’t want to touch Fleur because of the contagious consumption, there is an implication that he actually fears the mystical powers of the Pillager family more than the white man’s disease, and this is what prevents him from touching the girl, though his refusal to help her could just as easily be blamed for his subsequent death (as it quickly becomes clear that those who wrong Fleur in some way usually meet an untimely fate).



When he is well enough, Nanapush returns to **Matchimanito** to bury Fleur's family. He makes the markers for their graves, scratching images of **bears** and a marten into each one. Nanapush prays to the dead Pillagers, asking them to leave this world and making offerings to them, but he remains preoccupied with the thought of them. When Nanapush returns to his cabin, Fleur is also preoccupied with the memory of her family, though Nanapush didn't tell her where he was going. They don't share their thoughts with one another, and avoid leaving the cabin, allowing themselves to sit silently in their grief and go "half-windigo."

Father Damien, a young new priest, appears at their door one day to say that Fleur's cousin Moses has been found in the woods. When Nanapush goes outside to gather snow to boil into tea, he is surprised to find how much time has passed—it is spring. Fleur makes a gaulette and Nanapush begins to talk and can't stop, not allowing the priest to get a word in edgewise. At some point during this monologue, Fleur leaves. Nanapush notes that although Moses had survived, he "didn't know where he was anymore," as people would later say of Fleur.

Starvation has forced members of the tribe to make poor decisions, selling their land for a meager amount of food. Many are now eager to try to buy back their land as a group, or at least to pay a tax and refuse money from the lumber companies that are tearing down the trees that mark the boundaries of their land. Surveyors and Anishinabe enter the woods in the hopes of measuring the lake, despite their fear of the lake monster, Misshepesu. Nanapush tries to convince Fleur to stay with him in his cabin, but she remains intent on returning to her family cabin on the lake to live alone.

Even when the winter is severe and supplies are scarce, Nanapush continues to make offerings to the spirits, honoring the ones who have gone before, and hoping that this might provide them peace so they can move onto the afterlife and cease haunting him and Fleur. The spirits remain with the two of them, though, and, in their seclusion Fleur and Nanapush grow severely depressed, which they explain as going "half-windigo" or half-spirit, detaching from their physical needs and retreating deep into their grief.



Despite Nanapush and Fleur not having any allegiance to the Catholic Church, Father Damien appears to express concern and to share information he knows will be of interest to her. Nanapush refers to his verbosity as his last vice, but also claims that he kept himself alive during the consumption epidemic by talking so much he didn't allow death to get a word in edgewise. In the same way that Nanapush protected himself from death, he also protects himself from any proselytizing the priest might have been planning to do. Moses's faculties seem to have been compromised either by his battle with consumption or because of the actions he took to protect himself from the illness, possibly having eaten other humans, a reason they refer to his condition as having gone partially "windigo."



While the tribe had previously been able to provide for themselves, the impact of white civilization on Anishinabe life has pushed them into a position where this is no longer possible, and so to survive at all they must sacrifice even what is not being explicitly stolen from them. Misshepesu is introduced as the monster that protects the lake. Fleur's connection to the lake and speculated relationship with the monster is believed to be a reason she insists on returning to her cabin, though her true reasoning is perhaps more closely tied to her understanding of land as being essential to her survival and her family's history.



Fleur is asked to pay the fee for all four of her family allotments. The Agent goes out to collect it from her, but the spirits of the Pillager family lead him astray until he is lost. After he returns to ask Fleur for the money a second time, he ends up “living in the woods and eating roots, gambling with ghosts.” More and more outsiders arrive, hoping to claim the land as their own, but many never return. Those who do, though, take much of the lumber with them, and Nanapush feels himself weakening along with the earth.

Though it's possible the Agent just becomes naturally lost in the woods, Nanapush tells the story as though it is undeniable truth that the Pillager spirits disorient him so that he grows fearful and relents in his pursuit of the land fees. Nanapush's power being related to the strength of the land and earth evidences the ties the Natives believe there to be between their own livelihood and that of the earth. It is not merely a metaphor, but a literal truth, as the destruction of their land means the destruction of Native culture and individual Native people as well.



CHAPTER 2: SUMMER 1913, MISKOMINI-GEEZIS, RASPBERRY SUN

Pauline, a second narrator, tells of the first time Fleur drowned as a child. She is saved by two men who later disappear. When Fleur is fifteen, she drowns again, but no one will touch her. A man finds her washed up on shore and notices she is still breathing. Much later, the man drowns in his own bathtub. After this, despite Fleur's beauty, men steer clear of her, certain that Misshepesu, the lake monster, wants her for himself. Pauline shares the warnings that mothers give to little girls to beware the charms of the lake monster.

Pauline, the second narrator, records her own story on paper (a generally Western medium of communication) in contrast to Nanapush's oral storytelling. Fleur's relationship with the lake is relayed by Pauline, a woman who supposedly is devoutly Christian, having disavowed her Native beliefs. This is important to note, as it suggests that Pauline is not as distanced from her roots as she would like.



Out in the woods alone, Fleur is thought to have gone mad, wearing men's clothing, studying the ancient traditions of medicine, and turning into a **bear**, leaving behind **tracks** that match a bear's claws. Some members of the tribe believe that Fleur should be forced to leave the reservation, but none are brave enough to tell her so. As they finally get up the nerve, Fleur leaves the reservation herself, heading to the nearby town of Argus.

Fleur's tie to bears as a symbol of her family line is introduced here, showing her strength and tenacity in surviving alone in the wild. The tribe is so intimidated by her tie to the physical world and the way that she can seemingly manipulate the Manitou, or life force spirits in the woods, that they want to ask her to leave. They fear the evil they believe they know, in the form of their own culture, more than the overwhelmingly destructive threat of white culture that they don't know.



Fleur walks to the small town of three hundred people, drawn by the thin steeple of the Catholic church. She begins working at the butcher shop owned by Pete Kozka. Her coworkers are three men: Lily Veddar, Tor Grunewald, and Dutch James. Pauline's Aunt Regina has remarried to Dutch James, though he hasn't adopted her son Russell.

The Catholic Church stands in as the most notable entity in town, that which lures the Anishinabe people to white civilization. Fleur's employment in the butcher shop, a masculine job in white culture, shows the way she brings her unique identity even to her pursuits in town.



Pauline reveals that she asked her father to be sent south to live in the town so that she might learn to make lace from the nuns. Instead, she is taken in by her extended family and learns that they are mixed-blood. Her father warns her that living in town will fade her native ways, which she has already begun rejecting, speaking only English and opting out of the traditions he attempts to teach her. In town, Pauline takes a job sweeping the shop and caring for Russell rather than learning to make lace.

Pauline recognizes that Russell is industrious, while she herself falls into daydreams of what her life might be like if she were more like the white girls she sees in town. While she is living with her Aunt Regina, Pauline learns that many of her family members have died on the reservation, and that there is not enough labor to bury the bodies properly, so many are hoisted into trees instead, a thought that haunts Pauline.

Pauline admires Fleur, who refuses to tell Pauline about what happened in the time of the sickness on the reservation, claiming that it's possible some of Pauline's family moved north to avoid the sickness. At fifteen, Pauline feels she is invisible to the customers and men in the shop, and uses this fact to spy on everyone. She bears witness to the jokes the men tell, and what they do to Fleur. Fleur works in "a ramshackle board building, part killing shed, part store," next to the huge refrigerated storage locker. Fleur works alongside another woman named Fritzie, cutting the meat. Fleur is not as invisible to men as Pauline, and she treats Pauline's little cousin Russell sweetly.

Sometimes the men stay at the locker after closing to make dinner together and play poker or cribbage, but they rarely talk. Fleur's card-playing catches their attention even more than her looks. The men are surprised when Fleur sits down to play with them, and Lily's dog snaps at Fleur, but immediately recoils. Pauline and Russell hide to watch what will happen, but Fleur knows the children are there and shines a bright wolf-like grin at them. Fleur asks Pauline to give her the eight cents she earns weekly, and Pauline hands over her coins.

Pauline has begun to reject her heritage even while still living on the reservation, and when her father calls out that this trend will only continue to a greater degree if she leaves, she is unconcerned.

Though Pauline professes that she wants to go immediately to the convent, instead she lives with her half-Native family first, evidence that Pauline might not be as completely distanced from her heritage as she believes she is.



Pauline sees herself as a passive figure, wanting the wealth of the white girls around her, while recognizing that her male cousin has more ambition. Pauline's image of her family's bodies hoisted into trees and the way it disturbs her could fuel her desire to convert away from the Native faith and toward Catholicism, which insists on burying bodies far out of sight.



Fleur's treatment of Pauline shows that she can tell Pauline might not be strong enough to accept the truth about what has happened to her family. Pauline's invisibility to men, presumably because of her plainness, is used as a skill that allows her to observe people unnoticed. Pauline alludes to something bad that happens to Fleur, though we don't yet know what that is. Fleur and Fritzie's skill in making fine cuts to the meat is a translation of traditionally white feminine skills (fine hand work) into a more masculine medium (butchering meat).



Fleur's card-playing is an example of a woman displaying a skill typically seen as masculine in white Western culture. Lily's dog responds to Fleur instinctually in a way that mirrors the men's true feelings, barking to try to intimidate her, but then recoiling in fear (also showing Fleur's connection to the natural world yet again). The men are politer on the surface, though, and invite Fleur to join them, assuming she'll make a fool of herself. Fleur's wolf-like grin will return throughout the book in moments where she seeks to threaten or show her dominance.



Fleur plays steadily, but the men know she can't bluff. Pauline goes to sleep on a mound of sawdust, and when she wakes up, the men and Fleur are still playing. Eventually the game ends and Fleur tucks Pauline and Russell into a closet to sleep. The game continues the next night, and Fleur gives Pauline her money back "five times over," while Fleur keeps the rest of the dollar she has won for her stake in the next games.

Each night for a week, Fleur wins exactly one dollar, and the men bristle at her consistency. They wonder at how she has never won with anything above a straight. They have trouble believing that a woman could be smart enough to play cards, but stupid enough to cheat for only a dollar a night. Each night Fleur retires to bathe in the slaughterhouse tub and sleep in the unused smokehouse, which Fritzie has allowed her secret access to, in addition to the gift of a black **umbrella**.

Pauline becomes Fleur's shadow, copying her every move. In August, Pete and Fritzie head north to escape the heat. Fleur has won thirty dollars in thirty days. On a day that's so hot only Fleur can stand to work, the men wait for her to finish so they might play a game with her. They up the ante to a dollar, and Fleur loses, but they allow her to keep playing until she wins. They continue playing until the pot holds all their money, and then Fleur wins the hand fair and square. Lily slams his dog into the table in fury. Fleur gathers her winnings, and Lily demands another round, but Fleur leaves the table to feed the hog. The men linger around the table, drinking and silently planning their revenge.

When the men leave the table, Pauline drags Russell with her to follow them. Lily follows Fleur into the hog pen, trapping her, and she dumps a bucket of slop on him. He pushes her against the fence and her winnings spill out of her dress. Fleur escapes into the yard, but Lily follows. The sow attacks Lily and they struggle. The other men chase Fleur to the smokehouse. Russell tries to stop Dutch in his pursuit of Fleur, but Dutch throws the boy off. Pauline closes her eyes and puts her hands on her ears to block out Fleur's voice calling to Pauline and Russell to save her.

Fleur's commitment to honesty and honor comes through in her inability to lie to the others about the cards in her hand. Pauline benefits from Fleur's gambling, and Fleur displays generosity in repaying Pauline much more than she lent Fleur and also showing her care in tucking her and Russell in, so they won't be punished for secretly watching the game.



The men are skeptical of Fleur's ability to play cards so well that she wins exactly the same amount each night. The fact that Fleur only ever wins with low cards seems to indicate that Fleur might be using some sort of magic to ensure her wins, or it might be a strategic choice to improve her chances and divert the suspicions she knows they will form, as she is used to being mistrusted in her community. Fritzie's interest is evidence of the care and support women can provide to other women, not only on the reservation, but also in town. The black umbrella will return as an important symbol of protection throughout the book.



The men have waited for Pete and Fritzie to be out of town to seek their revenge on Fleur. It is as though they are looking for a concrete reason to punish Fleur, and so they up the stakes to an amount that seems punishable, as Fleur had only been winning in relatively small increments before. Fleur's refusal to play another round after winning the men's money shows that this was perhaps her plan all along, to gain their trust and then win as much money as she could to ensure she could return to her life on Matchimanito.



While Pauline acts as Fleur's shadow, following her after the game, shadows are passive rather than active, and so Pauline takes no action to deter the men from attacking Fleur. On the contrary, Russell attempts to appeal to Dutch, his stepfather of sorts, trying to convince him to leave Fleur alone. This builds on the way Pauline has identified Russell as being more proactive than her. Notably, Pauline covers her ears as Fleur calls for her—this seems to be a kind of "original sin" that leads to the break between Pauline and the rest of the Anishinabe, particularly Fleur and those close to her.



The next morning Fleur is gone, and the men are all hungover. Russell is beside himself, blaming himself for what happened to Fleur, and goes outside to brood. Stepping outside to call Russell indoors, Pauline can see that a tornado is gathering. When she steps back inside, the men have all disappeared inside the lockers. The building is trembling. Pauline and Russell, panicked, scream for Fleur, Regina, Dutch—"any of them"—when suddenly everything goes totally still. The door of the locker remains shut, and a dog can be heard barking inside. Pauline and Russell hear "a cry building in the wind," and a gust of wind slams them into the wall of the shed. Outside, they tumble through the air, witnessing a herd of cattle, a lit candle, and various other objects flying by in the tornado. The town of Argus is "turned upside down, smashed, thoroughly wrecked."

Days later, people in the town begin to look for the men who worked in the butcher shop. Much of the town is damaged, but a surprising amount remains intact, and seemingly no one has been harmed. Kozka's Meats has been completely destroyed, though Pete and Fritzie's living quarters remain undisturbed.

When Pete and Fritzie return from their time away, Fritzie asks after Fleur, whom no one knows the whereabouts of, and the other men, and that is when the town realizes they are missing. A search party hunts through the wreckage, eventually uncovering the meat locker, which was locked from the outside. Pete, Fritzie, Pauline, and Russell enter to find the men, dead, huddled around a card game. When the bodies are pulled out, it's determined that Dutch James is still alive.

Pauline leaves Argus. Fleur has moved back to **Matchimanito**. Pauline says she is the only one to visit Fleur at her home. She says she went to help Fleur give birth to a child in the spring, a child who people argue over the parentage of: fathered in the smokehouse, or by the Agent, or by the lake monster Misshepeshu. The child (Lulu) smiles in her sleep, perhaps because she knows people argue over her story—but the story is different every time, and no one knows the true version.

The weather is assumed to be the effect of Fleur's wrath, induced by the tribal spirits with whom Fleur remains closely aligned. The awareness with which Pauline is able to register the objects flying around her even while she tumbles through the air suggests exaggeration or magic, evidence of Pauline's predilection for lying, or the generally surreal nature of the book's action. The reader is made to wonder how a candle might remain lit while flying through the air.



