

The Bingo Palace Study Guide

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Plot Summary

Bingo Palace is a story about love, tradition and spirituality. The novel follows the lives of a group of people tied through various branches of lineage. The main characters struggle with life and coming of age on a Native American reservation in North Dakota.

Lulu Lamartine's trip to the post office opens this story. Lulu is the grandmother of the main character, Lipsha Morrissey. An unknown narrator is watching lulu as she carries on what the narrator calls her routine. Once at the post office, Lulu removes the wanted poster of her son, Gerry Nanapush, from the wall and makes a copy to send to her grandson, Lipsha. She keeps the original and frames it in her apartment.

At the time that Lipsha Morrissey receives the package from his grandmother, he is living in Fargo, North Dakota, working for a sugar beet factory. According to the members of the reservation, Lipsha never lives up to his potential, and they are all disappointed in his life choices. When Lipsha was younger, he scored incredibly high on his ACT exams, and everyone thought he would do great things with his life. Instead, Lipsha chooses a life of odd jobs and hasty decisions. Lipsha believes the package from his grandmother is a sign that it's time for him to do more with his life, so he packs his belongings and goes back to the reservation where he was raised. His return home starts off awkwardly at one of the reservation's dances. When he sees an old acquaintance, Shawnee Ray Toose, he forgets that he no longer fits in with the flow of reservation life. Lipsha is captivated by Shawnee Ray's presence and makes up his mind to pursue her. However, there are many obstacles in the way of his goal.

Shawnee has a son with Lipsha's uncle Lyman Lamartine, and Shawnee was also taken in by Lipsha's aunt Zelda Kashpaw. Lipsha describes Zelda as a calculating woman who cares so much about appearances that she takes Shawnee in to give the community the impression that Lyman eventually plans to marry Shawnee and take care of their child. In reality, either Lyman or Shawnee had long before squelched their marriage plans, so Zelda decides to use Lipsha to aid in getting Shawnee and Lyman together. She concludes that having Lipsha back on the reservation will either make Lyman jealous enough to marry Shawnee or make Shawnee see Lyman's worth after dating someone as unreliable as Lipsha. Her plan partially works, as Lipsha begins to fall in love with Shawnee and also goes to work for Lyman at the Bingo Palace.

The Bingo Palace is the reservation's local gambling spot. The building, which Lipsha compares to a circus tent, services regular bingo players with daily games but also offers a bar and slot machines. Lipsha is hired to keep the establishment clean and work behind the bar on occasion in exchange for a room and weekly wages. The job leads him closer to spiritual awakening when his mother's ghost shows up at the bingo palace one night after hours. His mother, June Morrissey, gives him a financial boost by giving him winning bingo slips, and her presence reminds Lipsha of his spiritual ties. However, his love for Shawnee Ray blinds him and limits the extent he manages to use these gifts. He lets Lyman tie his winnings into a venture that would desecrate their ancestors' spiritual land and becomes lost between this spiritual world and the modern

world he knows. He loses his spiritual ability, his financial freedoms and Shawnee Ray, and he must learn to use his spiritual gifts to survive.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Lulu Lamartine is introduced as she leaves her house to head to the post office. She is watched by the people in her community and by the unnamed narrator. Lulu drives to the post office, and while the other patrons fuss over packages to mail, she heads for the wanted poster of her son Gerry Nanapush. She removes the picture from its place on the wall and makes a copy. She keeps the original and places the copy in an envelope. According to the narrator, she mails the envelope to her grandson Lipsha Morrissey in Fargo, North Dakota. The wanted picture is of Lipsha's father, and she sends it as a warning. Lipsha's life is not on track and hasn't been for a long time. As a baby, Lipsha was rescued by Marie Kashpaw, his other grandmother. The community knew that he had spiritual powers, but he refused to tap into them as he grew older.

The reservation community had high hopes for him in his younger days, especially when he received a tremendously high score on the state's pre-college tests, but he didn't accept any of the job or schooling offers made available to him. Instead, he chose a life of job-hopping, bad business choices and menial living. He has ended up in Fargo working for a sugar beet plant, moving and shoveling sugar. The narrator relays that Lipsha calls Marie collect to voice his frustrations with the sugar factory work. He comes home every day covered in sugar that only attracts bugs and builds up in his apartment. The community warned Marie that he would be just like his father and that she shouldn't waste her caring on him. However, the package with the picture of his father makes Lipsha stop and reassess his life, a life that ties into many generations of family lineage.

Lula Lamartine and Marie Kashpaw are Lipsha's grandmothers. Lulu has a few children, including Gerry, Lipsha's father and Lyman Lamartine, the reservation's entrepreneur whose father was Nector Kashpaw. Marie's daughter was June Morrissey, Lipsha's mother. June's story is brief. She left Lipsha to drown in a marsh and Gerry with another woman. No one thinks of her after she is gone except her niece Albertine. Albertine is away struggling through college. Her lifestyle is compared to that of Shawnee Ray Toose, a young woman who had her son out of wedlock but is still a vision of beauty and spirituality. Finally, Fleur Pillager is the oldest of group, almost an ancestor with "a foot on death's road." She is thought to have plans of saving her medicinal powers to pass on to Lipsha.

Meanwhile, Lipsha gets the message that his grandmother hinted at with his father's wanted poster. He packs the essentials of his life into the blue Firebird car that once belonged to his mother and heads for the reservation where he was raised. Upon returning to the reservation, Lipsha goes to a social gathering at the high school gym. He looks around and realizes that he doesn't fall into any of the groups formed by the members of the community. "He was not a tribal honcho, not a powwow organizer...not a member of a drum group, not a singer...not even one of those gathered at the soda



machines outside the doors...because of being drunk or too much in love or just bashful...he was none of these, only Lipsha coming home."

Chapter 1 Analysis

Written in the voice of the Native American ancestors, this chapter serves as an overview of the characters to come. The narrative voice is ever watching and apparently impatient with the younger generations of the reservation. The narrator has insight into all of the characters and briefly describes their significance. The ancestors use imagery in these descriptions and constantly compare the characters to animals. Lulu is described with feline references, and Lipsha is connected with insects. To the ancestors, Lulu is calculating and sly but very intelligent with her actions. Lipsha, on the other hand, has limited possibilities in life and is already trapped. It becomes clear that the narrative voice is from beyond when Fleur Pillager is introduced. The ancestors speak about her like a comrade who won't let her worldly life go and "settle her bones in the sun with us." They want her to give up her hopes of passing on her medicinal powers to Lipsha and start her spiritual life as one of the ancestors. Overall using the ancestral voice to open the story gives the spiritual world a concrete place in the story and lets the reader know that spiritual forces will serve as an authority throughout the story.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

As Lipsha makes his way through the gym, the first person to catch his attention is his cousin Albertine, wearing what Lipsha calls her trademark satin. Lipsha's focus quickly shifts from Albertine to her dancing partner and friend, Shawnee Ray Toose, also known as Miss Little Shell. Lipsha is mesmerized by Shawnee's beauty, her clothes and her dance, and he cannot take his eyes off of her. He remains in this state until he notices Shawnee's parents, Elward Strong Ribs and big Irene Toose, who no longer lives on the reservation. When Shawnee's blood father died, her mother remarried and moved to Minot, leaving Shawnee to finish school and give birth to her son. To Lipsha, Shawnee's parents appear aloof in their daughter's presence and that of Shawnee's sisters, who are assumed to be outside getting drunk. Their interaction is minimal and only with Zelda Kashpaw, who holds Shawnee Ray's son in her arms.

Zelda is Lipsha's aunt, who he also knew as a sister. He describes Zelda as a force more so than a person. Lipsha reflects on the fact that every time he makes a move in his life that he believes to be independent thinking, it turns out he is simply acting out plans Zelda has already laid out for him. Fittingly, Zelda informs him that she knew he would be at the dance although he contacted no one before returning to the reservation. "I told them you'd make it."

Zelda's brother and Lipsha's uncle, Lyman Lamartine, fathered Shawnee Ray's son Redford. The two never married even after Redford was born, and Zelda deflected that fact by taking Shawnee and Redford into her home. The reservation turned their attention from Redford being born out of wedlock to Zelda's act of good will. This act also offers Zelda the opportunity to keep the word buzzing that Shawnee and Lyman are engaged and are simply waiting for the right time to set a date. Lipsha makes small talk with Zelda but still can't help but stare at Shawnee as she dances by. He forgets to hide his looks of interest from Zelda and also misses her reaction to his obvious crush on Shawnee. Lipsha's attraction to Shawnee would bring conflict to his already complicated relation to Lyman. "His real father was my stepfather. His mother is my grandmother. His half brother is my father." Lipsha points out, though, that his twisted family line is common in the Indian culture.

Zelda gives Lipsha an extremely heavy traditional fruitcake as a gift. He thanks her and lets his thoughts and attention drift back to Shawnee. He wonders if she could be a part of his fate, the same fate that brought the wanted poster of his father to his door and brought him back to his home reservation. Lyman joins the dancing, and something that Zelda says to Shawnee sends her over to Lipsha. They have a brief conversation that leaves Lipsha in a fog of hopes and dreams.



Chapter 2 Analysis

Lineage is prominent in this chapter when each character's tie to one another is revealed. Lipsha points out that the community is more concerned with making things right through tradition than with keeping their bloodlines from mixing. This thought begins to reveal the significance of ritual and custom to the reservation. However, the mix of the characters, both young and old, implies that there is a movement toward modern life and riches over tradition.

This is the second glimpse into the composition of the reservation, and this time the insight is through Lipsha Morrissey rather than the ancestors. His voice as the narrator is a direct contrast with the ancestral narration. Lipsha's view is limited, whereas the other narrator is able to see everything or nearly everything. In fact, Lipsha's sight doesn't go far beyond Shawnee Ray. He acknowledges the presence of other characters but doesn't spend much thought on them. Lipsha misses Zelda putting a plan for his life in motion because he is staring longingly at Shawnee. All of the thoughts he indulges in come back to Shawnee Ray somehow. His contrast with the communal voice of the first chapter's narrator foreshadows that his infatuation with Shawnee Ray will lead him even further from his ancestors and finding his spiritual power.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

Like Lipsha, Albertine feels the force of her mother, Zelda's overwhelming presence. Albertine was named after Zelda's first boyfriend, Xavier Albert Toose, a choice Albertine has never appreciated. There is an unexplained weight on Albertine, and she is searching for something to fill her. Albertine takes part in a traditional naming ceremony and is given the name of one of her ancestors, Four Soul. Later Albertine goes through the records of her bloodline through the Pillagers. She has heard her grandmother Fleur Pillager whisper the name Four Soul before, but she knew nothing more. Her research only reveals the name scratched into a record book. The name is marked with other Chippewa who, when tribes were forced to move west, came to the reservation in search of food and land. However, even in the church where she searched the records, she was plagued by reminders of her mother. Her mother was known for giving to charity and to the community, and the church was filled her mother's gifts. Her trips home from school were never made eagerly, more out of a sense of duty. In school, she sought exhaustion to remain unhappy and numb.

On this night, Albertine's exhaustion isn't enough for her to get to sleep, so she opts to watch television. After a while, a documentary on penitentiary life begins, and Albertine listens to inmates' reflections on being in prison. Then she hears a familiar voice that grabs her attention. "Chained and spread-eagled in the isolation four days." It is the voice of Lipsha's father, Gerry Nanapush. She notes a change in his face and his eyes. He has lost his spark. Albertine thinks back to the trial when Gerry was sentenced and the people in the courtroom shouted "no." She finds herself drawn to the television shouting it, too. The image of Gerry's changed face leaves a print in her mind as she falls asleep.

Chapter 3 Analysis

The language and imagery of this chapter supports the slightly depressed state that Albertine apparently lives in. The chapter opens, "Even in direct and skilled competition with death itself, Albertine did not escape the iron shadow of her mother's repressed history." The descriptions of Albertine's life after this opening line make the reader feel that a shadow has really been cast. Albertine spends her day hitting dead ends in her search for the history of her name, hinting further that she is in solitude. Finally, her day ends by seeing Gerry Nanapush in prison on her television, and she stares at the television so closely that the reader makes a parallel between his prison and her own.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Marie Kashpaw sits in her apartment thinking about Lipsha, the grandson she raised as her own son. She never connected with Lipsha's mother, her daughter June, and she realized that June was impossible to save. In turn, she turned all of her love and caring toward Lipsha. Lipsha's other grandmother, Lulu, believed that Marie spoiled him too much and gave him too many chances. To her, Lipsha was a given a second chance at life for a reason, and she made up her mind that after surviving a near drowning as a baby he needed more than other children.

Marie is expecting a visit from Lipsha, and in the midst of her thoughts, she hears his footsteps at the door. She notes that his appearance is a bit rugged. His hair isn't cleanly cut or shaved, and his style of clothes matches. As Lipsha sits, Marie offers him the pipe that her late husband, Nector Kashpaw, smoked. She held the pipe as she sat and waited for Lipsha, and now she offers him what she considers to be his inheritance. Lipsha accepts the gift from his grandmother and mother overwhelmingly. He is so honored to hold his stepfather's pipe that he can't find the words to say to her.

Lipsha leaves his grandmother and goes to do some job hunting. When he grows tired of the job search, he passes his time playing video games at a local arcade. As he plays the games, his mind becomes overwhelmed with thoughts of Shawnee Ray. He even convinces himself that there would be nothing wrong with giving her a call, and so he does. Lipsha quickly makes the call, and in his nervousness he goes directly to asking Shawnee Ray to go out with him. To his surprise, she accepts without hesitation, and he is again flooded with thoughts of their possible future together.

The date between Lipsha and Shawnee is set for that night, and he goes to Zelda's house to pick her up. He finds Shawnee waiting for him on the steps in the cold. Zelda comes to the door anyway for a brief moment, and Lipsha reads an odd look of satisfaction on her face. Lipsha and Shawnee start their date pleasantly, with Shawnee pointing out that she doesn't want their night to be considered a date. They decide to have dinner in Canada at the closest Chinese Restaurant to the reservation. After they go through basic formalities of catching up on each other's families, the ride becomes a little awkward. Shawnee's responses aren't negative, but they aren't encouraging. Lipsha decides to listen to the radio for the remainder of the ride.

