

# **Unhooking the Moon Study Guide**

## **Unhooking the Moon by Gregory Hughes**

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## Plot Summary

The DeBillier family lives in a rugged area on the outskirts of Winnipeg. John is retired and his only income is a government farm subsidy. He is a widower whose wife had died in an accident when his children were small. Although he tries to put up a happy front, he is profoundly sad. He has never recovered from losing his wife. His depression is the source of his alcoholism.

Bob and Marie Claire, also known as The Rat, ride their bikes to the Assinboine River where they take their motor boat, the Marlin, to the Luxton School in Winnipeg. The Rat has been chosen by her drama teacher to star in the school play that is being held on the last day of the school year. The Rat is an assertive and bold young girl. She and Bob are close although they are polar opposites. Due to Bob's passivity and gentle nature, he allows himself to be dominated by his outspoken and opinionated younger sister. But there is a quiet strength about Bob, and when he needs to step up, he proves that he can be a leader.

When Bob and the Rat return home after the last day of the school year, they find their father dead on the kitchen floor. His death sparks an adventure that neither child would have ever imagined. The domineering Marie Claire decides that they must bury their father next to their mother in the garden behind the house. Although Bob thinks they should call the authorities and see that their father has a proper burial, the Rat convinces him that the cops would put them in the foster care system. Their father wouldn't have wanted that.

The Rat has premonitions that often prove to be true. She predicted that their family dog would run away and that their father would soon die. Both predictions ultimately came to pass. She has had a recurring dream about a great protector who defends her among tall buildings. When a family friend tells the orphaned kids that their Uncle Jerome lives in New York City, the Rat is sure that he is the protector of her dreams. It convinces her that they must run away to New York and find Uncle Jerome. The passive Bob really doesn't want to leave home but the thought of going into the foster care system seems to be a worse choice. They hop a freight train and find their way to Toronto where they encounter Joey, a cigar trader, who gives them a lift to New York City. Joey has an affinity for the orphaned kids because he had lost his parents at a young age, too.

Once in New York, they try to track down their uncle. They had been told that he was a big drug dealer so they start their search in the Bronx because it is alive with drug dealers. Ultimately, their journey leads them to the posh penthouses of Fifth Avenue. Joey promises to help them find their uncle when he returns from a short business trip. In the mean time, they are forced to sleep in a "den" in Central Park and come in contact and make friends with the full spectrum of humanity – from street hustler to famous celebrity rapper.

They successfully elude the police until the cops spot the Rat by herself in Times Square. She winds up in an abusive children's home but is rescued by Bob and her



new-found New York friends. The incident leads to changes and upheavals in the lives of everyone. A troubling condition that the Rat has suffered from for her entire life escalates to a dangerous level and just in the nick of time, Bob finds Uncle Jerome who comes to the rescue of both of the youngsters.

The Rat found not only one protector in New York City – she found several, the most loyal of whom was her very own brother.



# Chapters 1 - 5

## Summary

### Chapter One

Bob was a student at Marymount Manhattan College on the East Side of New York when, in the school's library, he began writing about years before in Winnipeg when he was 12-years-old. Bob recalled watching his younger sister, 10-year-old Marie Claire - who was also known as the Rat - playing soccer. Before the summer break, she had told him that their father was going to die soon. Bob thought their father had years left but Rat was sure he didn't. The Rat had good intuition about the future. She had predicted that their dog would run away and he did.

After going inside John, their father, was already soused. He usually didn't drink until later. He was a good cook and picked up where their mother had left off. She died in a car crash when Bob was much younger. The Rat wanted to be an actress and could do a great aristocratic English accent. She was enamored of her teacher Ms. Mountshaft who was from England and taught Drama and English. Ms. Mountshaft had selected the Rat to star in the school play. The Rat would often read articles from the newspaper to their dada after dinner or would watch a movie with him. Marie Claire was nicknamed "The Rat" because she was born when her mother was visiting a friend on an Indian reservation. She was given an Indian name meaning Little Rat.

