Love Medicine Study Guide

Love Medicine by Louise Erdrich

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BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

When Louise Erdrich and her husband, Michael Dorris, first sent *Love Medicine* to publishers, they received nothing but polite rejections. Finally, Dorris decided to promote the book himself and was successful. Holt published the book in 1983, and it became an immediate best seller. Critics applaud Erdrich's wit, tenderness, and powerful style of writing. They particularly like the manner in which Erdrich creates the Native American voice through the form of a traditional Chippewa story cycle. Her characters tell their own stories In *Love Medicine,* seven characters from two families present fourteen stories about themselves and their relationships. Readers, especially Native Americans, appreciate her realistic portrayal of Native American life. The book has translations in eighteen languages and has received enthusiastic readerships through the Book-of-the-Month and Quality Paperback Book Clubs. In addition, television producers have discussed the possibilities of made-for-television serials as well as movies.

Love Medicine has won many awards for Erdrich's ability to demonstrate the differences among individuals within the sameness of their culture. While each of the characters reveals his or her personality, the distinct ties between the characters and their culture are obvious. For example, Nector, the iconic Indian whose portrait has hung in the state capitol, leads the same personal life led by men of lesser stature. He carries on an affair, has a failed marriage, and lives out his final days in a state of near oblivion. The theme of generational connections holds strongly throughout the novel.

Author Biography

Erdrich was born on July 6, 1954, in Little Falls. Minnesota. One of seven children, Erdrich and her family later lived in Wahpeton. North Dakota, close to the Turtle Mountain Chippewa Reservation. Her parents. Rita Joanne Gourneau Erdrich and Ralph Louis Erdrich, both taught at the Bureau of Indian Affairs boarding school. Erdrich's mother was born on the reservation, and Erdrich's grandfather, Patrick Gourneau, served as tribal chairman. Erdrich thinks highly of her grandfather, who keeps the old traditions alive within the context of modern culture and is respected in both cultures. While Erdrich says that none of her fiction is autobiographical. she does admit to picturing her grandfather's best traits through Nector Kashpaw in *Love Medicine.*

Erdrich entered Dartmouth College in 1972. That same year, Dartmouth established its Native American Studies department Anthropologist Michael Dorris, Erdrich's future husband. chaired the department As a student in his classes, she began to explore her Native American heritage. She and Dorris collaborated on a children's story which was published in an Indian magazine. At the same time, one of her other teachers encouraged her poetry writing. While she had several publications in Dartmouth literary magazines. Erdrich felt she had achieved true success when *Ms.* published one of her poems. Then, in 1975, the American Academy of Poets awarded her a prize. Feeling validated as a poet, Erdrich worked after graduation for the State Arts Council of North Dakota, teaching p0etry in schools. prisons. and rehabilitation centers.

In addition to being a poetry, teacher. Erdrich worked various jobs that have provided her with experiences she uses in her writing: as a waitress. lifeguard, construction worker, etc. As a specific example, Erdrich once weighed trucks on the interstate. In *Love Medicine,* Albertine and Dot weigh trucks for the state highway system. Through working at these jobs, Erdrich gained an understanding of and compassion for people of mixed blood. She felt compelled to write about them. In an interview with Michael Schumacher for *Writer's Digest* she says, "There were lots of people with mixed blood, lots of people who had their own confusions. I realized that this was part of my life-it wasn't something that I was making up---and that it was something I *wanted* to write about."

Motivated to focus on her writing, Erdrich began her Master's program at *Johns* Hopkins University. When she graduated, Dartmouth College hired her as a writer-in-residence. While at Dartmouth, she and Dorris renewed their acquaintance. Then, she left for Boston to work on a textbook. and Dorris went to New Zealand to do research. They kept in touch by sharing their work with one another. When their story, "'The World's Greatest Fisherman" won five thousand dollars in the Nelson Algren fiction competition, the two decided to expand it into the novel, *Love Medicine.* Since the publication of her debut novel, she has published several other novels, poetry, and her memoir.

Plot Summary

The World's Greatest Fishermen (1981)

The novel opens with June Kashpaw walking down the main street of Williston, North Dakota, killing time until she can board the bus home to the reservation. Instead of boarding that bus, however, she meets a man in a bar, and after several drinks they drive out of town and have sex in the front seat of his car. When he falls into a drunken sleep on top of her, she squeezes out and begins to walk home, but an Easter snow storm surprises her and she dies before she reaches the reservation.

The memories of family members fill in June's background. Raised by her bachelor uncle, Ell, she had married her cousin, Gordie, and had a son, King. The marriage had ended unhappily, however, and June ran off. Now King, her son, has used the insurance money from her death to buy a new car. June also had an illegitimate son, Lipsha, who was raised by Marie Kashpaw, but Lipsha does not know that June was his mother

Saint Marie (1934)

At fourteen Marie goes to the convent to become a nun. In an effort to fight off the devil and tame Marie's proud spirit, Sister Leopolda pours scalding hot water on the girl's back, and pierces her hand with a fork. Marie passes out from the pain of this last wound, and wakes to find the nuns all kneeling before her, awaiting her blessing, as Leopolda has told them that it is a holy wound which magically appeared on the girl's hand.

Wild Geese (1934)

Nector Kashpaw is thinking about Lulu while walking to town to sell some geese. He sees Marie Lazarre running down the hill from the convent with a convent pillowcase. Thinking that she has stolen it, he tries to stop her. He wrestles her to the ground and then cannot stop himself from touching her under her skirt. Only when he pulls back, shocked at what he has done, does he realize that the pillowcase is bandaging a wound on her hand. They sit holding hands as the sun goes down.

The Island

When Nector turns to Marie, Lulu begins to think of Moses Pillager, a strange, ghostlike man who lives as a hermit on an island. She goes to his home, and they fall in love. When they are expecting their child she realizes that she cannot stay there forever, but that Moses will never be able to leave.

The Beads (1948)

Marie takes in her niece, June Kashpaw, even though she has too many mouths to feed already. Though Marie loves June, June decides to go live with her Uncle Ell. Nector leaves Marie and she must struggle to support the children herself.

Rushes Bear, Nector's mother, comes to stay with Marie. When Marie is ready to give birth again, Nector returns. After the child is born, Nector tries to pay his mother, but she refuses the money saying that she no longer has a son, only a daughter, Marie.

Lulu's Boys (1957)

Lulu is visited by her late husband's brother, Beverly Lamartine. Beverly believes that the boy born nine months after his brother's funeral is in fact Beverly' s son, conceived on the day of Henry's wake. He has come with the hope of retrieving that son, but Lulu reminds him of his old passion for her. Finally he slips into Lulu's bed, and becomes her next husband.

The Plunge of the Brave (1957)

Nector tells how everything has always come easily to him. He receives many Job offers, and he can have any woman he wants. The one he wants is Lulu, and they seem to be moving easily towards each other, until he meets Marie. He marries Marie and soon feels overwhelmed by their many children and the demands of his Job. One hot summer day some butter is delivered to the town, and Nector asks Lulu to help deliver the butter. When they are alone Nector asks for her forgiveness, and they make love. After that he sneaks into her bedroom regularly. This continues until he begins to fear that she will marry her brother-in-law. He writes two notes, one to Marie, telling her that he is in love with Lulu, and the other to Lulu, telling her that he is leaving Marie. He leaves the note for Marie under the sugar Jar on their table, and he takes the other note to Lulu's house She is not home, so he waits in her backyard, but his cigarette starts a fire and burns the house down.

Flesh and Blood (1957)

Zelda finds the note her father has left on the table. Frightened, she brings it to Marie. Hours later Marie hears Zelda and Nector returning, and she wonders how to face him. She decides to put the note back on the table, but she puts it under the salt shaker, not the sugar jar, so that Nector will always wonder whether she has read it or not.

A Bridge (1973)

Albertine runs away from home and takes the bus to Fargo. She meets Henry Lamartine Jr., recently returned from a POW camp in Vietnam, and they spend the night together in a motel.

The Red Convertible (1974)

When Henry returns from Vietnam he is not interested in anything. Lyman breaks the car they had bought together in an attempt to get Henry interested in fixing it. Henry does fix it and takes a trip with Lyman, but then Henry jumps in the river and drowns. Lyman drives the car into the water and lets it sink.

Scales (1980)

Gerry Nanapush is constantly breaking out of prison and being caught again. Dot is pregnant with a child they managed to conceive in a prison visiting room. When Dot is very close to delivering the baby, Gerry breaks out so he can be with her. Weeks later Gerry is arrested again, this time for shooting and killing a state trooper.

Crown of Thorns (1981)

Gordie, June's ex-husband, begins to drink heavily after her death. Driving drunk one night, he hits a deer and puts the body in his back seat. He continues to drive, but then the deer, merely stunned, wakes up. Gordie grabs a crow bar and kills it, but then he becomes convinced that it is June he has just killed. He drives to a convent and confesses to a nun that he has killed his wife. She tries to explain to him that it is a deer he has killed, but he runs crying into the woods.

Love Medicine (1982)

Mane asks Lipsha to get her love medicine so that Nector will return the love she has always felt for him. Lipsha decides to shoot two geese, birds that mate for life, and have his grandparents eat the hearts. But when he is not able to shoot the geese, he buys two turkey hearts, reasoning that the faith is what is important. Nector, however, chokes on the heart and dies.

Resurrection (1982)

Gordie shows up at his mother's house and begs for some alcohol. She has none, but when she is not looking he drinks Lysol and dies.

The Good Tears (1983)

Lulu has surgery on her eyes, which are failing her, and she needs someone to put drops in them for her. Marie Kashpaw comes to do it, and, after a life-long animosity, the two women become allies.

The Tomahawk Factory (1983)

Lyman builds a factory that will make souvenirs. The products do not sell quickly, and the workers become disgruntled at the continual layoffs. Finally there is a revolt and the factory is destroyed.

Lyman's Luck (1983)

Lyman decides to start running Bingo games. He hopes to eventually open casinos.

Crossing the Water (1984)

Lulu tells Lipsha that he is the son of June and Gerry. Lipsha goes to King's house looking for Gerry. Gerry appears and reveals that when he and King were in prison together, King told officials of Gerry's plans to escape. The three men play poker, with the car bought with June's insurance money as the stakes. Lipsha wins and offers to drive Gerry anywhere he wants to go. Just then the police show up, and Gerry disappears. Lipsha begins driving the car home, but he hears a knocking in the trunk. He pulls over and discovers Gerry in the trunk. He drives Gerry to Canada and then heads home.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Love Medicine begins on the morning before Easter Sunday as June Kashpaw, a middle-aged Chippewa woman, wanders the streets of Williston, North Dakota. The town is considered prosperous by North Dakota standards, and it is bustling with men ready to drink a fat wallet of cash away in one of the many bars. One of these men, a mud engineer named Andy, notices June walk by and taps on the window. June's body is still as lithe as a young girl's, though her face is worn with age. June walks into the bar as Andy is peeling a bright blue hard-boiled egg. She is mesmerized by the color, but it is her starvation that draws her toward him. Andy is amused and offers her the egg plus several more. She eats all of them as the bartender looks on. The first bar quickly leads to the next, after Andy pays for their beers with a thick wad of bills.

The pair becomes more amorous with each drink until they drive out of town to a deserted country road. Andy stops the car and climbs over to June's side, straddling her legs and moaning softly. After only a few minutes of brushing against her clothes, Andy climaxes and promptly passes out. June untangles herself, reaching blindly for the door handle until it gives and she falls onto the ground. In a trance, not knowing if she is drunk or more sober than ever, she decides to walk home. The snow falls deeper on this night than it has in forty years. The winds are heavy, and her boots are thin. Still, June Kashpaw stays her course.

A week after the Easter blizzard, summer seems to have arrived. Albertine Johnson receives an upsetting letter from her mother. Aunt June is gone. She's not only dead, but she's already buried. No one wanted to disturb her with the news. Albertine is respected for her choice to move off the reservation to go to college, but she is alternately punished by a lack of family information. Out of anger, Albertine cuts off contact with her mother for two months. During this time, she has conflicted memories of June. Many of them are warm, like the time she proclaimed Albertine's hair "princess hair," though most thoughts of June lead to the undeniably sad facts of her life. She was abandoned by her mother and went on to marry her cousin and abandon her own children.

When Albertine finally decides to visit the reservation, her mother Zelda and her Aunt Aurelia are in the kitchen baking pies. Albertine's presence is barely acknowledged as the women chatter and punch dough, a cloud of flour hanging in the air. The house now belongs to Aurelia, but it was where Grandpa and Grandma Kashpaw raised all of their children and lived until recently. The sisters argue over June, debating whether or not she did any good and under what circumstances she died. Grandma took June in and raised her with Zelda, Aurelia and Gordie. When June and Gordie got married and made each other miserable, no one could decide who to blame.

The conversation fizzles, and the women continue their work in the kitchen. Albertine hears a car pull into the driveway. It is Grandma and Grandpa Kashpaw with King, June's son, and his family. There is a slow procession from the car into the house. Grandma gets out and notices that Grandpa is still sitting, unaware that they have arrived. Meanwhile, King and his wife Lynette argue violently over who will help Grandpa out of the car. The resemblance between June and King spooks Albertine, as he almost comes to blows with his wife.

In Grandpa Nector's advanced age, he is strikingly different from his twin brother Eli. When the twins were young, the government put Nector in school, and Grandma hid Eli to keep him at home. Education did not spare Nector from senility, while Eli remains clear-headed and continues to live independently. Eli joins the group later on. Grandpa Nector is content to sit in a lawn chair outside, while Grandma Kashpaw joins her daughter for some gossip in the kitchen. The topic is still June, and the story is about the time she almost got hung by Zelda, Gordie and Aurelia. Grandma Kashpaw recalls the story with humor, and it releases the previous tension when laughter erupts throughout the kitchen.

The extended family gathering reveals all sorts of fissures, most of which broke after June's death. King is a rotten young man who received a small inheritance after June's death, with which he bought a tricked out car. Lipsha Morrissey is King's brother, though he doesn't know it. The boys share the same mother - June. The extent of Lipsha's knowledge is that he was taken in by Grandma Kashpaw, and no one can say who his parents really are. By the hostile way King has always acted toward Lipsha, Albertine wonders if he knows the truth. The party disperses after King and Lynette start fighting and after the food is all eaten. Albertine goes off with Lipsha and makes a few attempts to talk about June, but the conversation doesn't take.

Chapter 1 Analysis

The Kashpaw clan is a large, unruly group of people with a web of tenuous connections to each other. At the center of the mystery is June Kashpaw, who dies at the beginning of the first chapter. June's absence leaves several members of her family wondering about the secrets that have gone unexplained up until this point. Albertine would like to see the tension alleviated between King and Lipsha, who are brothers but don't know it. She learned the secret that June is Lipsha's mother by listening carefully, and she is not in a hurry to force the answer out. However, Albertine cares for Lipsha like a sibling and feels that he deserves to know the truth.

June Kashpaw was an enigmatic character on her own merit, without the issue of her children. The reservation where the Kashpaws live is very small, and June was the kind of person who could easily stick in someone's memory. She had a simple striking beauty and a shy but mischievous personality. Also, the story of her childhood is remarkable. June lived with her alcoholic mother in the woods until her mother died and abandoned her. June survived alone due to some innate understanding of what was safe to eat and drink, until members of a neighboring reservation found her.

Those members of the family who are left behind battle conflicting feelings about June. Gordie has it the worst. He and June were raised like siblings, even though they were cousins, and they scandalized everyone by getting married. Like with most, June's relationship with Gordie was full of ups and downs. If she had not died so suddenly, it would be easier to hate June for all the bad she did when she was alive. Each family member has to choose between loving and hating her now, because there is no easy answer.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

In the second chapter, the story shifts back in time to 1934. Grandma is only fourteen years old. There is no Kashpaw to her name yet. At this age, she is called by her maiden name. Marie Lazarre is willful and headstrong, just bursting at the seams to make a name for herself off of the reservation. When she was a child, Sunday Mass was the only event that drew her family into town. The dilapidated Sacred Heart Convent on the hill always held mystique for her. Now, as she is beginning to define herself, Marie tries to find her identity in religion. Despite her self-described "mail-order Catholic soul," Marie is determined to prove her worthiness through prayer. She marches up the hill to the church and sets out to become the only saint born of Indian blood.

Immediately after Marie arrives and begins taking classes, she faces complete opposition from one person. Sister Leopolda is an old, grizzled nun with an uncanny sixth sense for the presence of the devil, and she frequently sniffs him out of the dark corners of her classroom. In the event that the Dark One resides near or within one of her students, Sister Leopolda carries a long oak pole with an iron hook on one end. She uses the pole to smack the children in the back of the head and catch Satan by surprise.

According to Sister Leopolda, Marie Lazarre is particularly vulnerable to the ways of evil. Marie believes that she stands out from the rest of the students, and she takes a certain amount of pleasure in this distinction. When she is alone at night, she imagines the evil words that the devil whispers into her ears. Even as Marie flirts with the devil, she trusts Sister Leopolda to protect her from letting him completely inside.

One quiet afternoon in the classroom, the battleground shifts. While working at her desk like the other students, Marie hears the devil. He is ransacking the closets in the back of the room and scratching around for crumbs. Despite her best intentions, Marie can't help it and smiles. Her heart jumps when she looks up and sees Sister Leopolda staring straight at her. There is a brief face-off between them as the class looks on, until Leopolda crouches down like an athlete and hurls her hook-pole over the heads of the students. It sails through the air and cracks through a thin closet door.

Marie can feel the devil rise up inside her heart, but she doesn't flinch when Leopolda approaches. The evil presence gives Marie resilience against the repeated blows of the pole, until Leopolda picks her up and throws her into the closet. In the dark, Marie tries to restrain her tears with a boost of strength from the devil, but she becomes afraid. Alone in the closet, Marie doesn't realize that a wailing sound is coming from *her* until Leopolda opens the door and takes Marie into her arms. What she feels now is Leopolda's love mixed with a fear of the black hook. Stronger than any force of evil, Leopolda has lodged herself in Marie's heart.

The struggle between Marie and the devil soon becomes a battle against Sister Leopolda. Marie suffers constant abuse, both physical and verbal, as she spends time performing chores for the nun. Leopolda teaches Marie that she will always struggle to keep the devil out of her heart. In one instance, after Marie has shouted back, Leopolda tips a kettle of boiling water and fills her ear. Blinded by the pain, Marie prays fervently as the water pours down, not moving or speaking. Marie does not have the power to break Leopolda's sadistic grip, nor do the other nuns have knowledge of the abuse, and so she continues to endure this treatment.

Marie begins hallucinating as a coping mechanism, and she imagines herself a kind of saint for undergoing the trials Leopolda puts her through. In a daze, she relaxes enough to let the nun come near and apply salve to her wounds. An incoherent vision of broken glass suddenly appears to Marie, and she tries to escape as Leopolda hisses that the devil isn't done with her yet. Despite her best interest, Marie does not run out the door, for she knows that this business is unfinished. In a slow, calculated way, the pair stalks each other around the kitchen, with Leopolda pretending to need help with her baking. As Leopolda gets nearer to the open oven door, Marie strikes forward and tries to push her in. Leopolda is holding a poker in one hand, which deflects her body from the oven and sends her backwards. In a rage, she stabs Marie through the hand and then knocks her out with a blow to her head.

When Marie awakes, several nuns of the convent, including Leopolda, surround her. She is very groggy, and it takes her a few minutes to understand what has happened. The nuns believe Marie to be a saint after all, but not for the reason she had hoped. Leopolda lies and claims the stab wound in Marie's hand is stigmata. She lies to cover the truth of her own evil. With this twist of events, Marie finally achieves the reverence and holiness she dreamed of. However, when she looks at Leopolda, she does not feel joy. Instead, Marie feels pity for her adversary. She cannot fully enjoy the victory, for all of the pain it has brought not only her, but also Leopolda.