The couple arrives at the Canadian border where Lipsha is used to breezing through with no problem. This time, passing the checkpoint takes a different turn that Lipsha describes as Zelda's doing. The officer asks Lipsha to step out of the car and begins to examine it. He finds a seed that he believes to be from marijuana. In the midst of the car search, Lipsha and Shawnee sit together. As Lipsha basks in Shawnee's presence, she is rather annoyed by the entire situation. She tells Lipsha that Zelda predicted that Lipsha would call after seeing Shawnee at the powwow. Finally, common sense returns



to Lipsha, and he realizes what Zelda is up to. Zelda wants Lipsha to be a pawn or a catalyst. Lipsha's interest in Shawnee is meant to make Lyman jealous enough to make a move to marry Shawnee or make Shawnee see that other love prospects are dim in comparison to Lyman.

Lipsha's new insight into Zelda's role for him only makes him decide that he will pursue Shawnee even more. Just as he has this thought what happens next makes him believe that Zelda has sensed his newfound fervor for Shawnee Ray. The officer comes into the room with the fruitcake that Zelda gave Lipsha at the powwow dance, along with his stepfather's pipe. The officer concludes that the cake is marijuana and that the pipe is meant to smoke the drug. He informs them that they won't be able to leave until he tests the items. The officer tinkers with the pipe, and Lipsha's spirit drops. He starts to ask the officer not to disrespect the sacred item, but he cannot form the argument.

Chapter 4 Analysis

Marie and Lipsha's interaction gives the chapter a sense of tradition and family. The scene has a feel of honor and sentiment. Marie lovingly thinks back on Lipsha's childhood, and he is obviously her favorite. She feels like she can trust his spirit and the fact that he has always been a special child. Even when his appearance that day does not live up to her expectations, she still offers him the sacred pipe of his stepfather or grandfather. The chapter closes with this sense of tradition being tainted by the outside modern world. Shawnee and Lipsha's desire to leave the reservation to enjoy their night is symbolic of the youth moving away from tradition.

Away from the reservation, there is the potential for trouble, represented by the officer. The imagery used in describing the eagle carved on Nector's pipe defines the difference between the life of Indian history and that of the modern day. When Lipsha receives the pipe from his grandmother, the reader gets a sense of its importance and its classic beauty. In the hands of the officer, "the eagle feather hung down...dragged lower, lower until finally it touched the floor." Lipsha thought that "in the hands of the first non-Indian who ever attached that pipe together, sky would crash to earth." The significance of tradition and ancestry is clearly outlined by paralleling the contrasting side.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Still in the station at the border of Canada, all Lipsha can think of is jumping in his car and escaping everything. Shawnee Ray isn't speaking a word to him, nor will she acknowledge him with as much as a gesture. She just keeps her head bowed over. Eventually, she wearily heads to the phone and calls Zelda, who calls Lyman. He makes it to the border station in a half hour. Part of Lipsha hopes that he keeps on driving through the checkpoint into Canada, but Lyman is obviously there to save Shawnee. Lipsha and Shawnee watch from inside, as Lyman talks with the guard, assuring him of the pipe's deep history and significance.

By the end of the conversation, the guard seems friendlier, and Lipsha wishes he knew how to carry himself in the manner that Lyman does. Shawnee pieces together that Zelda must have called Lyman, and she is a little flustered. Lipsha, getting ready to ask Shawnee how he should act in the awkward situation, has to fend for himself once Lyman and the officer enter the room. In his confusion, Lipsha greets Lyman overly casually, and Shawnee refuses to look at either of them. Lyman indirectly brushes off Lipsha's explanation for the situation because his attention is focused on Nector's pipe. Lyman offers Lipsha three hundred dollars to buy the pipe, and the idea is so strange that it takes Lipsha a minute to understand Lyman's proposal. According to Lipsha, the depths of the pipe's history are immeasurable. "Passed to Nector from his old man, Resounding Sky...smoked when the treaty was drawn with the U.S. government...solemnized the naming ceremony of a visiting United States President..." Lipsha knows the pipe is his inheritance, and he still feels the sting of the dishonor that he did to Nector by letting the guard handle it. Lipsha refuses the sale of the pipe but accepts when Lyman offers him a job where he can "keep an eye" on Lipsha.

The job Lyman offers Lipsha is to clean Lyman's bingo hall daily and substitute for the bartender when needed. Lipsha is given residence in the back of the converted warehouse. The bingo hall has an area for gambling, a bingo floor and dance area, a few old video games in a corner, a popcorn machine (where the women are known to gather) and a bar. The building is the shape of a half-cylinder, colored aqua and black with Christmas and neon lights decorating the outside walls. In the day, the building looks rather run down with remnants of previous nights: broken bottles and litter. The bingo hall is frequented by people of various occupations and ages, and on some nights even Zelda comes in. On the night of one of Zelda's visits, Lipsha is working the bar. Zelda orders tonic water, which Lipsha gives her on the house. She stiffly accepts his gesture and a compliment that he also freely gives. Zelda remains stiff and proper until Lipsha begins to lace her tonic waters with a light trace of gin.

Finally, she loosens up, and Lipsha receives the rare gift of her smile. He compares the light of her smile to that of a saint, "but you have to light a candle, make a sacrifice." Lipsha takes a small moment of triumph in knowing that Zelda's plan for Lipsha,



Shawnee and Lyman isn't working out exactly as planned. Zelda obviously didn't account for Lipsha working for Lyman, and as bad as the first date went, Shawnee still speaks to Lipsha on the phone. It's his conclusion that Zelda shouldn't play with matters of the heart anyway. His victory is short-lived because the more Zelda drinks, the more freely she speaks. Her conversation barrels straight at Lipsha.

Zelda gives Lipsha a lesson on his past and his family tree, starting with his great grandmother, Fleur Pillager. Fleur tried to kill herself by weighing her pockets down with stones and walking into the Matchimanito Lake. The only problem with Fleur's suicide plan was that the stones she tried to use were spirit stones, the stones she kept by her bed and had a spiritual relationship with. The stones didn't allow her to drown. Next, Zelda moves on to the story of her first boyfriend, or first love, Shawnee Ray's uncle Xavier Toose. When Zelda was younger, Xavier was an eligible man, attractive and intelligent, but in Zelda's mind, he wasn't the one she should marry. Zelda wanted to marry a white man who would get her away from reservation life. Zelda had strong feelings for Xavier but refused to acknowledge them because he was happy with reservation life. Xavier pursued her consistently year after year, and Zelda continued to refuse his advances until one year when he asked for the last time.

It was a winter night, and Zelda and Xavier met in the barn of her house. He offered her an engagement ring, and again she would not accept. With this response, Xavier told her that he would not leave until she admitted that she really loved him. Unable to admit the truth, Zelda angrily left the barn, and although her heart wanted her to, she never went back. The next morning, Zelda's brothers brought Xavier into the house, frozen. He waited in the barn like he vowed to, and when they found him, one hand was on his heart and the other on his bottle of whiskey. He lost the fingers that were on his heart, and after that Xavier carried on his life without her, becoming a spiritual and ceremonial man in the community.

Zelda then touches on other stories, like when Lulu found a dead man in the woods and when she watched her father burn the Lamartine family house. It is her final story, though, that weighs heaviest on Lipsha. It is the story of his mother leaving him to die as a child. Lipsha has heard rumors of the story but never allowed it to have any truth in his mind. Zelda dispels any idea of the story being petty gossip. When Lipsha was a baby, his mother June wrapped him in a gunnysack, added rocks and threw him into the marsh. Zelda witnessed the act, not knowing what was in the bag, but curious as to what June was doing.

Zelda waded into the muddy water after June left, and after several attempts, she produced the sack from the bottom of the slough. Lipsha feels sick hearing what his mother did and tries to stop Zelda's story. He even admits that he spiked her drinks, but she continues to drudge up Lipsha's painful story. Zelda's final thought is a question to herself, and she addresses it to Lipsha. It took her a long time to get to the bottom of the marsh and find Lipsha. "So why weren't you drowned?" she asks him. Lipsha, still reeling from the story and angry with Zelda for bringing it up threatens her with a threat his great grandmother once used. "You'll take my place!" When Fleur speaks those



words, the person she speaks them to reportedly dies in her place. The words make Zelda draw back enough to end their talk for the night.

Lipsha refuses to let himself believe that his mother or any mother could commit such a cruel act to her child. That night, he falls into a deep sleep and is jolted out of it by the beating of his heart. He decides to check on the bingo hall, and as he walks around he notices his dead mother. He describes her as having no age, looking both young and old. All of the thoughts Lipsha has had about ghosts and the afterlife cross his mind, as he convinces himself he shouldn't be afraid of his own mother. She lights a cigarette, and the first thing she asks is for her car, speaking of the blue Firebird that Lipsha drives and that was once hers. She speaks to him in a fairly annoyed tone as he tells her that the car works but is stalled. She tells him that she is in a rush but gives him a set of bingo tickets before disappearing. He runs outside, and there is no trace of her, only a falling star in the sky. Lipsha gets the feeling that his mother's visit will change his luck, and he goes back to bed. In the midst of his sleep, he hears an engine rev and thinks of his car, but the weight of sleep is too heavy. He falls back into it.

Chapter 5 Analysis

Entitled "Transportation," this chapter lays out Lipsha's story through the remainder of the novel. Insight is given into Lipsha's thoughts on love, spirituality, work and his surroundings, and Lipsha struggles with them all. Lipsha has fallen in love with Shawnee Ray only to find out that Zelda set them up for her own selfish purposes. Lipsha is obviously fickle regarding matters of the heart. He completely misses that he is Zelda's pawn because he is so in love with Shawnee. He refuses to accept that his mother really threw him in the swamp to die because he really loves her, and he believes that she really loves him. Seeing his mother's ghost hints that Lipsha isn't completely a lost cause because he is in touch with his spiritual side to some degree. There is also foreshadowing that June's bingo cards will change his luck, so things might look a little better for Lipsha throughout the story.

June has to come back from the grave in order to get her transportation. Like others, June seems to have been waiting for Lipsha's return to the reservation. She doesn't get in touch with Lipsha until he hears the truth about what she did to him as a baby. Even in death, she can't really get away from the reservation life that she tried to escape. She comes back to get her property, her transportation to take her where she needs to go. Lipsha seeing the star fall as a sign that June's visit wasn't a dream and that she is moving on.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

When June was young, her mother's presence was less than helpful and nurturing due to her drinking. On one particular morning, June wakes herself at dawn, feeds herself burnt crumbs from the oven and walks on her own to the school bus. When she arrives home, her mother, Lucille Lazarre, is in a bad mood that seems to be reserved only for June. Lucille tries to show love toward June's brother, Geezhig, and he rejects her. She takes out her anger on June. June retreats to a tree for a few hours before returning to the house, where she sneaks past her mother and goes to sleep on the floor next to Geezhig. Later that night, Geezhig wakes June to tell her to run and hide because Lucille's boyfriend is in the house. It is a usual occurrence for Lucille to get drunk and beat the children, especially Geezhig. They go outside and sleep in the bush.

On that night, however, June is too tired and cold to run and hide, so she goes back to sleep. June wakes up to the feeling of being thrown. Her mother has woken her up to try to find her brother. When June tries to escape, Lucille and her boyfriend tie her to the stove, informing June that there will be "no more running away!" June eventually falls asleep, but she is again awakened when Lucille's boyfriend, Leonard, unties her only to sexually assault her. June makes a promise to herself: "*nobody ever hold me again.*"

Chapter 6 Analysis

This chapter is a flashback into June's past, giving insight into what might have made her such a bad mother to Lipsha. It is now clear why even in death June is still trying to find a means to freedom. At heart, she is a kind spirit, but she is forced into a negative lifestyle from younger days. Again, June is referred to as a star speeding through the dark sky. She is bright, burning and constantly moving.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

Lipsha decides to attend a bingo night where he runs into his grandmother Lulu. Lulu is a bingo regular, and she bets higher than most in order to win big in the end. Lulu tells Lipsha to buy her a soda, and the two of them settle in for the game. Lulu has a special chair that she sits in every game and goes through her other rituals before the numbers start coming in. Lipsha watches Lulu closely trying to pick up tips on winning. Once the game starts, Lulu is completely engrossed.

Lipsha looks at the grand prize for the bingo hall, a luxury van with carpeted interior and other amenities that excite Lipsha. He has already come to the conclusion that the van will help him become the type of man that can win Shawnee Ray's love. When Lulu tells Lipsha that he needs to find an occupation, Lipsha tells her that maybe he will make his living off of bingo. Lulu is not impressed, and she encourages him to tap into his spiritual healing gifts. Lipsha spends his time working at the bingo hall and playing on his breaks, and he starts charging people to heal them. Every bingo game makes Lipsha feel closer to winning the van. On the contrary, when he gets greedy and takes money for his healing, he loses his touch more. The last time he tries to heal someone, it is Russell Kashpaw, a friend of Lulu and the "state's most decorated war hero." Russell is suffering from old wounds and other ailments that have forced him into a wheelchair. Lipsha puts all of his energy into the healing and comes up with nothing. He ends up hurting Russell because he is trying too hard to salvage some healing power.

Lipsha's goal to get the bingo is also sidetracked by thoughts of financial gain and his desire to get Shawnee Ray. Lipsha decides to play regular bingo pick cards, where the prizes are cash. After a few wrong tries, he hits the right numbers and wins two hundred dollars. Knowing that the washer at Zelda's house is always breaking, Lipsha camps out at the Laundromat hoping to run into Shawnee. Finally, she shows up, and they sit and talk until Shawnee wants to go for a drive. She and Lipsha ride with some friends to an area called Hoopdance. They each express longing for the other, and Lipsha tries to kiss Shawnee in the backseat of the car. She refuses, wanting their first kiss to be in private and more intimate. The group lets Shawnee and Lipsha out in front of a motel, and they are both overwhelmed with lust and anticipation. Shawnee makes a quick call to Zelda, ensuring that Redford is taken care of, and Lipsha heads to the gas station to pick up condoms. At the gas station, Lipsha exchanges insults with the white attendant when Lipsha senses the lewd ideas the young man has regarding his purchase. Neither race is trusting of the other, and they argue for a few minutes before Lipsha leaves.