Bob and Marie Claire's father would get philosophical sometimes. He told them that if they ever found themselves not believing in heaven, they should look at the stars and find themselves. The Rat was worried because their father was nearly sixty and increasingly frail. He'd got beaten up badly by a fellow named Pluto just recently after a money dispute in a poker game. When the Rat found out she swore to get back at Pluto. She warned him the next day to stay away from her father. Pluto was an ex-con and the Rat told him that if he ever touched her father again, she'd tell the cops that he molested her. The Rat must have gotten to him. He left town and was never seen again.

### Chapter Two

Saturday morning Bob woke up to hear his father singing to a Frank Sinatra song. He and the Rat reminded him that it was Saturday and that he could sleep late. He gave them a wad of cash and told them he wanted them to go to town and treat themselves to some new clothes. His only source of income was his welfare check. He had been a farmer and received a government subsidy. Bob and the Rat rode their bikes to the Assinboine River and took their canoe, the Marlin, down river to town and docked just below the St. Boniface Cathedral. They walked through the Cathedral grounds and passed a graveyard. A gravestone caught the Rat's attention but Bob didn't want to hear anything about it.



They headed to the French Quarter where the Rat liked to hang out. They stopped by a bookstore and a candy shop. After they sat in an outside café for a while they went to the Forks where there was always some entertainment taking place in the amphitheater. People often spoke to the Rat. She seemed to know everyone. Even the cops would stop her to talk. Some people spoke to her in French, others in the native Indian language. She knew strange people like Mad Mike the biker who was rude to everyone but the Rat. The only person that the Rat didn't get along with was Running Elk who was the sister of Bob's best friend, Little Joe. They ran into them in the French Quarter. Little Joe and Running Elk were going to the zoo but the Rat didn't want to look at caged-up animals. Bob wanted to go with them but stayed with his sister instead. Bob and the Rat bought cell phones and sent text messages to their friends. They headed to the State Legislative Building where they did stunts with their bikes.

Bob was worried about his father when they returned. He looked so sad but claimed he was fine and was just thinking about things. Harold was on his way over. Harold was the Rat's boyfriend. He was a nice kid who everyone liked, but something was wrong with his legs. He had a ton of surgery but nothing helped him and he had to use crutches to walk. He lived with his mother in a shack on the other side of the tracks. One day two years before, his father left for work on the train and they never saw him again. Harold still had hopes that he would return on a train one day. The Rat was careful to let Harold, who had a strong independent streak, do as much as he could by himself.

Bob left the Rat and Harold alone and walked to the back of the house. Their mother's ashes were buried in the prairie garden there. The grave was marked with a plaque. Harold and the Rat soon joined Bob in the garden. The Rat entertained them with the Native legend of how butterflies came to be. Suddenly, the Rat began to sway and fell to the ground in convulsion. Bob pinned her down to control the spasms. Their father came rushing out and held her tight. The spasms stopped and her jaw unlocked. The doctors said she wasn't epileptic and recommended that she be tested by a specialist in Vancouver but she refused to go. Bob was worried about her and so was their father.

### Chapter Three

It was the last day of school. Bob would be starting a new school in the fall and he would have his last class with Gabriela Mendez, a student teacher from Puerto Rico. The Rat was dressed in her finest Armani dress. She was excited about starring in the play. They rode their bikes to the river and took the Marlin downriver to Luxton School. The Rat was a little concerned that Harold wasn't waiting for her at the school gate as usual. He was probably resting his legs she figured. Bob and the Rat hung with their friends in the school yard until the bell rang.

Miss Gabriela put some easy exercises on the board for the class to do. After they finished their work, they were to go to the gym to play games. The boys all had a thing for Miss Gabriela including Bob but he kept his feelings about her to himself. He could have finished the exercises faster than he did but he wanted to stay with Miss Gabriela as long as he could. But eventually, he finished his work and headed for the gym. He



was in a bad mood having to leave Miss Gabriela but he wound up having fun playing crazy football.