Chapter 2 Analysis

This chapter introduces one of the founding members of the Kashpaw clan, Marie Lazarre. She typifies the fierce independence that is a trademark characteristic in the family. Marie sets out determined to make a name for herself, despite the limits placed on her by a poor family background. Her family is known for alcoholism and idleness, but Marie knows from a young age that she wants a different kind of life. With little thought about the difficulties, Marie enters the Catholic school system, even though she is the only Native American girl there.

Marie's success at the convent is contingent on her relationship with Sister Leopolda. Their relationship is not that of a typical student and teacher, but one of mutual adversaries. For Marie, her struggle against the nun is a larger than life battle of good versus evil. What begins as Marie's fear of the devil's influence becomes a more complex understanding of how fear can coexist with desire. Leopolda soon becomes a stand-in for the devil as she and Marie face off with each other. The power struggle

ends with Marie as the victor. However, Marie empathizes with Leopolda's failure. Once Marie has experienced the humiliation of defeat at the hands of Leopolda, she cannot fully enjoy her triumph with this awareness.

The Kashpaw brand of religion does not adhere to conventional beliefs, as evidenced in this chapter. A belief in God and the devil is as important as a belief in oneself. Also, there is a great importance placed on the power of visions. Marie's visions serve to guide her through the battles with Leopolda, but visions are valuable in future chapters for other reasons.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

The third chapter shifts in perspective to Nector Kashpaw, when he is a young, unmarried man with a multitude of choices ahead of him. It is summertime, and Nector spends most mornings with his twin brother Eli, hunting for birds in the marsh. They compliment each other well. Eli has excellent aim, but Nector has the necessary charm to take the birds into town and sell them. After they split their earnings, Eli usually goes off into the woods alone, while Nector goes to the fiddle dances to socialize.

Nector is tall, slim and handsome enough to have his pick of girls. On this particular afternoon his mind is focused on just one woman, Lulu Nanapush. She has captured his full attention by her voluptuous figure and flirtatious ways, despite the abundance of available women. As Nector walks along a dirt road, he is distracted by thoughts of seeing Lulu later on. Two plump geese swing from his arms as he makes his way up the hill toward the convent. At the very same time, Marie Lazarre barrels down the opposite side of the road.

Nector sees Marie before they collide, and he tells her to slow down. Determined to pass, Marie tells him to move aside. In an instant, Nector sees the initials of the convent, SHC, on the pillowcase in Marie's arms. Thinking fast, he decides that she must be running off with something stolen, and where there is a crime, there is potential for reward money. Nector, who is saving up to buy a lavish wedding band for Lulu, could use the cash.

The tangled dance begins. Nector firmly grips Marie's arm, but she cannot be moved. The geese tied to his arm swing against her hip, but she remains planted in the ground. Marie does not hold back. She kicks Nector swiftly with the hard toe of her shoe. He retaliates by twisting her arm until tears spring from Marie's eyes. Nector feels guilty for causing her pain until Marie's eyes glaze over just before she takes aim and rams her knee into his stomach. The blow puts Nector off balance, and the weight of the geese pulls him down to ground. As he falls, he reaches forward and tears one of Marie's sleeves off.

Not to be outdone, Marie curses and snatches the fabric out of Nector's hands. Before she can get away, Nector rushes back to his feet and pins Marie into the dirt. They lay joined together, still arguing, with Marie growing more disdainful until Nector accuses her of stealing the pillowcase. Marie spits in Nector's face, and then, as the realization dawns on her, she begins to laugh uncontrollably. Her laughter makes Nector angry. He slaps his hand over her mouth and holds her still as she tries to get up.

For what seems like a long time, Nector and Marie remain still. Their bodies slowly soften against each other as Nector becomes conscious of the fact that he is laying on top of a woman, not a girl. Subtly, Marie shifts her body so that her hips draw Nector

closer until he is caught. They make love before they know any better, and when it is over Nector is terrified that someone may have seen them. The dirt road is clearly visible to anyone watching from the convent. Marie gets up, brushes herself off and tries to make her scorn believable, but she is not convincing.

Nector notices now, for the first time, the wound on Marie's hand. In a gesture of good will, he offers her the geese still hung to his arms. He feels compassion for her, the same feeling he has for the wounded animals he sometimes encounters in the woods. Nector describes the animal bodies as "killed saints" that he should handle with gentle reverence. Marie cannot look up as Nector takes her hand. She can sense the fear in this action. He does not want to take her, but he must. What has started between them will not be stopped.

Chapter 3 Analysis

Nector believes that he has everything in his life under control. He has picked out the woman he wants to marry and is working toward marrying her. A man of such great confidence is particularly vulnerable in the universe of *Love Medicine*, and Nector is not exempt. Fate has a sense of humor in this chapter. When Marie comes hurtling down the path into Nector, it is as though fate has literally brought them together. The collision catches Nector and Marie off guard, and in response they both act defensively. Marie is nothing like Lulu, the woman Nector loves, but she finds a way to ensnare his heart nonetheless. The geese hanging from Nector's arms offer up a symbol of the hunted. Nector tries to control Marie as he lies on top of her, but by the end of their encounter, she has succeeding in trapping him. Nector planned on selling the geese in town, but instead, he offers them to Marie.

Marie's fortitude is stronger than Nector's as they face off, but after conquering him, she becomes weak. Her vulnerability shows. The sainthood Marie sought at the convent was attained under false circumstances, but the tender reverence Nector feels toward her is genuine. Marie achieves a different kind of sainthood through Nector's eyes. She is almost a martyr, for wounded and dying animals have the same expression that is on her face. Nector senses the conflicting feelings of pain and pleasure in Marie. The stark contradiction draws him closer to her.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

In 1948, Marie Kashpaw is married with too many children to feed and not enough food to go around. The last thing she wants is another child to care for, but that is what she is about to get. When the drunken woman she once called her mother comes to her door, she brings nine-year-old June Morrissey with her. Lucille, Marie's sister, has died in a drunken stupor out in the woods. Somehow, June survived on her own by drinking pine sap and eating grass. June's father, "the no-good Morrissey," is uselessly drunk himself and cannot care for his daughter.

The former family members on Marie's doorstep do their best to stay composed, but they lose themselves in laughter while telling about the beads around June's neck. The Cree Indians who found June couldn't figure out where she sprang from and decided she must have been raised by spirits. They put the beads around her to protect themselves. After this tale, Marie cannot stand any more out of the Lazarre drunks, and she sends her dogs after them while ushering June into her house.

The reluctance to take June on has to do with more than food. Marie has lost two children and is afraid of becoming too attached to any of her remaining children. With June, this fear is soon replaced by a desire to hold her closer than the rest. Marie thoroughly cleans the girl up. She washes the nits out of her hair with kerosene, puts ointment on her sores and finds some hand-me-down clothes for her to wear. The beads stay on. They are the only thing June will not part with. Surprisingly, June bears no resemblance to anyone in the family, and this makes Marie like her even more.

Meanwhile, Nector is working days at a job in the field to support his family. He doesn't know it, but Marie is in the midst of plotting a better life for her husband. When they got married, Marie knew she was getting a man with brains, and she is determined not to let him destroy that with alcohol. Not only will Nector benefit from her plans, but Marie will finally gain the respect she has yearned for and never received with the name Lazarre. Marie desires to be a woman people look up to. If this means she has to tie Nector to the bed with ropes and dump all of his liquor down the drain, she will.

One day, after June has settled into the family as well as she ever will, there is a scream from outside the house. Marie's daughter Zelda comes running to tell her that the children are hanging June out in the woods. Marie rushes after Zelda and finds June with a noose hanging loosely around her neck. Gordie, Marie's son, has one end of the rope in his hands. Marie is furious at the children, and she is especially furious at their lies when they tell her June *wanted* to be hung. She readies herself to punish them until June cries out that it is true. Marie ruined it. June stole their horse, so she was supposed to be hanged.

There is a moment when it is unclear if June understands what might have happened, but then she breaks the silence by shouting at Marie. "You damn old bitch," she says aloud. Marie grabs June by the shirt, brings her inside and starts washing her mouth out with soap. As she spits out the flakes, Marie thinks despite herself that June is just as brave as she was as a girl. After it is over, Marie looks June in the eye. She tells her that she can live there if she wants and be Marie's girl, but June replies with no expression. She says simply that she does not care. June carries a sadness that cannot be touched no matter who tries to reach out.

Nector pays little attention to what is happening at home. He spends his time working or drinking at the bars, unless Marie comes out to take all his money away. Then he comes begging to her. Eli, Nector's brother, often comes around in the absence of Nector. Marie knows that Eli is destined to live in his bachelor shack, but she appreciates his gentle ways, especially with June. The two go into the woods to catch birds, and they rarely come back empty-handed. Eli and June grow close, and Marie begins to understand that it is a mother's love that June will never trust. Eli is different.

The town gossips begin to talk as Eli starts spending more time at the house than Nector. Marie laughs to deflect the attention from herself. She changes the topic to stories of their own sad lives. Even so, Nector is spending more nights away, and it is becoming harder for Marie to protect her plans. She is growing tired.

One night, Eli is at the house as usual, but he stays after the children have gone to bed. At this point, he would normally leave, but on this night he sits in the kitchen with Marie. She stares down at her lap, furiously mending a piece of something in order to distract herself from the growing tension in the room. When Eli speaks her name, Marie does not look up despite every urge to do so. Eli quickly walks out of the room, and when Marie finally looks up, there is June in his place. June says simply that she wants to live with her Uncle Eli. After she leaves, Marie finds the beads that June always wore inside a kitchen jar. From time to time, she still touches those beads as her own kind of prayer.

Chapter 4 Analysis

This chapter presents the further evolution of Marie after she becomes a Kashpaw and continues to build a name for herself. Though Marie has already borne several children with Nector, she has not fully become a Kashpaw in mind and heart yet. The specter of the drunken Lazarres still haunts her. When Marie's mother and brother-in-law arrive at her doorstep with a young June, Marie's disgust for them is clear. June survived alone in the woods for days without her mother, Marie's sister, and she is withdrawn as a result. The Lazarre association gives Marie pause when she is asked to take June in, but she takes pride to be in a position to help her favorite sister's daughter. In the end, she decides in favor of June, perhaps because her goodwill proves a greater distinction between her family and herself.

The Lazarres are partially correct to call Marie a hypocrite. Though Marie abhors their alcoholism, she faces the same problem in her husband with a different attitude. Marie's

biggest aim is to convert Nector from a drunken mess into a success who will bring honor to the family. When the townspeople gossip, Marie counterattacks by bringing up the stories they would rather keep hidden. Marie's obsession with Nector's self-improvement creates tension between them. The marriage is already lacking in intimacy, simply because there are so many small children to care for. Marie's unwavering plan to move up the social ladder creates even more stress.

Marie's reluctance to take June in soon gives way to affection for the girl. After June gets cleaned up with some new clothes, she is quite the beauty. Despite allowing all the other changes in her appearance, June refuses to take off the beads that she always wears around her neck. Conversely, after June leaves, the beads are the only things she leaves behind. Marie finds a spiritual significance to the beads, though she keeps these thoughts a secret. Sometimes, when no is one is around, Marie reaches her hand inside the jar housing the beads and runs her fingers across them. In almost all things, Marie is a practical and literal-minded woman, but she still has a superstitious streak running through her blood.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Lulu Lamartine has never known a shortage of men in her life. After the end of several marriages, through death or divorce, there is always a new man to take the still-warm place of the last one. During a rare love lapse, she has eight sons at home to keep her company. Her youngest son is Henry Jr., born roughly nine months after the death of his father, Henry Lamartine.

Henry's departure came after a drunken night at the bar when he told everyone before leaving that, if "she comes barreling through, you'll never see me again." Lulu wasn't known to complain about his drinking, and yet no one tried to figure out what he meant until it became obvious the next day. Henry drove his car down the tracks of the Northern Pacific and passed out with his car across the rails. His body was so badly injured during the wreck that the casket at his funeral remained closed.

Beverly Lamartine drove up from the Twin Cities in Minnesota for his brother's funeral. He brought with him a trophy flag, the emblem of mourning for the Lamartine brothers, and he threw it over Henry's coffin as it was lowered into the grave. Lulu swooned and fainted, toppling into the grave after Henry with Beverly jumping down to revive her. The pallbearers had to work together to hoist the trembling Lulu out.

After Lulu's dramatic reaction to Henry's death, her reputation slightly improves. She has always been considered the biggest flirt in town and more invasive townspeople might comment on the fact that none of her eight sons look alike. In fact, Henry Jr. is the only boy with dark hair like hers. However, even his paternity is not entirely clear. The day of Henry Sr.'s wake, Lulu and Beverly leave for the backyard to catch some fresh air. In the garden shed, they both break down, and their waves of grief transform into an animalistic passion as they make love. After this outpouring, they do not see each other.

Now, seven years after Henry's funeral, Beverly decides to come back and see Lulu. He has a life back in the Twin Cities where he makes his money by selling homework study guides door-to-door. Elsa is the woman he adores - a self-important, tawdry blonde who consistently reminds Beverly that she might leave him at anytime. Despite these fulfillments, Beverly thinks often of his son and dreams of a way to integrate Henry Jr. into his life. One night he dreams that he is traveling to see his son. In his mind, Lulu is happy to have Henry Jr. taken off her hands, and she gladly gives him up to a better life with his father.

In reality, Beverly is quite helpless. As he sits across the table from her, drinking coffee, Beverly remembers the complete power and control Lulu has over men. Her well-behaved and respectful sons are one example, but another example happened long ago when Henry was still alive and before he was married. Beverly asks Lulu if she remembers the time the three of them played strip poker. With great poise, Lulu

proceeded to beat the brothers until they were both naked. Now, as Lulu recalls the story, she says her decision to marry Henry instead of Beverly was based on that poker game.

Beverly falls silent after her statement. The pain of Lulu's rejection was so deeply buried that he is shocked by the jealousy he feels now. Lulu just winks at Beverly and continues on without a beat. She is more beautiful than he would like to admit, even at her age, but her eyes are alert with scrutiny. The examination leaves Beverly feeling exposed, and he thinks of Lulu as heartless, wondering if she even remembers what they did in the shed after Henry's wake.

Henry Jr. comes to the window, and Beverly finds it hard to take his eyes off of his son. There is not much of a resemblance, except for a certain stare-down technique Beverly perfected during his tour of duty. Henry Jr.'s stare-down is dead on. Beverly looks away first. The conversation resumes, thankfully, to a more mundane topic as Lulu starts talking about her sons. Henry Jr. is learning to hunt from his brothers while one of the oldest is going to the junior college. Another son, Gerry, is enrolled at the mission school.

Lulu's boys are like a tribe, Beverly thinks, and she is the queen they all adore and protect. He watches them out the window. They move as a pack, like one organism. For a moment, the boys seem dangerous, even menacing in the way they are gathered together. Then Gerry leans over Henry Jr., showing him the right way to hold a gun, and Beverly softens. He remembers the way his own brothers would stick up for each other. He remembers what people used to say, that you couldn't let anything come between the Lamartines. Someone has, though - Lulu.

By the end of Beverly's visit, he has abandoned his original plans, to the point where he has no intention of bringing Henry Jr. home with him now. After the boys have eaten and gone back out again, Beverly stays in the kitchen with Lulu. She draws him close, slowly, with the charm that always does the trick, and Beverly gives in to her touch. Thoughts of his wife, Elsa, are fleeting and vague as he follows Lulu into her bedroom and lies down in her arms.

Chapter 5 Analysis

The story of the Kashpaw clan is enlarged to include Lulu Lamartine. Lulu's significance to the Kashpaws is unclear, but this chapter gives a substantial introduction to her character. Lulu is not unlike a spider that spins a web to catch prey, only Lulu's prey consists of men, and they allow themselves to be caught. Her charms are extraordinary, and the stories about her are legendary. She enjoys a constant steam of lovers, and once made love to her brother-in-law at her husband's funeral. Lulu's allure seems to be universal to all men, but women do not understand the attraction. Other women's husbands are fair game to Lulu, so their jealousy and paranoia are understandable. Nevertheless, Lulu's lack of female companionship can be lonely despite her

abundance of lovers. Though Lulu has a deep understanding of the ways of love, she knows little about friendship.

Lulu's skills for manipulating men are finely tuned. When Beverly Lamartine comes to claim the boy he suspects to be his son, Lulu artfully deflects the issue so that it does not even arise. She is adept at bringing up a man's self-doubts and deficiencies and using these sore points to maintain control over the situation. With Beverly, Lulu succeeds due to her confidence. It has been several years since their first and only sexual encounter, but Lulu draws him close to her like it was yesterday. Beverly melts into Lulu, even though he is married, and he abandons the notion of reclaiming his son.

Lulu has a similarly strong influence over her sons. Normally, a large pack of boys would be unruly and hard to manage, but Lulu's boys are very well behaved. Out of love and respect for their mother, the oldest boys make sure to keep the younger ones in check. As the younger ones grow older, they become like their brothers. When Beverly comes to the house, he notes how the boys are part of a tribe. The paternity of the boys varies, so their mother Lulu is the only common thread. Nevertheless, as Beverly watches the boys play outside, they move together as one body. There is almost a sense of danger in the power that they could wield together, as a unified front. With Lulu as the queen bee in the center of them all, the pack could be ordered to do almost anything.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Nector Kashpaw has always enjoyed a steady stream of luck. When he is a young man, the offers pour in - for jobs, political appointments and even movie roles. A film crew comes through South Dakota, and the talent scout handpicks Nector out of all the extras. His part is the biggest, even though his character dies in the scene. Another time, while working a threshing job in Kansas, Nector catches the eye of an old, rich woman driving past. She asks Nector to pose for her masterpiece. Later on, after agreeing, he finds out that she wants to paint him in the nude. Nector refuses on principle, but he finally relents after she offers a ridiculous sum of money.

The finished painted is called Plunge of the Brave, and it features a naked Nector leaping off a clip to his death in a river below. The painting goes on to become famous, and it even hangs in the state capital. Nector will have nothing to do with it, though. While musing about the painting, Nector imagines himself surviving the leap by giving in to the current's pull, letting it take him back to shore. Nector decides if the greater world is only interested in seeing him dead, he might as well catch a train back home.

Once Nector returns, he develops a taste for Lulu Nanapush's sweet affection, but then the brash Marie Lazarre comes along and takes him by surprise. The difference between the two women is great, but Nector alternately craves them both. In the years after Nector and Marie are married, their house is overrun by a pack of small children, both biological and the ones Marie takes in. Time passes in a flash of babies and work and drinking until one day everything goes still. Nector realizes that a large portion of his life has just gone by, and he was barely aware of any of it. In this state of mind, his thoughts return to Lulu.

Seventeen tons of surplus butter bring Nector and Lulu together again. Nector goes down to the tribal offices and encounters two trucks stocked with butter on the hottest day in July. There is no place to put it, until Lulu Nanapush drives by in her air-conditioned car. Though she is aloof, Lulu agrees to help by delivering the butter. Just as Nector resigns himself to rejection, Lulu has a change of heart, and she drives to a secluded vista. After only a few minutes of conversation, they are in each other's arms again. Lulu playfully smears some butter all over Nector's face as they begin to make love. Nector comes home after midnight feeling a combination of guilt and exhilaration. Marie is waiting for him in the kitchen, and after finding out he has been out all night and forgot to bring home *their* butter, she storms out of the room.