Back at the motel, the reality of Shawnee and Lipsha's intentions sets in for them. Lipsha's attention goes to the Bible kept in the hotel room, and he apologizes for bringing Shawnee to the motel. Shawnee responds only by asking Lipsha to comb her hair. The sense of intimacy returns to the room, and they have sex. By the end of their date, the next day, Lipsha gives her the two hundred dollars he won at bingo to help



Shawnee with the costs of furthering her career as a fashion designer. She promises to repay him, and they both return to their lives.

Lipsha goes into the woods to think about his life and Shawnee's life. He knows he doesn't have much to offer her. His only source of income is his bingo winnings, especially since he couldn't heal Russell Kashpaw. In the midst of his thoughts in the forest, where so much of his history took place, he thinks of his mother's visit. In the sky or in the darkness of his mind, he sees the little shooting star and makes up his mind to go for the bingo van that night. He looks for the bingo tickets his mother gave him, uses them and wins the bingo van. The other players are in disbelief and are jealous since so many of them have come close to winning the van and never could. Lipsha wants to call Lipsha to share his winning with her, but he opts to drive around alone for a while. Lipsha thinks he sees the blue Firebird that he once owned. His mother took it the morning after her visit, and now that he has transportation of his own, he wishes her well. The night passes until finally he makes up his mind to visit Shawnee, only to find Lyman there. Lyman is short with him because Redford is sick, and when Lipsha sees that Zelda and Shawnee are arguing about the situation, he tells Lyman to pass on his hellos and leaves.

Lipsha is jealous and heads to Hoopdance to find entertainment. He comes across a party with a mixed crowd, and Lipsha knows some of them from the past. He notices the young man he insulted in the gas station and avoids him, forcing himself to get drunk. The drinking makes him think of Shawnee even more, and he goes to the phone and calls. Shawnee answers in the same cross tone that Lyman used with him previously. Her only concern is freeing the phone line so that the doctor can get through. She hangs up on him. Lipsha takes her behavior as a signal to go over to the house and be supportive, but when he gets outside he is sidetracked.

The gas station attendant has recognized Lipsha and confronts him with a group of friends. They force Lipsha to drive to a remote location that they later reveal is a tattoo parlor. They intend to force Lipsha to get a tattoo of Montana, since that was the subject of Lipsha's insults to the attendant. Coincidentally, the parlor is owned by Russell Kashpaw, and Lipsha isn't sure if Russell is on his side or out for revenge after Lipsha's failure to heal him. The group of guys pays Russell and leaves him to do his work. As it turns out, Russell is more loyal to Lipsha than to the group of guys and gives Lipsha his freedom to leave. Lipsha sits with Russell for a while, and after going through his tattoo book, Lipsha gets a tattoo on his hand of the shooting star that has repeated itself in his mind. Lipsha heads home, and on the way, he finds his van in a field, totaled. He gets in anyway, finds a piece of the upholstery that isn't damaged and goes to sleep.

Chapter 7 Analysis

Lipsha taps into his spirituality, and his luck appears to change. It seems, though, that his love for Shawnee Ray can't coincide with his powers. This may foreshadow that his love for her will continue to hinder Lipsha from reaching his potential. Lulu is disappointed when he loses his healing power, but Lipsha is so caught up in impressing



Shawnee that he is more concerned with making money than he is with losing such an important gift. His ancestors speak to him again when he is in the woods after he has met with Shawnee, and he is able to win his dream van. Then, he even loses sight of the importance of that when he goes out to get drunk after seeing Shawnee with Lyman. The opinion of the narrator in the beginning, that Lipsha is the epitome of potential wasted, is reinforced throughout this chapter. Lipsha is so blinded by Shawnee that he won't see that his ancestral power is already his, as well as love. He won't have either if he doesn't find a way to make them work together.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Lipsha and Lyman sit at a table together at the bingo "palace," as it is nicknamed. Lyman is presenting a case for why he should have received the inheritance of Nector's pipe over Lipsha. Nector was Lyman's biological father, and Lyman feels he has a right to the sacred pipe. When Lyman speaks of the pipe as his possession, Lipsha can't help but compare his feelings toward the pipe to his feelings for Shawnee Ray. Lyman points out that Shawnee spends time with him because she chooses to. Nonetheless, Lipsha offers Lyman a trade of Shawnee's freedom of choice for the pipe. Lyman is only interested in trading money for the pipe but points out to Lipsha that Shawnee would really dislike him if she knew that Lipsha tried to trade her affection for a pipe.

Lyman gets ready for a business trip to the Indian Gaming Conference in Reno. He has somehow managed to get Nector's pipe away from Lipsha and packs it to take with him on his trip. He arrives in the airport in Reno and feels uncomfortable on foreign land. He gets a feeling that something is going to go wrong. He checks into the hotel, the Sands Regency, and goes to his room. He leaves his wallet in his room and goes to look around the casino. The splendor of the casino with its lights, machines and plush layouts overwhelms Lyman. A sudden attraction comes over him at the gambling tables, and he hurries back to his room to escape the feeling. He orders room service and resolves to stay in for the night. He knows he should be preparing for the presentation he has to make the next day, but he can't focus on anything but the time dragging by. He gets up, convincing himself that he is just going out to eat in order to avoid the long wait of the room service.

Even running into the waiter outside his room doesn't deter his new plans. Lyman almost makes it to the street, but at the door something forces him to turn back to the blackjack table where he spends the next five hours. Lyman spends the entire night playing cards, making trips to the cash machine. He wins and then loses until he loses so much that he pawns Nector's pipe for a hundred dollars. By morning, he has no money left and no collateral, and he almost jumps into the Truckee River. It is only a shallow river, though, and it can't help him escape his problems.

Chapter 8 Analysis

Lyman's weaknesses are outlined for the reader, but none of them are apparent to those around him. He controls Lipsha enough to get Nector's pipe away from him, but outside of the reservation he has no power, even over himself. Lyman is used to also display the weakness of life outside the reservation. Lyman's life is built around the non-traditional, his financial power on the reservation. Without the spiritual protection that surrounds his community, even his financial gain is lost. When Lyman pawns Nector's

pipe, a symbol of his ancestry, it is a sign of his people's history being lost to the outside world.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

Lipsha has mixed feelings about the money that he is making from June's bingo tickets. He calls it "insulation" rather than stability because the money is just enough for him to live, providing certain luxuries like fixing his ruined van. He has higher hopes for his financial insulation. He wants to impress Zelda in order to get her blessing on a union with Shawnee Ray. Overall, he wants to overcome any obstacle that stands between himself and Shawnee, including Shawnee herself. Thinking about her, he begins to ache with the memory of the night they spent together. Lipsha still remembers her smell and every moment in the motel room. He longs for them to meet that way again. Lipsha begins to wait around in his van hoping that Shawnee will pass the post office, the college or anywhere that he can speak to her again. When he does run into her, she appears happy to see him, but she tells him that because of Zelda and Lyman, he shouldn't try to contact her. She reminds him that since Redford was born it has been basically understood that she will be with Lyman. She needs Lipsha to leave her alone to get herself together. When Lipsha asks if she shares the love he has for her, she cannot answer. He reads her look to mean that she does.

Lipsha also doesn't have power over Lyman, who returns from his trip slightly changed in Lipsha's eyes. Lipsha doesn't like Lyman's response when he asks about Nector's pipe. Lipsha originally agreed to lend Lyman the pipe in exchange for Lyman's silence about Lipsha trying to barter Shawnee for the pipe. Lyman tells Lipsha that he will have to wait until he gets the pipe back, giving no details, but something in Lyman's newly unpolished look makes him more human and trustworthy in Lipsha's eyes. Even though in the later weeks Lyman regains his airs, he and Lipsha have an honest conversation about Shawnee and finances. Lyman admits to Lipsha that he couldn't stay away from Shawnee as they had originally discussed. When the conversation moves to money, Lyman recommends that Lipsha put his money in a bank account where it can build interest. Lipsha isn't very knowledgeable on money matters, so it takes a lot for Lyman to convince him. In the end, Lyman confides in Lipsha about a business plan to open a huge bingo hall to attract the outside public as well as those on the reservation. He asks Lipsha to invest with him on the project, and Lipsha does, for Shawnee. Like all other thoughts, the thought of financial stability leads him to Shawnee Ray.

Lipsha fights a losing battle to respect Shawnee's wishes to be left alone. He gives in to his desires one Sunday and calls Shawnee Ray. She tells him that the space he has given her has allowed her to think, and she has decided that he should indeed stay away from her permanently. Lipsha cannot accept those words and goes over to her house, after checking to make sure Zelda is at Sunday mass and after picking up a bouquet of flowers. Shawnee forgets herself for a quick moment and looks happy to see him. The happiness is short and quickly turns to suspicion. Like others on the reservation, she knows of Lipsha's flighty ways. They all pause, waiting for those ways



to show up. Nonetheless, Shawnee lets Lipsha into the house, informing him that he can't stay long because she is in the middle of packing to move out of Zelda's house.

Lipsha enters the house feeling overwhelmed with the excitement of being there and of being near Shawnee again. Shawnee gets him to try on a vest that she is making, and she informs Lipsha that she uses Lyman to measure for all of her designs. Jealousy pinches Lipsha, and to try to bring her attention back to him, he shows her his tattoo, telling her he got it for her. Shawnee doesn't like the star or tattoos in general, so she isn't impressed with his gesture. He tries again to impress her with news of opening a joint bank account with Lyman and partnering with him on the new resort and bingo casino investment. Her excitement over the news becomes annoyance when Lipsha tries to cover the fact that they will be building on tribal land already inhabited. He changes the subject with conversation about their future, but it only annoys Shawnee more. Nevertheless, he continues. He talks about loving her and wanting her, pointing out that Lyman isn't right for her. Shawnee tells Lipsha to leave, but knowing that he has already lost her attention, he starts to desperately and passionately beg for another chance. They end up having sex again, and Lipsha describes it as their shadows meeting.

Chapter 9 Analysis

Lipsha's pattern of erratic behavior in the name of Shawnee Ray continues. He uses the native tongue to describe her as his "n'qwunajiwi," his love. At the same time, though, Lipsha has no respect for the same native tradition. Lipsha's lack of respect and lack of awareness keep him a step behind. He thinks that money and power will earn him esteem in the community, but he abuses the foundation that the community is built on: history. In chapter seven, he abuses his healing power, a gift from his ancestors, and in this chapter he makes plans with Lyman to build a resort on tribal ground. It is obvious from the reactions of those around him, such as Shawnee Ray, that he would be taken more seriously if he tapped into his historical authority. It is ironic that Lipsha tells Shawnee Ray, "I got the love medicine," and she responds, "you got the medicine...but you don't got the love." Lipsha is the one gifted with his ancestors' medicinal powers, but without the love, he can't heal anything. He won't get anywhere, even with Shawnee Ray.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

After Lipsha leaves Zelda's house, Shawnee's feelings are in turmoil. She is frustrated that she has fallen for Lipsha, "Mr. Wrong," while she never could bring herself to love picture-perfect Lyman. Nonetheless, she can no longer deny the truth about her feelings for Lipsha. At the same time, she has big plans that don't include him. Shawnee doesn't like the fact that Zelda is beginning to control her and Redford's life. "Ever since Zelda had insisted on keeping Redford full-time...ever since Zelda had started holding on too tightly..." Shawnee has made up her mind to leave. Zelda and Lyman "kept her soldered in their own hopes." Shawnee keeps her plans a secret from them. She wants to win at an upcoming powwow dance to get enough money to move out. Shawnee secretly packs when no one is around and makes arrangements for Redford to stay with her sisters while she attends the powwow in Montana.

When Shawnee tells Zelda what she is preparing to do, Zelda tries to discourage her. Zelda uses every possible tactic to convince Shawnee that she is making the wrong choices, but Shawnee has made up her mind.

Chapter 10 Analysis

Shawnee's weaknesses and strengths are both touched upon. This is the first real insight into her character, and she is also torn between tradition and new living. She wants to leave the reservation, but she has strong ties to life there. She wants to use a traditional powwow to win money, and there is a hint that it won't work out, just as when Lipsha tries to take advantage of his medicinal powers for money. It is apparent that each of the characters has to choose whether to place his or her loyalties with financial gain and modern living or with the heart of their land and its traditions. It is the genuine side of Lipsha, something in his spirit, which draws Shawnee to him, and Lyman's lack of depth of spirit is what pushes Shawnee away from him. Shawnee has to choose between the two worlds, and she is confused. She is resolute, though, that she can't make the decision while being manipulated by Zelda's influence.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

Lipsha is concerned that Shawnee Ray does not return his love. She is the first one he has ever loved or ever made love to, and his feelings are genuine. He is frustrated that he can't get her to see this. Lipsha isn't encouraged by his claim to Shawnee about having love medicine. Shawnee thinks it is his ability to get her into bed, but he isn't even experienced in that area. Lyman, on the other hand, has a lot of history with women. Lipsha decides to find a way to outdo Lyman's love tactics. Lipsha seeks guidance for his medicinal abilities, so he finds his great grandmother, Fleur Pillager. Everyone is afraid of Fleur. The talk on the reservation is that bad things happen all around whenever Fleur comes into town to get her supplies. Everyone avoids her, and Lipsha waits. He busies himself with filling out identification papers at the town Agency. He has felt Zelda's presence even in this process because he has made no progress in becoming an established member of their community, where she has endless weight.