After lunch, the parents came. His dad, who didn't make it to the play, was great but it would have been nice to have his mother there. Everyone went to the main hall where they would watch the school play. The Rat was playing Juliet in scenes from "Romeo and Juliet". Bob found the whole thing hilarious and laughed a lot until he was told to be quiet. The Rat did real well; she remembered all her lines although she shouted some of them too loudly and overacted in the final scene.

Father Henri gave a final word to end the school year. Bob felt a little sad and it wasn't just that he would not be seeing Gabriela again. He thought he and his pals would reminisce about their time together. But soon all his friends began to drift away. The Rat was busy talking with Ms. Mountshaft who complimented her on her performance. The Hanson sisters invited Bob to go into town with them but he turned them down. Later he spotted the Rat talking with Gabriela and joined them. She wished Bob luck in the future and told him what a pleasure it was to have him in her class.

Bob could have died when the Rat told him that she told Gabriela that he had a crush on her and that he was intelligent, nice and would grow up to be good-looking. Gabriela was only nineteen – not that much older than Bob. He thought about her all the way home. He hadn't thought about what the Rat had said about their father until he found him dead on the kitchen floor when they got home.

#### Chapter Four

Bob knew immediately that his father was dead. The Rat leaned down by him and pronounced him dead. She closed his eyes and kissed his forehead. She told him that everything would be okay. The Rat called the Chief, Little Joe and White Cloud over to help with final arrangements. They would give him the appropriate send off to the other world. Bob said they would have to call the proper officials and report his death. They couldn't just bury him. The Rat insisted that they couldn't report his death. The authorities would take them into protective custody and they'd be split up. Bob reluctantly went and got the shovels. The Rat pointed out that their father would have wanted them to stay together. She picked a spot in the garden right next to their mother's grave.

Running Elk and Little Joe and their grandfather, the Chief, arrived soon and brought White Cloud and Harold with them. The Chief told the Rat that there had to be an autopsy – it was the law. White Cloud, who was a traditionalist and believed in the old ways, understood how the Rat felt. She had heard the owl call John's name the week before. The Rat had a recurring dream about a man protecting her in a city of tall towers. If John was not buried in the way in which his children desired, it would bring shame on the Chief. But he pointed out that he could be held legally responsible for an unauthorized burial. The Chief acquiesced and agreed to help them dig the grave. But when the law found out, his body would be exhumed. The Rat and Running Elk would



dress him in his suit and wrap him in a rug that their mother bought in Paris. Bob, Little Joe and the Chief began digging the grave.

After they dug the grave, the Chief asked Bob if he wanted to look at his father before they wrapped him in the rug. Bob couldn't bring himself to look at his father. They carried him outside and lowered him into the grave. The Chief presided over the burial, throwing dirt into the grave and speaking in the ancient language. He began to chant a song while running Elk and Little Joe beat a drum and shook a tambourine. Everyone swayed to the tempo except Harold who shuffled on his crutches. The Rat took the Chief's place in front of the grave paying tribute to him and saying a prayer for his spirit. Bob wasn't able to say anything.

Bob confided in White Cloud his worry over being placed in a home. He was most concerned about the Rat. She said strange things. She even predicted their father's death. White Cloud said that everyone had glimpses of the future but the Rat was special; she had been gifted by the Great Spirit. The Chief built a fire and everyone sat around as he told stories from Native legend. He talked about how kind John was; often contributing the crops he grew to the poor.

White Cloud suggested that they go live with their uncle Jerome, who lived in New York City. Immediately, the Rat knew it was the man she had dreamed about. Jerome was twelve years younger than John and was known as the bad brother. He had a rough life; became a seaman at fifteen-years old. John had told White Cloud that Jerome had become a drug dealer and had been responsible for his wife's death. The Chief was against them living with a drug dealer. But the Rat wanted to find him. Bob agreed to go the next day. They'd take a freight train to Toronto and then onto New York. Harold vowed to help them.