Despite feeling terrible about deceiving Marie, Nector cannot stay away from Lulu. He works as a night watchman for most of the week, but on the sixth night his tired body becomes young again when he visits Lulu. The affair deepens, and Nector comes to know Lulu as a woman with needs and desires, just like Marie. However, he cannot commit to her, and so when she becomes pregnant, he doesn't know for sure whether it

is his child or not. When Beverly Lamartine shows up, Nector is enraged with jealousy at the thought of Lulu getting married. Nector realizes, though, that he belongs with Marie. After diving into a cold lake and swimming to clear his thoughts, Nector vows to give up his Lulu habit.

At first, Nector is calm about his decision. The tribal group he belongs to has negotiated a settlement with the government regarding the occupation of land. If Nector's betrayal of Lulu was not certain before, it becomes clear when he signs the paper that will force Lulu out of her house. Afterwards, there is no chance that Lulu will have him back. One night he tries to visit her, and she turns him away. Like clockwork, Lulu's rejection sets Nector aflame again. Even worse than before, Nector is tormented by indecision. At one point, he composes two letters for the women in his life. He tells Marie that he is leaving, and he tells Lulu he is coming to be with her for good. The letters stay locked in his briefcase for a few days until he imagines Beverly with Lulu, and then he takes off for her house.

Nector has no plan of action. His raw emotions have carried him to Lulu's door, and once there, all he can do is stand outside and chain smoke. He drops a half-smoked cigarette on the ground, and the next thing he knows, there is a ball of fire engulfing the house. Nector does nothing. He does nothing to help or hinder the fire. He just stands unmoved. When he finally turns away, he hallucinates a vision of Marie at fourteen, watching and waiting for him. In reality, it is his daughter, and if she had not pulled him away, Nector would have burned in the fire.

Chapter 6 Analysis

This chapter gives greater detail to the internal struggles of Nector Kashpaw. As soon as women become a part of Nector's life equation, there are no easy resolutions. He struggles between two extremes. As a young man, Nector travels freely and enjoys a charmed life of luck. He has a striking presence or something that attracts strangers, for he is often chosen for random exciting things such as sitting for a portrait. After he discovers that the image other people have of him is not one he shares, Nector returns home. Once Nector falls in love with both Lulu Lamartine and Marie Lazarre, his life is never the same.

Marie's love overtakes Nector by force. She collides into him on the road, and the next thing he knows they are married with a litter of children to care for. Nector loves Marie, but he is tired of the speed of life they have been living. During a rare moment of quiet, Nector realizes that many years have passed by while he was barely aware of them. A desire to turn back a few years puts Nector in a reminiscent mood, which leads him to think of Lulu. The presence of children is a definite factor in Nector's decision to stray. He is tired of loving a woman who is busy loving her children. He wants a woman who can devote herself entirely to him. Lulu, despite the years of distance between them, loves Nector with passionate attention while Marie is too busy to notice.

While Nector is in the throws of his affair, he keeps a very tight schedule. He works every night except one, when he sneaks through Lulu's bedroom window to spend the night with her. Marie keeps Nector busy during the day with household tasks and other domestic minutia. At first, Nector feels exhilarated after seeing Lulu, but in time, he starts to slow down as the schedule becomes too much. By stretching himself so thin between two distinctly different women with unique demands, Nector loses part of himself.

Eventually, Nector is forced to make a decision. At first, he decides to stay with Marie, and so he goes ahead and signs the tribal paperwork that will force Lulu out of her house. As is typical of him, Nector soon changes his mind and wants Lulu back. After the betrayal, she refuses him, which sends Nector over the edge. It becomes clear that the women in Nector's life are what make him a man. Without them, he is an empty vessel. Nector stands grief-stricken outside of Lulu's house and carelessly drops a match, which starts a huge blaze. In his mindless state, Nector just stands there and does nothing. It takes another woman, his daughter, to pull him away from the fire.

Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

For weeks after Marie hears that Sister Leopolda is dying, she resolves to feel no pity. The stab wound she suffered from the nun still throbs when it rains, and even though many years have passed, Marie still enjoys imagining a fitting punishment. One afternoon, while canning apples, her thoughts wander back to Leopolda. Marie knows that it has been a slow decline, but now Leopolda is kept in a small closet-like room in the convent where she spends the day banging on her bedpost with an iron spoon, to drive away the spirits. If the room isn't cleaned regularly, Leopolda will lick the dust from her windowsill. Her appetite for dust is an introduction to death. Distracted, Marie accidentally pours hot syrup over her hand, screaming aloud as if it were Leopolda's fault. She decides to take it as a sign. She will go back up the hill to visit Leopolda one last time, and she will bring along her daughter, Zelda.

The visit is a chance to see Leopolda but also a chance for Leopolda to see Marie. In the years since Marie left the convent, she has become a woman of solid standing. Her husband is the tribal chairman, and her children are well behaved. Marie changes into her best dress, made of plum colored wool, which she wore for Nector's swearing-in ceremony. Zelda is glad for a reason to visit the convent, for she is friendly with a few of the nuns. She looks very presentable in a pressed white blouse and plaid skirt, with a ribbon in her hair.

As Marie walks up the hill with her daughter, she realizes how strange it feels to be coming back to the convent after twenty years. They walk past the spot where Marie and Nector first met, and Marie gives Zelda the simple version of the story. Marie also tells her that they are simply bringing apples to the nuns and visiting Leopolda, Marie's old teacher, because she is sick. Shortly after, they arrive at the convent. They are ushered inside and down a hallway to Leopolda's room. After knocking, there is no response. Zelda wonders if the nun is asleep, until a low, barely discernable voice calls back. Marie opens the door to a very dim room with a mound of white bed sheets in the center. Leopolda is the frail figure buried among them.

Marie opens the curtains to let a beam of light fall onto Leopolda. The old woman is all skin and bones, with shockingly white hair hanging off her head. Unexpectedly, she does not rave like a maniac at them, but she recognizes Marie and reaches out to grasp her hand. Leopolda's grip is as strong as it ever was, which makes Marie understand that the woman has part of her mind left and could still be dangerous. What follows is an insane banter back and forth, evoking the bitter nature of their relationship. No matter what Marie says to prove her worth, Leopolda finds a way to twist her words around. Zelda stands back, listening to her mother in disbelief.

At the height of the argument, Leopolda dives underneath the sheets and brings out her iron spoon. The nun starts maniacally beating the spoon against her bedpost, filling the

room with a terrible noise. The spoon seems to represent all of the nun's hellish power, just as the long iron hooked cane and the poker she used to stab Marie's hand did. Marie, in this moment, realizes that she must take the spoon before she can leave. Under the auspice of receiving a blessing, Marie kneels before Leopolda and waits until the hand holding the spoon comes closer. Leopolda's hand rises up, and Marie can see that Leopolda is about to slam the spoon into her face. The two grapple for a moment, until Marie looks into Leopolda's eyes and feels a great fear. Despite this, Marie lets Leopolda pull her closer in. She drops the spoon, and it falls onto Leopolda's chest, which is barely moving now as she struggles to keep breathing. Marie sits with Leopolda in silence, understanding that there is nothing she can do now with her hatred. By spring, the nun will be buried in the ground alone.

When Marie and Zelda arrive home, Zelda finds a note from Nector under the sugar bowl. It is the goodbye letter that Nector pens in Chapter Six. Marie's mind races, but at the same time her body is still. She thinks of many things. She thinks of Lulu's painted up face and how she will manage to raise the children alone. She wonders what Eli will think and whether he will come around the house anymore. She thinks that she would see Nector in hell before she'd lose her life on the train tracks like Henry Lamartine.

Finally, the inactivity gets to Marie, and she cannot take it any longer. In a daze, she goes about the house performing chores. She feeds the baby and puts her to sleep, and then she starts to peel potatoes. Marie gets through the entire sack, peeling to relieve her heartache at the thought of Nector finding true love with Lulu. She peels until her hands ache and blisters form. Gordie, her son, walks into the kitchen and asks why she has peeled all of the potatoes. She just shrugs.

Lastly, there is the floor to scrub and wax. Marie finds comfort in this task, knowing that she is the kind of woman to keep her floors clean even when left by her husband. Zelda has left to find Nector, and when they return, Marie ignores the sounds from outside. Instead, she puts the final wax down and waits for Nector to come in the house. Marie takes his note from her pocket and places it back under the sugar jar. Then, thinking twice, she picks it back up and places it underneath the salt. Will he wonder now?

When Nector comes to the door, Marie makes him wait before stepping inside. The shiny floor stands like a pool of water between them. After Nector takes his first step, he pauses out of fear. Marie holds out her hand to him. Thinking of what she has learned from Leopolda, she pulls him toward her and through the distance that scares him.

Chapter 7 Analysis

In this chapter, Marie has the chance to revisit the nun who tormented her as a child. When Marie first hears that Sister Leopolda has fallen ill, she feels no pity. The physical scars Marie received from the nun's brutal treatment are still visible, and she still holds a grudge. The illness attributed to Leopolda sounds fitting. She has lost her mind and is confined to a small dark room. Marie can imagine the picture vividly enough without going to see it. However, curiosity creeps up on her. Pride does her in as well. So many

years have passed since Marie's childhood that she has a daughter the same age as Marie was while at the convent. The idea of visiting Leopolda now that she is a respectable adult woman with a daughter of her own is appealing. Marie sets out for the convent feeling confident, dressed in her best clothing.

As soon as Marie steps inside Leopolda's room, she feels as though time has not moved forward an inch. It is possible to feel hatred for someone that spans the course of years. Leopolda and Marie are instantly at odds, though their battle begins in a more subtle way. Anyone else standing in the room, including Zelda, who Marie brings along, could not sense the shift in mood, but Marie understands the game involved. Leopolda crafts each sentence in a way that tries to undermine Marie's confidence. The purple dress she is wearing looks like a ragged shroud, and Nector's appointment as Tribal Chief is accidental. The women verbally spar until Leopolda's mad dive underneath her bed sheets breaks the rhythm.

Even after so many years, Marie feels her grudge against Leopolda as strongly as ever. When Leopolda resurfaces with a spoon in her hand, Marie desires that object with the determination of a child. Marie regresses in the company of Leopolda. All of the progress she has made in her adult life is wasted on this interaction. Zelda stands and watches as her mother battles with an ailing nun, trying to claw the spoon out of her strong grip. Whatever sense of self-pride she had coming up the hill, she loses by the time she comes back down. When Marie returns to the house and discovers Nector's letter, she loses even more.

The distances that can come between two people, especially people who live in the same house, often come up in *Love Medicine*. Marie quickly learns how far she has allowed Nector to slip away as she reads his letter. Oddly, she starts cleaning the house after the idea has sunk in. Even though Marie's desire to keep up appearances was a contributing factor to the separation, she cannot help but continue. Her stoicism is the only thing keeping her upright. Nector's physical return echoes this idea of distance. When he comes to the door, the freshly cleaned floors are still wet, and Marie makes him wait a moment before crossing. After a few moments of silence, she reaches her hand out to him to bridge the distance.

Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Albertine is fifteen years old, traveling alone for the first time alone, on a bus to Fargo. She is running away from home. In her arms, she clutches a bundle of clothing tied together with a sweater. Inside the bus depot, the bucket seats are full of vacant-eyed people waiting for their layover to end and for the next bus to arrive. Albertine sits down, frowning and trying to fit in, but anxiety seizes her. She gets up to go to the bathroom. The water she splashes on her face doesn't alleviate her indecision. Now that she has arrived, Albertine has no idea what to do in this city.

Sitting in the lobby again, Albertine looks up and notices a Chippewa man near the doorway. He is handsome with closely cropped dark hair, and he wears an army-green jacket. When he steps out the doors and into the street, Albertine follows. Once outside, she loses sight of him. The bus depot is on a strip of dingy bars and pawnshops, with vagrants lying under the neon light glow, passing bottles of booze back and forth. Albertine wonders where she will sleep tonight, thinking it may have to be in a doorway nearby. While watching the people on the street, she sees the soldier again.

The boy is Henry Lamartine Jr., Lulu's son. He is now an army veteran, after serving for nine months of combat in Vietnam. For half a year, he was held as a prisoner in North Vietnam, and it has only been three weeks since his honorable discharge. Fully aware that she has been following him, Henry turns to face Albertine. She looks young, and the bundle of clothes in her arms reminds him of the children he saw in Vietnam. Some of the small packages they carried exploded as they ran from gunfire.

Albertine is nervous but nevertheless drawn to Henry. Her fear lessens when she learns that he is a Lamartine boy, and he is amused to find out that she is a Kashpaw. They go from bar to bar together, drinking whisky and holding hands. It is very late, and the streets are quiet when they leave the last bar. Henry walks with his arm around Albertine.

Albertine and Henry check into a motel, signing in as "Mr. and Mrs. Howdy Doody" for the indifferent clerk. Henry takes a sudden dislike toward the clerk, but he immediately tries to calm himself and expel all thoughts of violence. Once inside the room, Albertine is suddenly very tired, and Henry is very drunk. She shuts the bathroom door behind her and tries to ignore Henry outside, who is loudly singing and talking to himself. It becomes more and more of a struggle for Henry to stay centered and remember where he is. To focus, he tries thinking of Albertine, but her image leaves his mind. He is lost.

Henry walks to the bathroom and thinks about kicking in the door, but he opens it instead. Albertine is still dressed, crouching on the floor with her bundle of clothing open and spread out. She looks like a woman from Vietnam to Henry, whose hallucinations become worse as he starts talking to himself again. Albertine thinks it would be best if

she left, but Henry plaintively asks for his pack of cigarettes. Despite her fear, she stays. As Henry smokes, he gradually stops shaking and is able to speak again normally. Albertine agrees to go to bed after he promises not to touch her.

Once in bed, Albertine and Henry both become aware of each other's body and emerge from their drunken sleepiness. Albertine turns toward Henry and starts unbuttoning her shirt. He takes off the rest of her clothing, and while pressed against her, he tries hastily to make love, only to climax immediately. She waits for a moment, touches a hand to his face and then rolls away. Again, they try to sleep, but Henry feels a renewed desire for Albertine. He pushes her over and pulls her body closer to him. He spreads her legs open and enters. Albertine gives in with a cry, and they make love like this, rather violently. When Henry climaxes, he whispers love talk into Albertine's ear, but she moves away from him to the other side of the bed. They fall asleep, disconnected, except for Henry's hand wrapped up in Albertine's long hair.

In the morning, Albertine wakes with no memory of last night's events. She turns toward Henry in bed, and his name comes back to her. She touches him and is about to say his name when he suddenly shrieks. Albertine lies on the floor, stunned and breathing heavily. She is terrified by this man's reaction and apparent fear, even when he touches her, weeping.

Chapter 8 Analysis

The title of this chapter, "A Bridge," has several different meanings. For one thing, this is the first interaction between the younger generations of Kashpaw and Nanapush. Albertine and Henry are drawn together for unknown reasons in a strange town, but after identifying which families they belong to, the connection has more weight. The sexual relationship between Nector and Lulu takes place outside the bounds of their nuclear families, giving it a blurry edge. When Henry and Albertine come together, they do so with little knowledge of how closely their families are connected. This makes their chance meeting seem ordained.

The second bridge belongs to Albertine. She is fifteen years old and on the verge of shedding the last vestiges of her childhood. The act of running away from home is the start of her rebellion. Albertine has enough bravery to make it a few hours away on a bus, but once she arrives at the depot, she almost turns back. If she had not spotted Henry across the room, her rebellion may have ended much sooner. When the pair gets a hotel room, Albertine's youthfulness rears back up. She suddenly realizes that she is alone with a grown man who is fairly drunk, and she locks herself in the bathroom. The events afterward belong to the gray region of experience. The sex lies in a questionable place on the continuum of pain and pleasure. Regardless of the interpretation, Albertine comes closer to becoming a woman because of the experience.

Henry Jr. has his own kind of bridge to cross. After his return from Vietnam, he has difficulty distinguishing between war flashbacks and reality. Of course this makes communication with other people extremely difficult. Henry needs a bridge that will allow

him to cross back into the life he left before the war. The night Henry spends with Albertine has a good start, but when the alcohol mixes in with his depression, he breaks down. The words Henry needs to explain himself do not come out. He cannot make his body perform how he wants it to, either. Though Henry intends to make love to Albertine tenderly, it comes out violently. When she touches him the next morning, he screams unknowingly. Henry is unreachable despite the best efforts of the woman who is with him.

Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

The summer before Henry Lamartine Jr. leaves for Vietnam, he and his brother Lyman buy a red Oldsmobile convertible. Lyman, to explain his ownership of the car, has always had a talent for making money. When he is fifteen, he starts working at the Joliet Cafy washing dishes, and he is gradually promoted until he earns part ownership in the place. At sixteen, Lyman owns the whole restaurant, but the entire operation is lost to a storm that rages through town. Before the insurance money runs out, Lyman has enough money to buy the red Olds with Henry.

The brothers first see the car in Winnipeg. It is parked with a For Sale sign, gleaming with promise in the sunlight. For no particular reason, they both have enough cash on them to buy the car, and so they do. In a few moments, before they are even able to realize the car belongs to them, Henry and Lyman drive off. That summer, they find themselves in a number of adventures involving the red convertible. Somewhere in Montana they meet a hitchhiking girl with her hair in buns around her ears. She needs a ride to Alaska, and the boys are happy to drive her there and spend a few idle weeks in the land where the sun never sets.

When Henry and Lyman return home, there is a letter from the army waiting for Henry. He has enlisted in the marines and is soon off to training camp. Before shipping out, he has time for one last visit home for Christmas, but the next contact from Henry is an overseas letter. He doesn't write too many more before he is imprisoned in North Vietnam. Nevertheless, Lyman continues to write him back, keeping him informed all about the still-perfect condition of the car. Nearly three years pass before Henry comes home.

The change in Henry's personality is obvious. Once a relaxed and lighthearted man, he is now jumpy and withdrawn. After a while, it gets to the point where most people prefer not to spend time with Henry, since he can get mean. The only time Henry is completely still is when he is sitting in front of the TV. Even then, he sits with his hands clenching the armrests, holding onto the chair for dear life.

The family discusses treatment options for Henry, including hospitalization, but Lulu is adamantly against it. She believes that once the hospital admits Henry, they won't let him back out. Lyman's only idea has to do with the car. Part of the problem, as far as he can tell, is that Henry doesn't care about anything from his past life. Perhaps if the car is in bad shape, he can get a reaction out of his brother. Lyman takes a hammer to the pristine car. He whacks the underside, bends the tailpipe and rips the muffler loose. Though it pains him, Lyman makes the car look as beat up as possible. Then he waits for Henry to find the car on his own.

Henry doesn't notice for over a month, but finally he comes to Lyman and angrily chews him out for letting the car get in such bad shape. Lyman plays it cool, pretending that the wear and tear was inevitable, but Henry persists in berating him. After that, Henry spends most days out in the garage working on the car. He stays out there at night too, with a light he rigs up. Gradually, Henry appears to be getting better.

One day in the spring, after months of spending time alone restoring the car, Henry asks Lyman if he'll go out for a spin. Before they leave, their sister Bonita snaps a photo of them together in front of the car. Henry smiles for the picture, his eyes squinting in the sun, with one arm around Lyman and his elbow on the windshield of the car. After the picture, they take off in the car with a full cooler in the trunk. At Henry's suggestion, they head east toward the Red River.

On the drive over, Henry and Lyman put the top down and let the cool spring air float around them. Lyman can sense that Henry is feeling calm and more peaceful, and this brings him hope. At the river, they start a fire and sit quietly for a while watching the flames. Lyman can feel a mounting tension in his brother, almost as though he can feel the anguish Henry has inside. Not able to take it anymore, he breaks the silence by shaking his brother's shoulders and telling him, "Wake up, wake up, wake up, wake up!"