When Lipsha sees Fleur, she is moving too quickly. He decides to give up on the ID forms and goes to Lulu's apartment to pass the time until Fleur, known to them as Mindemoya, passes back to head home. Lulu is nonchalant when Lipsha announces that Fleur, her mother, is in the area. She tells Lipsha that he need not inquire about Fleur Pillager because even if she told him Fleur's story he wouldn't be able to understand its significance. Lulu ends the conversation by telling Lipsha, "I don't hate the old lady...I understand her."

Lipsha finds Fleur in the church before she heads home. When he sees her, he kneels before her and offers her a greeting in their native language. Fleur responds to him in the old Chippewa language, and he can barely pick up on what she is saying to him. He proceeds to inform her that he is her great grandson. She only responds, "Is that right?" Lipsha is at a loss for words, so he sits beside her in silence. When she speaks again, she says that she is going to the store. Lipsha wants to carry her groceries home for her, despite her warning that the walk is a long one.

Lipsha has a hard time keeping up with Fleur on the trek through the forest to her house on the top of the hill. The land around her home is where Lyman plans to build his new gambling palace. Lipsha's thoughts are not on Lyman though. He is worried that the bad deeds he has done in life will catch up with him as he travels through ancestral grounds with the medicine woman. Fleur's house is on the top of the hill, and when they arrive she offers him tea by telling him that he is thirsty. He accepts her tea and the bean soup that she prepares, afterward feeling as if she has put him under a spell. He washes his face to get his bearings and reveals to her his reason for coming: "I need a love medicine." Her response is only to grab him quickly and force him to look into her eyes. Her presence fills the room to the point that the house goes completely dark. Lipsha can only hear the sound of her voice talking to him.



Chapter 11 Analysis

Lipsha has moved into a realm beyond that which he is accustomed. No one has had the courage to even approach Fleur, let alone visit her home. Lipsha finds that courage but again for the wrong reasons. His lack of true motivation is why Lulu won't satisfy his curiosity about his great grandmother. She sees that he thinks on simple levels and will not fulfill his spiritual potential, so she doesn't bother to indulge him. His journey to the ancestral grounds does not intrigue him to dig deeper into the spiritual world, as his medicinal gifts would need him to do in order to flourish. Instead, he seeks his great grandmother's assistance to outdo Lyman. Again, Lipsha's two paths or destinies are outlined in this chapter, and he follows the same path, ironically the wrong path, every time.



Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

The last time the people on the reservation see Fleur Pillager, it is a memorable visit. She enters the town in a white car with a young white boy, and they are both dressed all in white. The two of them make their way to Nanapush's house, where they stay for the majority of their visit. The townspeople watch curiously, trying to figure out what business Fleur has in town and where the young white boy came from. They notice that he has an adult-like nonchalance. He doesn't appear curious about anyone or anything, and he remains still and reserved. They worry when they see him carrying an umbrella when it rains, because their tradition states that children receive most of their knowledge from rain hitting their heads.

When the sun comes out, the people notice that the boy casts no shadow, and it becomes clear that he isn't simply a little boy. They are not sure if he is an illusion Fleur has created to take the attention off of the business she is in town to complete or if he is one of the many souls she has domain over. After all, her grandmother was Four Soul, and she was called that because "she possessed more souls than she had a right to."

Fleur's business is with Jewett Parker Tatro, a land agent who through various sale transactions now owns Fleur's land. He clings to the glory of his land wealth but has little to do in the height of his retirement. Visiting with Fleur has him full of anticipation, especially when he sees the beautiful white car she drives into town. He is accustomed to cheating other people out of their possessions, so he doesn't doubt that like her land, Fleur's car will be his soon enough. The events don't play out that simply, however. Fleur has a transaction of her own planned, and everyone looks on, knowing what the outcome will be. Fleur wants her land back, and she and the young boy play a game of cards, knowing that Tatro won't be able to help but join. As Fleur is known to do, she perhaps takes his soul in that card game. Whatever the case, she gets her land and keeps her car.

Chapter 12 Analysis

The chapter is powerful and displays the mystery and intensity of the spiritual side of this group of Indian people. The imagery used to describe Fleur's visit is vivid and distinct. The use of the colors white and black gives depth to the contrasts within the text. Fleur's ties to the both the spiritual world and the earthly world are marked by two things. First, the color white marks Fleur's spiritual and earthly ties. Fleur comes into town all in white, with a white car and a little white boy.

The color white is usually used to describe the heavens, ghosts and spirits. On the other hand, she is driving through town in a worldly possession, and their clothes do get soiled when they walk the forest grounds. The second indication is the boy himself; he



is also representative of both worlds. His race is white, and he has a child-like innocence about him. At the same time, his personality (or lack of personality) is that of an adult. He has a calm and aloof demeanor, and he carries an umbrella when a child carrying an umbrella is unheard of. It is never said which world Fleur or the boy truly belongs to, but the power of having ties to both worlds allows Fleur to get her revenge and take back the land that is rightfully hers. By taking back her land, Fleur assures that the casino project cannot take it away.



Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

Lyman has a dream that he is at a slot machine, and he is winning time after time. After a while, he starts to see faces that he knows appearing in the screen of the slot machine. Three images of Shawnee's face gives him the jackpot, and he sees Redford, Zelda and Lipsha and keeps getting coins. He is disturbed by the face of Fleur Pillager that keeps popping up in the machine and disturbed by the fact that he never sees his own face. It's Lyman's belief that his reflection or his true face was left at the bottom of the lake the day that he tried unsuccessfully to save his brother from drowning. Lyman's dream takes him into the bush of the forest, where he sees Fleur's face clearly. She tells him: "This time don't sell out for a barrel of weevil-shot flour and a mossy pork." Her words wake Lyman from his sleep, and he wonders if Fleur was really in his dream or if she really spoke to him in his backyard.

Chapter 13 Analysis

Lyman's dream has ties to his own weaknesses and how the ancestors feel about his lifestyle. Chapter eight introduces his problem with gambling, and although he is winning in this dream, Fleur's face is a sign that he won't win in the end unless he makes some changes. When Lyman gets a prominent vision of Fleur, always described as the bear, she is in the woods. In the casino, her face only flashes occasionally. The significance of Fleur in Lyman's dream is that he is trying to build a casino on Fleur's land and the ancestral land around her. She suggests to him not to barter important things like land in exchange for trash.



Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

Lipsha spends his days thinking about Shawnee, and the feelings are beginning to hurt and confuse him. He reflects on his time with Fleur Pillager and is a little frustrated that she didn't give him a tangible love potion like he desired. She only advised him on his love. "Admit your love, take it in although it tears you up." Lipsha isn't sure what Shawnee has decided to do with her feelings for him. He does hear that Shawnee is planning to win the grand prize at the powwow, and he knows that she will put it toward making her dreams come true, which means leaving Lipsha behind. Lipsha thinks of all of the stories he has ever heard about people in love and the strange things love can make a person do. Lipsha even starts wondering if suicide is the only escape from the torture that love has brought into his life. Lipsha decides to try to find answers in the Bible that he took from the motel where he and Shawnee made love.

The Bible is the only keepsake Lipsha has from that night, and he looks under the heading "Weariness" for insight into what he is going through. He finds nothing to satisfy his curiosity or to settle his pain and confusion, so he throws the Bible across the room. The Bible hits Lipsha's stereo and turns the power on. A Jimi Hendrix song gives him a sign that ending life is not the answer. Lipsha begins to feel the power of time around him, and he wants to get closer to that higher power. He knows that Shawnee is close to her religion and wonders if seeking that "real old-time traditional religion" will get him closer to her.

Lipsha hits another wall in the consideration of religion. Shawnee believes it, and even Lyman involves himself in religion. Lipsha, though, isn't sure he truly believes in God in the first place. He contemplates the various groups of organized religions and admits that his only reasoning for getting involved would be to win Shawnee Ray's affections. Lipsha turns to Lyman to find out what his religious paths and goals are, and Lyman hesitates. In the end, he tells Lipsha that he is going to Xavier Toose to take on a spiritual fast and quest for a vision. Lyman offers to take Lipsha to do the same. He asks Lipsha if he has ever had a vision, and Lipsha recalls to himself all of his visions but tells Lyman simply that he hasn't been satisfied with any of them.

Lipsha and Lyman carry on their business. Lipsha hands over his bingo winnings to Lyman for their joint bank account, and Lyman is pleased with the account's progress. Lipsha feels close to Lyman at this moment and decides to ask him about his late brother, Henry. Lyman tells Lipsha about some of his final moments with Henry.

The moment makes Lyman call Lipsha his brother, but Lipsha can't look Lyman in the eye. Lipsha's guilt for trying to take Shawnee Ray is too much to let him look Lyman in the eye at such an honest moment. Lyman breaks the awkwardness by suggesting they go out to eat. On their drive, Lipsha tries to find conversation, and against his better judgment, he asks Lyman how Shawnee is doing. As much as it hurts, Lipsha can't hate



or blame Lyman for loving Shawnee and wanting to have a family with her and Redford. He also hates that he can't blame Shawnee for loving her son enough to try to make things work with Lyman.

However, Lyman tells Lipsha that everything isn't great with Shawnee. Feeling an opportunity for himself opening, he pushes Lyman to tell the rest of the story. Lyman is upset with Shawnee for leaving Redford with her sisters and going to the powwow. Lyman has already started the process in the courts to legally take Redford from Shawnee's sisters. Lyman seems not to care that she is a good mother to Redford. He is almost happy that she has slipped up enough that he can reel her back in through the court system, since she won't marry him as he hoped. It takes hearing Lyman talk to make Lipsha think about Shawnee and how everyone, even Lipsha himself, has torn Shawnee in different directions for their selfish uses. He still wants her, though, and when the two men arrive at Dairy Queen to get their food, Lipsha explodes. He yells at Lyman for not being more understanding of Shawnee's needs.

By the end of Lipsha's verbal outburst, the two men end up in a physical exchange in the middle of Dairy Queen. By the end of the fight, they are both covered in ice cream and condiments and have to laugh at the whole situation. Lyman ends up confiding in Lipsha that his feelings for Shawnee are so strong that he is torn within himself. Lipsha is torn in responding because he is guilty for pursuing Shawnee and also disappointed in learning that he was trying to outdo Lyman when Lyman is just as strung out by love as he is. Lipsha continues to go through his days lost about his feelings for Shawnee and with no one to talk to. His only relief is when Lyman informs him that it's time for them to take their spiritual journey with Xavier Toose.

Chapter 14 Analysis

Signs are all around Lipsha, and he still can't bring himself to see them. He comes close to realizing that spiritual guidance may be what he needs. Once again, his love for Shawnee Ray has the potential to lift his life to where it needs to be, but Lipsha still misses the mark. Lipsha has the opportunity to bond with Lyman when Lyman asks him about his spiritual revelations and confides in Lipsha about his brother. Due to Lipsha's guilt for loving Shawnee, he doesn't allow himself to be open with Lyman. He barely remembers Fleur's advice, simply because she didn't give him tangible powers to make Shawnee love him. This chapter hints that Lipsha will either use his love for Shawnee to tap into the powers he possesses within or continue to miss his opportunities to take the place he was meant to take.



Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary

Redford is at his aunt's house while his mother is away at the powwow. The place is strange to him, but he still feels a sense of safety there. Redford is sleeping with one of his aunts, Mary Fred, and he gets an impression that something is coming for them. He doesn't know exactly what it is, but he is nervous. He paints an image in his mind of the coming danger. It's in the form of a giant metal object plowing its way to him with protruding objects, like his Grandma Zelda's potato peeler. As the object comes closer in his mind, it also becomes apparent to his aunt, and she wakes from her sleep and urges him to stay quiet. Redford looks through the boards of the house and sees that the entity he anticipated is Zelda, a police officer and a social worker. The three of them can't step foot onto the property due to Mary Fred's dogs, who stand patiently waiting for one of the people to dare enter. The three exchange words with Redford's other aunt Tammy, trying to convince her that they are there legally and with the best intentions for Redford. Tammy will not back down, and the social worker responds by writing up everything that is wrong with Redford's new surroundings. Still Tammy refuses to bring Redford out from hiding.

The police officer begins roaming the yard and comes to the shed where Mary Fred and Redford are hiding. The officer, Pukwan, knows immediately that they are there and calls to Mary Fred to come out for their own good. Pukwan even begins to talk about Shawnee, Mary Fred and Tammy's father, noting that he was a good man despite what others seemed to believe. The conversation brings on the opposite reaction from what Pukwan intended. Mary Fred times his steps to the door, and when he is close enough, she attacks him. She thinks her blows will knock him down, but he is vigilant enough to pull his gun on her. Everyone freezes. Again someone speaks to her. This time it's Zelda, and again Mary Fred attacks. Pukwan does not shoot her, but he strikes her with the back of his gun, knocking her out. The three retrieve Redford and get back into the police car. As Redford sits between Zelda and the social worker, he notes that he has been caught by the metal monster that he anticipated earlier, while napping in his aunt's arms. He thinks back to his aunt's unconscious body laying face down in the dirt, and he begins to scream.

Chapter 15 Analysis

Redford has a keen sense of his surroundings that can almost be mistaken for that of an adult. The reader is reminded that he is a child when his senses are expressed in an imaginative form. He knows that something bad is coming for him and his aunt, and the description of the object later gives insight into Redford's true feelings for Zelda. The treacherous object coming in Redford's mind is metal and loud with arms like chains and claws like the tips of Zelda's potato peeler, and the object turns out to be Zelda herself. Although Redford can pick up on the stale smells of his aunt due to her



excessive drinking, he still feels comforted with her. He doesn't want to wake her when he realizes that something is coming for them. After he is taken by Zelda and the city workers, the candy that Zelda gives him causes him to taste his own blood and that of his aunt. He knows that something is wrong when Zelda takes him and leaves his aunt injured on the ground. His manners tell him that he should thank Zelda for the candy, and his instincts tell him something else. He screams uncontrollably.