The fact that no one went looking for Tor and Lily is understandable, as they both live alone, but Pauline calls out Aunt Regina's lack of interest in Dutch's whereabouts as suspect, as though her aunt might have wanted to be rid of her companion. The fact that the site of abuse and assault is destroyed but Pete and Fritzie's living quarters remain intact shows that Pete and Fritzie are not to blame for any of the wrong that has been done (at least in Fleur's mind, if Fleur is indeed the cause of this destruction).



The townspeople assume Fleur is to blame for the meat locker being locked from the outside, as there is no one else they can imagine having done such a thing. Though Dutch is assumed dead, he is ultimately found alive, suggesting that he was perhaps less to blame for the harm that was done to Fleur than the other men. The fact that the men are huddled around a card game bears importance later in the book, when a similar game is played in the afterlife. It also suggests the reason for their horrific fate—the cards they played with Fleur.



Pauline's nature as a liar is illustrated here in the fact that she says she is the only one to visit Fleur at home on the reservation, when we later learn this is not to be the case at all. The gossipy nature of the community and the fear of Fleur's power is called out in the community's speculation over the origin of her pregnancy. Lulu, who has not yet been an active character, is described as mischievous and knowing even as a baby, aware that there is power in her uncertain origin.



CHAPTER 3: FALL 1913-SPRING 2014, ONAUBIN-GEEZIS, CRUST ON THE SNOW SUN

Nanapush continues his story to Lulu, telling her that his name loses power each time the government uses it, and so he refuses to give it to Father Damien and the Agent. A Captain comes to deliver a ration payout for the first treaty, but Nanapush refuses to sign his white man's name for that either. He believes that holding onto the land is his only hope, distrusting both cash and government promises and holding out like the Pillagers. Nanapush reveals that he received a Jesuit education as a child and so he can read and write English, uncommon amongst the tribe, and that his name is a tribute to a trickster who stole fire and girls' hearts.

Nanapush knows to protect himself from the influence of the government and the church, aware that if he is recorded on paper by these organizations, then they might hold some power over him. Nanapush's reasoning for this is based at least partly in his education. Because he can read the words on the contracts he is being asked to sign, he more fully understands the repercussions of entering agreements with these organizations. His affinity for his trickster namesake shows that he fancies himself clever and able to outwit those who try to take advantage of him, as in the case of his refusal to sign either his tribal name or white man's name on these documents.



Fleur both embraces and resists Nanapush like any daughter would a father after he saves her. Nanapush hints that Fleur has ended up complicit in keeping his own name alive, though he didn't know that would be the case when he saved her. He notes that much of what people experience and see can only be understood in hindsight.

Fleur's appreciation of Nanapush is not overpowered by her urge to remain strong and independent. Nanapush talking about Fleur keeping his name alive prompts the reader to wonder if they could possibly have a romantic or adopted-familial relationship later in the book. His comment about the benefit of hindsight indicates the importance of treating everyone fairly, especially in a close-knit community.



Fleur returns from Argus holding a black **umbrella** and wearing a dress that is too small for her, and Nanapush says that he didn't think, at the time, about whether the dress was tight because she carried a child or a pile of money. Nanapush invites her to catch up in his cabin, but Fleur just smiles and walks on. Pauline returns to the reservation soon after, as well. The people on the reservation know something is wrong, but they cannot tell what. A black dog guards the turnoff to **Matchimanito**, attacking a woman and her children when they hold up a cross to scare the dog off, but they remain unhurt because it was "odjib," a thing of smoke.

The umbrella that Fleur holds on her return stands as a symbol of the protection she believes she has from the fallout of her stay in the town. The townspeople notice that Fleur's dress is tight, and wonder if she is pregnant, but Nanapush realizes in hindsight that it might have just been the cash she won from the men in the poker game stuffed into her clothing for safekeeping. The spirit dog guarding Matchimanito is also a symbol of Fleur's protection via her connection to the spirit world.



The lake monster seems to have calmed down with Fleur's return; the fish are plentiful, and no boats are lost. Fleur's presence in the woods also seems to have stirred up some of the spirits of the dead there, but the other members of the tribe can't help but still hunt there because the animals and berries are of better quality. The people are even more afraid of meeting Fleur or her cousin Moses, who it is said has turned half animal as a way of defeating consumption. When Moses was a child, Nanapush had tried to help him fool the spirits into thinking he had already died, and Nanapush wonders if this bit of trickery is what initially confused Moses and set him off course as a child.

While the community fears Fleur's relationship to the lake monster, they also are grateful for it when her presence ensures their own safety, showing the dual nature of such superstitious beliefs. Similarly, while they know the woods can be a place of danger, they can't deny that it is also a place of plenty, and the risk proves itself worth it. Nanapush wonders if he is complicit in Moses's half-spirit existence, showing that he is a thoughtful, responsible character who acknowledges the power of the culture's spirits.



It's Moses who visits town to buy supplies for both himself and Fleur, and to pay off the Pillager allotments. He pays with coins and bills, when the Pillagers had always traded goods before, and so the villagers know the money has come from Fleur's time in Argus, and that it is far more than a single summer's wages. Fleur visits Nanapush at his cabin, and he asks Fleur if something is wrong. She tells him that she shouldn't have left the reservation. They play cards together and Nanapush mentions that Pauline has also returned home with a story. Fleur counters with the comment that Puyat people (Pauline's family) lie.

Nanapush explains to Lulu that Pauline was always unclassifiable as a person and uncomfortable to be around, so they tried to ignore her. He confirms that Pauline has a tendency to lie. He even wonders if Pauline is afflicted with mental illness of some sort, because her aunt says that Pauline has had visions. The people of the reservation speculate about how Fleur earned the money and why they never see her, and predict that she is pregnant—perhaps paid to disappear with the evidence of an affair inside of her, or even stolen from the father.

Nanapush then introduces Eli Kashpaw, who he describes as not the most industrious or educated of young men. Eli's mother Margaret tries to get him to go to church, but he's uninterested in that, too. Eli approaches Nanapush to teach him to hunt, though, and he grows so comfortable in the wild that he loses the basic skills to interact with humans, especially women. Eli asks Nanapush to teach him, also, how Nanapush was able to satisfy three wives in the days before the church banned such relationships. Eli has become interested in courting Fleur Pillager.

Eli tells Nanapush a story of hunting a doe in the woods, and injuring it, so that he must **track** the crippled animal. He follows the animal all day, eventually growing tired and failing to leave a trail back for himself, until eventually he is led to a fire where the deer has been already hung and split. Fleur stands there, gutting the deer herself. Eli tells Fleur that the doe is his, and Nanapush tells Eli that was the wrong decision. Eli insists on taking at least half, but Fleur ignores him as she works. Eli tells Nanapush how beautiful Fleur was to him despite her wildness, and mentions that the only curve on her gaunt body was her breasts, which surprises Nanapush, what with the rumors about her pregnancy. Nanapush warns Eli that Fleur is dangerous, and that Eli is not immune to her like Nanapush is.

The community realizes that Fleur managed to earn a significant amount of money while living in Argus, drawing more speculation as to how she was living there—if she might have been selling her body or stealing. Fleur's willingness to admit to Nanapush that she should have stayed on the reservation shows the closeness between these two characters, and shows that Nanapush trusts Fleur more than the story that Pauline, who he believes is a liar, has already told.



Despite the tribe's embrace of spiritual connection, Pauline's possible "visions" are rejected as suspect because they are not in line with what the others are familiar with. Pauline's liminal status in relation to the tribe makes it difficult for either Natives or whites to fully embrace her. More explanations for Fleur's money now appear, all of them seemingly easier to believe than the idea that a woman came by the money honestly.



While Eli is not judged as being conventionally ambitious, he does know what he wants, and he asks Nanapush to teach him how to get it. His embrace of the traditional hunting techniques is so all-consuming that he forgets the importance of human relationships, too. When he meets Fleur, who he believes lives a life similar to the traditional one he seeks for himself, he believes in the necessity of learning how to interact with humans.



Eli's commitment to following the footsteps of the doe mirrors the way he is then willing to track Fleur. He displays patience and openness with both, allowing the animal and Fleur to take the lead. When Fleur at first ignores Eli and his requests for the meat, this prompts him to take charge instead of waiting for her permission. Nanapush reprimands Eli because he believes in Fleur's powers to punish those who threaten her existence. Eli's mention of the lack of curve to Fleur's body that day suggests that she was not pregnant when she returned to the reservation, only that her dress was full of the money she'd earned and won in Argus.



Eli refuses this idea and tells of how he joined Fleur in butchering the animal. He finishes the job, hoists much of the meat into a tree, and then takes the choice parts into Fleur's cabin to prepare a meal for her. Fleur eats the whole heart of the deer by herself. Eli helps her to bed and then sleeps alone on the other side of the room. Nanapush tells Eli he should be happy he survived this encounter, but Eli says now he wants Fleur. Nanapush tells Eli to find a woman in town instead. Eli says he wants instructions instead of warnings, and Nanapush tells him that he'll need a love medicine to woo Fleur, but Eli says he doesn't want anything that can wear off.

Nanapush breaks down and tells Eli of his romantic history and what pleased his wives, but he does not mention his dead daughter, who was also named Lulu. Nanapush talks for a long time, telling all his stories, all connected so that there is no logical end. Nanapush says that this is the way he stayed alive in the year of sickness, by talking so much that death could not get a word in edgewise. Speaking of Fleur, Nanapush tells Eli, "It's like you're a log in a stream. Along comes this bear. She jumps on. Don't let her dig in her claws." Eli returns to Fleur and Nanapush assumes Eli is using his advice to keep Fleur off balance.

Eli's mother, Margaret, shows up to Nanapush's cabin to inform him of the rumors she's heard about her son's behavior. Nanapush attempts to ignore Margaret by continuing to read his newspaper. She swipes at the paper, but Nanapush knows she can't read and is shy of the "tracks" the newsprint will leave on her skin, because of the mystery inherent in the text.

Eventually Nanapush puts down the paper, and Margaret asks him where Eli learned all of the advanced lovemaking techniques her son was witnessed performing in the open woods (with Fleur). Margaret says she was told this information by Boy Lazarre, and Nanapush realizes that Margaret has paid Boy to spy for her. Margaret stalks off, furious, and Nanapush wonders if Fleur might be weaving a spell to attract Eli, as well.

Eli treats Fleur with respect from the beginning, offering her the best parts of the deer, and the way Fleur devoured the deer's heart shows her intense and powerful nature. Eli's display of respect continues when he opts to sleep on the other side of the room rather than taking advantage of being alone in the cabin with Fleur. Nanapush continues in his warnings about Fleur, suggesting that a love medicine could get Eli a short tryst with her, but Eli wants a companion for life, not a single night—and he might be punished by Fleur for taking advantage of her in any way.



Nanapush's talent for talking and telling the culture's stories proves useful to him throughout the book, though Nanapush recognizes that his audience often grows tired of listening. Nanapush sees this as his last vice, something common to old men who have lived through a lot and heard many stories. His advice to Fleur calls back to the Pillager clan marker, which featured a bear. The comparison of Eli to a log, aka a fallen tree, connects the men in the tribe to the slow deforestation happening around them.



The dynamic between Nanapush and Margaret at this point is playfully hostile. Margaret knows that Nanapush is the one who taught Eli to hunt, and so she assumes he is responsible for the other skills Eli has learned. While she doesn't have knowledge of these more traditional skills her son has learned from Nanapush, she also hasn't been formally educated as Nanapush has, and so is skeptical of all of the types of knowledge he bears, including the news from white civilization he gathers from his paper.



The balance of power in this situation relies on Nanapush putting down his paper to allow Margaret to speak. Margaret is reluctant to admit she paid one of the untrustworthy Lazarres to spy on her son, but Nanapush pushes her to admit the source of her information. Though the assumption is that Eli has seduced Fleur, Nanapush realizes that Fleur is powerful enough to have manipulated Eli in the same way.



Fleur and Eli continue with their bold displays of affection until the whole reservation is talking. Boy Lazarre returns from the woods one day, speaking gibberish, and people assume that Fleur saw him watching and punished him. Margaret returns to Nanapush to demand he take her to Fleur's cabin in his boat. Nanapush repairs his boat and he and Margaret set out at dawn. The water is cold, and Nanapush expresses trepidation because he is not a good swimmer. Margaret is resolved to make the journey, though, saying the lake monster can have her if he wants her so much. As Nanapush rows, Margaret must bail the water leaking into the boat the whole way to Fleur's cabin.

Boy Lazarre's incapacitated state is blamed on Fleur, but there are other reasons that might be the cause of Boy's disorientation. His lack of knowledge of the natural world could easily have allowed him to eat something that had an adverse effect. Margaret relies on Nanapush to transport her to her son, so she can see the situation for herself. She is unwilling to believe the word of another, especially another who seems so clearly separated from his wits. She tempts fate by suggesting that the lake monster can have her, so necessary is their journey to save her son, proven again in the fact that they don't turn around even when the leaky boat threatens to drown them in the freezing water.



Nanapush and Margaret repeatedly insult each other, but their interaction also grows flirtatious. Nanapush takes it too far and Margaret yanks his ears, sending him into a daze that lasts until Margaret returns from her visit to Fleur's cabin. Margaret throws some tobacco into the fitful waters as an offering and they head back, bailing and praying to the Manitous and the Blessed Virgin in alternation. They return to Nanapush's house and Margaret tells him that Fleur is clearly pregnant.

The nature of the insults Nanapush and Margaret exchange are mostly about the other's sexual activity and prowess, prompted by Margaret's concern over Eli's romantic overtures to Fleur and who he learned from (Nanapush). Margaret shows her balance of belief in both the native spirits and Christian God in the way she balances her prayers and offerings to both these entities. While no one was sure Fleur was pregnant before, Margaret is now certain, having observed Fleur's body. The possibility that it is Eli's child causes Margaret to search harder for an answer one way or another.



In the ensuing weeks, while Eli sets traps out on Pillager land, Margaret lays a trap of her own in her house, keeping the table well set until finally, in the winter, Pauline shows up while Nanapush is visiting. Pauline tells Margaret all that happened in Argus, though Nanapush is uncertain what is a lie, and notes that, for Pauline, lies almost become a kind of truth. Nanapush and Margaret spar again, making sexual innuendo that scares off Pauline before she's done talking.

The imagery of trapping draws parallels between the physical and mental skills needed to get by on the reservation. While Eli hunts for food and skins he might trade for other supplies, Margaret hunts for the truth, using food as bait. Margaret, hungry for more information and eager to learn that her son has no obligation to the powerful Fleur, wants to believe the story Pauline tells, but Nanapush is aware of Pauline's tendency to manipulate the truth. The attraction between Margaret and Nanapush is building in their exchanges here, turning insults into milder jokes.



Pauline has recently become Bernadette's assistant in preparing the dead for burial, and sometimes Pauline also sits with the dying, but Nanapush says he would rather die alone in the woods, like a dog, than have Pauline attend to him.

Nanapush's discomfort around Pauline is expressed in his statement that he wouldn't even want her company on his deathbed. Nanapush would prefer to die in nature rather than having someone like Pauline, who seems to perform this task under false pretenses, attend to him.



Pauline seems relieved to have finally shared her story. Margaret is happy to study all of the information, and is sure that Fleur's child must not be Eli's. She predicts the child will be born a demon of some sort, and that Eli will then return to Margaret.