What follows is a breakthrough. Henry seems, for a moment, to open up, and they are able to have an honest conversation. He admits that he always knew Lyman messed up the car, but he fixed it anyway because he wanted to give it back. Lyman doesn't want the car, but Henry insists. They start tussling. Henry rips the sleeve from Lyman's jacket, and he returns with a good punch to the jaw. Henry's eyes are full of tears, and there's blood. He's laughing, though. Lyman can't help it, and he laughs, too.

The brothers sit back again, drinking the rest of their beers until Lyman suggests they go into town and find a couple of nice Kashpaw girls. Henry says all the girls are crazy around town. Lyman calls back that the Lamartines are just as crazy, and Henry reacts wildly. He screams, "Crazier n' hell. Crazy Indians!" Then he starts dancing like an animal, swinging his legs around and screaming. Lyman sits rolling in laughter and watches as Henry shouts that he needs to cool himself off and then runs straight for the river and dives in. Henry's body is moved fast by the current, and his voice is very distant when he speaks his last words, "My boots are filling." Then, he is gone. A few moments pass, and Lyman jumps in after him.

The sun is down by the time Lyman gets out of the river with no sign of Henry. He walks back to the car, puts it in first gear and lets his foot off the clutch. The red convertible moves forward into the river, without him. The headlights are still on when it splashes into the water, and they shine into the depths for a few minutes before the wires short out. Months later, Lyman takes out the photograph of his brother and him leaning on the car. For a while, it reminds him of how close they used to be, but one day he can't stand to look at it anymore. Lyman takes the photo off of the wall, places it inside a paper bag and folds the bag over a few times before hiding it in the back of his closet.

Chapter 9 Analysis

This chapter gives further insight into the close-knit culture of Lulu's boys while also filling in the missing information about Henry Jr.'s past. Lyman, Lulu's youngest son, is very close to his brother Henry. They get along particularly well, because both boys have an easy-going nature, and they enjoy a good adventure. The red convertible fits their needs perfectly. It is a beautiful vehicle and ideal for long road trips with the top down during the hot summer weather. Henry's enlistment does not seem as foreboding as it should, because it comes after a long hiatus in which the brothers are free to travel as they please. Lyman cannot foresee what his brother will be like when he returns from the war.

That Lyman goes to such lengths to draw Henry out of his despair is a testament of Lyman's love for his brother. When Henry returns, he is not the same person who left in any respect. Henry is either silent or raging. Lyman tries to alleviate the fury by purchasing a television to calm Henry down through distraction. The TV works, but it works too well. All Henry does is watch television. Lyman's most selfless attempt to resuscitate Henry involves the red convertible. Despite the fact that Lyman has spent the last three years of Henry's absence taking meticulous care of the car, he smashes it up. Lyman goes to great lengths to use the one object Henry may care enough about to get angry.

Henry has just enough energy left in him to humor Lyman one last time. Henry works steadily to rebuild the car until one day in the early spring it is ready. The brothers take the car out for a drive, and for Lyman, it feels almost like old times. For Henry, the outing is the culmination of his final efforts on earth. Henry's ability to open up and talk to Lyman the way they used to is not a sign of his recovery. Henry experiences the intense release that only comes once he decides to end his life. In the end, Henry is ecstatic. He hollers and dances around freely, and finally, he leaps into the river. Lyman is stunned by Henry's sudden jump, but after searching for him in the water for hours and coming up empty, he knows the drowning was no mistake.

Henry's dramatic suicide brings to mind the portrait that features Nector, "The Plunge of the Brave." After posing and seeing the result, Nector is offended by the implication of death. He feels that if the scene were real, he would be able to swim easily back to shore. Henry's plunge offers a different perspective on the painting. Sometimes the leap is inevitable, and it would take a force against nature to deflect death.

Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

Albertine is in her twenties and living in a dreary town where nearly everyone has a job building the new Interstate. As official weight inspectors for the state highway department, she and her friend Dot Adare are included in this number. The job is monotonous but easy to do. Albertine weighs the trucks that drive up, and Dot verifies that the recorded weight is correct. For most of the day, the women sit around the tiny shack they call the "Scales" and do nothing but try to stay cool.

The friendship between Albertine and Dot seemed unlikely at first. It started when Albertine approached Dot's husband, Gerry Nanapush. Gerry is the one man in town who has a connection to the Kashpaw family. He is Lulu Lamartine's son, and he once dated June. Dot entered the bar, saw Gerry's arm around Albertine and immediately flew into a rage. Despite her large size and the added weight of being six months pregnant, she charged across the room. Gerry intercepted Dot before she landed on Albertine, and he dragged her out of the bar. The following morning, Albertine learned that Dot was the only other woman at her new jobsite. Luckily, after only a few weeks, the two became friends.

Gerry is constantly landing in jail, but he has a remarkable talent for getting out. Perhaps if he stayed long enough to serve a complete sentence, he would not have to live as a fugitive. As it stands, the tales of Gerry's miraculous escapes along with his naturally gregarious personality have turned him into a local legend and an activist for the Indian working class. Although there is nothing Gerry would like more than a life with his new family, it is nearly impossible to erase the prison record he's got following him. Dot understands that to live with Gerry is to accept his frequent disappearances, though she misses him greatly. She will take whatever time she can get with Gerry, however clandestine it must be. Even the conception of their child occurred in a shadowy corner of the visitors' room at the local prison.

Too much time has passed since the last time Gerry was around. On his last night in town, the three friends were in a bar discussing possible baby names when Officer Lovchik walked in. Gerry immediately ran out the door before the officer got close enough to arrest him, and that was the last sign of him. With her due date rapidly approaching, Dot is getting angry that Gerry may not be around for the baby's birth.

One morning, Albertine gets to work a little early, and she notices signs that someone has stayed overnight in the shack. She doesn't mention anything to Dot. Later on, a regular named Ed pulls through with a slightly overweight load. Ed laughs when the meter registers a lower weight, and he drives off leaving a puzzled Albertine. When she looks up, Gerry is standing in place of the truck. Gerry and Dot tenderly embrace. He looks down lovingly at the baby suit she's been knitting, and then they take off in Dot's car.

Albertine is lonely and bored without Dot, so it is a relief to see Gerry pull up to the shack a few weeks later. He's on a rusted-out motorcycle that looks barely big enough to fit his own girth, much less another passenger. Nevertheless, Albertine gets on when she learns that Dot is in labor. Gerry and Albertine wait for four hours in the lobby, silent out of anxiousness, until finally Gerry is allowed in to see his wife. Gerry and Dot have a baby girl named Shawn.

When Gerry comes back out to the waiting room, his fatherly reverie is replaced by the old fear of being caught by the police. Gerry nervously says he's leaving to buy some cigars. Albertine almost tells him to run fast and far now that the baby is born, but Officer Lovchik appears in the room before she can get any words out. Gerry takes off down the hall, jumps through a tall window and is fortunate to make a safe landing on the Officer's car. He quickly rolls off the hood and drives away on the motorcycle, popping a wheelie on his way out.

Weeks later, when Dot returns to work, she brings baby Shawn. The rhythm of the trucks coming in and out is the same, leaving plenty of time for both women to wonder where Gerry ended up. Eventually, they hear word that he was arrested on the Pine Ridge Reservation. This arrest involved gunfire and a shooting. Gerry killed one of the state troopers and is now held in a prison where the visitors must meet eyes through a sheet of Plexiglas. On another occasion when baby Shawn is at work, Albertine weighs her on the giant truck scale. She is surprised, despite common sense, to see Shawn's normal baby weight appear on the meter. A child borne out of such love should weigh more.

Chapter 10 Analysis

This chapter contains the first example of a true love story, though like all love affairs in the book, it has its complications. Gerry and Dot meet, fall in love and start a family. They have no other loves but each other and would likely spend their entire mortal lives together, if not for Gerry's prison sentence. Passionate people are punished for living life so large, as is the case with this couple. Gerry's initial prison term was not a life sentence, but for each escape, he must serve additional years. The reason Gerry escapes is to be with Dot, and eventually his child as well. By escaping, though, he ultimately minimizes the amount of time they can have together.

Albertine, as the outsider, perceives how complex issues of good and evil are in the case of Gerry. According to the state, Gerry is a criminal, but by all other accounts he is an honorable man who simply wants to be rejoined with his wife. From Albertine's perspective, with her personal acquaintance with the couple, it seems inhumane to keep Gerry apart from his family. As Gerry's escapes increase in number and weapons become involved, he is considered a dangerous criminal. Nothing serious occurs until the last time he is caught by the police. There is a shootout, and the rumor is that Gerry has killed an officer. Even under these circumstances, it is difficult for Albertine to judge Gerry's character negatively. She knows too many good things about him that outweigh the bad.

The chapter title, "Scales," is not only where Albertine and Dot work. It also underlines the importance of finding balance. In a good relationship, two people can balance each other, just as in a healthy individual, positive and negative traits are represented equally. Gerry and Dot are perpetually seeking to find that balance. Although they love each other, Gerry's inability to stay in prison will always keep him on the run. Dot wants to find a place where they can be in peace, but until they do, she will continue to wait for Gerry's sporadic visits in between prison breaks.

Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

The month after June dies, her husband Gordie starts drinking, and he doesn't stop. Alcohol alternately consoles and pains him. He can remember the good times way back to when he and June were kids growing up together. He also recalls the more recent times of their troubled marriage and shamefully, what his hands were capable of then. It is the memory of striking June that troubles Gordie the most.

Gordie is not completely alone in his despair. His Uncle Eli has been steadily caring for him through the rough patches, but Eli's patience is running out. One early morning, the two sit at Eli's kitchen table. Gordie is drunk, and Eli is trying to feed him eggs and coffee. Their interactions seem routine. It is clear that Eli has spent many mornings like this trying to care for his nephew. Gordie refuses the food and leaves the house in search of another drink.

Gordie barely makes it the mile back to his house. Once there, he stumbles inside and crawls across the floor to the phone. The man he calls is Royce, and he's willing to spot Gordie some liquor on credit, charging him extra for home delivery. Gordie's mind is at ease with the knowledge that he will have more booze coming soon. Hours or days later, he can't tell which, Gordie wakes up, and the quarts are empty. The kitchen is a sty of dirty dishes and cigarette butts, illuminated by the rising or setting sun. Again, he can't tell which, but he decides it must be setting.

All alone in the house he shared with June, Gordie starts thinking of her and says her name aloud. He regrets it immediately after, for he knows one should never call the dead by their names. They might answer. With a creeping feeling of anxiety, Gordie goes around and locks all the windows and doors until he reaches the bathroom. There are no curtains in the window, and peering through, he can clearly see June's face. Terrified, he races through the house and inexplicably plugs the toaster into the wall, causing a blackout. Now Gordie imagines that June is inside the house, so he gets in his car and tears out of the yard.

The panic wears off, and Gordie's drunkenness sets in. He has extreme difficulty staying on the road, and the other cars are swerving to avoid a crash. Gordie slows down after a close call, but after gaining confidence, he speeds up and turns his car straight into a deer. After examining the doe carcass, Gordie decides to put her in his trunk, but he doesn't have the correct key. In an outburst of emotion, he cites the missing key as yet another indication of how the universe is working against him. Gordie moves forward, shaking and disoriented, but determined. He puts the deer in the back seat of the car and drives off toward town in search of more alcohol.

A few miles down the road, the deer awakens out of her stupor and meets Gordie's eyes in the rearview mirror. He breaks the car immediately. Their exchange is full of meaning.

Gordie can see in the deer's eyes how he has "woven his own crown of thorns." Out of pure desperation and confusion, Gordie can think of nothing else but to smash a tire iron over the deer's head. The animal falls into the seat, and Gordie drives on. Still clutching the crowbar, though he is violently shaking, Gordie looks back again and suddenly believes he has killed June.

In complete hysterics now, Gordie walks up to the window of a convent. Inside, there happens to be an insomniac nun, Sister Mary Martin, who is peacefully playing a clarinet. When the windowsill rattles, Mary becomes aware of Gordie's presence and frightened, asks who is there. Gordie tells her that he needs to confess to a priest, and then he tells Mary that he has killed his wife. The nun is horror-struck, but she wants to see if June may be alive. Gordie leads Mary to the car, and she is shocked and relieved to find the deer in the backseat.

The acrid smell of the dead animal is almost unbearable, but Mary must crawl into the backseat just to reassure herself that all of this is true. By the time she emerges, laughing with relief, the night sky is lightening into day. Gordie is bawling, and when she approaches him, he takes off in a fast sprint away from the convent. Mary follows him but loses Gordie in the apple trees. As the police begin to arrive, Gordie can still be heard crying out in the fields.

Chapter 11 Analysis

There is a limit to the amount of support Gordie's family can give. After countless refusals for help from Gordie, Eli Kashpaw loses patience. In a way, Eli has supported Gordie to such great lengths simply because he was married to June. Although June is dead, her influence on Gordie is as strong as ever. Alcoholism begets more alcoholism, and June's disease was partially to blame for her death. Now, her troubles extend to her husband. Gordie's alcoholism reaches a grotesque point when he spends several days straight passed out on the floor. When he finally gets up, he cannot tell whether the sun is setting or rising, since his sense of time is so off. If the specter of June's disease is not haunting enough, Gordie hallucinates June's face through the window. Gordie's month-long bender reaches its inevitable climax when he flees the house in his car.

June always had an innate ability to blend in with her natural surroundings. When she was a girl abandoned in the woods, she survived by eating berries and drinking tree sap. Once she moved in with Marie and Nector, she left soon after to go live with Eli, who had the same sensibility about nature as she did. Even June's death fell in line with her true character. She wandered unafraid into a snowstorm when she died, confident that she would make it home. When Gordie hits the deer with his car and places it in the backseat of his car, it completely fits that his hysterical mind would see June's face instead of the doe. Gordie stares into the eyes of the deer and imagines June's sorrow staring back at him. Guilt overcomes Gordie, and he pulls over to the side of the road.

Gordie arrives at a house of worship during his time of need. He knocks on the door seeking someone he can confess his crimes to, and he finds Sister Mary Martin. Gordie

tells the nun that he has killed his wife and that she is down the hill, inside the car. Gordie confesses his hysterical version of events about June, because it is all that he knows. He is unable to fully accept the guilt over what happened in his marriage, and instead his mind produces a mirage. For Gordie to attain peace over June's death, he would need to face all of his demons. By running away from the car and into the grounds surrounding the convent, redemption evades Gordie.

Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

Lipsha Morrissey has the healing touch. He can't explain how it works, but if he rests his fingers on the source of someone's bodily pain, they will come away feeling better. Lipsha's touch works on his Grandma Marie's varicose veins, but it does nothing to help his Grandpa Nector. Marie wants Nector to keep away from their neighbor in the senior citizen apartments, Lulu Lamartine, but there's nothing in Lipsha's special powers to stop him. On any given day, Nector can be found outside Lulu's window digging up the dandelions in the courtyard.

The pain of jealousy is evident in Marie. Lipsha, young as he is, can see how his grandmother yearns for her husband. Nector's mind is almost entirely wasted away into dementia, but that is not what Marie mourns. She laments the fact that Nector, even in his bewildered state, still has an enduring obsession with Lulu. One afternoon, Lipsha goes looking for Nector and senses he might be in the laundry room. Lipsha opens the door to find Nector and Lulu passionately locked together. Not knowing what to do next, he shuts the door and startles them. Lulu's wig is askew, and her face is flushed. Nector, though, appears completely unruffled.

Judging by the laundry room incident, Lipsha decides that what Nector needs is a mental adjustment. If only he could forget about Lulu and be faithful to Marie. Love medicine is what Nector needs. Marie gives Lipsha the idea during a conversation. The medicine is an old Cherokee specialty, but one has to be careful to choose the ingredients. Lipsha takes it upon himself to dream up the right kind of potion to rekindle his grandfather's love.

Lipsha looks up while daydreaming a few days later, and he sees two Canadian geese flying over his head. Geese mate for life. He takes it as a sign, deciding that the most critical component of the love medicine will be a goose heart. The difficult part comes next - hunting the geese. Lipsha heads out to the marsh, but after waiting all day long, his shot misses. He comes back empty. Disappointed, Lipsha considers going back out the next day in the bone-chilling cold, but he decides against it. This is where he takes an "evil shortcut." He foregoes the geese and buys dead, frozen turkey hearts instead.

Wading further into the lie, Lipsha convinces himself that real love medicine does not depend on the ingredients. All a real potion needs is some faith in its cure. Taking it one step further, Lipsha goes to the church to get his turkey hearts blessed by the priest. The Sister Mary Martin comes to see Lipsha, but she kindly tells him that a blessing is not necessary. On his way out the door, Lipsha swipes a few drops of holy water from the cup and blesses the hearts himself.

Lipsha brings the consecrated hearts back to his grandmother, and she decides that the power will be most effective if eaten raw. Marie eats her turkey heart right then and

there. The difficult part is convincing Nector to eat his portion. Although Marie skillfully arranges the heart on a bed of lettuce, surrounded by peas and potatoes, Nector will not eat it. Finally, Nector spoons the heart into his mouth, but he teases Marie with it. He rolls it from one side to the other and sticks his tongue out with the heart sitting on the end. Marie has had enough out of Nector. She slaps him hard on back to make him swallow, but he chokes instead. As if he were giving into the death, Nector passes soon after he begins choking on the love medicine. Marie calls for help, swoons and faints to the floor.

When Marie wakes up, she looks angry for being disturbed from what she hoped would be an eternal peace. Her life must go on without Nector, for the love medicine failed and Lipsha's touch couldn't revive him. Lipsha waits a week before talking with his grandmother about what happened. The night he goes to her, she is silent and staring at the armchair opposite her, Nector's favorite. Marie says that Nector isn't gone yet, and Lipsha feels a chill of anxiety, knowing she must be telling the truth. He stays in her apartment that night watching for Nector, but it is not until the next morning that he appears again. Marie shrieks, and Lipsha comes running to her room to hear that Nector came to lie in bed next to his wife. Lipsha implores Nector to go back to where he belongs, for even Lipsha can feel a presence in the room.

On the following morning, Lipsha goes to see Marie again. He tells her the truth about the love medicine, but he says it only proves the medicine had nothing to do with Nector coming back. No supermarket turkey heart could have brought Nector's spirit to Marie's side. It was love and forgiveness for what she did that brought him to her. At first, Marie doesn't seem to believe it, but then her face softens. Taking down the beads she keeps on her bedpost, she presses them into Lipsha's hands. He was always her favorite.

Chapter 12 Analysis

Once again, the definition of love is complicated. Lipsha learns by observing his grandparents that love does not necessarily get easier as one gets older. Existing conflicts that we never fully resolved, and desires that have been suppressed, have a way of coming back. Even after Nector's mind grows soft, he still longs for Lulu. Even after Marie has kept Nector by her side all those years, she still feels jealous of his attraction to Lulu. During her old age, Marie's longing for Nector's attention gets worse. She knows there is nothing she can do to change him.

Lipsha has the gift of the healing touch, and he fancies himself somewhat of a medicine man. When Marie mentions an old Native American practice of administering love medicine to bring two people together, Lipsha volunteers to develop the recipe. Lipsha has a good heart. He is empathetic toward both of his grandparents, but he especially feels for Marie, because he can see how sad she is. Lipsha creates a medicine using frozen turkey hearts, and it has disastrous effects. Nector chokes to death, and Marie faints to the floor. After this, Lipsha's healing touch disappears, and he is left to wonder what kind of medicine really heals.

The truth about love is much more mysterious and wondrous than Lipsha imagined. The machinations of the love medicine were pointless and could not have proved anything. Though Nector was not always true, he loved Marie and their children very much. To love someone is to accept their faults, and like it or not, Nector could never make up his mind, even when it came to his wife and Lulu. Soon after Nector passes away, his spirit returns to Marie while she is lying in bed. Lipsha declares this visit to be the true sign of Nector's love, an indication that no amount of love medicine could provide. Marie is warmed by her grandson's tender heart. Perhaps with his mother June in mind, she takes down her beads and presses them in Lipsha's hands.

Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

Lulu Lamartine considers herself entirely misunderstood. Tagged with the reputation for being fickle and loving no one, she explains the truth. Lulu was in love with the whole world and everything in it. This philosophy often led her into the arms of men she loved simply for being in the world; however, there is one man who stands apart from the rest. Nector Kashpaw got a foothold in Lulu's heart when she was young. They never married, and now Lulu wonders if this is why her love endures. Lulu can get any man where she wants him, expect for Nector.

One of the reasons Lulu causes suspicion is that she never cries. This is another one of her secrets. Lulu has no tears left. When she is seven years old, she discovers a dead body out in the woods. It is a man's corpse with ragged clothes, lying in the doorway of the dilapidated playhouse she visits. When Lulu lifts the hat covering the man's face, she sees death in his cloudy eyes, even though she is too young to understand. Despite the eeriness of the man, Lulu continues to visit and rather enjoys having this secret. One day, she decides to take his pants down and see what is underneath. After this, Lulu does not visit her spot in the woods anymore. The first day of school comes, and on the bus, Lulu cries out all of the tears she will ever cry in her life.

The lack of tears does not prevent Lulu from feeling pain. Her affair with Nector lasts for five pleasurable years and produces a son, but it ends very bitterly. Once Nector signs over Lulu's land to the government, she cuts off contact with him and focuses on defending her right to stay. In a courtroom testimony, Lulu stares down the tribal council threatening to reveal the names of all of her sons' fathers. The council immediately motions to give Lulu compensation for her house, but she refuses their offer. A few days later, Nector burns the house down in a jealous rage over Lulu's impending marriage to Beverly.

Lulu barely escapes alive with her and Nector's son Lyman, and with no house to her name, she ends up taking the council's offer. As the years roll on, all of Lulu's boys grow up and leave the house. There are tragedies to bear, such as Henry Jr.'s death, but Lulu takes pride in Gerry's reputation as a leader and in Lyman's entrepreneurial spirit. After the house has emptied, when Lulu is in her late sixties, she moves to the senior citizen apartment complex.

To Lulu's displeasure, Nector and Marie are living there as well. After weeks of avoiding Nector, Lulu runs into him and realizes that his mind has degenerated into a child's. She feels sympathy for him and just a little tenderness. For the first time, Lulu begins to consider Marie and wonders how she dealt with all the nights Nector spent at her house. As a rule, Lulu does not acknowledge the wives of all her men, and she imagines the women prefer it that way. Her interest in Marie is different. Lulu wishes she

could simply sit with her and ask some questions about what went on for so many years.

Shortly after Nector and Lulu's last embrace in the laundry room, she realizes that only "dreamstuff" is left. Nector is just the shell of the man she once loved. When Nector dies, Lulu is in Grand Forks having an operation to cure her near blindness. She doesn't sense his passing at the time, but later she grieves deeply for him. One night, Lulu hears Nector softly whispering her name. Then, she feels his presence, just the same as it used to feel when Nector would slip through her window and curl up to her in bed. Lulu understands that there are worlds beyond what she can see.

The next morning, Marie is at Lulu's door. When Lulu put in a request for an aide to help her during the post-operation healing period, Marie volunteered. The women sit quietly at first, until Lulu says that she has no regrets. Marie softens and tells her, "There's a pattern of three lines in the wood." What she means is that someone had to put the eye drops, or the tears, in Lulu's eyes. They fall silent again, each sensing the other's grief over Nector. Lulu feels, for the first time, what another woman feels, and this gives her great comfort.

Chapter 13 Analysis

After several other accounts of Lulu's character, this chapter presents Lulu's own voice for the first time. There are two mysteries to Lulu that go a long way toward explaining her behavior. Long ago when she is a child, Lulu cries all the tears she has in her to cry. She witnesses the horrible specter of death in the form of a rotting corpse, and after that she decides to focus on the beauty in the world. Lulu's real secret is that she claims to be in love with the entire world all at once, and this is why she takes so many lovers. Whether or not her free-spirit defense is believable, it is true that Lulu is excellent at maintaining neutrality. She is able to keep every man out of her heart except for Nector.

Nector is the only man who loves Lulu with a deep passion, but he can also turn to the other side and hate her with just as much force. Nector's constant inner turmoil attracts Lulu at first. She wants to get the best of him, and she nearly does. After five years, however, Nector decides to return to family life, and he signs Lulu's house away to the tribal council. Even after so much time has passed, she still holds the betrayal against him.

Lulu is displeased to learn that Nector and Marie are living in the same senior home as she is. Though all three have grown old, the dynamic between them has not changed in thirty years. For the first time, Lulu is presented as the outsider in this chapter. From Marie's point of view, Lulu sits in the higher seat and has enjoyed the most attention from Nector. From Lulu's perspective, Marie is the venerable wife. Lulu starts to view Marie with more respect than the other women whose husbands she has carried on with. After a lonely lifetime of sporadic lovers and no female friends, Lulu is starting to long for a companion who she can simply talk to.

Nector's death brings the two loves of his life together, finally. Marie and Lulu are on a level playing ground after Nector leaves, for there is no one to compete over. Marie makes a surprising first overture of friendship by volunteering to care for Lulu after her eye surgery. As the women sit silently together, they already have a strong sense of each other without ever speaking. The "good tears" are literally the eye drops Marie give Lulu to heal her eyes. In another respect, the tears represent the pain Lulu has had to endure through her relationship with Nector, in order to feel emotions again.

Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

Lipsha Morrissey finally learns the truth about his heritage, but it comes from the most unlikely source. One day, while Lipsha is visiting his grandmother at the senior center, Lulu opens her apartment door and calls him in. She is very straightforward. Lulu says that June is Lipsha's mother, but his Grandma Marie is afraid to tell him now, in case he runs off. Lipsha doesn't believe it at first, but then Lulu's story gets thicker. She talks about her son Gerry. He was crazy for a woman who was married to another man. The woman was June. Her husband couldn't bear raising another man's son, and so Lipsha went to the Kashpaws.

After a lengthy pause, Lipsha looks at Lulu and realizes they have a resemblance to each other. She may be telling the truth. Lulu is resolute as ever. She is the only person who has nothing to lose by telling Lipsha the truth. When Lulu tells him that this knowledge will make or break him, Lipsha knows it must be true. His first reaction is anger and resentment toward his family members, who kept the secret for so long. Impulsively, he decides to leave town. Lipsha goes without telling anyone and steals money from his Grandma Marie before heading out.

Lipsha takes the bus to a border town and holes up in a ratty hotel. He spends his days drinking and feeling miserable, not knowing what to do next. One day he sees an army enlistment poster in a window and signs up without thinking twice. After walking out of the recruitment office, Lipsha looks around at the vagrants on the streets and wonders how many of them are veterans. When Lipsha honestly asks himself what he wants, the answer is clear. He wants to meet his father. A little bit of Lipsha's visionary power returns, and he senses that Gerry is about to break out of prison soon.

Lipsha gets back on the bus and travels to the Twin Cities to see King. Throughout Lipsha's childhood, King would antagonistically bring up the fact that Lipsha had no parents. He would use the phrase, "only the *real* children." When Lipsha arrives at King's apartment, all of his old hostility and bravado is present, but Lipsha feels confident now that he knows the truth. Also, King appears to be leading an ugly, depressing life. Lynette, King's wife, is as surly as ever, and their son, King Jr. is a strange child who stays glued to the TV.

The atmosphere feels particularly strange, but Lipsha doesn't know why. When King suggests a poker game, he sits down to play. Lipsha is good at the game, because of all the time spent with Lulu at the senior center learning her tricks. While Lipsha is beating King, he brings up Gerry Nanapush's name in conversation. He asks King if it is true. Did Gerry really kill someone? Right after he asks, a special broadcast comes on TV to announce Gerry's escape from prison. Both King and Lynette are tense after the announcement, but the poker game continues. It all makes sense when Gerry appears in the kitchen after climbing up the drainpipe.

King was Gerry's cellmate for a short time. Gerry makes King's kitchen the first stop on his way out of town, because he has a bone to pick. King revealed Gerry's escape plans to the authorities. Despite his obvious anger, Gerry is a gentleman. He notices the poker game and asks if he can join. King stammers out a yes. Gerry decides that they should make the game more interesting. When Lipsha suggest playing for June's car, King refuses. Gerry says that King is lucky if he will keep his life, and then the game starts up.

Gerry has a form of the touch with the cards, but Lipsha ultimately wins. Lulu's trademark grooves mark the cards, and Gerry understands the connection to Lipsha as though he were reading a line in a book. Just as the game ends, the police come to the door. King Jr. appears from nowhere and shouts, "He's in here!" Everyone panics when the door opens, but, before the police enter, Gerry disappears. After investigating the house and finding no one, the police apologize and leave. King grudgingly hands over the keys and registration to his car, and Lipsha takes off.

As Lipsha makes his way down the freeway, he hears an insistent knocking sound near the back of the car. When he pulls over and opens the trunk, he finds Gerry barely breathing inside. They share a laugh once Gerry gets settled in the front seat. Lipsha keeps driving due north toward Canada, per Gerry's request, for he really wants to evade the police this time and get back to his family. Their conversation is like a dream to Lipsha, though in most ways Gerry is still a stranger to him. Finally, Lipsha daringly asks if Gerry knew June. He says that he was in love with her like everyone else.

Near the end of the ride, Lipsha confesses that he's running from the army police. At this moment, Gerry demonstrates that he knows Lipsha is his son. He says not to worry about the army, because all Nanapush men have an irregular heartbeat that keeps them from having to serve. Gerry reaches out, touches Lipsha's shoulder and says, "We all have this odd thing with our hearts." Lipsha can feel his own heart do a little skip. After Lipsha drops Gerry off, he drives around until the sun comes up and then starts making his way back toward home.

Chapter 14 Analysis

All points lead to June again by the last chapter of *Love Medicine*. The truth about Lipsha's heritage was present throughout his entire life, but it took someone outside of the family to finally tell him the truth. Even with Lipsha's power of the touch and his visions, he was unable to see what was right in front of him. Without the knowledge that June is his mother, Lipsha cannot fully understand why his family relates to him in their particular way, especially King. Though Lipsha is angered at first by the secret, he quickly sees a brighter side to things and takes the opportunity to meet his father. The truth liberates Lipsha and solves many problems of self-identity, leaving him free to start a life for himself.

Lipsha's brother King, by contrast, is ruined by the revelation. In the beginning, King exerts his dominance over Lipsha using the angle that he is a "real child," meaning he

belongs to a real family. Lipsha, by implication, is the parasite living off the goodwill of King's family. Whether or not King knew the truth about June back then is unclear, but his face grows sick with knowledge after Gerry Nanapush appears. Lipsha gains power with the knowledge of who his father is, while King shrinks at the presence of Gerry. It is enough of a coup that Lipsha's real mother is June. When Lipsha finds out that the legendary Gerry Nanapush is his father, he feels joyful.

The final chapter elucidates all of the intricate connections between the Kashpaw and Nanapush clans, until the two families almost meld into one. The years of opposition between Lulu and Marie, the matriarchs, have transformed into a deeply satisfying friendship. Whether or not this blending will have a healing effect on the rest of the clan is yet to be determined. However, there is one member of both families whose future looks certain. Lipsha Morrissey Kashpaw Nanapush comes away with a stronger sense of identity than he has ever had before.

Characters

Uncle Eli

See Eli Kashpaw

Uncle Gordie

See Gordie Kashpaw

Henry Junior

See Henry Lamartine, Jr.

Henry Senior

See Henry Lamartine

Albertine Johnson

At the beginning of the story in 1981, Albertine Johnson-daughter of Zelda and granddaughter of Marie-is away from the reservation studying to be a nurse. She returns home upon hearing of her Aunt June's death. Once home, she tries to get Grandpa Kashpaw to recall his years as an Indian revolutionary.

Albertine has always been independent. In 1973, the fifteen-year-old runs away from home to Fargo, where she meets and sleeps with Henry Lamartine, Jr. In 1980, trying to decide what to do with her life, Albertine meets Gerry Nanapush and his girlfriend, Dot Adare. Albertine works on the construction sight with Dot until Dot delivers Gerry's baby.

Zelda Johnson

Zelda, sister to Aurelia and daughter of Marie, is Albertine's mother. Zelda was raised as June's sister. Zelda thinks Albertine should be married. She also criticizes June's son, King, for marrying a white girl when Zelda, herself, had been married to a Swede.

Aurelia Kashpaw

Aurelia, Albertine's aunt, is Marie's other daughter and Zelda's sister. She lives in the old homeplace on the reservation.

Eli Kashpaw

Eli Kashpaw, one of the youngest of Rushes Bear's twelve children, was raised in Indian ways while his brother, Nector, attended the white man's boarding school. Eli is Albertine's great uncle. Eli raises June after she leaves Marie's house. He remains a bachelor While his brother Nector's mind has deteriorated, Eli's remains clear and sharp.

Gordie Kashpaw

First-born son of Marie and Nector, Gordie is the brother of Zelda and Aurelia, and was raised as June's brother. He marries June, however, angering Marie. He and June have one son, King. Gordie truly loves June and is never able to deal with her death. He begins drinking one month after her death. In 1982, he dies from heartbreak and alcoholism in his mother's home.

Grandma Kashpaw

See Marie Kashpaw

Grandpa Kashpaw

See Nector Kashpaw

June Kashpaw

The story begins in 1981 with the final episode of June Morrissey Kashpaw's life. A long-legged, hardened Chippewa woman, June appears young to the casual observer. A close look, however, reveals her broken nails, ragged hair, and clothes held together by safety pins. June is the daughter of Lucille Lazarre Morrissey, the dead sister of Marie Lazarre Kashpaw (Grandma Kashpaw) June resides with Marie until she decides to go live With Eli. June marries Marie's son, Gordie, much to Marie's displeasure.

On one of her many leaves from Gordie, June meets a mud engineer, Andy, in a bar in Williston, North Dakota. She has drinks with him, knowing that he will want to sleep with her afterwards. Tired of the routine she knows so well, June plays along until Andy passes out in his truck. June, drunk, decides to walk back to the reservation but never makes it. She dies in a snow-covered field.

King Kashpaw

King is the son of June and Gordie. King is married to Lynette, a white girl, and they have a son named King, Jr. (Howard). King wants to believe he is the only true son of

June and torments Lipsha for most of his life. At the end of the story, Lipsha and Gerry both visit King and his family, reminding King of his acts against them and putting him in his place.

Marie Kashpaw

Marie grew up as Marie Lazarre, the daughter of drunken horse thieves, a Catholic girl who believed that Satan talked to her. One of the sisters who taught at Marie's school convinced Marie that Satan lived in her, and that the only way to be rid of him was to Join the convent. Marie lived in the convent from 1931 until 1934, enduring physical and mental abuse from the sister, Leopolda, who had cajoled her into coming to the convent. When Leopolda stabs Marie with a fork and knocks her out with a poker, Marie finally finds a way to escape her abuse. She allows the other sisters to believe Leopolda's story that the injury in Marie's palm is actually the mark of Christ-the evidence of a miracle that has occurred in the face of Satan's work. With this lie, Marie holds a power over Leopolda that enables Marie to leave the convent.

Marie meets Nector Kashpaw on the day she leaves the convent. Nector is a handsome Indian who is returning from shooting geese that he sells to the convent sisters. He throws Marie to the ground without thinking, and with one sexual act, seals his fate with Marie forever. While Nector really loves Lulu Nanapush, he marries Marie in 1934 and fathers her children-Gordie, Zelda, Aurelia and raises the children they take in-Lipsha Morrissey and June Kashpaw.

Neetor Kashpaw

Nector Kashpaw-son of Rushes Bear (Margaret Kashpaw), brother of Eli, and husband of Mane-attended boarding school as a young man, where he learned to read and write as well as the white man's ways. He represented his tribe well in his younger days, testifying in Washington for Indians' rights, getting a school and factory built, and saving his tribe's land. When the story opens in 1981, however, Nector Kashpaw has little memory of anything that has happened in the past.

In his lucid moments, Nector remembers his first meeting with Marie and wonders at the fact that he was unable to let her go. At that time in his life, he loved Lulu Nanapush, whom his own mother had raised. Yet he married Marie Lazarre, for which Lulu never forgave him. Nector, himself, could never forget Lulu. In 1952, realizing that he had to follow his heart, Nector begins a five-year affair with Lulu. The affair ends when Beverly Lamartine, Lulu's late husband's brother, arrives and becomes her lover. Nector gets Lulu kicked off her land, and as a result, Lulu ends the affair. He tries to forget her but ends up writing a letter to Marie telling her that he is leaving her. When he returns to Lulu's house and finds her gone, he burns her house down.

Beverly Lamartine

Henry Senior's brother, Beverly appears at Henry's funeral and then again, seven years after Henry dies. His secret motive for returning is to claim Henry Junior as his own so that he can "use" Henry Junior in his book-selling tactics. He succeeds in seducing Lulu and is the cause of the end of Lulu's affair with Nector Kashpaw.

Henry Lamartine

The man Lulu married out of "fondness," Henry dies in 1950 when a train crashes into his car.

Henry Lamartine, Jr.

Henry Junior, son of Lulu (and probably Henry Senior), is not the same person when he returns from Vietnam. Having been a happy-go-lucky kind of guy, the Henry who returns from three years overseas is very different. He suffers from depression, but there is no help available for him on the reservation. He seems happier after he begins working on the red car that he loves. One night, however, he and Lyman get drunk and Henry jumps into the river. When he doesn't reappear, Lyman tries to save him. Realizing that Henry has drowned, Lyman pushes the car into the river, leaving it there for his brother who loved it.

Lulu Lamartine

Lulu Lamartine loved Nector Kashpaw from the time that she was a young girl. When Nector married Marie instead, Lulu tried to put him out of her mind. She went to live with Moses Pillager, the crazy island man whose family had sent him to live in the land of the spirits She bore him a son, Gerry, and returned to town to live. When Pillager did not follow her, she married a Morrissey out of spite. Later, she married Henry Lamartine because she was fond of him. Lulu had eight sons, none of whom were Henry's and one daughter, Bonita, whose father was Mexican. The last of the eight boys was Nector's son, Lyman Kashpaw.

After Nector signed Lulu's land away, Lulu married Beverly Lamartine, Henry's brother, but did not live with him. She spent a few months living in a shack on her burned-out property, until the tribe built a government house for her on a piece of land bought from a white farmer. After she had turned sixty-five and with eyesight failing, Lulu moves to the Senior Citizen's Center where she and Nector have their last encounter with one another.

Lyman Lamartine

It is 1983. Lyman Lamartine, son of Lulu and brother to Henry Junior, has difficulty dealing with his brother's death. An astute businessman, Lyman begins to lose money, unable to bring himself out of his depression. A notice from the IRS prompts him to action, though He goes to work for the Bureau of Indian Affairs and opens a factory. When the factory is destroyed as the result of rioting among its employees, he begins planning a Chippewa casino.

Marie Lazarre

See Marie Kashpaw

St. Marie

See Marie Kashpaw

June Morrissey

See June Kashpaw

Lipsha Morrissey

Lipsha was raised by Grandma Kashpaw, but he was June's son by Gerry Nanapush during one of June's separations from Gordie. Lipsha, however, goes through most of his life not knowing that June is his mother Lipsha has special talents-an Indian medicine with which he was born. He decides to practice his medicine on his grandparents by concocting a love charm for them. When he "cheats" on the concoction, he believes he is the cause of his grandfather's death. His grandmother reassures him and gives him the beads that had belonged to his mother. He does not really understand the significance of the beads until Lulu Lamartine tells the nineteen-year-old that he is June's son. Lipsha decides to find and meet his father.