Chapter 16

Chapter 16 Summary

At the powwow, Shawnee participates fully, earning points in every round, participating in the traditional festivities and feasting on her breaks. She dances her way to placing as one of the four finalists in the traditional women's and shawl dance. As Shawnee waits for the drums to signal the beginning of her final dance, she has a memory of her father. He is standing facing their old car, and when he turns around, he is holding a butterfly. It is dead but still beautiful, and he rubs its wings along Shawnee's neck and arms, rubbing the element of its wings into her skin. He tells her, "Ask the butterfly for help, for grace." Shawnee feels rejuvenated and filled with all of the potential for growth that a butterfly has. She is eight or nine at the time, and her father picks her up and throws her in the air. She feels like she never remembers coming down.

Chapter 16 Analysis

Shawnee's dancing takes her to memories of her father and brings her closer to his spirit. She remembers a moment in her childhood when he blessed her with grace, and she calls upon that blessing to help her win the competition.



Chapter 17

Chapter 17 Summary

Lipsha and Lyman get ready to go to Xavier Toose for their spiritual fast and journey, but Lipsha happily tags along with Lyman to Zelda's house, hoping that he will get a few moments with Shawnee. Winning her over is the only reason he is looking for spiritual awakening, so he figures she would be a good inspiration before the fast. Without Lyman, he would never have seen Shawnee, because since the powwow when Zelda took Redford from his aunts, Shawnee has closed herself off from the world. She came close to her goal of first prize by getting second, but there was little else to say about her since. When they arrive at Zelda's house, Shawnee barely acknowledges Lyman and Lipsha. She simply passes Redford to Lyman.

Lipsha is desperate for her to show him some emotion. As soon as they have a moment together, he asks her to marry him. For a moment Shawnee is moved by his passion and sincerity, but this lasts only for a flash before she turns cold. Lipsha is on his knees holding on to Shawnee, and she breaks free, ordering him to get out of her way and threatening him with her foot. Lipsha retreats, unable to recognize the menacing tone Shawnee has taken with him. Lyman comes into the room at this moment and asks what Lipsha did to receive that tone from her. Shawnee snaps, screaming at both men to get out and informing them both that they will never be what she wants to marry. Both men are dumbfounded and clueless as to what could have brought on Shawnee's anger. She cuts through both of them, even insinuating that Redford may not really be Lyman's son. As they leave together, they have no words for one another, refusing in silence to believe that the woman who ravaged through their hearts was really their Shawnee Ray.

Lyman and Lipsha head into heavily wooded grounds as they near Xavier Toose's house. When they arrive, Xavier's touch alone is enough to dismiss Lipsha's misgivings about the trip. Lipsha anticipates that Xavier's presence and his land will invoke immediate ties to the ancestors, but instead, Xavier puts Lipsha and Lyman to work. They cut trees and clear leaves, and they build a small hut or lodging. Fussing with each other all the way, they collect stones for the fire and meet back at the lodge. There, they meet another man, Joe, who is keeping the fire burning.

The stones Lyman and Lipsha have collected are now red hot, and they are told to remove all of their clothing. The two of them get into the sweat lodge along with Xavier, and the other man closes the door behind them. Xavier adds water to the red-hot stones, filling the lodge with steam as he prays and instructs the two men. Lyman joins in with his own prayer, and Lipsha only prays hoping that it will help cool the room down. After a while, however, Lipsha manages to pray his mind into a higher state. He finds a space of comfort in his mind and almost lets himself indulge in it, but he is interrupted and overcome with disappointment.



The next stage is for Lipsha and Lyman to wash themselves in the lake to cleanse, but Lipsha can't get into the light mood. He feels like the river does not want him or won't accept him, and his thoughts are with June. He confesses to Lyman that he misses his mother, but Lyman is already annoyed with Lipsha and brushes him off coldly. Their next and final instruction is to find a place where they feel potential personal power and stay there for the remainder of the journey. They are given water, their sleeping bags, tobacco and a garbage bag to protect from the rain. Lipsha feels nothing from the land as he searches for a spot, and finally he stops on a rock when he is lost and tired.

The days pass, and Lipsha's mind is filled with thoughts of anger toward being Indian, anger toward Lyman, longing for food and dreams of running away from everyone and everything with Shawnee Ray and Redford. He waits for his vision day after day, but nothing happens. Pure boredom sets in, and Lipsha simply wants to go home. When something finally does happen, it isn't at all what Lipsha expected. Lipsha wakes up to a feeling of extra weight and warmth around his sleeping bag. He sees a skunk asleep on the curve of his body. Despite his careful attempts, he wakes the skunk. The skunk tells him "this ain't real estate" and then covers him with her scent. It is at this time that Xavier appears to inform him that the fast is over. The rest of the men laugh at Lipsha's misfortune and stay far from him due to the smell. Even Lipsha can't smell or taste the food he dreamed about the entire fast because the skunk's odor has deadened his senses. After eating, the four men gather to exchange stories and visions from their fast. Lipsha wallows in the shame of being out-done by Lyman once again.

Chapter 17 Analysis

Lipsha is clearly supposed to be taking steps in his enlightenment, and he takes more and more steps away from it. All of Lipsha's weaknesses are brought to the surface during his fast. He partly resents the traditions of his Indian culture. He doesn't see the ancestor's land as sacred, and for selfish reasons, he would rather see the land used for a casino than for things like spiritual fasting and being at one with nature. Lipsha has weakness of the flesh, and his weakness keeps him drawn to Shawnee without really knowing her. His weakness that makes him think only about food, movies and social events rather than taking in the gifts that are laid before him.

In this case, he has the gift of becoming one and at peace with the spirits and tapping into his powers. He allows Lyman to appear to outdo him again, when in reality all the answers he needs are in front of him. The skunk is representative of the depth that Lipsha needs to reach. The skunk is smelly, but if Lipsha stopped to think, he would see that the skunk has brought him the closest to enlightenment by addressing his disinterest in the sacred land. The land is not there to sell back and forth like real estate. The skunk comes on the last day of the fast to make him see what a fool he is to have spent all of those days in nature while only appreciating its potential real estate value. The words of the skunk are close to those of Fleur when she appeared in Lyman's dream.



Chapter 18

Chapter 18 Summary

During the fast, Lyman passes three days, until on the third day something moves him to dance. Lyman dances on and feels no distraction from hunger or exhaustion. Eventually, he hears a drum and voices singing in the wind. The sounds enclose Lyman, and he dances fiercely for his brother Henry. Others on the reservation assume that when Lyman dances it is for Shawnee, but Lyman has taken his brother's dance clothes and dances only for him and his legacy. Lyman has never gotten over his failed attempt to save his brother from drowning himself. Lyman thinks of how he was once jealous of Henry's dance abilities, but Henry wouldn't allow Lyman to stay jealous and would always share a hug with Lyman whenever he won a competition. As Lyman dances on, he feels his brother close to him, protecting him and finally telling Lyman to retire his old dance outfit. Henry lets Lyman know that he is at peace with the words, "It is calm, so calm...In that place where I am...My little brother."

Chapter 18 Analysis

Lyman has found strength within himself, not through Shawnee or even his son, but through his ancestors and his late brother. This is Lyman's first sign of true strength, and it isn't through all of his investments and bank accounts. Lyman mental strength is displayed when he feels no weakness from lack of food and lack of sleep. He is able to dance energetically under both of these circumstances. Henry's spirit shades and protects Lyman, and they are both able to find peace with one another.



Chapter 19

Chapter 19 Summary

Albertine is at her mother's house on the reservation, visiting from school. She is exhausted from the drive, but the smell of coffee and breakfast pulls her out of the bed. She is greeted by Shawnee, who offers her a mug of coffee. Shawnee informs her that her mother, Zelda, is at church, and she took Redford with her. Shawnee doesn't go into more detail about Zelda at first, and Albertine doesn't ask due to her strained relationship with Zelda. Albertine and Zelda came to an understanding during one of their fights that Albertine will do nothing to tarnish Zelda's name or standing in the community, and in turn, Zelda won't interfere in Albertine's life.

Knowing that they won't be able to talk freely once Zelda comes home, Albertine asks Shawnee if her relationship with Zelda has gotten any better. Shawnee's answer is simply that she is moving out, and the response makes Shawnee think of her childhood with Zelda and the effect it has on her present relationships. Zelda was never affectionate with Albertine when she was a child, and the affection was something Albertine longed for. Albertine also didn't know anything more about her father than his picture, framed in Zelda's house, and she knew her family structure would make her needy in future relationships. The things that Albertine lacked in her life are what drove her to medical school and working in a field helping people.

When Zelda and Redford return from church, Albertine greets him excitedly. He runs to the safety of his mother's arms before returning her greeting. Shawnee mentioned to Albertine before that Redford has become very hesitant with people since Zelda and the police took him from his aunts. Redford won't let his mother out of his sight. Albertine starts a conversation with Zelda, teasing her about her inability to sew and her new nonchalant style of cooking. Albertine notices when Zelda refers to Redford she calls him "our boy," and she tries to correct her mother, reminding Zelda that Redford is Shawnee's son.

Albertine purposely leaves an opening in the conversation for Shawnee to defend herself, but her spirit appears to be broken. She remains quiet. Zelda uses Shawnee's association with Lipsha as her reasoning for making sure she is the one to care for Redford, even when Shawnee leaves for school. Zelda is upset that Shawnee seems to have an interest in Lipsha when Lyman comes around asking about Shawnee all the time. When Shawnee leaves the room, Zelda and Albertine have the chance to talk on their own, and Albertine first tells Zelda that maybe Shawnee has real feelings for Lipsha. The conversation makes Albertine ask about Zelda's first love before Albertine's father. Zelda brushes off the comment and carries the conversation to every other subject.



Chapter 19 Analysis

Albertine wakes up in the guestroom of her mother's house, and from the memories she has about her childhood, she has always been like a guest there. Zelda wasn't warm with Albertine, even when she was a child, and it has made their adult relationship tense. Zelda's lack of affection also makes her unable to relate to Shawnee's possible feelings for Lipsha and Shawnee's feelings about the fact that her relatives practically stole Redford the minute she turned her back. Zelda's reasoning is based on the practical rather than the emotional. Zelda can sooner indulge Albertine in superficial conversation than think about her true feelings for her first love, Xavier Toose.



Chapter 20

Chapter 20 Summary

Lipsha sees his cousin Albertine during her visit home from medical school. Rather than start their conversation on the woes of his own life, he tries talking about her strife. Albertine doesn't have many negatives going on in her life, she says. She is where she wants to be in life and content with it. The talk goes back to Lipsha, as he states, "I don't want to live." (p. 215) Albertine thinks he is talking about his embarrassment with the skunk during his spiritual fast, but he is referring to Shawnee. Albertine's advice is for Lipsha to get his own life together and then pursue Shawnee. There is a lot that Lipsha wants to say in response to her statement. He wants to thank her for pushing him and supporting him and tell her about his regrets for disappointing everyone, but he can't find the words. He goes home quietly.

At home, Lipsha takes a nap, and in the depths of sleep, his mind moves him into a vision from his childhood. He sees himself going down into the slough as a baby. As he tries to cry out, the water fills his lungs, and he nears death. Lipsha then feels someone take him and breathe life back into his body. He can't find one thing to describe what has saved him. The entity is both human and spiritual, part animal and part goddess. The entity comforts Lipsha until Zelda saves him. Lipsha wakes up, but he can't will himself to leave the bed. His visions continue. Lipsha hears a voice repeat the words of the skunk from the forest: "this ain't real estate." He sees that the skunk has returned, and he is annoyed at its presence.

The skunk chastises him for being slow in learning the lesson he must learn. When Lipsha submits to giving the skunk the chance to teach him what he is supposed to know, his mind is taken to a vision of Lyman's future casino and bingo hall. In the beginning of the vision, the casino is a success; money is made in abundance. The skunk reminds Lipsha that the land is not real estate, and Lipsha sees that the casino is built over his ancestor's land and over tribal land owned by the reservation. Even Fleur's house would be demolished for the casino parking lot. Lipsha tries to tell the skunk that that vision is not the one in his future. Lipsha sees a vision of old and new coming together in the casino. He wants to use the traditions of old to build something profitable. He envisions himself at the tables using his luck to win money and the praises of the community. The skunk tells Lipsha, "Luck don't stick when you sell it," and Lipsha has to admit to himself that the skunk is right. "Everybody knows bingo money is not based on solid ground...our reservation is not real estate, luck fades when sold. Attraction has no staying power, no weight, no heart."

Chapter 20 Analysis

Lipsha's conflict between modern living and tradition is most obvious. The chapter opens with his drive with his cousin Albertine. Lipsha finally has his true vision, and it



comes in the last form that he expects, the skunk from the woods. This chapter is confirmation that Lipsha has misinterpreted his path as it was foreshadowed throughout the novel. Lipsha has the vision of his childhood while he is in a dream state, giving him a chance to brush the lesson off like all of the others. In turn, the skunk makes the vision undeniable. The skunk shows him that Lipsha's decisions will turn out negatively, and in the end, he will only degrade the history of the very people he tries to impress. The vision also notes that the young bingo caller would be calling numbers "day in and day out." This could also be the future that Shawnee is trying to get away from. She once told Lyman that she would not spend her life in the bingo hall, calling numbers. The vision that the skunk shows Lipsha could also mean that the new bingo hall project would seal Shawnee into a fate that she never wanted.

Lipsha's vision also has another use. The reader has the chance to really see how Lipsha thinks. In Lipsha's mind, he sees a bingo palace that will incorporate both the new and old elements of his culture and ultimately bring him the respect he wants from the community. He notes that the old tradition is present when he envisions the dome of the future bingo hall and casino as resembling a turtle shell. The turtle shell is traditionally a symbol of luck and wealth, and he wants it to be a part of his investment. Unfortunately in actuality, the new world and the old world cannot coexist in a bingo hall. One would have to be sacrificed, and Lipsha finally realizes this.



Chapter 21

Chapter 21 Summary

Gerry Nanapush makes it through his time in prison and in solitary by dreaming. He thinks about various foods and places, but he thinks most about two women in his past. First, he calls his last wife's name: Dot. He pictures her carrying on her regular tasks like knitting. She calls him every week, faithfully, even after they divorced and she remarried. However, June Morrissey's face haunts him more. He thinks about her all the time and draws her face when he can. With these thoughts, his days pass until one day he receives the news that due to his mother's efforts he will be transferred to a nicer maximum-security prison in Minnesota.