Pauline's story seems to have temporarily convinced Margaret that the baby is not Eli's, though her theory still seems confused, as Margaret assumes the child will look like a demon with lake monster parentage, rather than a "half-blood" as Pauline's story implies.



One day Nector arrives home with a crippled heron that he says is a gift for Eli's wife. Margaret takes issue with the designation, but Eli says that what he has with Fleur is as good as marriage, and mother and son fight. Margaret's hope in keeping Eli close to her is driven by her need to be cared for in her old age, and Nector seems too drawn to the ways of the town to be reliable in this way. Margaret worries that she will not be able to boss Fleur around as she would like.

Nector believes that Eli and Fleur are living as man and wife, but Margaret's conversion to Catholicism does not acknowledge their relationship in this way. The communal nature of elder care in the tribe requires one of their sons to remain on the reservation to care for her, and Margaret wants to maintain her power, ruling over a daughter-in-law. She can see that Nector will leave the reservation, as he is interested in the ways of white civilization, and she can see that Fleur will not defer to Margaret when making decisions, so Fleur is not an ideal match for Eli.



Fleur's labor begins. Pauline runs to fetch Margaret, as she might be the grandmother. Nanapush paddles Margaret across the just-melting lake, as Margaret argues that she is not helping because of kinship, but only to see proof that the child is not Eli's. Nanapush later tells Lulu that the appearance of the child provided no proof of her parentage, though. He informs Lulu that she was born on the day Pauline shot the reservation's last **bear**, which was drunk on trader's wine.

Pauline, though now educated in preparing bodies for death, lacks knowledge in helping babies be born. Margaret and Nanapush again risk their lives trying to row across the lake in the hopes of helping Fleur's baby to be born. Despite Margaret's belief that the baby does not belong to Eli, she still wants proof, and so is willing to assist in the birth. In the telling of this story, though, Lulu's appearance does not prove her parentage. Lulu, a Pillager whose clan marker contains a bear, is born on the day the last bear dies, a comment on the way life continues even with the decimation of the tribe. The fact that the bear is drunk when he is shot is a clear symbol of the balance between both self-destruction and outside dangers.



Eli and Nanapush wait outside the cabin for over a day, and hear nothing from inside. They make a fire and fail to eat from worry and courtesy, respectively. Finally, on the afternoon of the second day, they hear the sound of the Manitou in Fleur's cries, and Nanapush speculates that perhaps the **bear** heard these calls as well. Eli, who has gotten drunk in his anxiety, slashes his arm and runs into the woods. Nanapush finally helps himself to some food, just as the bear shows up. Nanapush, weaponless, calls for help, but he only attracts the bear. Margaret marches up to the bear to intimidate it, but realizes she has no weapon either and returns inside, the bear following her.

Eli and Nanapush are not directly involved in the birth of the baby because they are men, and birth is considered a woman's job. Fleur's connection to the natural world is heard in her cries of pain, and Nanapush believes this is what summons the appearance of the bear, a sign of Fleur's clan. Eli is scared of the responsibilities of fatherhood, and so injures himself to absolve him of his responsibility in this moment. Nanapush, being a masculine figure, would be assumed to be the protector in this situation, but when the bear appears, he is caught weaponless, unable to defend the women inside the cabin. Margaret's confidence also proves ineffective.



Nanapush says he can only pass on what he hears happened in the house because he was not there. The **bear** rears on its hind legs and Fleur, filled with fear and power at the sight, gives birth. Pauline takes the gun down off the wall and shoots the bear point blank, but the lead of the shot only gives the bear strength, and the bear turns around and runs out of the house into the woods, leaving no **trail**, suggesting that it might have been a spirit bear. After this, it seems as though Fleur has died, but when the baby cries, Fleur opens her eyes and breathes again.

Father Damien appears the next day to secretly baptize the child, but Fleur hears what's happening and takes the baby before it can be named. Left outside with the priest, Nanapush says to name the child Lulu Nanapush.

The reliability of stories is again called into question here, suggesting that while what Nanapush says might be the truth, it might also be apocryphal because he did not witness it himself. The bear's threat to Fleur perhaps reminds her of the need to continue her family line, again forcing into stark contrast the significance of both birth and death. The fact that the bear leaves no trail and that it might be a spirit builds on the idea that Fleur is able to conjure the spirits to provide her what she needs in times of struggle.



Fleur's rejection of Catholicism allows Nanapush to name the baby, continuing his family line and honoring his own dead daughter. In her stark refusal to participate in Catholicism, Fleur accidentally allows her child to be signed away from her own family line. We now see why Nanapush had mentioned that Fleur played a crucial role in the continuation of his name.



CHAPTER 4: WINTER 1914-SUMMER 1917, MEEN-GEEZIS, BLUEBERRY SUN

Pauline reveals that she left Argus because the men haunt her dreams. Dutch James, the only survivor of the night of the tornado, ails in bed, slowly losing parts of his body due to frostbite and infection. Pauline's Aunt Regina suddenly loves him again, nursing him back to health, and he loves her for caring for him. Women from the church visit in endless streams, bringing dishes for them to eat. Eventually, when this parade of visitors ends, Dutch is just healed enough to actually marry Regina.

Bernadette Morrissey and her brother Napoleon visit Argus to trade for what they cannot supply themselves from their farm. They are wealthy from having acquired allotments from the hard-up Chippewa people. Napoleon, a known drunk, is well-regarded for having taken in his sister and her children, including her strapping son Clarence.

Pauline's Aunt Regina takes on a typically feminine roll in nursing Dutch back to health, as do the women from the church, who arrive with food prepared in the hopes of healing the man, but also possibly luring him away from Aunt Regina, the town having lost three of its eligible bachelors. While Dutch had avoided marrying Regina before his convalescence, he is now open to it, seeing that she was willing to care for him even when he was at his worst.



Despite his bad habits, Napoleon is seen as the honorable one in this situation, as he is the one who owns the land—but Bernadette is the one who does the work maintaining the farm, keeping a close eye on the financial records, and looking after her brother, showing the inequity of gender roles.



The Morrissey farm is large and has a variety of crops and animals. Sophie is the older of Bernadette's daughters, and Philomena the younger. Pauline tells Bernadette that her Aunt Regina and Dutch had beaten her when she lived with them in Argus, and this lie convinces Bernadette to pity her and take her in. Bernadette teaches Pauline how to read and write, and keeps the financial books for the farm during the late hours that she sits with the dying. Napoleon soon shows interest in Pauline, though she tries not to encourage him.

Pauline's habit of lying appears in moments when the lies will benefit or protect her. Bernadette is a responsible, caring woman who takes in Pauline, while also realizing that she could use a hand in her own work caring for the dying. People assume she has great patience, but her appreciation of the quiet hours spent with the dying is also practical, as the silence allows her to focus on the finances of the farm. When Pauline begins to receive Napoleon's attentions, she refuses them, but hints that she might be somewhat flattered.



Pauline at first feels lighter since telling the story of what happened in Argus to Margaret, but after she shares this information she begins to dream of Fleur. Pauline then reveals that it was she who locked the men inside the meat shed before the storm, though Fleur was blamed for it. Pauline tries to use a dream catcher to quiet her dreams, but it doesn't work.

Pauline believes that telling Fleur's story will relieve her of her responsibility in what happened, but this proves not to be the case, as it's revealed that Pauline had not told the whole truth at all. Pauline attempts to use a Native tool to comfort herself, but her guilt is too strong and her faith in the old ways too weak.



When Mary Pepewas dies in Pauline's company, Pauline is finally able to rest again. Pauline goes with Bernadette to Mary's house, and when it is time to take her turn sitting with the dying young woman, she gets the feeling that Mary wants to be gone—so Pauline cuts the rope, "frayed down to a string," hanging in the air between them. Pauline again feels a lightness, as she levitates and experiences death as a form of grace. Bernadette finds Pauline resting in a tree later that morning, shocked at how she might have gotten there.

Pauline discovers that she has the power to end a person's life by spiritually cutting the thread of life holding the girl's spirit to this world, an echo of the Fates of Greek myth. Pauline does not do this as an act of mercy so much as an act that provides herself with a sense of power. After taking this action, Pauline has a vision of lightness, but the next morning Bernadette finds her in a tree, suggesting that Pauline's vision might have been a psychological break that caused her to climb the tree, a place that she associates with the bodies of her dead family who could not be buried. (Or this might be another moment of characters being affected by magic or spiritual powers.)



After this night, Pauline feels as though she has become holy, learning how to prepare the dead and, instead of washing it off of her, passing this form of grace on to others. Her treatment of the dead and dying becomes an almost selfish way for her to find peace. Speaking of the reservation again, Pauline says that Misshepeshu is benevolent for a time. She sees the light of his eyes in Lulu, but also sees the Kashpaw nose on her face (suggesting that Eli might be her father). Pauline tells how Margaret was unable to resist the lure of her granddaughter, and takes up residence in Fleur's cabin to help raise Lulu. Pauline continues to visit the cabin, but she gets the sense that they don't like her, as though Pauline has told some lie about them.

Pauline's experience on this night, though seemingly tied to her native religion if anything, of deepens her faith in Christianity. Pauline rejects the Native need to wash the residue of the dead off of her skin, and she protectively holds onto this connection with the afterlife. Pauline still has a desire to remain connected to the Pillager and Kashpaw families living on Matchimanito, despite her judgment of them, though they clearly distrust her. Pauline is unable to reconcile her own disavowal of native life with the way the Pillagers and Kashpaws reject her intrusion.



Pauline can feel the electricity between Eli and Fleur, and it spurs a jealous lust in her as well. Pauline thinks of finding herself a husband, and becomes receptive to Napoleon's advances. Napoleon tells Pauline to meet him at an abandoned house in the woods, where he undresses her and criticizes how thin she is. They embrace, but do not consummate their relationship. Napoleon stops, "like a dog sensing the presence of a tasteless poison in its food."

When Pauline and Napoleon wake at the morning light, they try to have sex again. Gossip about them begins immediately, with people laughing at the pair. Clarence tells Pauline that Napoleon has headed south to sell some horses, but Pauline says he'll be back. She sees that Clarence is the one she ought to have pursued, but she knows he wouldn't have had her.

A year passes as Pauline continues to assist Bernadette, sometimes going out on her own to attend to the dead, and people recognize her as a sign that someone is dying. She also continues to visit Fleur's cabin, hoping to soak up some of the attraction between Eli and Fleur in lieu of experiencing such feelings herself. She feels that Fleur acts coldly toward her, while she is attracted to Eli's heat. Pauline thinks that Eli might feel the same, and allows herself to touch him, but Eli snatches her hand away, causing her to hate him while still feeling the attraction.

One night Pauline dreams of Eli, and awakes next to Sophie, noticing how beautiful she is. She comes up with a plan. Pauline can imagine herself in Sophie's form. She buys fabric to make Sophie a new dress, fitting it tightly to her form. Bernadette doesn't pay attention to Pauline's interest in Sophie, because she is busy running the farm and attending to the returned Napoleon.

One day Bernadette stumbles on Napoleon cornering Pauline behind the barn. Pauline escapes, changing the subject to suggest that they hire another man to help on the farm, specifying Eli. When Pauline returns to the Pillager cabin, Fleur tells her Eli is in the woods. Pauline tells Fleur about the opportunity at the Morrissey farm, and Fleur jokes that that is where Pauline is staying. Pauline feels certain that Eli and Fleur must have been laughing about Pauline's advances together. Fleur says she'll pass on the message to Eli.

One of the reasons that Pauline seems drawn to the cabin is because of her interest in the attraction between Eli and Fleur, something she has never experienced herself. Her awareness of their magnetism makes her open to Napoleon's interest, but Napoleon seems to sense that there is something wrong about Pauline that stops him from proceeding.



The gossip of the people in the town worries Pauline far more than gossip worries any of the Pillagers or Kashpaws. Pauline seems acutely aware of how she is seen, and this must be at least partially related to her tendency to lie, as she attempts to save her reputation when her actions contradict her beliefs.



Pauline as a character here literally becomes a symbol of death. Her body is read by others as a Grim Reaper-type figure, heralding someone's imminent loss of life. Pauline continues to embrace this power, as previously she had felt entirely invisible. Pauline, so ensconced in the attraction between Fleur and Eli, doesn't realize that she has no place in the dynamic exchanged between them. She lies even to herself in trying to convince herself that Eli might feel the same way.



Pauline knows that she remains invisible sexually to men, but she can see the power of attraction in her roommate Sophie. She begins to plot her revenge on Eli for rebuffing her advance, by manipulating Sophie. Pauline's ability to "inhabit" others suggests that she is out of touch with reality, or that her imagination is very strong, or that she can tap into some of the powers those like Fleur have access to.



Pauline is embarrassed that Bernadette has caught her in her affair with Napoleon, but rather than admitting to it and suggesting they find a way to proceed according to the Catholic church, Pauline refocuses their interaction on the revenge she is plotting against Eli. Pauline is perhaps even more embarrassed that Fleur clearly knows about Pauline's attraction to Eli, and that Fleur remains totally unthreatened.



Two days later, Eli shows up at the Morrisseys' to work. Pauline has acquired a sack of medicine powder from Moses, who forces Pauline to tell him her plan—which is to snare Eli—even though she knows Moses will certainly tell Fleur. Pauline plans to bake the concoction into Eli's lunch. On the first day, Pauline sees Eli and Sophie interact and knows that her plan is possible to execute. Pauline encourages Sophie, calling out how Eli looks at her. Sophie begins to bring Eli treats. Napoleon teases her, and Clarence vows to kill Eli if he lays a hand on her.

When the day comes, Sophie heads out of the kitchen with a water jug, a loaf of doctored bread, and a block of butter. Pauline sneaks out to watch, imagining herself into Sophie's body and controlling the girl's actions. Sophie lifts her dress and straddles Eli, and he carries her to the water. Pauline follows, and Sophie and Eli have sex. Eventually Pauline allows them to stop. She sees men approach over the hill, and Eli darts out of the water.

Pauline then reveals herself and tells Sophie to go home or she'll be punished, but Sophie collapses and Pauline has to drag her home. At the Morrisseys', Pauline shows Bernadette the evidence of what happened on the dress, and Sophie confirms. Clarence loads his gun, arguing about wanting to go pay a visit to Eli, but eventually he goes to sleep, unsure of what has happened.

Pauline worries she has gone too far and that Eli might know she had something to do with the seduction, but she knows that Eli cannot betray her crime without revealing his own crime to Fleur. The next day Pauline reveals to Bernadette that she did witness what happened, but that Sophie made the first move. Bernadette goes inside to whip Sophie, and Pauline feels the beating too. Pauline goes in and stops Bernadette from continuing, and Bernadette breaks down in tears. Sophie tells Pauline it is she who should ask for God's mercy, and calls Pauline "death's bony whore." This comment prompts Bernadette to send Sophie far away to live with a pious aunt. Sophie jumps from the cart soon after she departs, however, and runs, as though out of her own control, toward Fleur's cabin.

Pauline is not above falling back on tradition and Native medicine to ensure the success of Sophie's flirtations and Pauline's overall plan. The men in the family are far more aware of the potential threat Eli poses, while Bernadette sees Eli and Sophie's interactions as more harmless.