Lulu Morrissey

See Lulu Lamartine

Gerry Nanapush

Gerry Nanapush-the result of Lulu Nanapush's time with Moses Pillager-is a renegade, nearly as wild as his father is. Known for his numerous breaks from prison and his dedication to the American Indian Movement, Gerry keeps on the run from the authorities. He feels his true place in life is with his family, in the bosom of his tribe. He

finds it difficult to live the white man's life. On his last break from prison, he seeks out King to punish him for turning him in to the authorities.

Lulu Nanapush

See Lulu Lamartine.

Themes

Family Ties

The characters in *Love Medicine* exhibit distinct personality traits and live their lives accordingly. Yet, very strong ties exist among all the characters-the ties to their common families and heritage. For example, while Albertine has chosen to leave the reservation to study nursing, she is drawn back home upon hearing about her Aunt June's death. Back on the reservation, Albertine wants to connect with her grandfather, hoping to understand more of her heritage. She asks him questions about his days as an advocate for Indian rights, hoping that something she says will rekindle his memory. The other characters also tell their stories through their relationships to June. Thus, the familial bonds provide a common thread through out *Love Medicine,* offering a universal theme to which everyone can relate.

Individual vs. Society

In addition to their ties to family, the characters in *Love Medicine* hold their cultural heritage close to their hearts. They try to live in contemporary society while keeping their Chippewa traditions alive. Lipsha Morrissey presents a good example. The family recognizes that Lipsha has the "touch," that he possesses the ability to heal with his hands as many of his ancestors could. He tries to use his ability to make his grandfather love his grandmother again. Feeling at loose ends when he cheats on his potion for love medicine and his grandfather dies, and having the newfound knowledge that Gerry Nanapush is his father, Lipsha allows the white man's world to lure him into joining the Army.

Culture Clash

Gerry Nanapush's self-identity has always been at odds with the society in which he lives. Like his son, Lipsha, Gerry has a strong sense of his heritage and feels wronged by the white man, who will not give him a fair chance. When he fights a white man by "reservation rules" (Brooch) in a bar one night, he loses and gets a prison sentence. He escapes from prison because he believes that his rightful place is with his family. Because white man's law dictates that he be returned to prison, Gerry must hide from everyone-unable to live the honest and peaceful life that is his heritage.

Race and Racism

Gerry Nanapush's barroom fight resulted from his trying to defend his heritage. A "cowboy" had asked him whether a Chippewa was also a "nigger." Gerry fought him by "reservation rules"; he kicked the man in the groin That ended the fight, and Gerry thought the issue was settled. Yet he had to go to court, where the white witnesses and

the white doctor stacked the evidence against him. His Indian friends provided him with no help as witnesses; they did not believe in the United States judicial system. Gerry received a sentence that was stiff for a first offense but "not bad for an Indian."

Identity

Lipsha Morrissey grew up in Grandma Kashpaw's home. He never really knew who his parents were until he was nineteen years old, when Lulu Lamartine told him. All of those years, though, the family treated him well. He thought that it was because he had his special "touch." Yet, he discovers that he is June's son by Gerry Nanapush during one of June's separations from Gordie. When Lulu tells him the news, she says that she thinks he should know because she feels that he has always been troubled, not knowing where he really belonged. He decides shortly after this that he wants to meet his father. When Lipsha and Gerry meet, and Lipsha helps him escape, he finds his true Identity in Gerry's words: "You're a Nanapush man. We all have this odd thing with our hearts."

God and Religion

Erdrich's Catholic upbringing is reflected in Marie's stories. As a young girl, Marie (Saint Marie) aspires to rise to the stature of the nuns who live in the convent on the hill. She feels that she is as good as they are. "They were not any lighter than me. I was going up there to pray as good as they could. Because I don't have that much Indian blood." Sister Leopolda, Marie's teacher, constantly warned the children that to disobey her was to let Satan take over their lives. When Marie's attention once strayed from her schoolwork, Leopolda convinced Marie that Satan had chosen her. As a result, Marie sought salvation through Leopolda. To rid herself of Satan, she would conquer Leopolda; she would get to heaven before Leopolda. Marie joined the convent. For three years, she endured the emotional and physical abuse Leopolda inflicted on her, believing that the harder she prayed and praised God, the sooner she would be free of Leopolda and Satan's grasp. Then, Leopolda nearly killed her with a poker. Regaining consciousness, she realized that Leopolda was telling the other sisters that Marie had undergone a spiritual transformation and received the mark of Christ in her hand. When Marie understood that she had been living a faithless lie and that Leopolda was a sick woman, Marie no longer believed that she needed the faith that the nuns offered.

Style

Point of View

The point of view Varies with the speakers. Sometimes they speak in the first person; at other times, they speak in third person. While there are actually fourteen stories in *Love Medicine,* seven members of five families-the Kashpaws, Lazarres, Lamartines, Nanapushes, and Morrisseys-tell their views of many of the same incidents. For example, both Nector and Marie tell about their encounter on the hill below the convent. Many critics view this technique as a strength, because the reader gets to hear both sides of a story. Other critics think that the use of so many voices makes the novel too confusing; readers must reread to find relationships among the characters and the stories they tell.

Structure

Above all else, critics discuss the manner in which Erdrich presents her story through the separate voices of seven characters. Some say that Erdrich's use of this technique provides a rich portrait of not only the events in the lives of the characters, but also a realistic illustration of Native Americans trying to cope in modern culture. For example, Harriett Gilbert says in *New Statesman,* "Largely using her characters' own voices, she washes their stories backward and forward in rollers of powerful, concentrated prose through half a century (1930s to now) of loving, hating, adapting, Surviving and tragically failing to survive" Others criticize her style. Gene Lyons, in *Newsweek* says that *Love Medicine* is not a novel but a book of short stories. "No central action unifies the narrative, and the voices all sound pretty much the same-making it difficult to recall sometimes who's talking and what they're talking about."

Setting

Most of *Love Medicine* takes place on the Turtle Mountain Chippewa Reservation in North Dakota, or in the area close to it. The story spans a period of 50 years, from 1934 to 1984. The setting lends credence to the story; write readers get a glimpse of life in a culture that is foreign to most of them. The details Erdrich provides emphasize the lives of many contemporary Indians on reservations. According to Robert Towers in *The New York Review of Books,* "... Impoverished, feckless lives far gone in alcoholism and promiscuity ... an irrefutable indictment against an official policy that tried to make farmers out of the hunting and fishing Chippewas, moving them from the Great Lakes to the hilly tracts west of the wheat-growing plains of North Dakota"

Poetic License

Literary experts say that writers who deviate from the conventional form are taking "poetic license." Many think that Erdrich does this with *Love Medicine* Not only does she use separate characters to tell their versions of the events in the book in a nonlinear fashion, but also she adds a lyric quality to her writing that is more typically seen in poetry. Because she is a poet, Erdrich has a practiced mastery of words; she is able to write concisely without losing meaning. This is especially evident in the way her characters talk. According to D. J. R. Bruckner in a review in *The New York Times,* "... many of their tales have the structure and lyric voice of ballads."

Dialogue

Native American readers appreciate Erdrich's artistry with dialogue. They have written to her saying that she was the first writer who knew how Indians really talked. The language the characters speak has evolved from several other languages blended together to result in a unique voice that is now an established part of the culture. The verbs used come from Chippewa, while most nouns are French. Also heard are traces of other Native American and European languages

Historical Context

The Chippewa (Ojibwa) Tribe

Seventeenth-century French explorers found the Chippewa Indians, or Ojibwa, in Canada. They lived there in small villages around the Upper Great Lakes near Sault Sainte Marie. At the time, they lacked tribal organization, and the village people governed themselves. They worked as fur traders, used birchbark canoes, and were skilled woodcraftsmen. As they prospered, however, their population grew, and they acquired more territory. In addition, they began focusing more on developing tribal customs and rituals. They established one organization in particular. the Midewiwin, or Grand Medicine Society. In *Love Medicine,* Lipsha Morrissey, known for his inherited "touch," practices the ways of the old medicine. *Love Medicine* is named for the love-potion ritual Lipsha tries to recreate for his grandparents.

As the tribe grew, they drove out other tribes. For example, they expanded to take over the entire Ontario peninsula by the late 1700s, forcing the Iroquois to leave. This expansion reached into western Wisconsin and northeastern Minnesota. In the United States, the Ojibwa became known as the Chippewa. By the early 19th century, Chippewa lived in Ontario, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan in Canada-where they were still called Ojibwa-and in North Dakota, Minnesota, Michigan, Wisconsin, Indiana, and Ohio in the United States. They lived away from the white man's settlements and continued to practice their tribal customs. The Kashpaws and Lamartines are fictional descendants of the Chippewa who settled in North Dakota. As of 1990, there are more than 100,000 Chippewa living in the United States.

Indian Territory

In the late 1700s and early 1800s, the large areas of land in the western United States that were originally settled by Indians were known as Indian Territory. As white settlers moved westward, however, the United States government passed laws that removed the Indians from Indian Territory. Two such laws were the Indian Removal Act (1930) and the Indian Intercourse Act (1834). These laws made Indian Territory the areas including Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska, and the Dakotas. The government forced Indians to move to these new lands. As a result, many Indians had to learn new ways to support themselves. The Chippewa, for example, existed as hunters and fishermen when they lived on their original homelands. After being forced to the Great Plains regions, they had to become fanners if they were to survive.

Indian Reservations

The lands to which Indians were forced to move were known as Indian reservations, designated by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Between 1830 and 1840, more than 70,000 members of the "Five Civilized Tribes" had to move to reservations. In *Love Medicine,*

the Kashpaws and Lamartines lived on one such reservation, Turtle Mountain. Many Indians fought this forced resettlement, in battles known as the Indian Wars.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs

Established in 1824 as part of the War Department, the Bureau of Indian Affairs still exists as the governmental agency through which Indian affairs are handled. Earlier names for the agency include the Office of Indian Affairs, the Indian Department, and the Indian Service. The agency now resides in the Department of the Interior rather than the War Department, and is directed by the Interior Department's Assistant Secretary of Indian Affairs. The twelve offices of the agency oversee reservation and Indian-community programs and, on some reservations, manage education, social services, law enforcement, mineral and water rights, and land leasing. Erdrich's parents both worked as teachers for the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

The Dawes Act or General Allotment Act

The Dawes Act enabled individual Indians to claim parts of tribal lands for themselves. The Act meant to encourage the Indians to become farmers but resulted in loss of tribal lands to white settlers. To halt this tribal loss of land, the government enacted the 1934 Wheeler-Howard Indian Reorganization Act. Not only did the Indians reclaim ownership of the reservation lands, they also became self-governing in a partnership with the Bureau of Indian Affairs. In addition, the partnership provided assistance in developing the land, managing resources, and establishing other programs.

Tribal Rights

The 1950s saw the termination of special federal programs and trust relationships with Indians, legislation enacted to force Indians to more quickly become a part of white society. This resulted in economic disaster for many tribes. There was so much opposition to the policy, the government withdrew it by the mid-1960s. Since the Bureau of Inman Affairs was established, many Native Americans have protested the lack of Native American input into the agency. They have felt that no one speaks for their rights. In the 1970s, members of the American Indian Movement, an Indian-rights group, demanded that the agency pay more attention to Native American needs and interests.

Modern-Day Social Ills

Forced assimilation into white society has, in part, been responsible for the many problems Indians face today. Those who live on reservations lack education, have few jobs, suffer early deaths, and have a higher tendency to commit suicide. Those who leave the reservations to live in cities, assisted by a relocation program sponsored by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, are often unable to adjust. Without skills that would enable them to be successful away from the reservations, they either return to the reservations

or face failure in the cities. Unhappy and at loose ends, many Indians resort to crime and alcoholism.

Improved Outlook

While many problems still exist for Indians living in modern-day society, more and more Native Americans are overcoming the odds. The Bureau of Indian Affairs works harder today within the government to protect Native American interests. The Office of Tribal Justice, created in 1995 within the U.S. Department of Justice, now assists with questions of state-tribal jurisdiction. Reservations themselves support education through tribal colleges and employment endeavors such as radio stations and gambling casinos.

Critical Overview

In view of the overwhelmingly positive reviews that *Love Medicine* continually receives, it is difficult to believe that publishers at first rejected the book. Only after Dorris promoted *Love Medicine* himself did Holt publish it in 1983. It immediately became a huge success. Reviewers believed that Erdrich's writing was comparable to Faulkner's and O'Connor's. They predicted a successful career for her. For example, Marco Portales said in the *New York Times Book Review,* "With this impressive debut Louis Erdrich enters the company of America's best novelists, and I'm certain readers will want to see more from this imaginative and accomplished young writer." Jascha Kessler said in a radio broadcast, "I am glad to report that in 1984 a really first-rate novel by a young woman named Louise Erdrich appeared, and I think it is a book that everyone on the lookout for good, imaginative, rewarding writing will enjoy and admire."

The fact that reviewers think that the book can appeal to everyone represents one of its best qualities: the universal nature of its themes. *Love Medicine* tells stories of enduring truths such as love and survival. Like all Americans, the Native Americans in the story struggle with problems on a daily basis. These families must cope with alcoholism, economic deprivation, and marital problems. Like all people, they seek solutions to these dilemmas while attempting to live normal lives. Cynthia Kooi says in *Booklist,* "Erdrich creates characters who .. reveal the differences between individuals by the similarities of their society...." Because the families in *Love Medicine* act so much like families everywhere, readers relate to them and their Situations.

Reviewers also appreciate the skill with which Erdrich realistically portrays the lives of two Chippewa families who are attempting to foster their heritage while living in contemporary society. Jeanne Kinney notes in *Best Sellers,* "By showing their world impinging on the white world that surrounds them and by showing the white world impinging on them, the author leads us into another culture, her own." Through a period of 50 years, readers become acquainted with seven members of the Kashpaw and Lamartine extended families. All characters hold Chippewa tradition close to their hearts in some way, while having to constantly fight poverty and racism. Even though the Native American culture and beliefs very subtly underlie the stories common to all people, Erdrich manages to provide a vivid picture of Native American society. Kooi says, "The book poignantly reflects the plight of contemporary Indians and at the same time depicts people the reader wants to be with a little longer."

Erdrich presents her realistic characters living universal lives through prose that critics praise for *its* lyric quality. Even while the characters suffer, the joy and beauty that they experience emerges with a poetic sense. To accomplish this, Erdrich uses not only the characters' multiple voices but also language that, according to Bruckner in *The New York Times,* "convinces you you have heard them speaking all your life " The characters' stories resemble ballads. The characters, themselves, live through the vivid events, details, and attitudes offered by the individual speakers. Erdrich manages to use the combination of the characters' stories and their personal narration to create a community voice that, according to Kessler, "... conveys the magic, the ancient

mysteries and lore, the inner heart of the religious and of the traditional ways of thought and feeling of groups who have never been part of the European cultural experience. "

Willie most critics appreciate Erdrich's multi-voice style and the richness of her characters' language, some view these aspects of Erdrich's writing to be distracting. Gene Lyons says in *Newsweek,* "The first thing readers ought to be told about Louise Erdrich's novel *Love Medicine* ... is that no matter what the dust jacket says, *it's* not a novel it's a book of short stories... so self-consciously literary that they are a whole lot easier to admire than to read. . .. No central action unifies the narrative, and the voices all sound pretty much the same-making it difficult to recall sometimes who's talking and what they're tailing about." Robert Towers also criticizes Erdrich's style. He says in *The New York Review of Books, "Love Medicine...* is very much a poet's novel. By that I mean that the book achieves its effect through moments of almost searing intensity rather than through the rise, climax, and closing of a sustained action, and that its stylistic virtuosity has become almost an end in itself." He, too, thinks the relationships among characters confuse the reader. Yet he credits Erdrich's ability to write dramatic, graphic scenes.

Most literary experts agree that Erdrich writes powerfully, chronicling events in the lives of a society about which most people know nothing. She is able to remain loyal to her heritage while maintaining her art; her writing appeals to everyone. Marco Portales says it best in *The New York Times Book Review,* "Ethnic writing-works that focus on the lives and particular concerns of America's minorities-labors under a peculiar burden: only certain types of people are supposed to be interested. Louise Erdrich's first novel, *Love Medicine,...* dispels these spurious notions."

In summary, *Love Medicine* continues to receive high marks, even though a few critics disagree with all the accolades. The book has won numerous awards including. the Sue Kaufman Prize for Best First Fiction (1983); the National Book Critics Circle award for year's best novelist (1984); the Virginia Scully Award for Best Book Dealing with Western Indians (1984); the American Book Award from the Before Columbus Foundation (1985); and the Great Lakes Colleges Association prize for Best First Work of Fiction (1984).

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

Donna Woodford is a doctoral candidate at Washington University and has written for a wide variety of academic journals and educational publishers. In the following essay she discusses the story as a form of love medicine.

Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine* is a novel made up of several stories about the people that reside on a Chippewa reservation in North Dakota.

The stories cover three generations, fifty years, and several families, and there are eight distinct narrators. Because the stories seem so loosely related, some Critics have questioned whether the novel is truly a novel. Alan Velie suggests that it is, rather, a "collection of short stories, all of which deal with the same set of characters." Furthermore, Catherine Rainwater asserts that the novel is full of conflicting codes which lead the reader to expect one type of novel, and then frustrate that expectation by producing a very different sort of narrative. She claims, in fact, that "Erdrich's novels conspicuously lack plot in this traditional sense of the term. One need only ask oneself for a plot summary of *Love Medicine* to substantiate this claim. The novel seems rife with narrators (eight, to be exact, bereft of a focal narrative point of view, and replete with characters whose lives are equally emphasized."

But what unites these seemingly disconnected stories is the common theme of characters in search of love and in need of stories. Throughout the many stories that make up the novel, characters search for a "love medicine," a trick or a potion that will bring them the love they so desperately need. In the end, however, it is the stories themselves that prove to be the love medicine. As Margaret J. Downes notes, "Love and stories are both imaginative creations essentially aware of the presence of The Other, who responds as if this offered figment were real-who observes, Judges, and participates, who willingly suspends disbelief and meets halfway." In *Love Medicine* it is the imaginative creation of stories which allow for the imaginative creation of love.

The first overt mention of a "love medicine" is from Lulu Nanapush. As a child she comes to live with her uncle Nanapush and his wife, Rushes Bear, a woman so renowned for her temper that she is said to have scared off a bear by rushing at it head on, with no weapon. Even the wild animal was afraid to face her, but old Nanapush seems to possess a strange power over her. Noting this, Lulu asks him, "What's your love medicine?. She hates you but you love her crazy." Nanapush replies that his secret is, "No clocks. These young boys who went to the Bureau school, they run their love life on white time. Now me, I go on Indian time. Stop in the middle for a bowl of soup. Go right back to it when I've got my strength. I got nothing else to do, after all." But Lulu has already received the first clues that the real love medicine is not just Indian time, but Indian language and stories. As a young child bereft of her mother, Lulu has only the memory of her mother's voice to con sole her. She dislikes the "flat voices, rough English" which she hears spoken at the government school, and she longs for the old language and her mother's voice:

Sometimes, I heard her, N'dawnis, n'dawnis My daughter, she consoled me. Her voice came from all directions, mysteriously keeping me from inner harm. Her voice was the struck match Her voice was the steady flame. But it was my old uncle Nanapush who wrote the letters that brought be home.