## Chapter 5

When Bob woke the next morning, the house was silent and there was no smell of pancakes and coffee. The Rat was already outside kicking a soccer ball around. She was excited about going to New York. Her acting career might take off. Bob was worried about her and asked if she was all right. She was fine but needed breakfast. She asked Bob to make pancakes for her. The Rat had two suitcases packed with all her clothes and shoes and soccer gear. Bob told her they couldn't carry suitcases on their bikes which they would ride to the rail yards and use in Toronto. They agreed to take their backpacks. Bob would let the Rat put her Armani dress and soccer gear in his backpack. They tidied the house and took \$150 from the cookie jar. Outside they planted flowers on their father's grave and said a silent prayer. They left when it was dark.

They rode to the river and put their bikes and backpacks in the Marlin. They paddled down river for a while so the sound of the motor wouldn't draw any attention. They cruised toward St. Boniface and jumped onto the jetty and tied up the Marlin. They pulled their bikes and backpacks out of the Marlin and left it behind. Bob thought of Miss Gabriela and wished he could talk to her. They passed through St. Boniface and headed





to Symington Yard. They had arranged to meet Harold there who would help them get onto a freight car. They hid among the boxcars and containers so they wouldn't be spotted by a guard and waited for Harold.

Harold and Little Joe suddenly appeared and led Bob and the Rat to a boxcar. Little Joe grabbed the bikes and backpacks and threw them into the boxcar. The train was slowly beginning to move. Harold and the Rat vowed that they would still get married when they were sixteen. Harold gave her another backpack that was filled with food. After they got moving, they pulled open the door so they could tell where they were. They passed through a darkened Winnipeg and gazed at the stars in the black sky. The Rat missed her father but he had never been happy without their mother. Now he was with her. They opened and crawled into their sleeping bags and soon fell asleep.

## Analysis

### Chapter One

Bob thinks back to his younger years when he and his sister lived with their widowed father. They lost their mother at a young age. Although their father is loving and caring and spoils them as much as he can, he is an alcoholic and presents another form of abandonment for the youngsters. The Rat, aka Marie Claire, emerges as an off-beat character. She is only 10-years-old but has premonitions about the future and is bold and outspoken. She has predicted that their father will die soon. Bob is the more conservative and reserved of the two. Although he is three years older than the Rat, she is the dominant sibling at least ostensibly. Bob has a protective attitude toward his little sister. He lets her prattle on but he has a quiet strength that will be a factor in the story. The Rat is a voracious defender of her father who was beat up by a neighbor. She threatens to turn the man in as a pedophile if he ever touches her father again. Bob stands by in quiet support of his sister.

### Chapter Two

Living on a farm subsidy from the government, John doesn't have any money to spare. None the less, he gives them a wad of cash and tells them to treat themselves in town. The kids are on their own. He doesn't offer to go with them to town. When they return, Bob is upset by the sad look on his father's face. But his father denies that anything is wrong. Without expressing it, Bob knows that something is eating at his father and driving him to drink. Bob is the worrier of the family. He worries about his father and about the prediction that the Rat made about him dying. He also worries about his sister. He is concerned that her bold outspokenness will spell trouble for her.

Bob and the Rat demonstrate their kind and caring natures in their friendship with Harold who is the Rat's boyfriend. Harold is crippled and has to use crutches to walk. But he has an independent streak. The Rat shows her sensitivity to Harold by being careful not to fuss over him and to let him do as much as he can on his own. The Rat has a condition that causes her to have spasms. The source of the problem is unknown.



The Rat didn't want to find out what was wrong which indicates a chink in her image of strength. She doesn't want to face what might be wrong with her. Whatever it is won't just go away and will re-emerge in the story.

### Chapter Three

The Rat was thrilled to be starring in the school play at the end of the school year. It was a sad occasion for Bob when he looked around and saw the parents of the other students attending the play. Their mother was dead and their father obviously wasn't able to make it. Bob has a serious crush on a teacher's assistant who, at 19, is six years older than Bob. He feels sad leaving school since he'll be attending a new school in the fall and will never see Gabriela again. None the less, he fantasizes about a future with her. Thinking about Gabriela has displaced his worry about the Rat's premonition that their father would die soon. His thoughts of the beautiful Gabriela are zapped when he returns home to find his father dead on the kitchen floor. Not only will Bob and the Rat miss their father, at 10 and 12 what will be their fate?