Pauline imagines herself out of her own body and into Sophie's so that she can experience the sensation of having sex with Eli. It is not just an empathetic identification that Pauline performs, though, so much as a measure of control over the tryst, forcing them to continue until she allows them to stop, when she knows they will be caught by people who will make the affair known, absolving herself of the necessity to gossip about what's happened.



Pauline acts as though she has no responsibility, even chastising Sophie for something she clearly is partly guilty of. Sophie does not lie or try to hide what happens, but admits to her misdeeds, showing a greater honor than Pauline. While his initial instinct is to defend Sophie's honor, Clarence will not commit violence against a man whom he's uncertain is in the wrong, also showing a greater honor than Pauline's duplicity.



Pauline's ability to imagine herself into Sophie's body is not limited to the sensual interaction between Sophie and Eli, as she also feels the punishment delivered by Bernadette. Her feeling of this punishment has important repercussions, as Pauline seeks out other forms of self-humiliation to identify herself with Christ's suffering as the novel continues. While Pauline halts Bernadette in her action, this shouldn't be read as a charitable act, as Pauline is ultimately stopping her own suffering in this moment. Sophie suffers more for calling Pauline a name that is harsh, realizing that Pauline goaded her into seducing Eli.



Sophie kneels, as if possessed, outside Fleur's cabin. Pauline arrives and tries to break Sophie's trance. Fleur tells her there's no need to do that. She tells Pauline that Eli is on the trapline. Pauline says that the last time she saw him, Eli was running away from Sophie, naked, and so he must be hiding from Fleur. Margaret emerges to try to force-feed Sophie some broth, but the girl's mouth won't open. They go inside, and sometime later in the night, they hear Sophie's body topple over. Fleur refuses to bring her in, insisting that Margaret instead cover her with a blanket. Meanwhile, Pauline finds herself sleepless again. In the morning Sophie still kneels stiffly in the pouring rain. Margaret constructs a rudimentary structure around the girl.

Eli returns with six ducks on a string, and still Sophie does not move. Eli gathers his courage and enters the cabin. Fleur ignores him, continuing to cook some venison, and flinching from him when he tries to touch her. Eli leaves and returns to the woods when he realizes that Fleur knows what he's done. Pauline returns to the Morrisseys'. Clarence slips out and Napoleon approaches Pauline, reaching into her blouse to touch her back. Pauline tells him that they have Sophie out on the Pillager land. Pauline then hears as Clarence and Napoleon stomp down the road. Pauline eats dinner and then follows in their **tracks**.

The Morrissey men are unable to move Sophie, no matter how hard they try. The men leave, and Pauline stays to assess that Sophie has not changed since she left Fleur's cabin, aside from Margaret having built a small fire to keep the girl warm. Clarence and Napoleon run to the church, rouse the priest, and Clarence grabs the statue of the Virgin Mary from the church's niche. A nun in the church chases after them, but Clarence makes it all the way to Sophie. Then he can't figure out what to do next. The nun arrives and orders Clarence to surrender, and begins to pray as Clarence shines the Virgin's gaze on the huddled Pauline and Sophie. The nun beats Clarence with her robe until he withdraws.

A vision then appears to Pauline and Sophie, of the Virgin crying, but Pauline refuses to reveal what she saw to anyone else after the event, believing it was meant for Sophie alone. Sophie tries to stand, but falls in the snow and Clarence hauls her up. Napoleon and the priest arrive in the clearing, but no one observes Pauline scoop up the Virgin's hardened tears from the ground. She puts them in her skirt pocket, but her legs melt them back to water. Pauline imagines that the Virgin cried because she had never known the pleasure of men, but that she realized it was the opposite, as Pauline spends each night with the comfort of Napoleon's warm body—the Virgin had experienced the same sensation, but in the exponentially greater power of God's embrace.

Sophie's actions are assumed to be the result of a spell Fleur has placed on the girl, though it could be that Sophie is doing this to prove her devotion to Eli or repentance to Fleur. Margaret's sympathy for the girl is much greater than Fleur's, as she tries to feed and shelter the young woman. The effect of this situation on Pauline again sends her into a fit of sleeplessness. The unrest seems to occur when Pauline acts immorally, only abating when Pauline performs more selfless acts that begin to negate the harm she's done. Eli is afraid of the repercussions of his actions, and hides from Fleur.



Eli returns to Fleur with an offering, much in the same way that the Native characters make offerings to nature when they need extra protection. Clarence seems complicit in Napoleon's desire for Pauline, leaving the room so they can be alone together. Pauline only tells them of the whereabouts of their sister as a way of deflecting Napoleon's attentions. The fact that she eats dinner before following after them shows a lack of concern over how they might try to punish Eli.



The fact that the girl is unmovable even by the two adult men suggests that she is indeed being controlled by some force larger than herself. The men's attempt at addressing this power is to steal the statue of Mary as a counter to the Native forces holding her in place, but this necessitates Clarence committing a theft to perform this action, against the wishes of the nun. Clarence is still tied to the idea of a physical object's presence being the best antidote to a Manitou controlled by Fleur.



Pauline thinks that because she saw the vision of the Virgin crying that Sophie must also have seen the same, even going so far as to believe that the vision was meant to save Sophie, and not herself, as Sophie slowly comes back to her senses after the vision. Because the tears that Pauline collects melt in her pocket, Pauline has nothing to prove what she's seen, relegating her vision to another story that, if told, would need to be blindly believed from the mouth of someone who has proven untrustworthy. Pauline justifies her relations with Napoleon as being similar to the way Mary joined herself with God.



CHAPTER 5: FALL 1917-SPRING 1918, MANITOU-GEEZIS, STRONG SPIRIT SUN

Eli arrives at Nanapush's house with an offering of some provisions, in the hopes that Nanapush will take him in. Nanapush offers him some gopher stew, but Eli declines, sitting in silence. Nanapush looks through his mail, a new service provided to the reservation. Eli mutters to himself, and Nanapush tells Eli to tend to the fire. Eli pities himself aloud, and Nanapush tells him it might be better if he showed some remorse. Eli claims he was bewitched, but Nanapush warns him that Fleur will only think him weak if he uses that excuse.

Nanapush changes the subject to ask Eli what he will do with the cash he is offered for his land allotment, and Eli responds that he will spend it on liquor. Nanapush knows Eli is being dramatic, but he reminds him that if Eli sells his land, he'll have nowhere to live.

Eli eats the gopher stew and grimaces at the foul taste. He tells Nanapush that he wishes Fleur were a member of the church, because then he could simply ask for forgiveness.

Nanapush reflects on how the Anishinabe land is slowly being whittled down and sold, and how few of the tribespeople can read the papers that they sign with only a thumbprint or an "x." Nanapush had worked as a government interpreter as a young man, until he told an Indian not to sign a treaty that would concentrate the Ojibwe people, and he was fired. Nanapush knows that Eli cannot understand the tribe's current situation or history in the way that he does. He invites Eli to sleep on his floor tonight, but says that he should return home as soon as possible to be sure his family has enough food. Eli says Fleur knows how to fish in the ice, and that she's a good shot besides.

After six days of putting Eli up, Nanapush has had enough of Eli eating his cupboard bare. On the seventh day, Nanapush hands him his gun and Eli heads north. Nanapush checks his traps but finds nothing, and he ponders what he might do for food for the end of this long winter. He lies down and blackens his face with a piece of charcoal, and begins to pray. He has a vision of Eli's **tracks** in the snow and knows that he is wandering around aimlessly. The sound of Nanapush's prayer awakens Eli to the fact that the conditions are perfect for hunting moose. Eli returns to a spot where he had spotted some moose tracks and begins to follow a moose at a distance. Nanapush continues his song of prayer while Eli prepares his final approach.

Eli again makes an offering upon his arrival, following traditional customs. When Nanapush tells Eli to tend the fire, he means it both literally and figuratively. He is suggesting Eli cultivate his own strong feelings to use them productively toward atoning for his wrongs, rather than wasting energy on being angry or self-pitying.



Nanapush, having been reminded of the threat of government while looking at his mail, reminds Eli of the threat to his land, and tries to convince him that no amount of money is worth trading in the land. Eli's petulant response shows he's only trying to get a rise out of Nanapush, rather than thinking reasonably in this moment.



In the absence of the game animals that once were reliable, the Native characters are forced to eat things like gopher stew.



Nanapush has a much clearer understanding of the threats the tribe is under because of his understanding written English, a skill that most of his fellow tribe members don't possess. At his job he tried to provide guidance to the people he knew were accidentally making a decision they would later regret, but this gesture was not appreciated by the government. Nanapush is still old-fashioned enough to suggest a family needs to be provided for by the male, but Eli knows well enough that this is not the case with Fleur.



The winter has lingered, and Nanapush has not been able to provide for himself via his usual method of trapping. He hopes that Eli will return with something for them to eat, and performs a ritual, imagining Eli and sending him strength. Nanapush's song travels a distance far enough that Eli cannot be literally hearing it, but instead is hearing it in a more spiritual or magical way. Eli knows well the importance of following tracks, and listens in Nanapush's song for guidance on what he should do, eventually tuning into his intuition about the land and realizing what the conditions of the earth are pointing to.



Nanapush mentally reminds Eli not to startle the moose because its adrenaline would sour the meat. When the animal lies down to rest after eating, Eli shoots it dead. Eli turns over the animal and slices its belly. He eats a small piece of its liver for strength and buries another piece of it in the snow as an offering. He saves the rest for Nanapush. Eli butchers the animal and ties as many of the pieces of meat to his body as he can, burying the rest in the snow or hoisting it into the trees. Eli walks back slowly, aware that if he walks quickly and begins to sweat he will die of hypothermia. Nanapush beats a drum to the rhythm of Eli's footsteps to call him back.

Nanapush meets Eli on his return, and removes the meat from his body—it has all frozen into Eli's shape. Nanapush eats the liver Eli saved him, wraps him in a blanket, and places him near the stove to thaw. Nanapush prepares the kidneys and heart and feeds them to Eli and himself. Nanapush tells Eli he regards him as a son. Eli says that he knows he cannot stay away from Fleur. When he returned after the incident with Sophie, Fleur would not speak to him, touch him, or cook for him, and after three days of this, Eli finds himself more attracted to her than ever.

Eli tells Nanapush that one night Fleur slipped out of the cabin and Eli followed her to the lake. Fleur entered the icy water, but didn't re-emerge. Eli jumped in to try to save her, but he couldn't find her and gave up, falling asleep on the shore. When he woke up much later, Fleur emerged from the water. Eli is convinced that Fleur's rejection of his advances is caused by her copulating with the lake monster Misshepesu. Eli thinks Fleur is pregnant, but not by him.

Nanapush tells Eli that he is foolish and ungrateful. Nanapush says that Eli must start over with Fleur to win her back, this time by humbling himself to her. Eli falls asleep and wakes up refreshed, trekking out twice to bring the rest of the moose meat to Fleur and collapsing under the weight of his burden. Fleur insults him, but Nanapush tells him this is a good sign.

Eli shows respect to the moose he is hunting in allowing the moose to finish eating and relax before shooting it, maintaining the quality of the meat and allowing the animal some peaceful final moments. Eli also shows respect for his elders in saving part of the liver, the most prized piece of meat, for Nanapush. Eli exhibits natural intelligence and knowledge of hunting and life in the wild in the way he brings back the meat in the freezing cold.



The way the meat of the moose is frozen in Eli's shape serves as a reminder of the way humans, too, are meat and prey vulnerable to the natural world. Humans are an element of nature, instead of just a force acting on it, though this power balance can easily be tipped. Nanapush extends his sense of family, having lost his biological relatives, when he tells Eli that he thinks of him as his son. Eli, despite his hope that he could conquer his will, knows that Fleur's power over him is stronger than his own self-control, and so he must find a way for her to take him back.



Eli tells Nanapush a story that absolves him of the responsibility for Fleur's rejection, blaming the lake monster rather than himself for her anger. His belief is so strong that he distrusts whether the child Fleur is pregnant with is his own. No longer enjoying the warm embrace of Fleur's affection, Eli has adopted the fearful superstitions of Fleur that the other tribe members believe.



Nanapush, the closest thing Eli has to a father, now advises him that to win back Fleur he must do the opposite of what Nanapush had previously counseled him to do, and Eli accepts his instructions, willing to sacrifice his masculinity to win back Fleur's love. Fleur appears to take the bait, relishing in her power—and at least acknowledging Eli's presence by insulting him.



Nanapush says the rift between the people of the tribe grows after the incident between Eli and Sophie, expanding to include the differing opinions about money and settlements. Nanapush, Margaret, and Lulu go to church, where Father Damien is happy to finally see Nanapush. At church Nanapush thinks about how he is more grateful for the old Manitous than for the Christian God, and Lulu dozes.

The rift Nanapush refers to is specific to the division between the Pillager/Kashpaw/ Nanapush tribe members and the Morrissey/ Lazarre tribe members. The Morrisseys and Lazarres have been happy to capitalize on the ignorance of the other tribe members who have sold their land for very little, while the others have been trying only to save what little land they still possess. Nanapush, despite attending church, maintains his Native beliefs, and Lulu also shows little interest in Catholicism.



After mass they head home in the dark, and realize that Boy Lazarre and Clarence Morrissey are following them in the snow. The Lazarre and Morrissey families have recently come together over a land agreement with the lumber company. The two men pass them and Nanapush has a bad feeling. He tries to convince Margaret to turn around and go to his cabin, but she wants to go on to her own.

Nanapush knows that the ill will between the two factions of the tribe goes beyond disagreement about the land, and senses that the Morrisseys and Lazarres are not so honorable that they won't enact physical revenge for Eli having dishonored Sophie, perhaps also addressing their issues with the sale of land in the process.



Boy and Clarence then jump out to grapple with Margaret and Nanapush, and Lulu runs off. Margaret bites Boy Lazarre, giving him a wound that will later kill him. Clarence wrestles Nanapush to the ground and knocks him half conscious, throwing him in a wheelbarrow to take him to the Morrissey barn. Nanapush regains consciousness tied to the center pole of the barn, and he sees Margaret tied to a stall. Nanapush tells the men to let them go, and says he won't tell his cousin Pukwan. Nanapush lies, saying he'll sign the papers if they let them go.

Boy and Clarence show no qualms about attacking two people significantly older than them, having discarded tribal respect for elders in an attempt to avenge the wrong done to their family. Nanapush is unable to protect Margaret with his physical prowess, but attempts to use his intelligence to outsmart the foolish men, promising to sign over the land if they'll spare them their lives.



Nanapush realizes that this is not just about land, but about Clarence wanting to humiliate Margaret in the same way that Eli has humiliated his sister Sophie. Nanapush tries to discourage them from assaulting Margaret by lying and saying that she is like his wife, so they'll have to kill him, too, which will only further anger Pukwan. Clarence says that Pukwan has gone to fight in the war, but Nanapush says he'll return looking for the money Nanapush owes him. Clarence says that Pukwan is in favor of the sell-off. Nanapush warns them that any harm done to Margaret will be punished by Fleur's cursing of men who do her wrong. Clarence appears skeptical, but it's clear Boy believes.