The memory of her mother's spoken words provides Lulu with the love medicine which keeps her from inner harm, which allows her to continue loving her mother, even though she is gone, and to love herself, though she is motherless and Without anyone to teach her love. Likewise it is her Uncle's command of the written language that brings her love a second time by bringing her to a loving home. The words of her mother and uncle are what allow Lulu to change from the child who "stumbled in [the] shoes of desire," longing for her mother and someone to guide her, into a woman who can say, "I was in love with the whole world and all that lived in its rainy arms." Their words give her the ability to love the world and herself. When she goes to live with Moses Pillager, she will again discover the power of stories. His life has already been dramatically affected by the story with which his mother fooled the spirits and kept him from sickness. But while this story kept him alive, it also made him into a ghost When Lulu goes to the Island, however, she is able to reverse the spell of this old story by retelling it. She restores his voice to him, allowing him to finally speak his thought aloud to another person, and she undoes his mother's spell by finally speaking the name no one had been allowed to say: "He told me his real name. I whispered it, once. Not the name that fooled the dead, but the word that harbored his life. I hold his name close as my own blood and I will never let it out. I only spoke it that once so that he would know he was alive." The same word which had to be hidden to keep him from death is now the name that harbors his life, and by knowing his story and speaking his name, Lulu can restore him to life. Her speech is the love medicine she brings to the island with her. The most obvious story about love medicine, of course, is the chapter entitled "Love Medicine," and once again this chapter is not just about love medicine but also about stones. When Marie Kashpaw asks her grandson Lipsha to find her a love medicine so that Nector will return her love and forget Lulu, Lipsha initially tries to think of traditional love medicines such as special seeds, frogs caught in the act of mating, or nail clippings. But the love medicine he finally settles on is pure fiction, as all love medicines must be. First he invents the idea for the love medicine. he sees a pair of geese and thinks that if he feeds the hearts of birds that mate for life to his grandparents that will surely be a powerful love medicine. When he fails to shoot the geese, he decides to buy two turkey hearts instead, and he convinces himself that the medicine will still work since it is faith that really matters:

I thought of faith I thought to myself that faith could be called belief against the odds and whether or not there's any proof. How does that sound? I thought how we might have to yell to be heard by Higher Power, but that's not saying it's not there. And that is faith for you it's belief even when the goods don't deliver Faith might be stupid, but it gets us through. So what I'm heading at is this. I finally convinced myself that the real actual power to the love medicine was not the goose heart itself but the faith in the cure.

He is, in essence, saying that a myth to believe in, something to "get us through" is more important and more powerful and traditional love medicine. And indeed, in this chapter, it is the story that proves to be the true love medicine. When Marie is convinced

that Nector's ghost is returning because of the love medicine, Lipsha tells her the truth about the turkey hearts:

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

She looked at me She was seeing the years and days I had no way of knowing, and she didn't believe me I could tell this Yet a look came on her face. It was like the look of mothers drinking sweetness from their children's eyes. It was tenderness.

Lipsha, she said, you was always my favorite.

Though his stones cannot cause his grandfather to fall in love with his grandmother, his words do work medicine between Lipsha and his grandmother. She feels the depth of his love for her in the words he speaks to ease her pain and in the stories and lies he creates to help her, and his words evoke from her a mother's love for him, the love he has longed for always. The story of Lipsha's mother is perhaps the most powerful example of the story as love medicine. All of his life he is told that his mother tried to drown him in the slough and that Grandma Kashpaw rescued him, although everyone else knows that June was his real mother and that Grandmother Kashpaw took him in because June was already married to Gordie when she became pregnant with Gerry's child. When Lulu tells him that he is the son of June and Gerry he is shocked. He does not, at first, know what to do with this powerful new story of his life. He "couldn't take it in." Lulu has given him "knowledge that could make or break" him, and he does not at first know which it will do. But as he pieces together the story of his life, the love medicine of the story begins to work its magic. He gets to know his father, and learns about his mother. He sees how miserable and bitter King, June's acknowledged son has become, and he makes peace with the story of his life. When Gerry says, "Enough about me anyhow ... What's your story?" he is able to answer without bitterness. He can tell his story now, and his only "problem" is that he is running from the army police. In this instance, too, a story saves him, for Gerry is able to tell him that he, like all men in his family, will fail the army physical because of an irregular heart rhythm. Knowing the story of his past allows him to avoid a future of running needlessly. And finally, knowing the true story of his life, he is able to forgive and love the mother who gave him up and the grandmother who took him in:

I thought of June. . How weakly I remembered her. If it made any sense at all, she was part of the great loneliness being earned up the driving current. I tell you, there was good in what she did for me, I know now. The son that she acknowledged suffered more that Lipsha Morrissey did. The thought of June grabbed my heart so, but I was lucky she turned me over the Grandma Kashpaw

Knowing his story allows him to be reborn. The story functions as a love medicine, allowing him to love his mother, his grandmother, his father, and most importantly, himself. Speaking of Chippewa beliefs and myths, Victoria Brelim states, "They

considered all stores to be true, whether they classified them as daebaudjimowin (chronicles from personal experience) or Auwaetchigum (what Western cultures describe as myths)." So, in love medicine, the personal stories and the cultural myths of these people are woven together and intermixed, but they are all "true" stones, and all can function as love medicines.

Source: Donna Woodford, in an essay for *Novels for Students,* Gale, 1999.

Critical Essay #2

In the following excerpt, Schneider examines the unifying role that storytelling plays within Erdrich's novel and between characters in the novel.

Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine* has been regarded as simply a collection of short stories, lacking in novelistic unity and overriding structure. Yet despite shifts in narrative style and a virtual cacophony of often individually unreliable narrative voices, Erdrich successfully weds structure and theme, style and content. For the novel is as much about the act of storytelling as it is about the individual narratives and the symbols and interrelationships which weave them together thematically. In *Love Medicine,* storytelling constitutes both theme and style. Erdrich repeatedly shows how storytelling-characters sharing their troubles or their "stories" with one another-becomes a spiritual act, a means of achieving transformation, transcendence, forgiveness. And in this often comic novel, forgiveness is the true "love medicine," bringing a sense of wholeness, despite circumstances of loss or broken connections, to those who reach for it. Moreover, the novel is in itself the stylistic embodiment of Erdrich's theme; as a series of narratives or chapters/stories shared with the reader, the work as a whole becomes a kind of "love medicine" of forgiveness and healing in its own right....

[T]he means by which Erdrich's characters learn to internalize and integrate past with present is through the transformative power of storytelling. A non-Native reader, or any reader, is not the sole audience to these stories, for it is the characters themselves who, within the course of the narratives, begin this recovery of stories as they move beyond gossip to share with one another intimate revelations of highly personal desires, guilts, and troubles. It is in the personal stories that the characters *tell each other* that the real spiritual force of the novel can be felt.

Stories as "love medicine," moreover, provide the alternative in the novel to the characters' struggles With experiences of alcohol abuse, religious fanaticism, or compulsive sex relations, as well as the spiritual havoc that these kinds of seductive but hollow "love medicines" wreak on human relations. But although Erdrich focuses on the Chippewa experience, the troubles her characters experience are not exclusively "Indian problems." Erdrich herself sees the novel in terms of its articulation of "the universal human struggle," and her characters, as Bo Scholer has said of other Native literary depictions of alcohol-related themes, are motivated by "complex and ultimately profoundly human causes." These are problems common to every society, and the solution she posits is relevant for both Native and non-Native cultures alike. Forgiveness in *Love Medicine* is thus of the everyday variety, that which is extended from a child to a parent, a wife to a husband, brother to brother. Moreover, for Erdrich, forgiveness is not explanation, not unconditional, not forgetting. It is the transformation that comes through the sharing and recovery of stories, and the giving up of the notion of oneself as victim....

The novel opens on Easter in 1981 with June Morrissey Kashpaw's thoughts and feelings, related in third person, as she commences upon the alcoholic binge which will

lead to her death. June's death will affect all the other characters. In a radical revision of Christ's Easter resurrection, the death of this alcoholic Indian woman becomes the impetus which propels many of the other characters toward healing. In this scene, June is clearly reaching for something spiritual, something to hold on to in a life broken by divorce and disappointment. But she looks for her answers in a bar, and comes up empty. Intending to catch a noon bus for the reservation where she was raised, she stops at the invitation of a man to "tip down one or two." When she enters the barroom, the narrator tells us, "What she walked toward more than anything else was that blue egg in the white hand, a beacon in the murky air." Blue is the color of sky, of Spirit and transcendence, signaling to her like a "beacon." But instead of the blue egg the man in the red vest peels her a pink one, thwarting her impulse and replacing it with the faded color of earth, of blood, of sexuality When she drinks, it is "Blue Ribbon" beer and "Angel Wings," again symbolizing a frustrated spiritual instinct, and she says to the man, "Ahhhhh, you got to be. You got to be different." June seeks transformation through sex and alcohol, but the only metamorphosis they are able to bring is degradation and death.

The balance of chapter one shifts to the first person narrative of June's niece, Albertine Kashpaw, who introduces the theme of the recovery and sharing of stones. Albertine has been attending nursing school off-reservation, but returns several months after June's demise seeking a sense of completion with a death she cannot understand.

Albertine's denial of June's alcoholism may relate to her own psychic connection with June, a connection which becomes clearer in the central chapter entitled "A Bridge," where the narrative spins back to 1973. There we learn that Albertine takes a Journey remarkably similar to June's own, one that, but for small differences, could have resulted in equally tragic consequences. The two journeys are contrasted in almost every detail. Albertine has taken the bus to run away from the reservation. It is another "harsh spring," if not Easter then close to it, for we learn it is "not yet May." Albertine also sees something which she compares to a "beacon," but unlike June, interprets this to be a "warning beacon." Where the man June meets only looks familiar to her, the man Albertine sees in the bus station turns out to be Henry Lamartine Junior, another Chippewa whose family is known to her from the reservation. June wears white, the color of death in Chippewa culture, and Albertine wears black. June drinks "Angel Wings" with a man who doesn't listen to her, while Henry romantically whispers to Albertine, "Angel, where's your Wings." When June enters the ladies room, "All of a sudden she seemed to drift out of her clothes and skin With no help from anyone"; Albertine, on the other hand, feels her body "shrink and contract" while alone in the bathroom, and feels herself becoming "bitterly small." Perhaps the greatest difference between the two is that while June intends to stop drinking after "a few" but cannot, the younger Albertine still retains some control: "She had stopped after a few and let him go on drinking, talking, until he spilled too many and knew it was time to taper off."

But in the opening chapter, Albertine only alludes to these links. She says:

I had gone through a long phase of wickedness and run away. Yet now that I was on the straight and narrow, things were even worse between [my mother and me].

After two months were gone and my classes were done, and although I still had not forgiven my mother, I decided to go home.

What Erdrich shows here is that simply getting on "the straight and narrow" is not enough; that alone does not fill the spiritual void that leaves Albertine full of resentment It is in fact only the beginning, just as Albertine's return to the reservation is only the beginning of the novel And Just as the car she drives has "a windshield wiper only on the passenger side" and "the dust [hangs] thick," her vision is still obscured. But once she arrives home, she initiates the recovery of stories that begins a transformation process....

Throughout the novel, the narratives balance and playoff of one another, forming a crystalline structure with smoothly interwoven themes and symbols. And although each chapter is its own story, able to stand alone, taken all together the novel becomes a synergetic whole of chapters/stories about telling stories. The theme of storytelling as healing, as resolution, as spiritual, thus becomes incorporated into the structure of the novel itself. In contrast to the dust that obscures vision, and the water that drowns, in the final chapter the characters are humorously drinking 7-Up, and Lipsha says, "The sun flared"; with many stories told, nothing is forgotten, yet there is the strong sense of forgiveness and transformation.

Source: Lissa Schneider, *"Love Medicine* A Metaphor for Forgiveness,"_ *in Studies in American Literature,* Vol 4, No I, Spring, 1992, pp. 1-13

Critical Essay #3

In the following excerpt, Matchie compares Love Medicine, *which has been criticized for its lack of unity, to Herman Melville's* Moby-Dick, *asserting that Erdrich's work functions as a complete novel.*

Published in 1984, *Love Medicine* is about a tribe of Indians living in North Dakota. Its author, Louise Erdrich, is part Chippewa and in the book returns to her prairie roots for her literary materials. Recently, Erdrich published another work entitled *Beet Queen,* also about the Red River Valley, and some of the same characters appear in both novels. *Love Medicine* is different from so much of Native American literature in that it is not polemic-there is no ax to grind, no major indictment of white society. It is simply a story about Indian life-its politics, humor, emptiness, and occasional triumphs. If Erdrich has a gift, it is the ability to capture the inner life and language of her people.

Since its publication, *Love Medicine* has won several national awards. Still, critics see in it a serious lack of unity-it was originally published as a series of short stories or vignettes. Also, some think it has little connection to authentic Indian values; students at the White Earth Indian Reservation in Minnesota identified more with *Giants in the Earth,* Rolvaag's epic novel about white immigrants on the Dakota prairie. My contention is just the opposite, that the book does function as a whole, though this may not be immediately evident, and that the author is highly aware of Indian history and tradition, which emerge in subtle ways, helping us to understand the mystery of existence, whatever our color or ethnic origin.

While reading the novel it may help, strangely enough, to keep in mind another novel, Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick.* These two works may seem far apart, one about the sea-"in landlessness alone lies the highest truth" -and the other about the Dakota prairie, the geographic center of North America. But one of Erdrich's characters, Nector Kashpaw, sees himself as Ishmael-"call me Ishmael," he says, after escaping a particularly difficult situation. If one looks further into the matter, it becomes evident that there are many ways these two books are alike. First, they have similar episodic or disjointed structures. Then, the major characters in one story seem to draw upon those in the other. And through it all, the same motifs (e.g., water and fishing, wildness-particularly among the males, preoccupation with power as well as the Importance of the heart, the alternating realities of life and death, concern with colors, especially white and red) appear again and again. Indeed, it may be that the truest unity and deepest values of *Love Medicine* come clear when juxtaposed with Melville's classic novel of the sea.

In regard to structure, *Love Medicine* begins with a short account, told in third person, of the death of June Kashpaw in 1981 in the boomtown of Williston, North Dakota. Then the novel proceeds with many short, seemingly unrelated episodes-some descriptive/narrative, some dramatic-told from multiple perspectives, but all about life on and off the reservation over a period of fifty years (1934-1984). Each vignette centers on shattered family life and the alienation of individuals. The parts may indeed seem

dissimilar, unless one views them in an organic way, much as *Moby-Dick* in 1850 represented a departure from the classic or three-part structure so common at that time. *Moby-Dick,* of course, is about the disintegration of a ship, not only physically, but spiritually, for the purpose of the voyage and the unity of the crew collapse, all because of Ahab's preoccupation with one white whale. It begins with Ishmael's narrative, but then switches to everything from descriptions of the whaling industry, to poetic monologues, to dramatic episodes both comic and tragic. The parts, though different, are interposed erratically and often unexpectedly, but in the end they work together toward the whole. And that is how one must view *Love Medicine.*

In both cases the circle, so indigenous to Indian life, governs all, though in the case of the structure of *Love Medicine,* it takes fifty years to see it. *Moby Dick* starts with Ishmael's leaving New Bedford, contemplating many kinds of images of death (e.g., in the chapel, through Fr. Maple's sermon, in the Sprouter-Inn, in the prophecies of Elijah). Then, after the wreck of the *Pequod* (named after an extinct tribe of Indians), he surfaces in a circular vortex as he rises out of the chaos before coming home. In Erdrich's novel the action starts with June's death and then, after going back in time through a series of chaotic scenes dealing with Indian family life, circles back to the beginning when June's lost son Lipsha surfaces-rises psychologically and spiritually, not only to discover his real mother and family, but in his words to "cross the water, and bring her home."

Undoubtedly, Erdrich did not set out to write a book like *Moby-Dick,* but like Melville she writes about what she knows best-Indian life in this century-and like him she seeks through her characters the answers to some profound questions about human existence. It is in this context that she parallels in broad and general ways Melville's pattern of development, themes, characterizations, and motifs to create a virtual allegory of his work. In many ways her novel mirrors his, for her Dakota prairie can be as wild as his ocean typhoons, Just as his sea can be as calm and dreamy as the Midwestern prairie Indeed, as we shall see, the motif of wildness runs through the novel, but the character most directly exhibiting this quality is Nector Kashpah, who sees himself as reliving *Moby Dick.* Nector literally connects the various Indian families on the reservation, himself a Kashpah, he marries Marie Lazarre Morrissey, but never loses his passion for Lulu Lamartine, a promiscuous mother of a girl and at least nineteen boys, one of whom is Nector's.

Midway in the book Nector, a type of figure not uncommon in Melville because he is both comic and tragic, says:

I kept thinking about the one book I read in high school... *Moby Dick,* the story of the great white whale I knew that book inside and out. 1'd even stolen a copy from school and taken it home in my suitcase.

"You're always reading that book," my mother said once "What's in it?"

"The story of the great white whale"

She could not believe it. After a while, she said, "What do they got to wall about, those whites?"

I told her the whale was a fish as big as the church. She did not believe this either. Who would?

"Call me Ismael," I said sometimes, only to myself. For he survived the great white monster like I got out of the rich lady's picture [he'd been paid by a rich lady to disrobe for a painting she called "Plunge of the Brave"] He let the water bounce his coffin to the top. In my life so far, 1'd gone easy and come out on top, like him. But the river wasn't done with me yet.

I floated through the calm sweet spots, but somewhere the river branched.

Here is where he falls headlong again for Lulu.

One of the ironies of the novel is that Nector is not really Ishmael at all, but more like Ahab, in that he is an irrational figure who thinks he can control all worlds-the Kashpahs and the Lamartines, his wife's and his lover's. A member of a most respected family and the chairman of the tribe, Nector becomes the victim of his sexual passions, falling for Marie as she escapes from the Sacred Heart Convent, but equally possessed with the beautiful and lascivious Lulu, into whose waters he continually sails to satisfy his fantasies He finally concludes:

I try to think of anything but Lulu or Mane or my children I think back to the mad captain In *Moby Dick* and how his leg was bit off. Perhaps I was wrong, about Ishmael I mean, for now I see signs of the captain in myself.

In trying to burn a letter he's written to Lulu saying he is leaving Marie, he actually sets fire to Lulu's house-an event reminiscent of Ahab's burning masts in *Moby-Dick-before* returning sheepishly to Marie In the end he dies a pathetic old man, one who has literally lost his mind and has "to have his candy." He chokes to death on turkey hearts, the ironic symbol of his erotic needs and manipulative ways.

The Ishmael who discovers the real "love medicine" is Lipsha Morrissey, the bastard son of June Kashpah-the one who brings Nector the hearts. Like Melville's narrator, he is a wanderer who has to discover in painful ways the meaning of his universe and how he fits. He has to find that his true mother is June, who dies on her way home crossing the prairie. He has to find that his brother is King, his boyhood tormentor, disrupted by the Vietnam War and as wild and torn as Nector....

But most of all Lipsha has to find that his father is the perennial criminal Gerry Nanapush, one of the older sons of Lulu Lamartine. With this discovery late in the novel, Lipsha combines in his own person the larger symbolic family of the Chippewas. He does all this as a kind of innocent observer, like Ishmael, who only occasionally takes part in the action. But out of the death and destruction of his people he, unlike Nector-Ahab and his male counterparts, accepts the responsibility for his life and worth as he

rises to the surface in the end. He is the one who truly "connects" all, for he completes the cycle begun by his mother whose spirit he now brings home.