### Chapter Four

The Rat loved her father and will miss him but she is not as grief-stricken as Bob. Perhaps her premonition prepared her for his death. As Bob is immobilized by his father's abrupt passing, the Rat assumes a take-charge attitude. She insists that they bury him in the garden beside their mother. When family friends come over to help Bob and the Rat, the Chief insists that the authorities must be contacted. It would be a serious violation of the law if they didn't call the coroner in. But the Rat is adamant. They can't call the authorities because they'd split her and Bob up and put them in different homes. Their father wouldn't want that. She is unrelenting and convincing in her arguments and the Chief finally acquiesces and helps them bury their father.

Knowing that the law would discover that John had died, they plan to leave for New York City to find an uncle. But the uncle was a known drug dealer and the move may not be the best. But to both the Rat and Bob, being with a drug dealer would be better than being in a foster home and separated. The Rat feels that it is the right thing to do since she had been having dreams about being protected by a man among huge towers – the skyscrapers of New York City. How will these two youngsters survive the long trip from Winnipeg to New York City in search of an uncle of dubious repute with only \$150 to their name? It will undoubtedly take all of the Rat's cunning and Bob's intelligence.

### Chapter Five

The Rat reveals her soft side as she and Bob gaze at the bright stars in the dark night on their way to New York. She feels that the stars are an omen. Their father is happy now. He had wanted to be with his wife and now he would be. The Rat has a calming impact on Bob. He feels more resolution about his father's passing.

The kids have hopped a box car on a freight train. They will have to stay out of sight and will have to deal with crossing the border from Canada to the U.S. The Rat is certain



that everything will be all right. Bob is already missing home which is reflected when his thoughts turn to Gabriela who he wishes he could talk to.

## Discussion Question 1

What premonitions did the Rat have that came true?

## Discussion Question 2

What did White Cloud tell Bob about the Rat's gifts?

## Discussion Question 3

Why didn't the Rat seem to be upset about her father's passing?

## Vocabulary

immune, vicious, nonexistent, aristocratic, protégée, famines, ballistic, pedophile, subsidy, spasm, abundance, epileptic, sophistication, scepter, bereaved, autopsy, sacrilege, exhumed, barren, decipher



# Chapters 6 - 10

## Summary

### Chapter Six

Bob woke the next day to the noisy clanging of the boxcar. Bob and the Rat dug into the food that Harold had given them. They ate breakfast watching the beautiful scenery pass by from their vantage point inside the boxcar. While Bob had slept through a stop the night before, the Rat made contact with a Native woman who told them that they would find Jerome but that they were in great danger. The Rat felt that the boxcar had a good spirit and that they were safe for the time being. The Rat had a dream about angels carrying her to the top of skyscrapers. She dreamed about the Windigo. Bob responded that Windigos weren't real but the Rat insisted they were.

Just like angels, Windigos weren't always visible. Angels were everywhere. When they were inside of people, the people did good things. When people had demons inside, they become Windigos or pedophiles and all they wanted to do was hurt people. Pedophiles hissed when they talked and pretended to be nice especially to kids but Windigos were never nice and were more difficult to spot. If a person had both an angel and a demon inside, they would have an internal conflict but the angel would always win. As far as the Rat's premonitions, they came to her in her dreams or in strong feelings that something was going to happen.

When the train stopped, Bob and the Rat closed the boxcar door and peeked out. They stayed quiet and still so they wouldn't bring attention to the train workers who kept passing by. At one stop they saw dozens of cattle pens. Bob was afraid that train workers would put cows in their boxcar but the Rat said they wouldn't and they didn't. As they traveled on to Manitoba, the landscape changed from prairie land to mountains. They saw beautiful blue rivers and waterfalls. They spotted bald eagles and sheep and horses along the way.