The joy of the trip alone keeps Gerry anxious for the transfer. He longs to see new sights and smell new air. Two marshals escort Gerry, who is handcuffed and led to the airplane. One marshal he describes as "sand colored" and the other "black haired with pale green eyes and a lumped-out jutting chin." Neither of the marshals will consent to relieving Gerry of his chains or handcuffs, or even to loosening them. In the sky, the captain announces that they are flying into a storm, and before any of them knows it, the plane crashes. Gerry looks around and sees one marshal either dead or unconscious. No one else is in view. He is almost exploding with joy as he leaves the scene, hobbling through the snow in his shackles.

Chapter 21 Analysis

This chapter is full of comparisons between humans and animals, signaling Gerry's return to the spiritual side during his imprisonment. He even believes that he is transforming into an animal when he sees his hand change to a paw while he is in solitary. He sees June, who has moved on to the spiritual world as nature: lightning, snow, clouds and a mink. She is everything and nothing, similar to the spirits described in previous chapters. Gerry's link to his spirituality and relation to Lipsha is marked by feelings about his luck. "He felt his luck coming back...he knew from sitting in the still eye of chance that fate was not random." Just as he feels his luck changing, it does. The plane crash frees him from imprisonment.



Chapter 22

Chapter 22 Summary

After taking Albertine's advice to leave Shawnee Ray alone, Lipsha is on the right path to doing so. He finds out that he doesn't have a choice but to give Shawnee space because she has moved away to attend school. He looks her up but only uses the number as inspiration, calling her and hanging up once in a while. Lipsha's feelings for Shawnee are strong but less self-serving. He focuses on them having a future together rather than aiming for another night in a motel room with her. With Shawnee gone, Lipsha turns back to his bingo luck to help fill his thoughts. He happily thinks about all that he has saved to this point, and one day he decides to go to the bank to see the numbers up close. The bank informs him that the account has been exhausted and closed by the joint party, Lyman. Lyman has used Lipsha's funds to rebuild his finances, paying off old debts and other obligations. Lipsha accepts this defeat and notes that he knew and was told that bingo money was never a sure thing. From this point, he stops betting at the bingo hall.

The seasons pass, and Lipsha moves through work and life at a steady and mediocre pace. One night after Lipsha falls asleep, he dreams that he is in jail. Just as he is getting stressed out with the idea of confinement, he sees his father next to him in the jail. He watches his father near the machines in the jail laundry room, sorting through the jail uniforms and undergarments. He wakes up with a clear memory of what he has dreamed, and later he finds out why the dream took place. One of Lipsha's associates tells him of his father's escape from prison. Lipsha goes back to his room, knowing that his father will call. When the call comes, Lipsha and Gerry's exchange is very limited, and Gerry's part is spoken in their native old language. The arrangement is made for Lipsha to meet his father in Fargo, although Lipsha isn't able to completely decipher the exact location. Nonetheless, Lipsha knows he has to go to Fargo and find his father before anyone else catches up with him.

Lipsha goes to the place he thinks his father wants them to meet, the video arcade. Lipsha plays games to pass the time as well as to avoid suspicion and the cold temperatures outside. Hours pass, and there is no sign of Gerry. Once Lipsha sees the evening hours strike, he leaves. Going back to his van, he finds that he left the headlights on the entire day, and his battery is completely dead. Lipsha takes refuge from the freezing temperatures in a bookstore in downtown Fargo. He sees a book entitled *Fear and Trembling and Sickness unto Death* and thinks the book is a sign about his father's fate. Lipsha goes to the other possible translation of their meeting place, the alleyway behind a lodge downtown. He thinks his father might have said he would be waiting in the dumpster. Lipsha gets desperate when he sees that the dumpster is covered in snow, knowing that if his father is in there, he must have frozen by now. Lipsha digs the dumpster out of the snow and finds it empty. When he turns around, his father is behind him. They skip the formalities of catching up and try to figure out how to get home with no car.



Chapter 22 Analysis

Lipsha has moved forward, allowing himself to let Shawnee live her life and ending his competition with Lyman. Lipsha sees Lyman for what he is worth. He is a financial mover only, and Lipsha lets him be that without interruption. Lipsha's vision of his father is also an indicator showing Lipsha's forward motion. He accepts the vision, and he waits to find out its meaning in his life. Lipsha's transition leads him back to his father, and he has come full circle. The photo of Gerry that Lulu sent Lipsha brought him out of Fargo back to the reservation. Lipsha's vision and the phone call for Lipsha to meet Gerry in Fargo imply that Lipsha's journey is nearing its end by circling back toward its beginning.



Chapter 23

Chapter 23 Summary

One night after Shawnee and Redford move out, Zelda goes to sleep, leaving her father Nector's pipe on the kitchen counter. Her mother presumably left it there. Zelda dreams that her heart explodes from her chest and dances in front of her, splitting in sections in its fervor. She wakes trying to recover and realizes the dream is real, and she can't breathe. Her first thought is that she is dying of a heart attack, and the thought almost calms her as she prepares herself for the moment. Zelda makes sure that even in death she is the picture of perfection by propping herself slightly upright and wrapping her rosary beads between her fingers. In the midst of her preparation, Zelda begins to think of her regrets in life. At first, she can't think of any, but then she sees flashes of Redford's face the day she took him away from his aunts. She sees herself making love to a man with long hair, and she realizes that her regrets are for what she has missed in life and the things she didn't do. Zelda remembers that love caused her father's death, and she then resolved to remove love from her own life. Until this point, Zelda has succeeded at the task.

Zelda gets a vision of her father as clear as the day she saw him set fire to his lover Lulu Lamartine's house. Her father died, but Lulu never burned. Zelda was bitter because of it. Zelda's thoughts and the sight of her father begin to breathe life back into her body. She feels the pain of her ice heart melting, and she doesn't know what to do with all of her pain and emotion. She cries out. The pain in her heart subsides, and in the calm that follows, she sees Xavier Toose in her mind. Zelda realizes that he was a missed opportunity and that she never stopped loving him. She knows that they can't make up lost time, but they could share in her father's pipe. Zelda gets up, slowly gets dressed and drives to Xavier's house. Upon arriving, she realizes that her visit might seem awkward to him because they have never looked each other eye to eye since the night he lost his fingers. Xavier sees her through the window and meets Zelda at her car. The two don't say a word. They breathe each other's essence and walk back to the house, leaving the pipe in the car.

Chapter 23 Analysis

Visions of ancestry are used again to teach a character a lesson. The concept of the ancestors as the authority figures is reinforced in this case by the control they have over Zelda's fate. She needs to see that in death she would not be happy with the way she has lived her life. She has lived under the illusion that she does good for herself and for everyone around her, when in reality she stopped loving anyone when she was young. Throughout the book, the reader has been able to see how she pushes emotions to the side, but Zelda never sees it until her father comes before her and melts the ice from her heart with his fire.



Chapter 24

Chapter 24 Summary

Lipsha and his father pass time until they figure out their next move by browsing in the train station drug store. Gerry's plan is to steal a car, and as they wait for the right one, Lipsha sees a colorful stuffed toucan and decides that he has to have it. Part of him wants to steal it to get his nerves ready for stealing the car, and the other part of him wants it for Shawnee Ray. Lipsha walks out the store with no one noticing at first, even Gerry. Then the store manager comes running out after them, and the two men are forced to jump at their first opportunity for escape.

When Lipsha sees a man leaving his car running, he and Gerry think they have gotten lucky. Lipsha tucks the stuffed toucan into the rack on top of the car, and they slide in and drive off. A few moments later, the owner of the car jumps on top of the moving car, screaming at them. His frantic words only make Gerry drive faster, until they notice what all of the commotion is about. There is a baby in the backseat of the car. They slow down a little, and Lipsha suggests they leave the baby for someone else to find it. Gerry disagrees, and they keep driving. As they drive on, the baby starts to cry, and Lipsha gets nervous while Gerry is consumed in his own thoughts. The police chase them but are cut off when the car rack breaks and flies at them, along with the large stuffed toy.

Once Gerry and Lipsha overcome that obstacle, they are faced with an oncoming storm. The snow gets really heavy, and they have to drive behind a snowplow to make it through. As they are driving, Lipsha notices a car speed up beside theirs, moving at equal pace. The car is June's, and both Gerry and Lipsha see her silhouette in the front seat. Gerry is overwhelmed and drawn to her so much that he leaves the safety of the snowplow and takes the car completely off of the road. Gerry follows June despite Lipsha's fight to stop him. They move behind her as if they are on a road until Gerry realizes that June's car is floating, and theirs may be too. The realization makes him panic, and the car gets stuck.

June pulls her car to a stop, and by this time, Lipsha is too cold to ask his father to stay. He watches helplessly as his father gets into his mother's car, and they drive off. Lipsha turns on the heat and climbs into the backseat with the baby. For their last hours, the snow covers the already white car, along with any tracks they made. The engine and the heat go off as Lipsha holds the innocent baby in his coat.

Chapter 24 Analysis

The theft of the stuffed toy is a parallel for Lipsha and his father. While Gerry is ready to steal a car, Lipsha steals something on a smaller level. Nonetheless, the prediction by the ancestors in the first chapter, that Lipsha will be just like his father, has begun to come true. Shawnee is also again the opening for Lipsha to make hasty choices and



decisions. He wishes to himself that Shawnee were enough a part of his life for him to really steal the toy for her. "Shawnee Ray got us into this, I tell myself, even though I know it is more my wish than a thought that makes any sense."

Once the car is stolen, the baby is a symbol used to represent the difference between Gerry and Lipsha. Lipsha is upset when he realizes that the only reason Gerry keeps the baby in the car is because the cops won't try to injure them with a baby in the car. Lipsha even comes to the baby's defense when Gerry calls him names in anger. In the end, Lipsha holds the baby, hoping that the child will at least be comforted in death, even though he can't be.

Lipsha's fate in this chapter is symbolic of when June tried to drown Lipsha as a baby. June's car covers the stolen car with snow, basically burying Lipsha and the baby alive. Lipsha also thinks about how he has always been alone, and his parents never looked back to change that fact. When June and Gerry drive off together, knowing that Lipsha will be left behind to die, it is a confirmation of Lipsha's solitude.



Chapter 25

Chapter 25 Summary

Federal agents barge into Lulu's apartment, searching for Gerry and searching for a reason to involve her in his escape. Lulu is prepared for the intrusion and has dressed in complete traditional Indian garb. During hours of questioning, Lulu tells the agents a mixed up story, from which they conclude that Gerry did go home after escaping. Lulu feigns confusion, memory loss and stress, even fainting at one point. Lulu's plan works perfectly. She tells her questioners that she drove Gerry to the border, but she can't remember where he intends to go. The agents continue to search Lulu's apartment but find nothing except the wanted poster of Gerry that Lulu stole from the post office. This is the only excuse they can find to take her in, so they use it. Lulu is arrested, and in the process, she sends the police on a wild goose chase for Gerry. As Lulu is carried out to the police cars, through media and mayhem outside, she starts a traditional ceremonial dance that the onlookers describe to be like her Pillager ancestors. Right before Lulu gets in the car, she raises her white eagle feather fan and bellows a strong victory cry. The cry is contagious to those on the reservation watching on, and they all join in.

Chapter 25 Analysis

This chapter is distinct and powerful, as Lulu has been characterized throughout the novel. The voice of the narrator moves back to the ancestors or Lulu's neighbors at the elders' community on the reservation.

Either way, the voice speaks from an all-knowing, ever-watching point of view and marks the move of the novel back to highlighting tradition. Lulu's clothing shows that she lives for tradition, as she would not present herself to the federal agents in normal attire. "Maybe they thought Indians dressed that way all the time. Maybe they thought Indians dressed that way to go to bed." Even in the end, Lulu never holds her head in shame. The opening chapter says that all of Lulu's moves are calculated and with reason, and her move to protect Gerry and Lipsha is no different. Lulu's power is in tradition. She is described as various animals as she moves smoothly through her strategy to thwart the police, and her victory is marked by a dance and a tribal cry to the masses.



Chapter 26

Chapter 26 Summary

Shawnee's new apartment at the university is drafty, and she wakes up every morning to seal air out with clothes and towels before Redford wakes up. One morning, she wakes up, having dreamt about Lipsha. For the first time, she feels warm. She thinks that she has finally succeeded at completely sealing the apartment from the drafty air, but her dream has something to do with her warm energy as well. In the dream, Lipsha says to her, "There is so little time, just the warmth of a breath," and he kisses her deeply. Shawnee looks outside and sees that there was a snowstorm.

On the radio, she hears that everything is closed. She also hears that Gerry has not been found, but the hostage has been found in good condition. After breakfast, Lyman calls to speak to Redford, and Shawnee carries on her day. She takes Redford out in the snow with her to shovel her car free. When they return to the apartment, Shawnee goes back to work on a shirt she is making for Lipsha. She admits that her longing for him has even made her think of marriage. She continues sewing and from time to time senses a strong presence of Lipsha around her, at the window or in the wind. She remembers her dream again, and it is so vivid that she can feel his kiss and even smell his scent.

Chapter 26 Analysis

Shawnee has a true connection to Lipsha despite his shortcomings. Lipsha has reached out to her in his thoughts, while he is fading away in the snow where Gerry and June have left him. Here is a sign that Lipsha has tapped into his powers, and he has had the love medicine for Shawnee all along. Lyman's presence can't even interrupt Shawnee's connection with Lipsha that morning; it is that powerful.