If there is a parallel to Moby-Dick in *Love Medicine,* it is June Kashpah. She dies early in the novel, but like the great white whale, her presence pervades the entire story and gives It depth. She is not there and yet there. Sometimes she even "comes alive," as when Gordie thinks the deer in his back seat, stunned and yet moving, is June herself. Initially having run away from Gordie, June is hungry and picked up in Williston by a stranger, whom she thinks is "different," but after falling from his truck, perishes walking across the cold white prairie as she "came home." In this early vignette, Erdrich captures the bleakness and boredom at the center of so much Indian life in this century. It is that dark side of life, the side which preoccupies Ahab in *Moby-Dick,* something he equates through the white whale with an "inscrutable malice" behind the Universe-a mask he wants to penetrate. Erdrich does not philosophize as much as Melville, but this concept of evil is a legitimate way of viewing the source of so many of the destructive aspects of Indian life depicted in *Love Medicine.* It is interesting that when June's in-laws-Gordie and Zelda and Aurelian-recall her life, one of the dominant incidents they remember is their trying to hang her, and her egging them on, like some kind of evil mind. *Love Medicine,* like *Moby-Dick,* is a type of journey to penetrate the enticing but illusive mask that conceals the mystery of evil.

As the story unfolds, however, we discover a beautiful side to June, much as Ishmael sees a mystifying and uplifting aspect to the white whale to counter Ahab's view. June has been raised by Eli, Nector's brother, the moral center of the novel, who lives in the woods and represents the old Indian past. At one point in the novel the irascible King insists that Eli have his hat, on which are the words the "World's Greatest Fisherman," for all agree Eli deserves it most. June is inevitably associated with Eli, with water, with fishing, with the good in the Kashpah history. All the Kashpah women admire June, as do her husband Gordie and son King, to whom she leaves money for a car. Like so many of the males, however, King's destructive wildness keeps him from being the responsible human being his mother wanted; this is left for Lipsha to achieve. June, then, is a driving force behind the Chippewa world, but the reader must pick between the beautiful and humanizing aspects of such a presence, and what Ishmael calls when reflecting upon the whiteness of the whale, "the all-color of atheism"-the possibility that behind the Indians' life patterns (which are now white patterns) is not much of anything at all....

[T]he characters-the Kashpahs, the Morrisseys, the Lamartines-whose stories stretch from 1934 to 1984, much as the characters on the *Pequod* evolve on the voyage to capture Moby- Dick... .

Good human relationships are important to both authors, and if Ishmael crosses cultures in making friends with the pagan harpooner Queequeg (who like Eli in *Love Medicine* is a kind of noble savage), Albertine is herself a half-breed, red and white, the daughter of Zelda and the "Swede." She suffers because of her double-nature, but her return, like Ishmael's setting out, comes from her uneasiness and is an effort to escape loneliness and build human bridges. Curiously enough, Albertine has her own chaotic

history, and just as Ishmael may be an innocent observer, but is taken in by Ahab's powerful dark influence, so is Albertine taken in. As Erdrich's story circles back in time we find that Albertine in 1973 at fifteen tries to run away from the reservation. She goes to Fargo, only to end up sleeping with Henry Lamartine Jr., one of Lulu's sons, on N. P. Avenue in the cheap Round Up Hotel. After making love, Albertine feels empty and wants to separate herself from him, whereupon he senses that she has "crossed a deep river and disappeared." In short, he needs her, and her horror pales beside his nightmare explosion. Like King, he has been damaged by the Vietnam War, and when he touches her the next day "weeping," she is now touched emotionally by the depth of their mutual loneliness.

In the beginning of the novel, however, Albertine returns to the reservation. Like Ishmael, she is not pure, but she has more distance than the others, having lived in a white woman's basement for some time away from home. Through her we meet Zelda and Aurelia. On the *Pequod* the chief mates, like Stubb and Flask, are skillful whalers, but not thinkers, and soon become extensions of Ahab's mind. The women of the reservation are also servants, but they are more free and happy people like the harpooners in *Moby-Dick* who dine in an atmosphere of merriment following their humorless captain's meal. These women don't fight the system, run by the males, but they are basic to its existence-giving birth to the children, planting and growing the food, cooking and baking for the men-like Gordie and King and Lipsha, who unconsciously quarrel over and destroy the newly baked pies. Among the Nanapushes, Gerry leaves prison temporarily to impregnate Dot, who is then left to raise and feed the child. These women may be treated like dogs, as Ahab treats Stubb, but they keep the whole operation afloat. They maintain the land, encourage their men, survive catastrophe. The *Pequod* is a commercial enterprise where under contract the mates and harpooners follow their mad leader without question. The women in *Love Medicine* are not paid, but they keep the family itself intact, in spite of the alcohol, the violence, the abuse and misuse of one another.

Albertine identifies with these women-their fun, their hopes, but also their fears and worry about the men. In one of the most powerful scenes in *Moby-Dick,* Ishmael almost loses control of the ship as he gazes into the Try-Works (the red-hot pots of sperm oil), contemplating how intertwined are both the magnificent as well as the most hellish moments of life, even as the Catskill eagle flies high and yet at times swoops very low. Albertine Ishmael, amid all the fighting and confusion, is worried about Lipsha and takes him for a walk in the fields, and gazing at the northern lights, she muses:

I thought of June She would be dancing If there was a dance hall in space. She would be dancing a two-step for wandering souls [like Lipsha] Her long legs lifting and falling. Her laugh an ace Her sweet perfume the way all grown-up women were supposed to smell Her amusement at both the bad and the good

Her defeat. Her reckless Victory. Her sons

So June, amid the high moments and the low, the bad and the good, gives substance to the Indians' quest for meaning. Lipsha will find himself in the end, but it is too early to

know that now, and Albertine, his alter ego, can only hold his hand, and like Ishmael, try to keep the ship on course....

There are other major incidents in *Love Medicine* that pick up key threads in *Moby-Dick,* like the close relationship between madness and wisdom. Both King Jr. and Henry Jr. are affected mentally by the Vietnam War to the point they become violent souls. Henry Jr., after a long drive with his brother Lyman, who cannot save him, drowns himself in his red convertible. In Melville's story, the castaway Pip loses his mind when Stubb will not save him from the sea, but he returns in his madness to offer sharp, bitter wisdom to Captain Ahab, and from him the captain accepts it. In Erdrich's world where one generation fails, the next seems to succeed, as when King Howard Kashpah Jr. (King and Lynette's young son), after all his father's rage, learns to write his name, Howard Kashpah, in school on a red paper heart. The marker label says "PERMANENT," and the teacher tells him "that means forever." So Howard in his Pip-like childish wisdom undercuts the adult world around him to establish his own identity as a human being. In this way Howard parallels the growth in Lipsha Morrissey, the other son of June.

Colors, especially red and white, are also crucial in both novels, for they are a part of the very texture. White and red seem to go back and forth in *Moby-Dick,* as the red heat of the tea-pots lights up the *Pequod,* just as do the tapering white candles or mastheads struck by lightning. In one case Ishmael philosophizes on life, while in the other Ahab commits himself to death. In *Love Medicine* the Indian is, of course, the redman living in a white world. June in the beginning has on a red nylon vest when the stranger in a white jacket "plunged down against her" with a "great wide mouth," as though she were entering the whale itself. Then there is the red convertible in which Henry Jr. drowns; the mark of white society, tills is the machine that spells freedom, but It cannot solve basic human problems where so many are held psychologically captive.

Finally, there is the red of the heart itself-a powerful symbol in both novels On the *Pequod* Ahab, just before the fatal chase, talks to Starbuck about the Importance of the heart, family, love. His words are touching, coming from a man bent on destruction: "I .. do what in my own... natural heart, I durst not ... dare," he says. In *Love Medicine* both Lipsha and Howard come to know the meaning of the heart-Lipsha through the turkey hearts which kill his Ahab-like grandfather, and Howard through the paper heart on which he writes his name. Lipsha says that love means forgiveness, that It is not magic, but a "true feeling." Later, when he discovers in a card game his true father and sees himself as part of the larger family, he says, "The jack of hearts is me." These awakenings give a kind of tragic joy to a story pervaded by so many deaths.

Love Medicine, then, is a book about the prairie that examines the wild, chaotic lives of several Indian families whose lives on the reservation have immersed them in a dark and often violent existence, one that the author seems to equate with Ahab. It is a world created by a white-shall we say malicious-intelligence, except that behind the scenes hovers an amazing human being, June Kashpah, whose life and recent death still give meaning and hope to its members. Albertine-Ishmael goes back to that world to experience again the rage dramatized by her grandfather Nector-Ahab, as well as other violent males. But she also discovers the values sustained by women like her mother,

Zelda, and Aurelia and Dot Adare, but especially by Mane and Lulu, who in spite of the men and the systems and the power, give dignity and spirit to an otherwise hollow and violent world.

Out of the chaos emerges, through Howard and Lipsha, possible new worlds, just as June would have wished. Indeed, Lipsha-Ishmael begins to see the importance of love within all the families and in this way "brings June home" as he (to use Nector's words) lets "the water bounce his coffin to the top" in the end. *Love Medicine* is a novel about the land, but one which has so many parallels to *Moby-Dick* that it draws tremendous power when placed beside Melville's classic novel about the sea.

Source: Thomas Matchie, *"Love Medicine* A Female *Moby-Dick,"* in *Midwest Quarterly,* Vol. 30, No 4, Summer, 1989, pp. 478-91.

Adaptations

Love Medicine is read by Erdrich and her husband/collaborator, Michael Dorris on this audiotaped, 180-minute abridged version of the book; available from Audiobooks.com.

An audiocassette version of *Love Medicine,* along With *The Beet Queen* is available from Amazon com. Entitled *The Beet Queen: Love Medicine (Excerpt E),* the cost of this audiotape is $13.95.

Topics for Further Study

Part of Erdrich's unique style is her narration by different speakers. She asserts that she writes in the traditional storytelling form of the Chippewa. Research storytelling techniques to learn more about this Chippewa tradition. Explain in your own words what Erdrich means by this. Think about other authors who use this technique in similar ways. List at least one, and give examples that will show the comparison between the authors' styles.

There are distinct similarities between Erdrich's style in *Love Medicine* and Gloria Naylor's style in *The Women of Brewster Place.* List and explain the similarities using specific examples from both novels.

While Erdrich's writing in *Love Medicine* is said to be non-autobiographical, there are many aspects of the story that Erdrich has taken from her own experiences. Locate and read a biographical sketch of Erdrich and compare it to *Love Medicine.*

Trace the history of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Describe its original intent and purpose. Discuss its place in contemporary America.

Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) is said to be prevalent among Native Americans. Research this disease. Describe the symptoms and causes as well as the treatments and current studies that are being done. Locate and discuss references to the relationship between the disease and Native American culture.

Compare and Contrast

1830s: Through the Indian Removal Act (1830) and the Indian Intercourse Act (1834), Indian tribes were forced to move onto reservations into territory now known as Oklahoma, Kansas, Nehraska, and the Dakotas.

1850s: Indians were further confined to present day Oklahoma through the Kansas-Nebraska Act.

1860s: The Indians living in Oklahoma were forced to give up the western half of their territory.

Late 1800s and early 1900s: The Dawes Act, or General Allotment Act, allowed tribal lands to be parceled out to individual Indians, resulting in widespread sale of the land to white settlers.

1930s: Tribal ownership of reservation lands was restored through the Wheeler-Howard Indian Reorganization Act, overturning the 1887 General Allotment (Dawes) Act. Indians also received limited self-governing privileges and help with development and management of land and resources.

1950s: Policies ended special federal programs and trust agreements With Indians.

1960s: The termination policy of the 1950s was abandoned.

1970s: Native American groups become more aggressive in reestablishing their rights. The Narragansett, Dakota, Oneida, and other Indians' claims were upheld in the Supreme Court, gaining them fishing, water, and mining rights, among others.

1990s: Native Americans continue to regain their rights. Legislation passed in 1990 protects Indian gravesites and allows return of remains. In 1991, Chippewa Indians gained the right to hunt, fish, and gather plants from reservations in Wisconsin.

What Do I Read Next?

The Beet Queen, published by Holt in 1986, continues the story of the Chippewa, but Erdrich focuses on people connected to the Lamartines and Kashpaws through the community beyond the reservation. This story is about the family of Dot, the woman with whom Gerry Nanapush is involved in *Love Medicine.*

While *Tracks* was published after *The Beet Queen* (by Harper in 1988), the story centers around the events that occurred and the people who lived before those in *Love Medicine.* In *Tracks,* the evil medicine woman, Fleur Pillager, works her magic. She is the ancestor of several of the people in *Love Medicine,* inc1uding Moses Pillager.

Erdrich interrupted her work on *Tales of Burning Love* to write *The Bingo Palace,* published by HarperCollins in 1994. *The Bingo Palace* provides readers not only with the continuation of the story of Lyman Lamartine and his bingo palace, but also with the tale of the reconciliation between Lipsha and Lyman and a renewal of Chippewa ways.

HarperCollins published *Tales of Burning Love,* Erdrich's sixth novel, in 1996. Going back to the story of June Kashpaw, this book relates the events in the life of Jack Mauser, the man whom June has sex with on the night of her death. After June's death, Mauser has four wives. His life is both comedic and tragic; Jack dies in a house fire.

Erdrich's first work of nonfiction, *The Blue Jay's Dance,* was published by HarperCollins in 1995. In this book, Erdrich chronic1es her child's birth and first year of life. It examines the balancing act that working parents experience on a daily basis.

Grandmother's Pigeon, published by Hyperion in 1996, is Brooch's first children's book It is about an adventurous grandmother who travels to Greenland on the back of a porpoise, and her children who get messages to her by way of carrier pigeons.

Gloria Naylor's *The Women of Brewster Place* offers a style of writing comparable to Erdrich's. Naylor tells her story through the distinct voices of seven women struggling to survive ghetto life. *The Women of Brewster Place* was published by Viking in 1982.

Critics have compared Erdrich's non-chronological storytelling through characters voices to William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying.* Published in 1930 by Jonathan Cape and Harrison Smith, *As I Lay Dying* is a dying woman's story told in a stream-of-consciousness fashion.

Further Study

Miriam Berkley, in an interview in *Publishers Weekly,* August 15, 1986, pp. 58-9

Erdrich describes to Berkley how her many Jobs have provided rich experiences from which to draw to create believable characters and their lives.

Robert Bly, in a revIew in *New York Times Book Review,* August 31, 1982, p. 2.

Poet Bly describes Erdrich's unique approach to telling a story through characters who speak at any time and in any place.

Victoria Brehm, "The Metamorphoses of an Ojibwa Manido,'" *American Literature. A Journal of Literary History, Criticism, and Bibliography,* Vol. 68, No.4, December, 1996, pp. 677-706

Brelim discusses Erdrich's use of Native American mythology, specifically the figure of the water god, Micipijiu.

D. J R Bruckner, in a review in *The New York Times,* December 20, 1984, p C21.

Bruckner applauds the lyrical quality of *Love Medicine* and Erdrich's rich characters

Allan and Nancy Feyl Chavkin, eds , in *Conversations with Louise Erdrich and Michael Dorris,* University Press of Mississippi, 1993.

A collection of 25 interviews with Erdrich and Dorris, this book includes a description of the unusual collaborative relationship the two share.

Mary B. Davis, ed , in *Native America in the Twentieth Century' An Encyclopedia,* Garland Publishing, 1994.

An alphabetized reference that includes works by Native Americans and other experts dealing with Native American life in the twentieth century.

Margaret J. Downes, "Narrativity, Myth, and Metaphor. Louise Erdrich and Raymond Carver Talk about Love,'" in *MELUS' The Journal of the Society for the Study of Multiethnic Literature of the United States,* Vol 21, No 2, Summer, 1996, pp. 49-61.

A comparison of two novels about love, Louise Brooch's *Love Medicine* and Raymond Carver's *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* Downes says that she finds Erdrich's novel more satisfying because of the characters' belief in and use of myth and storytelling.

Louise Erdrich, in *The Blue Jay's Dance,* HarperCollins, 1995.

In this book, Erdrich chronicles her child's birth and first year of life. It examines the balancing act that working parents experience on a daily basis.

Paul Pasquaretta, "Sacred Chance Gambling and the Con temporary Native American Indian Novel,'" in *MELUS The Journal of the Society for the Study of the Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States,* Vol. 21, No.2, Shimmer, 1996, pp. 21-33

An analysis of the gambling stories in novels by three Native American authors Pasquaretta says that these gambling stories serve as a ritual site on which to contest the forces of corruption and assimilation.

Barbara L. Pittman, "Cross-Cultural Reading and Generic Transformations. The Chronoscope of the Road in Erdrich's *Love Medicine,"* in *American Literature. A Journal of Literary History, Criticism, and Bibliography,* Vol. 67, No 4, December, 1995, pp. 777-92.

An analysis of the road motif in *Love Medicine* Pittman sees the motif as mediating between the Euro-American and Native-American traditions in which the novel participates.

Catherine Rainwater, "Reading Between Worlds' Narrativity in the Fiction of Louise Brooch," in *American Literature A Journal of Literary History, Criticism, and Bibliography'* Vol. 62, No.3, September, 1990, pp. 405-22.

Rainwater discusses the many sets of conflicting codes in *Love Medicine.* Rainwater chums that these codes frustrate the reader's expectations, but in so doing they also make the narrative more powerful.

Michael Schumacher, in an interview in *Writer's Digest,* June, 1991, pp. 28-31.

In this interview, Erdrich tells how her childhood experiences and heritage have influenced her writing.

Alan Velte, "The Trickster Novel," 10 *Narrative Chance: Postmodern Discourse on Native American Indian Literatures,* edited by Gerald Vizenor, University of New Mexico Press, 1989, pp. 55-6.

An analysis of the novel in terms of the picaresque, or trickster genre.

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Louise Erdrich, "Scales," In *Love Medicine,* New York HarperFlamingo, 1998, pp 43, 201-202, 366.

Harriett Gilbert, "Mixed Feelings," in *New Statesman,* Vol 109, No 2812, February 8, 1985, p 31.

Jascha Kessler, "Louise Erdrich: *Love Medicine,"* in a radio broadcast on KUSC-FM-Los Angeles, CA, January, 1985.

Jeanne Kinney, in a review of *Love Medicine,* in *Best Sellers,* Vol 44, No 9, December, 1984, pp. 324-25

Cynthia Koot, in a review of *Love Medicine,* in *Booklist,* Vol. 81, No.1, September 1, 1984, p. 24

Gene Lyons, "In Indian Territory," in *Newsweek,* Vol. CV, No.6, February 11, 1985, pp. 70-1.

Marco Portales, "People with Holes in Their Lives," in *The New York Times Book Review,* December 23, 1984, p. 6

Michael Schumacher, in an interview in *Writer's Digest,* June, 1991, pp. 28-31.

Robert Towers, "Uprooted,"' in *The New York Review of Books,* Vol XXXII, No 6, April 11, 1985, pp. 36-7.

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Project Editor
David Galens

Editorial
Sara Constantakis, Elizabeth A. Cranston, Kristen A. Dorsch, Anne Marie Hacht, Madeline S. Harris, Arlene Johnson, Michelle Kazensky, Ira Mark Milne, Polly Rapp, Pam Revitzer, Mary Ruby, Kathy Sauer, Jennifer Smith, Daniel Toronto, Carol Ullmann

Research
Michelle Campbell, Nicodemus Ford, Sarah Genik, Tamara C. Nott, Tracie Richardson

Data Capture
Beverly Jendrowski

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Imaging and Multimedia
Randy Bassett, Dean Dauphinais, Robert Duncan, Leitha Etheridge-Sims, Mary Grimes, Lezlie Light, Jeffrey Matlock, Dan Newell, Dave Oblender, Christine O'Bryan, Kelly A. Quin, Luke Rademacher, Robyn V. Young

Product Design
Michelle DiMercurio, Pamela A. E. Galbreath, Michael Logusz

Manufacturing
Stacy Melson

For more information, contact
The Gale Group, Inc
27500 Drake Rd.
Farmington Hills, MI 48334-3535
Or you can visit our Internet site at
http://www.gale.com

Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Novels for Students (NfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, NfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in NfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by NfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

NfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Novels for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Novels for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Novels for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

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Editor, Novels for Students
Gale Group
27500 Drake Road
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535