Nanapush decides to lie in the service of trying to save both of their lives, a reasonable concession to make that doesn't pose too great a threat to his honor. Nanapush continues to push the influence of the dangerous yet absent Pukwan, but the men insist they know better than Nanapush what Pukwan would want. Finally, as a last resort, Nanapush warns against the spiritual powers of Fleur, a reputation he isn't necessarily committed to spreading.



Margaret taunts the men, saying, "Come near...Let me teach you how to die!" Margaret then sings a shrill death song. Clarence knocks out Nanapush. When Nanapush wakes up, he sees that Boy has sliced off Margaret's braids and now shaves the rest of her scalp, careful not to shed a drop of blood. The men stuff the braids into Nanapush's mouth as a gag.

Between the two, Margaret is more aggressive than Nanapush here, and calls back to the Native death song to try to intimidate the men, who are less aware of the traditions and thus might be more frightened by their mystery. The men shaving Margaret's head has an echo of the practice of "scalping," but the men do not go so far as to kill her, only dishonoring her in their actions.



When they are finally freed, Margaret calls out for Lulu, but they find her safe, sitting with Nector at Margaret's house. The kids ask where Margaret's hair is and Nanapush pulls it from his pocket, ashamed that he wasn't able to prevent the men from cutting it. Margaret is happy he saved the braids. Nector vows to get revenge with Eli, but Eli is tending to his traps in an attempt to reconcile with Fleur. Margaret doesn't shame Nanapush, but when she sees her reflection in her mirror, she vows to take a knife to the men. Nanapush admits having the same thought, telling Nector he'll have to work with him instead of with Eli, and that they'll need to find an old Anishinabe way to get their revenge.

Nanapush thinks hard on how they'll do it, eventually thinking of a plan when they return to Fleur's cabin. Margaret tells Fleur what happened, and Fleur wordlessly shaves her own head in solidarity and then goes out hunting, not waiting "for night to cover her **tracks**." Nanapush plans carefully, realizing he is now attracted to Margaret. "When I hunt," he tells Nector, "I prefer to let my game catch itself." He then reveals his plan to set snares which kill slowly and will allow Boy and Clarence to consider what they've done wrong. Nanapush cuts two of the end wires out of the church piano to use in the trap.

Fleur goes to town with her newly bald head, and Clarence and Boy run from her in fear. Fleur visits the Morrissey house, touching random items and sprinkling powder on the stove. Fleur then cuts off a hank of Clarence's hair and chases Boy to the barn, where she cuts his hair, fingernails, and eyelashes into a square of flour sack. Afterward, Boy cries for days as an infection in the wound Margaret gave him climbs up his arm. Nanapush and Nector finally set the snare near Boy's shack. They wait outside in the cold for hours, and Nector asks questions about the land and the associated fees. Finally, Clarence appears and steps right into the noose. His flailing legs just barely straddle the hole that's been dug beneath the snare though, and so he remains precariously balanced and alive.

Nanapush and Nector reveal themselves to Clarence, but Nanapush can't bring himself to kill him, and he and Nector walk away, leaving Clarence frozen in place. After Boy cuts Clarence from the tree, Clarence's mouth droops on one side, a constant reminder of what happened. Nanapush buys Margaret a black hood that looks like a coal bucket, and they begin to warm to each other.

Lulu showed instinctive smarts in running home when her grandparents were attacked. Nanapush shows a sensitivity in knowing that the braids would matter to Margaret even after they've been cut off her head. The entire family's instinct for revenge, including Margaret, comes alive in this moment, but Nanapush takes charge, committing himself to doing so with more traditional methods that necessitate cunning rather than modern weapons or brute strength.



Nanapush is able to tap into the Anishinabe methods of revenge best when on Pillager land, the location most closely tied to their heritage. Fleur's show of solidarity with the way the men have humiliated Margaret draws the two women closer together. Fleur also feels the need to prove her lack of intimidation by going out and hunting, even when the men might still pose a threat. Nanapush plans to force the men to acknowledge the dishonorable way they've acted, and Nanapush stealing the wire shows that he seeks his own individual way for the church to be useful in his life.



Clarence and Boy see Fleur's bald head as a threat to their well-being, as it shows that she knows what they've done to Margaret and she will likely seek revenge. The fact that she willingly shaved her head also takes away the power of what they did to Margaret against her will. They are so afraid of Fleur that they believe her simple touch is a curse on the items in the Morrissey home. Her removal of their hair and nails is assumed to be for some sort of spell that will bring harm to them.



Clarence is left with a physical reminder on his body showing that Nanapush and Nector easily could have killed him, a mark of humiliation that all can see.



Father Damien asks if Nanapush and Margaret will marry, and Nanapush tries to shock him by saying they're already having relations. Even so, Father Damien asks Nanapush to make a confession, and Nanapush isn't shy with the details. Father Damien stops him and gives him his penance. Nanapush admits also to the attack on Clarence and tells the priest that he used the wire from the church's piano to do it. Father Damien says the discord between the tribespeople must stop, and Nanapush offers to return the wire to him. At the trading post later, Nanapush and Fleur run into Boy, who, scared, steps backward into a row of traps set as demonstration, killing him.

Winter continues, but Nanapush's traps remain empty, and they run out of moose meat. Margaret tries to convince Nanapush to live at her place because her cellar is full of preserved food, but Nanapush just tells her to go bring them back to his cabin. If she wants to continue their relationship, he says, she'll need to feed him. Margaret points out the gaps in the log walls, and Nanapush tells her to stuff something in them. She then goes to open Nanapush's third wife's trunk, but he tries to stop her.

Margaret runs outside with some of the items in the trunk, and Nanapush hears tearing. He goes outside, ready to beat Margaret for her transgressions, but sees that it's her own skirt she is ripping. Margaret threatens him and Nanapush insults Margaret's bald head, but realizes right away that her lack of hair actually gives her power because of the way she saved him that night. Margaret leaves, and Nanapush doesn't see her for weeks.

Nanapush becomes depressed in Margaret's absence. He grows so weak he cannot stand, and has a dream he previously had at the time his family died. He imagines himself one tree among many, tall and strong, that topple at the firing of a single gunshot. Now, the tree weakens and bends toward the earth.

When the snow thaws, it's Margaret who wakes Nanapush with a spoonful of berries. Lulu is there too, with a new pair of patent leather shoes tied to her belt because they're too fancy to wear. Eli had trapped a family of minks and sold the furs for the shoes, flour, a blanket, and bullets. Nanapush tells them not to waste food on him, and flirts with Margaret. They all live in Nanapush's cabin together until the weather turns.

Nanapush enjoys reacting against the conservative values of the church as a way of establishing himself as reluctant to convert wholeheartedly to their system of beliefs. The priest responds with composure until Nanapush goes so far as to reveal the real harm he almost caused, and draws a line where Nanapush's wrongs are no longer a light-hearted joke. Even Father Damien can see that the conflicts within the tribe are aiding in the dissolution of the community.



Though Margaret and Nanapush are finding some affection for one another, they are both stubborn and neither one will make a concession to move to the other's home permanently. Margaret tries to reason with Nanapush, showing that his home is inferior in both its store of food and its construction, which Nanapush acknowledges good-naturedly, but Margaret goes too far when she opens Nanapush's wife's trunk, something he holds sacred.



Nanapush shows a sign of aggressive, misogynist tendencies that haven't been displayed in the book up until this point, proving the importance of the trunk to him. This threat and his insult of her pushes Margaret to withhold her affection from Nanapush as punishment.



Nanapush's identification with the trees that are being slowly cleared from the reservation land is a metaphor that continues throughout the book. Nanapush feels very closely tied to the earth, and the threats posed to his environment are clearly reflected in his body, especially when he is not bolstered by the presence of other tribe members.



Margaret finally returns to Nanapush to save him a second time with the preserves she'd previously withheld from him. Lulu's fancy shoes are a sign of her interest in white civilization, but her parents won't allow her to wear them because they are impractical in their current life. Margaret agrees to live in Nanapush's cabin only until he's recovered.



Eli returns to Fleur and she accepts him back. People fish through the ice on the surface of Lake **Matchimanito** and hear cries of pleasure from within Fleur's cabin, though no one ever emerges. The sounds of happiness bring hope to the people fishing on the lake.

When Fleur and Eli reunite, the other people around them are relieved, because they believe Fleur poses less of a threat to them when she is happy. The positive effect of the reunion is also seen in the reaction of the lake monster, who allows to the people to safely fish and provide for themselves as the winter ends.



CHAPTER 6: SPRING 1918-WINTER 1919, PAYAETONOOKAEDAED-GEEZIZ, WOOD LOUSE SUN

Pauline realizes she is pregnant, but doesn't know when she might be due. Pauline has already committed herself to God, so she tries to cause herself to miscarry. Bernadette catches her doing this and stops her. Pauline reveals that it is Napoleon's child, and Bernadette says she'll take the baby. Pauline declines, asking Bernadette to help her abort the child, but Bernadette reminds Pauline that this is a mortal sin.

Despite Pauline's commitment to the Catholic faith, she is again concerned with what others think of her, and is willing to act against her faith to save her reputation. Even though Bernadette offers to keep Pauline's secret and raise the child, Pauline would still prefer to commit what is considered a mortal sin in the Catholic Church.



Pauline and Bernadette plan to hide the pregnancy as long as Pauline promises not to try to stop the pregnancy again. Pauline struggles with this, knowing that Moses Pillager could make a potion to cause her to lose the child. Bernadette watches Pauline closely, though, and she complies. Pauline knows the child will be a girl, and Bernadette says her name will be Marie, after the Virgin, but Pauline thinks the child is more the spawn of Satan.

Pauline is finally sufficiently shamed by Bernadette into keeping the baby, but Pauline still thinks of the old native ways that might help eliminate the problem of her pregnancy. The child is named after the Virgin, a sign of Bernadette's commitment to raise the child in the Catholic Church, but Pauline blames Napoleon for her pregnancy, and views him as a Satanic figure of temptation, and so she thinks the child must also be evil.



Bernadette also insists that Napoleon not show his face to Pauline, and makes him stay in the barn. Pauline watches him eat from her window and then listens to him play his fiddle, a sound that is painful for her to hear. Sophie and Philomena dance to the music, growing thin as Pauline grows more and more pregnant.

Even though Pauline sees Napoleon as demonic, she finds it painful to be separated from him and also painful to be reminded of him. Napoleon's joy while playing the fiddle is upsetting to Pauline, as she is sequestered and forced to live with the discomfort of her body, incubating a baby she doesn't want.



Fall comes, and the men gather the last of the wheat. The armistice bells clang, keeping Pauline awake. She goes into labor, Bernadette coaching her through, but Pauline realizes that she doesn't want to let the child go because she'll be lonelier without her. She tries to hold the child inside of her.

The armistice bells signal the end of World War I. Fall signals the approaching winter, the season that is always the most challenging. Pauline, who tried to rid herself of the baby, now wants to hold onto the child.



Pauline tells Bernadette that she wants herself and the child to die so that the baby won't be tainted by original sin. Bernadette leaves the room and returns with a coil of rope and two cooking spoons. Bernadette ties Pauline's arms and legs to the bed, and then uses the spoons to grasp the child's head and pull. Pauline sees the bruises left by the spoons and says she has been marked by the devil's thumbs. Bernadette hands the baby to Pauline to try to feed, but Pauline refuses. She leaves the house as soon as she is well enough, and goes to the convent.

Despite Pauline having acknowledged to herself that she'd feel lonely without the baby inside of her, the explanation she gives to Bernadette is tied to religion. Bernadette is resourceful in delivering the baby and refuses to allow Pauline to kill herself and the child. Even when the child is born, Pauline looks for signs that the baby is the spawn of Satan as she'd suspected. She refuses to nourish the child once it is born, holding Bernadette to her commitment to care for the child entirely on her own.



At the convent, Pauline rises earlier than all the others to begin her chores. She is hungry and cold, and offers up these feelings of discomfort to God. She believes that God visits her, sitting on the stove at night. He tells her that she is not Indian at all, but white, and that she was chosen to serve. He tells her she is forgiven for Marie, and that Pauline should forget her.

Pauline's commitment to appearing the most pious continues at the convent. She begins to think of all of the negative things she experiences as an offering to God, and continues to have visions, believing herself special enough that God communicates with her directly. And God tells her exactly what she wants to hear: her hatred of her Native heritage seems justified when she learns she is (supposedly) white, and her rejection of Marie is affirmed when God tells her to put Marie out of her mind. The reader has good cause to question Pauline's trustworthiness in relaying these visions accurately, and in her general mental stability.



Many people die that winter, and Pauline tends to them. God tells Pauline that she must make room for him in the minds of the Indians. Sister Saint Anne announces that the order won't accept Indian girls, and Pauline is thankful to have found out that she is not Indian.

The multitude of deaths means lots of work for Pauline, a problematic conflict of interests. Pauline wants to be praised for this, but God tells her she must do more. The refusal to allow Indian women to enter the convent closely ties Catholicism (in the book) to white oppression and racism. Sister Saint Anne's acceptance of Pauline's claim of being white seems like an act of mercy on the nun's part.



Pauline tells Sister Saint Anne that God visits her in the dark and talks to her, but that he doesn't stay long because it is too cold. Sister Saint Anne allows Pauline to stoke the fire before bed to welcome the Lord, and gives Pauline her thin wool blanket, though Pauline is sure the sister wears her heavy wool cloak to sleep. She thinks about telling the Sister about how she is the chosen one, but Pauline then sees her own shadow move separate from her, a sign of the devil, and decides not to tell the sister. Pauline waits for God to tell her what to do about Fleur, who Pauline believes is the gateway to the lake monster and Manitou for the tribe. She realizes that she can be this same gateway to Catholicism for them.

Pauline's claim that God complains of the cold in the convent seems far-fetched, and Pauline refuses to accept the sister's gift as generous, assuming the nun is keeping the better option for herself. Pauline's pride at believing she is chosen is something she wants to share, but her concern with reputation again comes into play when she worries she might actually be chosen by the devil rather than the Christian God, and she begins to question who has been visiting her at night in her visions.



Pauline relays a story from Nanapush about guiding a group of white men to hunt buffalo. They killed so many for only their tongues and hides that the few who remained began to act strangely. The living buffalo ate the bodies of dead and tried to cripple each other, even attempting suicide. Only when the thunder came did the animals calm down. Pauline sees a similar thing happening with the remaining people of the tribe. Pauline has a vision of all of the souls she has delivered to God by preparing them for death, and asks what she should do. God tells her to bring him more.

Pauline goes to Fleur's cabin with the goal of converting those inside. Fleur opens the door and Pauline sees that she's clearly hungry, though surviving despite the difficult times, and is also pregnant. Pauline asks if she can come in, and Fleur calls her a Morrissey. Pauline enters anyway, asking for something to eat. Eli refuses to acknowledge Pauline. Fleur removes her headscarf to remind Pauline of her bald head. Pauline is surprised that she is being taken as a Morrissey, and claims she left them behind because she couldn't fend off Napoleon forever. Fleur smirks at her and then at Eli, as though she knows different.

Fleur brings up Marie, and Pauline claims to know nothing about her, but Fleur identifies that this can't be true—because Pauline has already revealed she knows the baby was a girl. She says that the baby has a Puyat mouth, but "hers hasn't told any lies." Fleur allows Pauline to sit near the fire and feeds her bannock.