Chapter 27

Chapter 27 Summary

Fleur prepares herself for a journey. She is ready to travel wearing her traditional clothes: rabbit tail moccasins, owl feather hat, leather gloves and satin and swale fur coat. She carries only a toboggan of ancestral bones and her daughter Lulu's baby moccasins. Fleur leaves behind her house and everything in it, and she starts toward the Matchimanito Lake. Her goal is to reach the island on the other side, where her ancestors and family members reside to take Lipsha's place in death. Fleur is a little annoyed with her task, and she knows that journey will be long. She travels over the ice-covered river anyway. She can see everyone waiting for her on the island: her grandmother, Four Soul, her sisters, parents and husband. Fleur falls through the ice, and her life ends. Her journey continues. Her story is told long after she is gone. Some say that they can still see her footprints across the river, and others hear the rejoicing on the island the day she arrived. Still, Fleur's bear-like grunt is often heard, letting her people know that she is always watching.

Chapter 27 Analysis

Fleur's journey culminates the journeys that all of the characters have taken in this novel. Lipsha is finally ready to make the most of his potential, so now Fleur can rest. The narrator in the first chapter foreshadowed all of the happenings in the novel, and it has all come to pass. Through tradition every character, including Fleur, finds his or her place of peace.



Characters

Lipsha Morrissey

Lipsha is the main character, and he functions on various levels in the story. His constant is that he comes close to maximizing his potential but never quite makes it all the way. One of his biggest wishes is to make everyone on the reservation look at him with pride. Lipsha is in love with Shawnee Ray Toose, and he lets this love lead him in the wrong direction. Lipsha is young and fickle, and he uses his love to make the wrong decisions time and again. Everyone around him knows that he has the ability to be powerful in his own right, but it takes Lipsha a long time to realize it for himself. Besides his weakness for Shawnee Ray, Lipsha has a weak spot for his father, Gerry Nanapush and his mother June. His naivety makes him deny both of their shortcomings for most of his life and almost leads him to death at the end of the novel.

Shawnee Ray Toose

Shawnee is a young, driven single mother who gets caught up in trying to please those around her. Her son is Redford, and his father is Lyman. Everyone in the community wants to see Shawnee marry Lyman, especially his sister Zelda. Zelda takes Shawnee and Redford into her home to help them and in the end try to control their fate. Shawnee wants to become a fashion designer, and marrying Lyman is not in her sights. She humors the situation because she needs help getting on her feet after her father dies and her mother remarries and moves away. She struggles with commitment to her child's father and her blooming love for Lipsha.

Zelda Kashpaw

A very powerful member of the reservation community, Zelda's life revolves around her name. Zelda's daughter remembers that her mother was never loving or affectionate toward her or anyone else. Zelda saw love as a weakness once her father died because of his love for Lulu Lamartine. She vowed at that point never to let love use her like that. Zelda's mark in the community is always felt, and her contributions are visible at every turn. She receives acclaim for taking Shawnee and Redford in and uses the praise to make sure Redford's illegitimacy is never a topic for bad rumor. Zelda is the one who saved Lipsha from drowning as a child, but like everyone else, she never believed that he would amount to anything. Zelda's lack of love made her life and life's relationships very superficial, and coming close to death makes her realize that she wanted to love all along.



Lulu Lamartine

Lulu lives in the elders' home, a community on the outskirts of the reservation. She is an intelligent woman who everyone knows not to mess with. Her son is Gerry Nanapush, and her grandson is Lipsha Morrissey. Throughout the novel, she is a woman of few words, but her actions are powerful. The story opens with Lulu stealing the wanted poster of her son and framing it in her apartment. The story ends with Lulu getting arrested for stealing that very poster and for covering for her son, who has now escaped. In between these events, Lulu speaks about her mother, Fleur, who she has a reserved respect for, and about Lipsha finding a suitable profession other than bingo. Her name comes up often, however, intertwined in the pasts of others. For example, Zelda's father was her lover. Even though she has had many husbands and has a mother that everyone fears, Lulu is never looked down upon by anyone.

Lyman Lamartine

Lyman is the reservation's "big cheese" according to most. He has made all of the right investments and the right business choices, and he is an all-around good citizen. He is the only character with a foot in the outside world as well as in the world of the reservation, and he appears to succeed in both. However, in reality Lyman has many weaknesses that no one on the reservation is truly aware of. His first weakness turns out to be gambling. Away from the safety of the reservation, Lyman is powerless in his fight against temptation. He almost loses a piece of his heritage and history at his weakest point. Lyman's other weakness is Shawnee and his love for her. Due to Zelda's cover up, it isn't clear to the community who is holding up the marriage between Shawnee and Lyman. It seems natural that he would be an obvious choice for Shawnee, so everyone assumes that Lyman hesitated in sealing their life together.

In reality, he loves Shawnee beyond his understanding and can't figure out why she wouldn't want to marry him. Lyman's final weakness is overcome with his visit to Xavier Toose. Lyman carries incredible pain and guilt for his brother's death. Lyman tries unsuccessfully to save his brother from drowning himself and can't let the remorse go. In the end, Lyman is able to overcome his weaknesses and flourish in his own right, and he is therefore the consistent character, the one with staying power.

Fleur Pillager

Lulu Lamartine's mother and Lipsha's great grandmother, Fleur is an ancestor long before she crosses over into the spiritual world. Fleur lives alone in the woods, in an old handmade cabin. She lives and breathes the power of the ages and those who left the earth before her. Fleur's grandmother Four Soul left her with the gift of an almost eternal life by exchanging her living for others' death. Lyman and many others see Fleur in their dreams when she has a message, and she is known to take the form of many animals, especially the bear. Her presence strikes fear and curiosity in everyone she encounters, and they all know her power. In the first chapter, the reader learns that Fleur hasn't



passed on to the spiritual world because she is waiting to give her powers to Lipsha. By the conclusion of the novel, she keeps her intention and uses her life to save his.

Marie Kashpaw

Marie Kashpaw is Zelda's mother and Lipsha's adoptive mother/grandmother. She spoils Lipsha and always showed him more love because she believed that he needed more than others due to his mother's shortcomings and his own anxious nature. She tried to mother June, but Marie knew that she was never suited to be a mother. June's attempt to drown Lipsha confirms Marie's beliefs. Marie's relationship with Lipsha is one of tender closeness, shown by her choice to give Lipsha, instead of Lyman, her husband's pipe.

June Morrissey

June is Lipsha's mother, and she experienced a lot of trauma as a child. Her childhood explains a lot of her inability to raise Lipsha properly. June is described throughout the novel as different elements of nature. She was apparently uninhibited in life, and that didn't change in death. For Lipsha, she is a falling star and a shooting star, close but still on the move and out of reach. For Gerry, she is like a bolt of lightning, powerful enough that he follows her to death.

Gerry Nanapush

Gerry is the fox of the story. He avoids living a caged life through luck and cunning. The charges against Gerry have been augmented because of his repeated escapes. Lipsha thinks back to the many times he and June were involved with Gerry's escapes. Unfortunately, Gerry always gets caught at some point; his luck only carries him part of the way. During his last escape, he has a chance to catch June after constantly dreaming about her while incarcerated. Gerry has to leave his son and his life to go with her, but the choice seems obvious as he and June drive off together.

Xavier Toose

Xavier is introduced to the novel as Zelda's first love. As a young man, he was into the traditional dancing at powwows and events, and he was a little wild spirited. He was handsome and very well liked by the women of the community. However, he had eyes for Zelda only. Xavier sought her hand in marriage time and again, but Zelda refused. He lost his fingers on the last night that he proposed to her because he told Zelda that he wouldn't leave her barn until she admitted her love for him. Unfortunately, Zelda never came back outside to profess her love, and Xavier's fingers froze, clenching his heart. As an adult, he becomes the spiritual guru of the reservation. He leaves his wild ways behind and devotes his life to his spiritual duty.



Objects/Places

Bingo Hall

Described as a glamorous by night and dingy by day, the bingo hall is the only gaming spot on the reservation. Lipsha works at the bingo hall cleaning up and bartending occasionally. Lyman owns the bingo hall and has dreams of expanding to add a casino to the financial potential. Both young and old frequent the bingo hall. Some are faithful bingo players, and some come for the social exchange. Some come to have a drink, and some come to dance. The bingo hall is the catalyst for Lipsha's lessons in money, love and life.

Fleur's House

Lipsha is the only one in the novel who has a first-hand look at Fleur's house. It is a dim, old-fashioned house full of earthy scents. Fleur has writing and text on the walls and tables, and she keeps stones near her handmade bed. Her property is fought over a few times throughout the book.

Matchimanito Lake

The lake has many stories of life lost, and it takes on an identity of its own. Lipsha notes a feeling of fear when he passes the lake. He doesn't want his life to be exchanged for one of the spirits residing in the water. The lake is also the last place that Fleur's physical body is seen.

June's Blue Firebird

Lipsha uses the Firebird to pick up his life in Fargo and move back to the reservation. He exchanges the car with his mother for his bingo luck. She seeks out her car even after death, and he sees her using it on more than one occasion. It represents transportation for Lipsha, his mother and Gerry to get away from everything.

The Motel Room

The motel room is a small, cozy room with basic amenities like a small desk, lamp, shower stall and television. The room is where Lipsha finds and takes the small Bible that he keeps as a reference through the rest of the novel. Lipsha and Shawnee have sexual intercourse for the first time in this motel room.



Lulu's Apartment

Lulu's apartment is in the elderly community on the reservation. The complex is separate from the rest of the reservation, but they are closely knit amongst themselves. Lulu's apartment is where Gerry's wanted poster is kept and the first place the police go when they find out about Gerry's escape.

Nector's Pipe

The pipe is originally given to Lipsha by his adoptive mother, Marie. It was her husband Nector's pipe, and it was passed down through a long line of family history. Lyman considers it to be a relic and thinks it should be his because Nector was his real father. He feels he would appreciate it more than Lipsha could. Near the end of the novel, the pipe brings life and love back to Zelda, and she takes it to her first love, Xavier, for them to share a smoke.

Lipsha's Bible

Lipsha opts to take a small Bible from the hotel room he shares with Shawnee Ray. He uses it as a comfort in his state of confusion with Shawnee, and he seeks answers in the Bible when he can't find them anywhere else.

Fargo

Fargo is the town where Lipsha lives before moving back to the reservation. He isn't happy there, and his grandmother sends him a sign that he shouldn't be there anyway. Fargo is also where Lipsha and Gerry end up stranded when Gerry escapes from prison.

Bingo Van

The Bingo Van represents status for Lipsha. He intends to use it to impress Shawnee and the people on the reservation who doubted his abilities. The van can only be won in bingo, and everyone who plays has their sights on it. Lipsha uses his mother's gift of winning bingo cards to get the van. His motives are misplaced, and he loses the van twice.

Las Vegas Casino

The casino is described as loud and flashy, and it is the site of Lyman's lowest point in the novel. He can't resist feeling like the other high rollers, since that is his status on the reservation. However, outside the protective borders of the reservation, he has no will power against the temptation of gambling.



Gerry's Wanted Poster

The novel begins and ends with Lulu and the wanted poster. In the first chapter, she steals the wanted poster of her son from the post office. She frames the poster in her apartment, and a few of the other characters can't help but stare at it when visiting her. In the end, the agents searching for Gerry use the theft of the poster as an excuse to arrest Lulu.



Social Concerns And Themes

Writers have been known to extend trilogies and tetralogies, to change their vision of completeness, but it looks as if Erdrich is serious in closing out her tetralogy on Chippewa life with *The Bingo Palace*. While *Love Medicine* (1984), *The Beet Queen* (1986), and *Tracks* (1988) have some characters that occur in more than one novel, Erdrich in *The Bingo Palace* brings back characters from all previous books when possible in the flesh; when not, in memory or dream fantasy. The novel closest to *The Bingo Palace* is *Love Medicine* (please see separate entry); Lipsha Morrissey is a major character in the latest novel, but Lyman Lamartine, Albertine Johnson, Marie Kashpaw, Lulu Lamartine, Gerry Nanapush, June Morrissey, and Zelda Kashpaw reprise their roles from the earlier novel. Fleur Pillager from *Tracks* in her nineties is a real, a ghostly, and a mythic presence in this closing novel, while Dot Adare is remembered in *The Bingo Palace* from her roles in *The Beet Queen* and *Love Medicine* and Russell Kashpaw of *The Beet Queen* has a casual role in Erdrich's latest major work as a tattooer with back problems. In addition, Erdrich makes an effort to summarize actions from earlier novels in *The Bingo Palace*. The book is loaded with artfully presented exposition. Since the four books together present imaginatively approximately a century of tribal history, readers can expect some interpretation of where the tribe is going, what is likely to happen to these people collectively. Erdrich has even employed in several chapters a community voice, a first person plural, to give readers a greater sense of this group.

Of course, since *The Bingo Palace* is a novel, this collective interpretation is largely measured in individual lives — Lipsha's primarily, but also Gerry's, Lyman's, Lulu's, Albertine's, Zelda's, and Shawnee Ray's. For the male characters, there is tragedy and disappointment; for the female characters, hope.

Naturally, the dilemmas of reservation life and that of the larger white world are present in *The Bingo Palace*, as they have been in earlier novels of the tetralogy. Among the female characters, success in white standards seems to pull Albertine to medical school and Shawnee Ray to college, while Lulu is led off triumphant in shackles as a Native American revolutionary attempting to reclaim tribal lands, and Zelda discovers her white success and religion hollow, joining a Chippewa man (who has led a traditional life) she refused in marriage thirty years before.

Lipsha, with his Huckleberry Finn charm, innocence, and appeal, dies in a snowstorm trying to assist his father's escape from federal authorities, while Gerry, whose body is unrecovered in the novel's action, is no doubt dead from the same storm as well. Problems of justice and dilemmas of personal success and family and tribal loyalty seem to destroy the prominent male characters of *The Bingo Palace* — Lyman succeeds in building his casino, but the price is community land and embezzlement of his nephew's money. Success leads in his case to moral failure. The personal loyalty, the love of family and tribe that Gerry but particularly Lipsha has, leads to their deaths. They achieve an ethical success at the expense of personal failure and their very lives.



While the female characters experience the same tragic dilemma, they seem to balance better the terms of difference and choice in their lives. Lipsha's death, a tragic loss of potential for the tribe, determines the structure of feeling that is the novel. The relative success of the female characters, even the optimistic wrangling of Fleur and Lulu to increase tribal lands, does not balance the pain of his loss.