They speculated about whether their uncle would want them. The Rat admitted she'd miss her friends but would settle for becoming a great actress. They both agreed they wouldn't sell drugs for their uncle. Harold sent a text message. He said they should think about giving their father a proper burial and that they should be careful. They wondered if their mother had run away with their uncle.

### Chapter Seven

The next time Bob opened his eyes, they were entering a rail yard that looked like the one in Winnipeg. They quickly rolled their sleeping bags up, gathered their items and lowered their bikes to the ground. They darted between two train cars and caught the attention of a guard who told them to stop but they just pedaled all the faster with the Rat leading the way. She dropped to the ground and scrambled under a train and Bob



followed. They dragged their bikes in behind them and exited on the other side. In minutes, they were back on their bikes and on racing away. They sped across a field and pulled their bikes across a fence. The guard was out of breath and warned them they could get hurt playing around a train yard. In the distance they saw the CN Tower in Toronto.

They arrived in Toronto in the early morning. There were very few people out on the streets. They saw a sign that pointed to Lake Ontario and followed it. There was an old-time sail boat gliding through the water and a bright orange Canadian Coast Guard boat next to a fireboat equipped with a big water cannon. They found a coffee shop and ordered drinks and cookies. Bob figured they should wait until dark to try to cross the border. The Rat speculated that they might encounter armed guards and barbed wire. They dropped their backpacks off at a bus depot locker and killed time at a mall. They were tired and found a grassy area where they could nap. Bob woke up later to witness the Rat telling off a guy she thought was a pedophile. She realized she was wrong and apologized to him.

The Rat talked to some bicycle couriers who gave her directions to Niagara Falls and Fort Erie which was where the border was.

## Chapter Eight

They rode for hours. Bob's backpack seemed that it gained weight. The Rat who never complained was exhausted. They stopped in a clearing and decided to continue the next morning. It was cold and Bob was shivering and wishing he was in his warm bed in Winnipeg. Bob thought about going to the cops and turning themselves in. But the thought of being placed in a foster home stopped him. Two cars screeched to a stop on the road in front of them. Two men were making an exchange. Rat whispered that they were drug dealers. After the exchange, the younger of the two men couldn't get his car to start. Suddenly, the Rat was on her bike and heading for the car. Bob followed right behind. She told the man that they were looking for their uncle who was a drug dealer, too. The man was out of gas and the Rat volunteered to ride to a gas station they had passed and get him gas. He didn't have a gas can but Rat said they could use her soft drink container. The man gave them \$5 and Bob and the Rat headed for the gas station. They filled the cup with gas and brought it back to the man. The Rat offered the man a few dollars for a ride to New York.

The guy didn't want to cross the border with two kids he just picked up. He thanked them and drove off but a few minutes later he changed his mind and put the car in reverse. At the U.S. border, the Rat called the man Uncle Joey and told the border guard that he could look in their backpacks. A woman asked them where they were going. The Rat responded that Uncle Joey was taking them to their grandmother's house. The Rat had thought to bring their birth certificates and displayed them to the woman. They were cleared and were allowed to cross the border. "Uncle Joey" told them that breakfast was on him.



In the restaurant, Joey was calling the Rat MC and teaching her how to talk like an Italian New Yorker. Bob asked Joey what had been in the packages that he exchanged with the other man. Joey claimed that it was cigars, expensive Cuban cigars. When Joey understood that the youngsters were truly orphans, he vowed to help them. He had lost his parents at a young age and was taken in by a couple who he still had contact with. As soon as he finished some business in Atlantic City, he would help them find their uncle. He promised them that they wouldn't wind up in a home.

## Chapter Nine

Bob had strange dreams all night. He dreamed about his father singing silently from his grave and about White Cloud. He dreamed that Gabriela told him she'd be his mother. Father Henri was holding a Bible and ranting at him. The Rat and Joey woke him up and told him they were in New York. Joey told them to look up a girl he referred to as Sexy Sandra who would put them up until he returned from Atlantic City. Joey gave the Rat a wad of money. They'd have to pay Sexy Sandra.