Nanapush, who spends much of his time at the Pillager cabin and is there now, mocks Pauline, asking to see her hairshirt. She reveals that she has made herself underwear of scratchy potato sacks, and he suggests she might like the feeling. Pauline contests, saying her suffering is a gift to God. Nanapush continues teasing her, but Margaret tells him to stop. Margaret then dishes out some watery soup to all of them, skipping her own bowl. Nanapush hands most of his plate back to Margaret, who eats a spoonful and gives the rest to Fleur, claiming that she ate while she cooked.

Pauline continues to visit Fleur's cabin, and Nanapush notices that she wears her shoes on the wrong feet, another way of punishing herself as an offering to God. Pauline does this only when away from the convent, because the Mother Superior discourages these strange acts of penance. Nanapush tells Pauline she is unusual, and Pauline feels proud that he could be noticing that she is chosen. In fact, he is observing that she never allows herself to go to the outhouse. Indeed, Pauline only allows herself to use the outhouse twice a day. Pauline admonishes Nanapush for his crude comments, and he stops.

The comparison between the buffalo and tribe members' self-destructive actions is very clear in the story that Pauline tells, clearly showing the way that weakening the larger community also weakens individuals, but it's essential to note that the initial cause of this weakness comes from entities outside the community. Seemingly the only thing that distracts the buffalo from their individual pain is a reminder of the natural world.



Even though Pauline recognizes that Fleur is pregnant and hungry, she still asks the people in the Pillager cabin to share their food with her. Pauline is surprised that Fleur views her as a Morrissey, unaware that living with the family and bearing one of their children—a secret that Pauline doesn't realize Fleur knows—would align her with them in others' eyes. Pauline continues as an outsider to the private relationship between Fleur and Eli.



Pauline is caught in her lie when she identifies the gender of the baby before Fleur mentions it. Fleur acknowledges that the child must be Pauline's, but she still feeds Pauline, showing Fleur's willingness to be generous once she has established her power.



Nanapush is judgmental of Pauline's commitment to Catholicism, perhaps convinced that her interest in the order is only an interest in her own survival. He sees her actions as falsely pious, and Pauline proves too proud not to mention the uncomfortable underwear she hides beneath her clothes as a constant punishment. Margaret's commitment to providing for the family and going hungry so that they might have enough shows a humbler (and more effective) type of sacrifice.



Mother Superior's advice to stop the unusual offerings to God shows that Pauline is failing to follow orders and has some alternative purpose in causing herself such discomfort. When Nanapush calls Pauline strange, she feels a surge of pride, but really Nanapush's comment is tied to his trickster ways, hiding his observation of another one of her abstinences. Pauline is offended by the way Nanapush acknowledges what she's doing, though she clearly wants people to notice.



Nanapush, though, has not given up on teasing Pauline. On a day when Pauline needs badly to use the outhouse, Nanapush brews some sugary sassafras to tempt her, and Pauline can't resist and drinks several cups. Nanapush then begins to tell a story of a girl slowly flooded by water, and Pauline begins to pray the rosary in her head. The only way for the girl to save herself from drowning is by grabbing something that sticks out of the water, which the girl does. Pauline feels the need to pee grow and grow, tapping her feet anxiously, as Nanapush tells the story of the water rising. When the water finally retreats, the girl makes good on her promise and copulates with the thing that was sticking out of the water.

Nanapush's mischief shines in this scene. He plies Pauline with a delicious beverage and then tells a story that focuses on water and also sexual innuendo, trying to get Pauline to pee herself while also teasing about her supposed abstinence from sexual relations, though it's clear the inhabitants of the Pillager cabin know that Pauline bore a child. Copulating with a being that lives in the water also echoes the rumors of Fleur having sex with the lake monster. Nanapush's teasing of Pauline is mostly harmless, as there's no logical reason she can't use the outhouse.



Nanapush tells that nine months later the girl bore a child, and he pulls a condom from his pocket. He begins to fill the condom with the tea, and says that the child was made of nothing but water. Pauline is in agony, and the condom bursts, spilling tea everywhere. Pauline runs from the room, having wet herself.

Nanapush continues his teasing of Pauline by showing that the birth in his story could have been prevented with a condom—but Catholics don't believe in contraception, so this is offensive to Pauline. Nanapush goes even further in filling the condom with tea in the same way Pauline's bladder has filled to bursting.



Back at the convent, Pauline imposes new limits on her life. She won't allow herself to move at night while she tries to sleep. She plunges her hands into icy buckets of water in the morning. She denies herself most food and drink, having only hot water and small bits of bread. She sews burrs and grass into her dress to irritate her skin and allows her toenails to grow uncomfortably long. She also makes herself suffer Nanapush's insults to her as he refuses to allow her inside because of her stinking underwear, but she still won't allow herself to wash.

Pauline, having broken her vow by accidentally urinating, makes up new forms of punishment for herself. Her urination in the previous scene has also revealed a secondary form of self-flagellation: Pauline refuses to wash both herself and her clothes, and so the way she is punishing herself is also a punishment to those around her, as they have to smell her dirty body.



Fleur offers to wash Pauline's clothes so that she can come inside. Fleur tells Lulu to gather snow to melt into water from outside. Margaret leaves, accompanying Eli and Nector to town to sell some wood to pay the land fees. Pauline allows herself to undress, and hands her clothes to Fleur. Fleur and Lulu wash Pauline, but Pauline reminds herself not to enjoy the experience. When Fleur begins to wash her hair though, she can't help but feel pleasure. Pauline uses the outhouse, and Fleur gives her floursacks to wear for underwear instead of the potato sacks.

Fleur makes another concession to Pauline in offering to do the washing so Pauline doesn't break her vow of not washing herself. This vow ultimately makes more work for others, but Pauline sees it as a sacrifice. Though Pauline tries not to enjoy the gentle touch of Fleur and Lulu washing her, eventually she cannot help but enjoy the bath, and she accepts the gift of softer fabric for underwear, no longer denying herself these comforts.



Pauline then notices that Fleur is bleeding, and Fleur asks Pauline to retrieve some alder for her to stop the premature birth. In the lean-to, Pauline sees how little they have to eat for the rest of the winter. She knocks many of the containers to the floor looking for the alder. She grabs something that she is unsure is the alder, and begins to boil it. Lulu puts on her thin patent leather shoes and goes to Margaret's house to retrieve the others. Fleur tells Pauline to get moss to plug the bleeding. Pauline fumbles through the actions that Fleur directs her to take. It seems as though it is taking too long for Margaret and Nanapush to arrive. Fleur holds onto Pauline and repeats the word "no" as the baby emerges.

Fleur grabs the child and tries to resuscitate it. Finally, it cries. Fleur then goes to the lean-to to gather more roots and powders, aware and angry that Pauline boiled the wrong thing. She boils a new mixture and drinks it down. She tries to give the baby some of the cooled liquid, too. Pauline worries that Fleur has died, until she stands and staggers across the room. Fleur stands over Pauline, threatening to kill her as well if she and the baby die, believing that Pauline's bumbling attempts were not genuine. Pauline sits dazed in the glow of the baby's serpent eyes. Fleur then plunges a knife down and it pins Pauline's skirt to the floor. Fleur opens the door to leave the cabin, and Pauline is freed. Pauline follows the mother and child down to a road by the lake in the biting wind and snow. The beaten, icy path makes it clear Fleur has made this journey before. Pauline imitates Fleur's method of tying bark to her feet as snowshoes.

Pauline is surprised at all the Indians she sees on this path with them. She sees buffalo and unfarmed land. She sees no fences or **tracks**. Pauline realizes the others she sees are the dead she has blessed, and sees her own mother and father, too. She begs Fleur to turn back, but they approach a fire where they see the three men from the butcher shop playing a game together. Fleur asks them to deal her in, and she loses the first round. A woman emerges to take the baby from Fleur, signifying the death of the baby. Lily then pulls out a lock of Lulu's hair and a patent leather shoe, and Fleur plays now for Lulu's life. She wins with four queens and a wild, saving Lulu's life.

Fleur relies on Native treatments to address her premature labor, but Pauline is unable to distinguish the different substances stored in the food shed. Pauline is careless in the way she hunts for the alder, perhaps punishing the residents of the Pillager cabin for the way they have failed to embrace her and her religion. Instead of admitting to Fleur that she can't find the alder, she boils a different substance that likely won't do any good, and could even cause harm. Lulu, out of her mother's control, makes the foolish decision of wearing her thin shoes out into the snow, showing her desire for a connection to white civilization that has been muted by her mother's discipline.



Fleur figures out that she cannot rely on Pauline to help save the baby, but she is also exhausted from the effort of giving birth, and possibly close to death herself from hemorrhage. Pauline does nothing to try to help the dying pair, and Fleur tries to pin Pauline in place so that she can escape with the baby without Pauline's bad luck following them. Pauline seeing the eyes of the baby as a serpent shows that she believes the father of the child to be the lake monster, something she thinks might be confirmed by Fleur's trek down to the lake. Pauline is curious how she has never seen such a well-trod path, but she follows after Fleur, curious to see what will happen, and perhaps wanting to gain insight into Fleur's powers.



The path that the women travel is actually the path to the land of the dead, and the scenery around them shows a life that is far in the past before the advent of white civilization. Pauline worries that their journey means they are all dying, and thinks she can reverse these events by returning to the Pillager cabin. The men from the butcher shop continue the poker game they were playing in the meat locker during the storm, but the stakes are higher here, as Fleur gambles for the lives of her children.



The men look at Pauline, and she is no longer invisible. She can tell they know it was her who sealed them in the meat locker on the day of the storm. Fleur and Pauline race back to the cabin just before Margaret arrives. Pauline finds that her skirts are again pinned by the knife Fleur plunged into the floor. Margaret stokes the fire, warms the medicine, and rails against Pauline for not doing a better job of helping Fleur birth her baby. Pauline frees herself and goes to Fleur's side to try to baptize the dead baby, but Fleur bats her away. Margaret wraps the baby in a box and gives it to Eli, who ties the tiny coffin high in the trees, out of reach of the forest animals.

Whereas Pauline was once invisible as a non-threat and non-sexual being, now the men are aware of the true threat she poses—delivering people to death. Pauline and Fleur arrive back to the cabin just before Margaret's arrival, suggesting that their journey might only have been spiritual, not physical, as no one witnessed their absence from the cabin, and Pauline somehow became re-pinned by the knife. Fleur rejects Pauline's attempt to baptize the dead baby, wanting the child to have nothing to do with the Catholic church. The ground is too cold to bury the baby, so instead she is hoisted into the trees in the native tradition, an image that already haunts Pauline because of the way her own family was put to rest.



Pauline sees herself out, saying she'll send Father Damien and Bernadette. Margaret, holding a knife, spits on Pauline's shoes and then her veil, and Pauline holds out her hands, tempting Margaret to stab a stigmata (the wounds of Christ on the cross) into her hands as punishment, but Pauline claps her palms together at the last moment and runs out the door, avoiding injury. At the convent she scrapes her hands raw on the ice caking the bucket of water, until Mother Superior tells her to go to sleep.

Margaret believes that Pauline is to blame for poorly following Fleur's instructions. She insults her, but Pauline is less brave than she believes herself to be, and withdraws her request to be punished in the image of Christ. Instead, she attempts to deliver her own punishment under the watch of the Mother Superior, who Pauline knows will tell her to cease her actions.



CHAPTER 7: WINTER 1918-SPRING 1919, PAGUK BEBOON, SKELETON WINTER

Nanapush finds Lulu passed out outside Margaret's cabin. Lulu is so frozen that she can say only that something is wrong with Fleur. Margaret wraps her in warmed blankets. The snow outside has obscured any **trail** or typical landmarks. Lulu had become lost, and suffered more because she'd worn her thin, fancy shoes. Margaret curses Eli for buying them and tries to burn them. Margaret instructs Nanapush on how to warm Lulu, and then runs to the **Matchimanito** cabin. Lulu struggles against Nanapush's embrace as she thaws. Nanapush talks all night to try to keep Lulu calm.

The story backtracks a bit when it transitions to Nanapush's perspective and we learn that Margaret did not arrive sooner because Lulu became lost and hypothermic in the snow on the way to tell them that Fleur needed help. Nanapush takes on the feminine caregiving role for Lulu in the same way he cared for Fleur years before. The shoes are seen as a cause of Lulu's condition, indicating the danger of white culture in the context of reservation life.



Father Damien arrives with the off-reservation doctor, and with butter to spread on Lulu's frostbitten skin. The doctor examines Lulu and gives her Laudanum, and says he must take Lulu to his office because one of her feet is entirely frozen. Nanapush refuses her being taken away, because he knows the doctor won't be able to save Lulu, even though he isn't certain he can save her either. The doctor storms off, and Lulu wakes to give Nanapush a secret look.

Father Damien thinks that Western medicine is necessary to help heal Lulu, but Nanapush distrusts the doctor, believing that Lulu will suffer under non-native care. Nanapush reads the look that Lulu gives him as affirmation. Though Nanapush is often grateful to Father Damien, this is a case where Nanapush refuses Father Damien's suggestion that Western ways are superior to Native traditions.



Nanapush nurses Lulu for days in Margaret's cabin, though Fleur, trapped in her own cabin by the weather and her weakness, begs for her, convinced Lulu is dead. On the first warm day, Nanapush takes Lulu to Fleur on a toboggan, the same way he saved the sick Fleur years ago.

When Nanapush arrives at the cabin, Fleur looks ragged and sick, and lurches toward Lulu on the sled. The black **umbrella** has been propped in the tree where the baby's body was placed, to protect it from the elements. Upon seeing Lulu and knowing the baby's body is protected in the tree, Fleur awakens to her senses, and tends to Lulu's needs. Later Fleur dreams of a place where a deer might exist that they could hunt for meat, but when Eli tries to find the animal, he comes home empty-handed.

The next day, Fleur cuts a hole in the ice of the lake to fish. Eli wrestles her home and tends the line himself, but catches only a tiny perch. That night, Fleur sings a foreign song until Nanapush urges her to sleep. None of her sung prayers cause the appearance of the food they need though. Instead, government wagons appear with commodities, and someone must go to town to register for the rations with the Agent. All are reluctant to be the one to go.

Margaret volunteers to go and leaves the cabin for town. She returns with Father Damien, who has a pack of provisions for the family. Nanapush greets the priest, and Father Damien shows them a map of the land on the reservation and the large fees due on their land before summer. Father Damien refuses food, but he sits with the family through their silence, contemplating the map together. Margaret worries over the way the Morrissey land threatens her own, but Nanapush can see that the real threat is that of the lumberjacks and bankers. Fleur believes no one would try to collect Pillager land, but Margaret knows that times have changed.

Nanapush serves the more traditionally feminine role of nurse to Lulu. Fleur, overcome with the grief of having lost her baby, wants to see proof that Lulu is alive, but neither is well enough to travel. Fleur believes they might be keeping Lulu's death a secret from her so that she might recover.



Grief has turned Fleur into a zombie-like figure, but once she knows her baby's body is protected by the umbrella Fritzie had given her and that Lulu is alive, she takes up her responsibilities once more. This also reflects the game she played with the dead gamblers—she lost her baby, but saved Lulu. Fleur dreams of how she can provide for her family, but Eli is unable to use the same knowledge to act as provider, showing Fleur's special connection to spirits and dreams.