Techniques/Literary Precedents

People who have read only *The Bingo Palace* will not realize the artistry with which Erdrich has concluded her tetralogy. Probably her most difficult task, aside from bringing in a cast of characters from the previous novels, is to summarize previous actions and indicate continuities. The novel could easily drown in exposition, but it does not.

Much summary is handled by alluding to previous actions by having a point of view character think about them. To work successfully, of course, action in the present cannot come to a halt.

The symbolic method that has been Erdrich's trademark is present again in *The Bingo Palace*. The late Nector Kashpaw's ceremonial pipe, a gift from Marie Kashpaw to Lipsha, is desired, and for a time, is in the possession of Lyman. This pipe becomes the stolen birthright of Isaac in the biblical story of Jacob and Esau once Lipsha steals a Gideon Bible from the motel where he and Shawnee Ray first make love and she reads the story. Even Kierkegaard's spiritual torments provide an emotional harmony to Lipsha, when Lipsha encounters the theologian's writing while waiting for Gerry in Fargo. Lyman's dancing as a spiritual exercise in memory of his dead brother, Vietnam veteran Henry, also is well done. Lipsha's dying in a cold white blizzard at Christmas, protecting the life of a white child, and redressing his own abandonment by June is beautifully rendered by Erdrich. As usual with Erdrich, the symbols arise naturally from action, and action's climaxes and turning points cause the symbols to resonate.

The community voice, the first-person plural, effectively brings out the tribe's perspective at pertinent points in the novel. Although many writers have used this perspective before Erdrich, Faulkner, as seen in stories such as "A Rose for Emily" most likely is Erdrich's model. Point of view is important to establish in *The Bingo Palace*; readers need to know the relation of characters to the community, or the tribe, and they need to sense the community or tribe's destiny in this concluding novel of the tetralogy.

Themes

Indian vs. Non-Indian

The lack of understanding highlighted in this novel is mostly between whites and Indians. In this chapter, the guard or officer at the border stops them for some reason and decides to examine the car. Upon his examination, the officer finds a seed, a fruitcake wrapped in foil and Lipsha's family heirloom. It is a pipe, and the guard associates the pipe, the cake and the seed with marijuana. In turn, he inspects the pipe, not knowing or caring about its importance. "...always, he would think back to that action, which seemed to happen slowly and to last for timeless moments. It seemed, on thinking back, that there, in the little border station, in the hands of the first non-Indian who ever attached that pipe together, sky would crash to earth." (p. 35)

The second encounter displaying the tension and misunderstanding between Indian and non-Indian people is Lipsha's argument with the gas station clerk near the motel he and Shawnee went to. For no real reason, Lipsha and the attendant exchange cultural insults, and their anger almost brings them to fight. When Lipsha and the attendant run into each other a second time, the attendant kidnaps Lipsha. He and a group of friends try to brand Lipsha for life with a tattoo of Montana, the center of Lipsha's insults on the first day they met. The two are never able to come to a cultural understanding, and Lipsha is lucky that the tattoo artist has a greater loyalty to his Indian culture than to money or the young white men.

Cultural Difference

The final highlight of cultural difference is at the end of the novel when the federal agents storm Lulu's apartment, searching for Gerry. Lulu's attire is a huge symbol for the Indian community, and if the agents could read the symbol they would have known that they shouldn't have bothered with their searching and questioning. However, they never even notice Lulu's clothing. The Indian culture is portrayed with a great sense of pride and loyalty, but the agents are not privy to the code. "We hide our smiles back behind our hands, to be polite to our government, for which so many of our men have died and suffered, and our women too, but we can't help but say it was a useless cause for them to offer Lulu Lamartine her own coffee from her own pot...to ask her if she would like to sit down in her own chair...to make herself at home in her own home. It was useless to set up the tape recorders...the pens and papers. For what question were they going to ask that would receive a reliable answer...when her son and her grandson were the ones at issue...maybe they thought Indians dressed that way all the time. Maybe they thought Indians dressed that way to go to bed at night. No one commented or noticed Lulu's outfit, ceremonial and bold, as if she was ready to be honored."



Animalism

Many of the characters are referenced as animals, representative of power and distinction. This culture traditionally reveres the ways of the animal community, and it is an honor to be compared to an animal. The novel opens by describing Lulu's mannerism as that of a cat; "On most winter days, Lulu Lamartine did not stir until the sun cast a patch of warmth for her to bask in and purr." (p. 1) "Lulu entered the post office...lingered, looking all around, warming herself like a cat at the heat register..." Lulu and her mother Fleur are the characters most described as animals, and they are the most respected, feared and powerful members of the community. Fleur is always described as a bear. Her hands are spoken of as claws, and her prints are not footprints, but bear prints or claw prints where she walks. Other characters are given animal qualities when they are at pinnacle moments of their lives. Gerry's hands turn to paws when he is close to being free of prison, and Shawnee is described as a panther when she dances. Her father gives her the quality of a butterfly to represent her freedom.

Animalism also represents tradition and the spiritual world. Transitions to the higher world or higher power are marked by the presence of animals. Lipsha's revelation is brought about by a skunk. Also in the end when Fleur has passed on to the spiritual world, she announces her presence in the earthly world by bear noises, rather than speaking or showing herself. The prints from her final journey are marked by bear prints in the snow.



Style

Points of View

The novel is written from the point of view of an unseen narrator and from Lipsha Morrissey's point of view. The unseen narrator is believed to be both the spiritual ancestors watching over the reservation and the elders living in the community. The impression is given that the voices are spirits when they encourage Fleur to give up her earthly life and join them on the other side. There are limits to what they are able to see. They claim to get some of their information from the neighborhood gossip, Josette, and this gives the reader the impression that they are other elders in the community. The chapters written in this voice have a critical air about the new age Indian like Lipsha. The voice has no tolerance for the new way and embraces tradition, as shown by the descriptions of Lulu.

The chapters written in Lipsha's voice are very lengthy and inconsistent in tone. Sometimes Lipsha understands his life, and at other times, he is completely confused. Highlighting Lipsha's thoughts emphasizes that Lipsha is torn between many aspects of his life and can't define them enough to make a definitive statement about himself.

Setting

The North Dakota reservation is the setting for the majority of the novel. Winter is the season most highlighted on the reservation. Although the novel goes through other seasons, winter is used to underline reservation life. The other areas mentioned are Canada, Fargo, North Dakota and Las Vegas. These other places bring confusion, temptation and sometimes chaos to the characters that visit. Lipsha almost gets arrested trying to enter Canada, and his life is going nowhere when he lives in Fargo. Fargo is also where Gerry meets Lipsha after escaping from jail, and they end up stealing a car and a baby and almost losing their lives. Lyman's greatest point of weakness takes place in Las Vegas when he can't control his gambling and almost loses everything that gives him power back at the reservation. Thus, the reservation is given a sense of power due to the shortcomings of the other locations.

Language and Meaning

Imagery is used as a language tool throughout the novel. The author uses basic language and vivid imagery to highlight each character. First, the usage of color descriptions paints a picture of the native clothing, the scenery and even the tones of the characters' skin. Animal comparisons are a form of imagery used to tell the characters' personalities. The reader for instance can imagine the sly and calculated ways of Lulu, the cat, the power and presence of Fleur the bear or the grace and beauty of Shawnee, the panther and the butterfly. Abstract imagery is used to describe unknown entities like the spirit who nurtures Lipsha back to life after June's drowning



attempt or the scary machine-like monster that Redford sees coming for him on the day he is taken by Zelda and the social worker. Descriptions that are random but larger than life are used for those that are both of the world and not, like June, who visits as if she is still alive, but who in reality is a spirit.

The author also inserts samples of the tribal native language into the novel. There is no exact translation for many of the excerpts, but their meaning is either insinuated or not necessary. Where there is no translation, the use of the language serves to display that tradition is still alive in certain parts of the culture. Lipsha doesn't understand Fleur or his father when they speak the old language, and this is a tool for the author to show the reader the distinction between old world and new world life.

Structure

The novel is broken into twenty-seven chapters, each with a heading hinting the subject matter of the chapter. Most chapters highlight one of the main characters. The chapters written in Lipsha's voice note his name above the heading. The novel is built around Lipsha's story, and the other characters are inserted through short chapters between Lipsha's long chapters. The reader is given detail about one main aspect of each character while Lipsha's life is outlined in detail on every level. The reader learns about his journey through love, his parents, his family and his relationship to the community and to the spiritual world. Lipsha's life transcends every level that the novel highlights as a whole, so his chapters are the weight of the novel.



Quotes

"...a foot on death's road." (p. 6)

"He was not a tribal honcho, not a powwow organizer...not a member of a drum group, not a singer...not even one of those gathered at the soda machines outside the doors...because of being drunk or too much in love or just bashful...he was none of these, only Lipsha coming home." (p. 10)

"...settle her bones in the sun with us." (p. 7)

"I told them you'd make it." (p. 14)

"His real father was my stepfather. His mother is my grandmother. His half brother is my father." (p. 16)

"Chained and spread-eagled in the isolation four days." (p. 24)

"...the eagle feather hung down...dragged lower, lower until finally it touched the floor.

"In the hands of the first non-Indian who ever attached that pipe together, sky would crash to earth." (p. 35)

"Passed to Nector from his old man, Resounding Sky...smoked when the treaty was drawn with the U.S. government...solemnized the naming ceremony of a visiting United States President..." (p. 39)

"...but you have to light a candle, make a sacrifice." (p. 44)

"...so why weren't you drowned?" (p. 51)

"...no more running away!" (p. 59)

"...*nobody ever hold me again.*" (p. 60)

"...state's most decorated war hero." (p. 65)

"I got the love medicine'

"you got the medicine...but you don't got the love.'" (112)

"Ever since Zelda had insisted on keeping Redford full-time...ever since Zelda had started holding on too tightly...kept her soldered in their own hopes." (p. 117)

"I don't hate the old lady...I understand her." (p. 130)

"I need a love medicine." (p. 136)



"...she possessed more souls than she had a right to." (p. 140)

"This time don't sell out for a barrel of weevil-shot flour and a mossy pork." (p. 148)

"Admit your love, take it in although it tears you up." (p. 151)

"...real old-time traditional religion..." (p. 157)

"Ask the butterfly for help, for grace." (p. 184)

"It is calm, so calm...In that place where I am...My little brother." (p. 205)

"Luck don't stick when you sell it." (p. 220)

"Everybody knows bingo money is not based on solid ground...our reservation is not real estate, luck fades when sold. Attraction has no staying power, no weight, no heart." (p. 221)

"...black haired with pale green eyes and a lumped-out jutting chin." (p. 226)

"He felt his luck coming back...he knew from sitting in the still eye of chance that fate was not random." (pp. 225-226)

"Shawnee Ray got us into this, I tell myself, even though I know it is more my wish than a thought that makes any sense." (p. 251)

"Maybe they thought Indians dressed that way all the time. Maybe they thought Indians dressed that way to go to bed." (p. 262)

"There is so little time, just the warmth of a breath" (p. 267)



Key Questions

The Bingo Palace can be read alone and appreciated without reference to the earlier novels of the tetralogy, and perhaps that might be a good way to begin discussion of the novel. One might imagine the novel as the lone surviving artifact of Chippewa culture, and then try to assess tribal organization and health. One might explore the position of women and men in the tribe, contrasting and comparing that position to sexual roles in the larger society. What seems important in the lives of these characters — what matters to them? The action seems to center on Lulu's plans, the love triangle of Lyman, Lipsha, and Shawnee Ray, and what it means, the deaths of Lipsha and Gerry, and the building of the casino. The significance of these actions needs to be discussed in order to understand the novel. Then, with the book in place, the other novels and their actions need to be discussed to understand how this book can be the conclusion of a tetralogy of Chippewa life.

1. Lipsha's death is probably the most painful experience in the novel.

Why is this so, and what is Lipsha's relation to the tribe?

2. The love triangle of Shawnee Ray, Lyman, and Lipsha is the stuff of melodrama, but the men represent values to Shawnee Ray. What does each man represent, and why is the choice so difficult for her to make?

3. What is the connection between Lipsha's ability to heal others and his luck in bingo? Why does the luck appear to drive away the healing power?

What seems to be the cause of this?

4. Lulu is all dressed up in Chippewa finery when federal officers come to question and later arrest her. What does she hope to accomplish, and how does she hope to attain her goals?

5. The last chapter of the novel dramatizes Fleur's action and then briefly alludes to the new casino. Is Fleur's land simply being used for a new purpose, or is the character of the land erased through this purpose?

6. After reading or reading summaries of the earlier novels in the tetralogy, how is The Bingo Palace a fitting end to the series? How does the novel reach closure for the series?



Topics for Discussion

Decide and support whether Lipsha's journey is complete. Does he ever reach his fullest potential, or is he still lost?

Examine Fleur's importance in the novel. What does she represent for the reservation, and is that representation lost when she passes her life to Lipsha?

What is the state of the characters and the reservation by the end of the novel?

Have the characters' journeys brought them to a better place?

The novel constantly compares and contrasts traditional life and non-traditional life. Using specific examples, ask: Can the two lifestyles co-exist?

Is the author implying that traditional life is better or worse than new-age life?

By the end of the novel, do the two extremes (traditional life and the new life) find a middle ground, and does the main character truly find that ground?

Related Titles

The Bingo Palace is part of a tetralogy that includes Love Medicine, linked short stories; The Beet Queen, novel; and Tracks, novel.

The Bingo Palace extends the latest actions that occur in Love Medicine. The novel with the action furthest back in time, where critical deals were made between the government and the tribe, is Tracks. The Beet Queen, which deals more with white than Native American characters, interfaces the reservation and the white town of Argus, North Dakota. In The Bingo Palace the traditional Chippewas lose more of their definition, as the Pillager line, the most traditional members of the tribe, seems to reach an end, and the common lands of the tribe are swallowed by Lyman's new casino.



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