They rode their bikes across the Brooklyn Bridge where Joey had left them off. The famous New York skyline and the Statue of Liberty soon came into view. The city seemed to be alive. The Rat called it the "Emerald City". The first thing the Rat wanted to do was to go to Ground Zero and say a prayer. Then they would start their search for Uncle Jerome. The city was so loud that it made Bob nervous. After they found Ground Zero and Rat said her prayers, she felt sad and said that angels had been there. Even though it was dangerous, the Rat wanted to start their search in the Bronx where a lot of drug dealers operated.

They bumped their bikes down subway stairs and bought two tickets to the Bronx. A police officer told them which train to take. The subway was dirty and dismal and huge rats scurried about. The first train that stopped was too crowded and they couldn't get on. They were able to get on the next train and took it to 42nd Street. They got off and followed signs that led them to Times Square. They found the subway entry that was marked "The Bronx". A black woman on the subway was begging for money. No one put any money in her cup. Bob felt sorry for her and gave her a dollar. The woman was followed by a whole parade of beggars. Begging was apparently big business on the subways. Finally, they made it to the Bronx. Bob just wished that they would make it out.

## Chapter Ten

The Bronx was a gloomy, rundown place. When they arrived it started to rain. Once on their bikes, the Rat led the way and asked a few groups of guys if they knew Jerome DeBillier. No one had heard of him. Rat asked an old couple she saw emerging from a building. The old man recognized the name and thought he was a friend of Larry's. The old woman went back inside the building to call this "Larry". The Rat pulled Bob aside and warned him against going inside. It was a trap. She envisioned blood on the walls. The man glared at the Rat and she called him a demon and a murderer and she and Bob took off.



After stopping for pizza, they continued their search. Bob was well aware that they may never find Jerome. He might have left the city and he could even be in jail. Bob felt the fear and anger growing within him although the Rat did her best to bolster his spirits. Tensions led to an argument. The Rat took off by herself and Bob began to cry and couldn't stop. He felt so lost and missed his father who he loved so much. Bob panicked when he couldn't find the Rat. He rode around and finally found her. She wasn't crying but she wasn't her confident self. Bob had called her crazy during their argument and told her she'd wind up in a mental institution. Bob soothed her hurt feelings and told her she was just a little crazy. They both felt better and resumed their hunt for Uncle Jerome.

They asked everyone they encountered – a traffic cop, a woman with kids and shop owners. They asked two little black girls skipping along in the rain. As creepy as the Bronx was, Bob had to admit that most of the people were nice and polite. Someone told them to ask Al the Butcher on the next block – he knew everyone. They found Al and he kept repeating that Jerome DeBillier was the guy on TV. They showed him the photo of Jerome that White Cloud had given them. Al recognized the face but couldn't come up with a name. He told them to come back the next day, maybe he'd remember by then.

The Rat showed the photo to an old Hispanic woman. She recognized him but said he was much older now than in the photo. The last she knew, he lived in a penthouse that overlooked Central Park. She said he was one of the biggest drug dealers in New York.

## Analysis

### Chapter Six

The Rat shows more of her spiritual side. She has contact with a Native woman who warns them that although they'll find Uncle Jerome they will be in great danger. Just what Bob, who is dubious about the whole thing and is spooked by his sister's predictions, needs to hear. The Rat also focuses on angels and demons. She equates demons with pedophiles. Pedophiles are nicer on the surface, especially to children. When she was angry at Pluto for hurting her father, she threatened to turn him in as a pedophile. It is becoming obvious that she is fixated on pedophiles. Had she been molested in the past? Was it by someone who appeared to be nice, someone who she normally should be able to trust? Her father always told her to watch out for pedophiles.

### Chapter Seven

The Rat calls a man in Toronto a pedophile but the man was perfectly innocent. He was just asking her if she was lost. It is not normal for a 10-year-old to immediately think that every man might be a pedophile. While parents teach their children to beware of strangers, the Rat is too quick to label the man a pedophile and is overly aggressive in confronting him about it. Bob notices this aggressiveness about her and, although he doesn't appear to suspect that she'd been a victim of pedophilia, he worries about her





anger and her confrontational behavior. Bob is only 12 and accepts the Rat's personality as normal for her. He hasn't given any thought to what caused such a young girl to be angry and have an almost survivalist mentality.