Fleur is too weak to hunt, but she tries to fish. Eli attempts to take over for her so she can continue her recovery, but even at home Fleur tries to act, praying for food. None of this works, though, perhaps showing perhaps that even Fleur's spiritual power is not enough to provide for the family in the wake of the devastation caused by white civilization. Embarrassingly, they must accept government help if they are to survive.



Margaret's willingness to go to town and interact with the Agent is being established here. Father Damien's attempt to assist in the situation is also appreciated by the residents of the Pillager cabin, but he has also arrived with the bad news that it will be very difficult for the three families to keep their land. He is being kind in that he doesn't eat with the family, aware that they have fewer provisions than he does back at the Church. Fleur is unaware of how modern society no longer respects tradition and spiritual power as law.



Nanapush tells Father Damien that the government can't tax their parcels of land because they are in trust, but the priest and Nector know different, saying that if they don't pay, the land will be auctioned off. Father Damien says that some people want to build a fishing lodge on the lake, but that they might trade for another allotment. Nanapush says they will have to raise the money to save their land. Father Damien suggests gathering and selling cranberry bark to a tonic dealer, and they take advantage of this opportunity each time the dealer comes to town. The odor of the bark sticks to all of them, signifying "salvation and betrayal." The rustling bark keeps them awake at night, mimicking the sound of dollar bills.

Eli goes to town to get the last of the supplies due to them, but Nanapush knows they are giving up some of their independence in accepting them. He notes, too, that Fleur has changed. She is less straightforward, and is eager to cover the fear caused by having lost one child and almost losing another. Nanapush tells her to go to the lake to pray to her helpers, but she goes to sleep in the bed instead.

Nanapush thinks of the wisdom he would pass onto Fleur if she would listen. After much thought, he tells Fleur that he has never believed himself fully responsible for his power or for his failures, but says that Fleur believes she is too powerful to be responsible for others' failures. Nanapush tells her that keeping the land is not entirely her responsibility, and neither was keeping the baby alive. Fleur turns away from this information.

News comes from town. Pauline has taken her vows. Sophie and Clarence Morrissey have married their cousins, the Lazarres. Sophie's Lazarre has six children from a previous marriage, in which he was believed to have murdered his wife. The new families take over Bernadette's house, and Bernadette brings baby Marie and Philomena to live in town, where she takes a job working for the Agent, though it's clear she has consumption.

Nanapush tells Lulu that Napoleon was driven to drink again by the new relatives in the house. He tells Lulu that people get the grandchildren they deserve, and draws attention to who Lulu's grandchildren might be if she marries a Morrissey, as she would like to do.

Even Nanapush is not educated in the current laws, but Father Damien and Nector are. Father Damien provides a generous suggestion in how the family might earn enough money to save their land, and they accept his advice, though they feel guilt at stripping the bark off all of the trees. At the same time, they feel both relief at the growing likelihood they will be able to save their land, and also anger at the way that white civilization has betrayed them and how they have been forced to betray nature in turn.



Nanapush is embarrassed by the way they're giving up their independence in accepting assistance from the government, and would rather rely wholly on what the land can provide them. Fleur's power and bravery have decreased because of all she has lost, and now she seems to distrust how much good the Manitou spirits can do.



Nanapush tries to rebuild Fleur's confidence, believing that they need her power to survive. He thinks that if he takes some pressure off of her and helps her realize that she is not to blame for all that has gone or could go wrong, then she will reassume her relationship with the spirits that have protected her all her life, but Fleur's confidence is of the all-or-nothing variety, and she refuses Nanapush's nuanced advice.



The Morrisseys and Lazarres force even Bernadette, their blood relative, out of her home. These families show a shortsightedness in the partners they choose and the way they go about their business. Bernadette fully converts to the side of the white man in taking work in the Agent's office, a position that allows her to have greater control over the livelihood of the Pillagers and Kashpaws.



Though Lulu is not Nanapush's biological grandchild, he does view her as his family, and thinks he is lucky to have her as his own. Here it is revealed that Nanapush's purpose in telling this story is not only to pass on the history of their families to Lulu, but also to convince her to be smart in who she decides to marry (and suggesting an entire life for the present-day Lulu outside the bounds of the novel).



One day, Nanapush and Nector go to the Morrissey farm as Napoleon is butchering his last cow. Clarence tells them to stand back and they'll throw them the guts. Nanapush reminds them how they spared Clarence's life, and says the Morrisseys owe them half the cow at least. Clarence butchers them a small portion and Nanapush registers how the Morrissey place has fallen into disrepair. More of the same follows in the years after, according to Nanapush, the Morrisseys' record books and livestock growing unkempt as they focus on breeding with one another.

Fish swarm to the surface of the lake in late winter, and the residents of the Pillager cabin catch the fish through holes in the ice. They can eat more now that they are catching their own, and Nanapush is again interested in Margaret romantically. They make love, and Nanapush says they should build a house on the Pillager land for themselves. Margaret assures Nanapush that they'll get the money together to save both the Kashpaw and Pillager family allotments. It's revealed that Nanapush's land has already been lost—he mentions that his land had only been empty for a month when it was overtaken by a pack of the growing Lazarre clan.

Father Damien visits to tell how he stumbled upon a naked, dead baby in the snow, and how all the others in the house the child belonged to were blind drunk. He tells Nanapush he should step forward and involve himself in the government to prevent further tragedies like this, but Nanapush can tell the goal of the government is simply to further control the Indians. Father Damien begins to talk as Nanapush has taught him, not allowing Nanapush to get a word in, and Nanapush gives in. Father Damien writes a letter to the government recommending Nanapush for a government position, but the letter goes unanswered by the new secretary to the Agent: Bernadette.

Nanapush says that after Fleur lost her other baby, she became more protective of Lulu. Margaret asks Fleur to let Lulu have some freedom now. Nanapush identifies with Fleur's reaction to losing a child, but he knows Margaret does not understand because she has not experienced this tragedy. Still, Nanapush thinks he should go to Moses to get a medicine to allow Fleur to detach from Lulu. Nanapush brings gifts to Moses and they devise a plan.

Nanapush's concern for the downward spiral of the Morrissey clan is confirmed when he visits to ask for a share of their butchered cow meat. Nanapush is critical of the Morrissey clan for their carnal interests and the way they allow these urges to overpower the other skills and actions necessary to support themselves. All of this is provided as proof to Lulu of the reasons a Morrissey is not a fit partner for her.



The residents of the Pillager clan are in a better position for survival with the government-provided provisions and the fish that are now plentiful in the lake. Nanapush, perhaps sensing that paying off both allotments is only delaying the inevitable and that they'll need assistance from the younger family members as they continue to age, suggests that they all live on the Pillager land. Margaret is too proud to give up her stake, though, reluctant to let the Morrisseys and Lazarres take over the cabin she so loves—and this reluctance foreshadows events to come.



Father Damien can see the writing on the wall: the tribe's numbers are dwindling, and the half-natives are falling prey to the temptations of white civilization. They need a strong leader to help them regain control of their lives. Nanapush is reluctant to take part in this way, fearful that he'll become a mere puppet of the government. Father Damien cleverly uses Nanapush's methods of persuasion to break the old man down, but Bernadette is a barrier to Nanapush taking any sort of power because she knows he will not act in favor of the Morrissey family.



Having lost his entire family, Nanapush is able to sympathize with Fleur's urge to keep Lulu close, but he fears they may lose their land soon, and can already see the value of allowing Lulu to be educated and cared for at a government boarding school if that is the case. Margaret, despite having birthed many children, was lucky never to lose a single one, either in infancy or in the consumption epidemic, and so she is less understanding of Fleur's attachment to Lulu—a more typically masculine response to parenting.



Two days later, Moses approaches the Pillager cabin carrying two drums. Nanapush mixes yarrow with another ingredient he won't name, a concoction he dreamed of. The potion allows him to reach into boiling pots to pull out meat or to reach into human bodies to pull out the names haunting a person, as he did when he was mourning his family so that he might survive his grief. As they prepare the fire and stew, Pauline approaches the tent they've built, and Fleur and Margaret arrive, too.

Nanapush pulls some meat from the boiling pot with his hands and gives it to Fleur to eat. Pauline approaches the pot, and Margaret tries to quietly nudge her out of the tent so that Fleur might continue her cure, but Pauline says she has been sent to prove Christ's ways. Pauline plunges her hands, unprotected, into the boiling pot and holds them there, until she finally screams and withdraws, running back to town.

Afterward Fleur seems improved, but Nanapush isn't sure if it's his cure that helped her or the money that they finally gather together just after the deadline. All of the family contributes every cent they have, and then Father Damien adds the last necessary quarter. They have just enough for both the Pillager and Kashpaw land. Nector volunteers to take the money to town, and then they are all so relieved that none of them think it odd that Nector and Margaret spend a significant amount of time away.

Nanapush relies on Moses's help in finding a way to loosen Fleur's hold on Lulu. In the same way that Fleur dreams of the things she needs to survive, so does Nanapush, drawing comparisons between magical physical actions one might take and also more spiritual gestures to be performed. Though she was not invited, Pauline continues to visit the cabin in the hopes of converting more of the tribe to Catholicism.



Pauline is so confident in her abilities and her faith that she believes anything Nanapush might be able to, she must also be able to do. In her attempt to prove herself, though, she in fact makes a fool of herself and receives no divine intervention to protect her, making Nanapush's beliefs seem far more credible than Pauline's.



Though Nanapush hoped the ritual he performed with Moses might be what cured Fleur, he realizes that it might be the more practical fact that they earned the money they needed to save their land. Father Damien contributes to their effort, and Margaret again shows a willingness to go deal with the Agent in town. The relief they all feel then blinds them to possible further threats.



CHAPTER 8: SPRING 1919, BAUBAUKUNAETAEGEEZIS, PATCHES OF EARTH SUN

Pauline sees her burned arms as a sign that Christ is weak in comparison to the old spirits that were at work in the tent that night, and Pauline feels that no martyr has suffered as she has. She believes that a man comes into her room one night to prod her with all manner of sharp instruments. He says he is the Light of the World, but Pauline believes he might be Lucifer. The visitor scurries off at the sound of approaching footsteps, and tells Pauline they will meet in the desert. Sister Saint Anne arrives with a bowl of broth to feed Pauline, but Pauline insults her and refuses the soup.

Pauline, feeling forsaken by God for not protecting her from the burning stew, now begins to think herself superior to God. Pauline believes her pain to be greater than all martyrs who have gone before her, including Jesus Christ. Pauline returns to the idea that the entity she has been communicating with might not be God, but Satan. (This is reinforced by the idea of the two meeting in "the desert"—Jesus was tempted by Satan in the desert for forty days and forty nights.) Again, Pauline's visions are not witnessed by anyone else, as the supernatural figure disappears just as another person arrives.



Sister Saint Anne pinches Pauline's nose to get her to open her mouth for the soup, and Pauline resolves to let herself suffocate. In her thoughts, though, instead of taking the road to the afterlife, she finds herself on the shores of **Matchimanito**, and sees the lake monster rise before her. She awakes, taking in a deep breath and a mouthful of soup. Sister Saint Anne makes an excuse for Pauline, saying she is so sick she didn't know what the Sister was saying. Pauline, meanwhile, believes that Christ hid from her out of cowardice in the face of Misshepesu, but she commits herself again to God despite his weakness. When her bandages are changed, Pauline sheds the dead, burned skin beneath the bandages, like a serpent.

Pauline goes out, her body newly fleshy from having been force-fed in the convent, leaving strange **tracks** with her shoes worn on the wrong feet. She wants to visit **Matchimanito** one last time before she takes her vows as novice, and then she will leave all of her previous life behind. Pauline finds Nanapush's boat and a stone for an anchor, and launches onto the lake alone. Pauline spies the Kashpaws in the woods and lowers the stone, aiming for the lake monster. She believes she sees one of its golden eyes open. The water leaking into the boat reaches Pauline's ankles, but she prays and the water stops. She calls out to Nanapush and they all turn to watch her.

People gather on shore, including the women from the convent. Father Damien launches a canoe onto the water, but the water carries him back to shore. Pauline sees the Morrisseys approach, including Napoleon and young Marie. The Kashpaws and Pillagers retreat, but Nanapush stays on the shore, getting into the same canoe Father Damien had tried to row out. Nanapush reaches Pauline and yells at Pauline to get into the canoe, but she quotes scripture and lies down in the boat instead. Nanapush points to the people watching on land and tells Pauline to look, but Pauline just laughs at them, believing them all damned. Nanapush returns to shore.

Pauline looks for a sign, and finally sees Fleur standing on the shore. Pauline calls to her and Fleur, in her white scarf, seems to grow in response to the call. Pauline imagines Fleur as a door into blackness, hears the hinges creak, and then finds herself in the darkness, unable to breathe, as though drowned. Then Fleur walks away, and Pauline regains her senses.

Though Pauline tries to continue her self-deprivation even when burned, Sister Saint Anne won't allow it. When Pauline attempts to suffocate herself, she sees not God waiting for her on the other side, but Misshepesu, perhaps revealing what her true beliefs are, or which of these entities is the greater force (in either reality or in her beliefs). Sister Saint Anne shows remarkable tolerance and forgiveness in her treatment of Pauline. Pauline has previously identified the lake monster as a serpent, so it is significant when her own physical presence is compared to that of a snake.



Despite the fact that the Mother Superior tells Pauline not to wear her shoes on the wrong feet in the convent, Pauline switches them when she leaves. Pauline intends to spend 40 days and nights in a boat on the lake as a form of repentance or testing, similar to the way Jesus wandered the desert for that amount of time, being tempted by Satan. Even in this moment of offering, Pauline is most concerned with people witnessing her act of faith than with actually doing the right thing.



Father Damien's attempt to rescue Pauline fails because he is not connected to the natural world in a way that allows him to master the lake. Nanapush has more success, but he doesn't have the power to convince Pauline to get into his boat, and doesn't want to sacrifice his own life to save hers. Even in this moment, where Pauline is most vulnerable, she still sees herself as superior to the other people who are "damned" for their sins, while she remains on the right side of God.



Pauline has a vision of Fleur that is similar to the vision she had of the Virgin Mary. Fleur's influence is reflected in the way her form swells on the shore, indicating again that native belief, which Fleur represents, has a stronger hold on Pauline's mind.



Night falls, and Pauline tries to bail out the boat. The numbers on shore dwindle. Pauline reveals that she intends to wait forty days and forty nights in the boat, her version of a desert, while she waits for her tempter, the lake monster, to appear. Pauline lies down in the boat to pray out of the wind, but the lake monster cuts the anchor's rope and the boat drifts toward shore.

Despite claiming that she wanted to suffer, Pauline tucks herself out of the wind to minimize her suffering. When her boat begins to drift back to shore, she makes no attempt to return to the middle of the lake and finish her gesture, reasoning that the lake monster must have cut the rope so that they might have their interaction—another example of the way Pauline always justifies her actions when her commitment falters. Again, the forty days and nights reflects the temptation of Christ in the desert, showing again how Pauline essentially has a “Messiah complex” and thinks herself to be like Jesus.



Pauline stands in the boat and strips off her clothes, clutching only her rosary. The boat slams into shore and Pauline scrambles to right herself, calling out to the devil to show himself. The monster approaches, the size of a man. Pauline seizes the man and uses her rosary around his neck to strangle him. She kicks his body until the light begins to come up in the sky, and slowly, she sees that the monster takes on the form of Napoleon Morrissey.

Shedding her clothes shows Pauline finally shedding her inhibitions and following her instincts without worrying about the judgment of others. She uses a symbol of her faith, her rosary, to kill the “devil” she meets on shore—an entity she first sees in the form of the lake monster, but then determines to be her true demon, the man who she believes caused her to sin.



Pauline convinces herself that what she has done is no sin, because there was no way to know the form the devil would take. Pauline drags Napoleon's body into the high weeds. She begins to walk back to the Mission, but rolls in mud to hide her nudity and throws away her rosary. She continues to cloak herself in the forest materials to shroud her humanity.

Pauline again justifies her actions by convincing herself that the person she killed was indeed the devil. Despite her claim that it was the devil she killed, her actions contradict her thoughts in her urge to hide the body. Her shame returns in her urge to cover her nakedness, but in doing so she connects to the earth, coating herself in the natural substances of the forest.



Pauline shares that she is now recovered and about to be initiated by the bishop, taking Christ as her husband. She overhears that the Morrisseys found Napoleon in the woods and blamed Fleur for his death. Pauline believes that her deed of killing the devil in the form of Napoleon has chained the lake monster to the bottom of the lake. The surveyors visit the Pillager land to measure it so that it can be divided and sold. Meanwhile Pauline has been assigned to teach math at a Catholic school in Argus. Pauline doesn't like this assignment, but she sees it as further opportunity to atone, and looks forward to gathering those souls as her responsibility, too. She receives the new name of Leopolda to go by.

Pauline affirms her belief as she is about to be formally initiated as a nun. She again allows Fleur to take the blame for a death Pauline has caused, and even believes that she has somehow gained control of the lake monster, rather than Fleur. Pauline is the first to inform the reader that the Pillager land is indeed going to be sold, even though the fees had been assumed to have been paid. Pauline seems to have basically gone mad at this point, and sees herself as a savior doing battle with the devil and communing directly with God—even though she also believes the Catholic God is weaker than the entities of the native religion she has rejected. She dislikes her new assignment as math teacher, but by now she has wholeheartedly cut off her Native side and embraced white culture and religion.



CHAPTER 9: FALL 1919-1924, MINOMINI-GEEZIS, WILD RICE SUN

Nanapush hears wildlife rushing toward Fleur’s cabin, and soon after finds the cause to be the lumberjacks cutting down the homes of the animals. Fleur emerges, ready to fight for her land, but Nanapush tells her to let him figure out what’s going on first. No one will tell Nanapush the cause of the lumbering, but when he reaches the Agent’s office, he explains that the reason the land had been sold was because an offer had come in and the government must sell land on which the taxes are unpaid. Nanapush is confused, saying he watched the fees taken to town, but the Agent tells him that Nector and Margaret paid off only the Kashpaw allotment, not the Pillager land, because there was a late fee in addition to the taxes owed.

The lumberjacks cutting down the trees forces the animals and the spirits into smaller and smaller clusters of forest. Fleur is ready to battle in the old Anishinabe way, but Nanapush believes there must be a logical explanation to discover first. The betrayal of Nector and Margaret in saving only their own land and not informing Fleur of their decision was an act of dishonesty that prioritized the maintenance of their property over the values of the tribe and their community—reflecting an individualism that resembles white civilization’s values more than those of the Anishinabe.



The Agent explains that the lumber company has started its operation on the far side of the lake so that the residents will have time to vacate. Nanapush accuses the Agent of pocketing much of the cost paid for the land, and he’s asked to leave the office.

The Agent tries to frame the situation in a diplomatic way, but Nanapush distrusts him (and for good reason). Nanapush believes that the Agent must also have a personal stake in the situation.



On his way back to **Matchimanito**, Nanapush considers the deep scars in the land from the lumbering company. He sees the road back to the cabin as being the road of the dead for the trees, and for all that live beneath the trees. He knows that Nector had listened carefully to his advice, and acted with foresight and shrewdness, qualities that will benefit him if he takes on the life of a politician. Nanapush loses himself in his thoughts as he approaches the untouched wilderness surrounding Fleur’s cabin. Lulu approaches him, looking for candies, but finds none. She leads him to Fleur.

The path that Fleur and Pauline once followed to the land of the dead is now viewed in the same way by Nanapush, though reframed around nature rather than just humanity. Though Nanapush had been reluctant to become involved in bureaucracy, he could always see that Nector had a talent for it, and he realizes now that he could have been more careful with the information he shared with Nector, since the young man put it all to use in protecting his family land at the expense of others.



Nanapush realizes that Eli must already know the truth, but shares what he’s learned anyway. Nanapush then says that, after this, the three never lived together again. It is revealed that Lulu won’t visit Fleur now, because she’s angry her mother sent her away. When Nanapush finishes telling Fleur about the sale of her land, a man’s cry is heard across the lake, followed by the snap and crash of a tree falling. Fleur doesn’t respond.

This section reveals some of the aftermath of this moment. Eli having kept the safety of his family’s land a secret from Fleur is an unforgivable offense in her eyes. Lulu getting sent to a government school caused her to reject her mother, showing a stubborn streak in Lulu that is similar to Fleur herself.



Eli suggests that Fleur could live on the Kashpaw land if she will marry him. She remains silent, purposefully sorting stones, putting them into the pockets of her skirt, and Lulu helps her. Eli promises to earn money to buy some of her land back, but begs Fleur not to blame Nector. Fleur chooses a flat boulder and walks into the lake holding it.

Eli, in an echo of his earlier transgression with Sophie Morrissey, attempts to atone with Fleur, but Fleur does not forgive so easily. Even if Eli buys back her land, it will be different than it is now because all the trees will be torn down. Fleur chooses the stones to seemingly sink herself to the bottom of the lake so she can consult with the lake monster, though this action could also be interpreted as a suicide attempt.



Eli dives in after her to try to save her, but Fleur struggles against him. Eli drags her back to land, unconscious. Nanapush tells Lulu to go fetch blankets, and announces that this is the third time Fleur has drowned. Eli and Nanapush revive her, but Nanapush steps away when she opens her eyes, to avoid responsibility for bringing her back to life. They feel the ground beneath them shake, and know it is the lake monster causing it. Fleur cries that Nector will take her place as a curse. Fleur remains on the ground, facing west and keeping her eyes on Eli, and she shines her wolfish grin on him. He runs away from her to the lumber camp, where he takes work in the hopes of earning money to buy back Fleur's land.

Nanapush wraps Fleur in the blanket, telling her to close her eyes, and she falls asleep. They remain on the shore while the lumber wagons retreat, and Nanapush asks Fleur if she will curse him next. Fleur says she will not, but that she will curse the lumber bankers, officials, and Morrisseys. Nanapush and Fleur are quiet for a long time, until Lulu says something silly in her sleep, and the two of them laugh together. Margaret arrives, and Fleur tells Nanapush to go to her. Fleur says that Margaret has saved her life twice and taken it twice, so now all debts are even. Fleur tells Nanapush she still owes him as her father, so she won't harm Margaret for his sake, but that she will never go to Kashpaw land.

Nanapush moves to Margaret's house, but he is never able to believe the best of her again or to love her as fully, after she saved only the Kashpaw land. Nanapush continues to visit **Matchimanito** in the following weeks, and is there when the surveyors find Napoleon's body. Napoleon is surrounded by natural objects that Nanapush assumes Fleur put there, but she doesn't even get a chance to defend herself. The Morrisseys and Lazarres have already spread the rumor that Fleur drowned Napoleon and stole his tongue, allowing her to walk without leaving **tracks**. The ghost of Napoleon supposedly returns to speak to Clarence and accuses Fleur, proof to Clarence of what happened.

Moses says that the spirit of the lost Pillager baby had been watching over the land, and that Napoleon had wandered under the **umbrella**'s shadow. The tribe's policeman demands an investigation into Napoleon's death, and begins spying on the tribe members to try and overhear what happened.

Eli manages to save Fleur, though those who have saved Fleur from drowning in the past have been punished, seemingly for not allowing the lake monster to have her. When the ground shakes, this is an indication that Misshepesu has again been robbed. Fleur transfers the curse of the lake monster to Nector, because he is the one who allowed her land to be sold. Fleur facing west indicates that she was close to death, and is communing with spirits that still remain in the little bit of forest left. Her wolfish expression has not previously been turned on Eli, but it scares him in the same way it has scared others.



Nanapush again cares for Fleur, and she is comforted by his presence, promising that she will not harm him—and even that she won't harm Margaret, who has betrayed her. Though the logical place for Fleur to go is Kashpaw land—since that is where the (presumed) father of her children lives, and where the man who is closest to a father to her will live—she cannot bear to leave her own land for that of the Kashpaws who cheated her.



Nanapush agrees to live with Margaret, a topic they've regularly argued over, because he now has no other option. Though he has embraced her dominance in many areas, he did not give in on this until he had to. Because we know that Pauline killed Napoleon, if there are natural objects around his body, it perhaps means that Fleur was making offerings trying to protect his body, the opposite of what the people assume of her. The people believe Clarence's dream without even asking Fleur for her side of the story.



Here the umbrella is given a spiritual power to protect the Pillagers, and a spell is assigned that previously we hadn't heard about, so it's unclear whether this might be true or something that Moses made up. The policeman's belief that he can solve the case via an "investigation" is an example of white civilization believing it knows better than the Natives.



One day Nanapush goes into the confessional to play a trick on the policeman. The priest is suspicious, but Nanapush goes on to say that the keeper of the law in the village, since returning from Paris, sometimes masturbates in the grass thinking of a certain street. The priest assigns him a punishment for divulging this information, and tells Nanapush he can't talk for the rest of the afternoon. Nanapush complies until sundown, when he begins talking nonstop.

The lumber companies continue to harvest the trees, and many of their workers die in unusual accidents, but this doesn't deter them. Fleur seems to be flourishing in the woods despite the approaching threats, and Nanapush wonders if she is still in her right mind, trailed now by cats the way Moses is on his island.

Nanapush tells Lulu that Fleur sent her away because she could not protect Lulu from all these threats, including herself. After sending Lulu off to the government school, Fleur returns to **Matchimanito** to live alone. Margaret spends her time gathering berries and making preserves for Nector, who she fears will suffer the effects of Fleur's curse at any moment.

Nanapush goes to visit Fleur, walking around the lake the long way, despite the threatening weather. As he approaches her cabin, he hears the hum of many voices, both animal and human spirit. He sees all of his past relatives—his wives, his children, and his father, who obscures the **trail** of the other spirits. He sees his mother and sister and his first love. Nanapush knows that Fleur has resisted the call of these ghosts and so he does, too.

The weather gets very still as Nanapush sees Fleur standing in the door of her cabin, and he knows Moses is also nearby. With the lumberjacks close behind, Eli among them, Eli tries to talk Fleur into evacuating her house so they can cut down the last of the trees. He says they have a wagon waiting for her, and he'll pack it himself.

Nanapush attempts to punish the policeman's snooping by making up lies about him and telling Father Damien, who knows the game that's being played. Nanapush follows the request of the priest, but then he reverts to his own ways as soon as possible, talking a lot to make up for his time in silence.



Though the lumber industry is a dangerous one, the accidents that befall the workers are blamed on Fleur and her anger over the woods being torn down. Fleur has connected even more with nature, as the cats that have flocked to Moses are now following her as well.



We are reminded that Nanapush is telling all of this information to Lulu, partly to reframe the story as an explanation of why Lulu was sent away to boarding school. While Nanapush agreed to live on Kashpaw land, Fleur held to her promise and remained in her cabin as long as she was able, living alone.



The spirits that once lived in the west woods are now quite concentrated in the last stand of trees left. Nanapush, who has compared his own strength to that of the trees, feels the call of his family from the afterlife all the more strongly now, as the trees dwindle and he advances in age. He looks to Fleur as a model, though, and refuses to give up his life just yet.



Though Eli is working for the lumber company to try and earn the money to buy back the Pillager land, he is the one who needs to tell Fleur it's time to leave her cabin for good. Eli is forced by the lumberjacks, who fear Fleur and her power, to be the spokesperson on their behalf, and thus Eli transforms into a symbol of the threat to the tribe and nature, rather than a protector of it.



Nanapush hears the wind building and the voices of the dead gamblers from Argus in the woods. Nanapush warns the lumberjacks to go, but they hold their positions. Then a tree crashes down, out of sight. Another tree topples, and Fleur grins at the nervous men. One man tries to escape, but a tree bars his path. Several others climb into their wagons, but more trees fall, trapping them in place. Nanapush realizes all the trees have been sawed through at the base.

The wind picks up and knocks down all the trees. Then Fleur wheels out a cart from behind her cabin. The cart contains her weed-wrapped stones from the lake, roots, rags, her **umbrella**, and the grave markers of her ancestors. She and Nanapush leave quickly. Fleur asks Nanapush for his blessing to go off at the fork in the road, and he gives it to her reluctantly, asking her to stay. Fleur heads south, toward civilization.

After this, Margaret and Nanapush attempt to get Lulu back from the government school. Nector goes to Oklahoma. In their attempts to battle the government over Lulu, Nanapush sees that they are now a tribe of paper, trees pressed into the service of the government. Nanapush becomes a bureaucrat so he can better fight to get Lulu back. Margaret and Nanapush go to Lulu's school to retrieve her in 1924. Lulu is changed from her time, but she still has the angry grin that matches Fleur's. Lulu runs to them, and they brace themselves like trees in the wind.

As the powers of nature gather to support Fleur in her effort, the wind begins to finish the job we're assumed Fleur has started. It is revealed that all of the trees have been sawed through at the base, and the way they fall in such an uncontrolled cacophony is a danger to the men, who want to run from Fleur's power but are trapped in proximity to it.



Fleur has taken on the destruction of the last bit of her land as a way of proving her ownership over it. There is no logical way she might have sawed through the base of all of those trees just enough to leave them standing until the lumber company arrived. Fleur also reveals that she has already packed a wagon for herself, and that she has a plan for her future that is separate from the people she has counted on up until now, taking only the most symbolic and powerful objects with her.



Nector, who has always been more connected to white civilization, departs as expected. Nanapush finally involves himself in government when he realizes he must compromise with white civilization if he is going to get back the one thing he truly cares about: his granddaughter. Though Lulu is now more heavily influenced by white culture, Fleur's intimidating grin on her face proves that Lulu is still tied to her roots and has her mother's independence and mysterious power. Once again, the metaphor of the elders Nanapush and Margaret being like the trees of the forest is mentioned—but this time, they hold strong.





HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Jemc, Jac. "Tracks." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 20 Apr 2018. Web. 21 Apr 2020.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Jemc, Jac. "Tracks." LitCharts LLC, April 20, 2018. Retrieved April 21, 2020. <https://www.litcharts.com/lit/tracks>.

To cite any of the quotes from *Tracks* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

Erdrich, Louise. *Tracks*. Harper Perennial. 2011.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Erdrich, Louise. *Tracks*. New York: Harper Perennial. 2011.