#### Chapter Eight

As the trip continues, Bob is overcome with his fatigue, his growing doubts about leaving Winnipeg, and grief over his father's death. Rat again shows her boldness by approaching two men who are making some kind of an exchange. Rat thinks that they are drug dealers and rushes over to them much to Bob's dismay. There is a certain charm about her strong personality and she is able to parlay the chance encounter with Joey who they think is a drug dealer into a ride to New York. Again at the border, she is able to use her wiles and quick-thinking to get them through the border.

That chance meeting with Joey may turn out to be their rescue. Joey is charmed by the Rat and he relates to the kids since he lost his parents at a young age and was taken in by a kindly and caring couple. He seems trustworthy and even gives them money to tide them over until he gets back from a business trip. He vows that he will not allow them to be placed in a home.

#### Chapter Nine

Rat's first stop is Ground Zero. She remembered how upset her father was when the terrorist attack occurred. She said a prayer and sensed that angels were there. Rat has a spiritual connection to her father. The kids fearlessly take on the Big Apple with the Rat in the lead. They both felt that the city itself was a living being. Perhaps Rat felt that she had found a kind of paradise on earth replete with angels and away from demons when she referred to New York as the Emerald City – an allusion to fantasy and escapism and idealism. Will she find her home in the Emerald City, and is Uncle Jerome the wizard behind the curtain? Her dream was that her protector was in a place with tall towers – an obvious reference to the New York City skyscrapers. Could Uncle Jerome, an alleged drug dealer, be her protector?

#### Chapter Ten

The Rat's tenacity and determination lead her to a possible real connection to Uncle Jerome. Her "demon" radar targets a man who tries to lure Bob into his house. She has a vision of blood on the walls and calls the man a demon and a murderer. If her premonitions were right, she may have saved her brother's life. Nothing much gets to the Rat but she is hurt when Bob calls her crazy. Apparently, that is something she does fear. Perhaps this fear stems from real concerns that her dreams and visions could be symptoms of a mental condition. Bob's quiet strength emerges when he senses her pain and the tables turn between the two siblings. He comforts her and for once feels the need to encourage her to continue on. The only other weakness or vulnerability that the Rat has shown before was her fear about finding out what was causing her spasms. Perhaps the Rat connects her physical ailment with her fears about her mental stability.





## **Discussion Question 1**

Why does Bob think of turning himself in? Why keeps him from doing so?

## **Discussion Question 2**

How did the Rat describe demons and Windigos? What did she say about a person who had both an angel and demon within?

## **Discussion Question 3**

What vulnerability did the Rat show after she and Bob argued?

## **Vocabulary**

shuddered, pathetic, mocha, bimbo, quays, loitered, courier, bewildered, borough, comeuppance, dismal, obscenities, profanity



# Chapters 11 - 14

## Summary

### Chapter Eleven

The youngsters wound up in Harlem where they got a glimpse of the Empire State Building. They stopped at a coffee shop. Bob was taken aback by the girl behind the counter. She looked and sounded just like Gabriela. She told him he was real cute and if he was a little older they could have gone out. She gave him his coffee free of charge. Rat knew that the girl was flirting with Bob. She wanted to go but Bob wanted to stay a little longer. As usual, the Rat got her way.

They found Central Park West and the hostel where Sexy Sandra would get them a room. But Sexy Sandra was off that day and the manager wouldn't give them a room because they were under age. The man told them to come back the next day. They decided to go to Fifth Avenue and look for Uncle Jerome. Although Central Park looked dark and intimidating they headed in. Bob was worried about muggers with switchblades but, as usual, the Rat told him not to worry. They came out on the other side of the park onto Fifth Avenue. They drove down the avenue to Central Park South and back into the park where Rat led them to a small dry clearing. Bob initially refused to spend the night in the park but finally agreed to because they really didn't have any choice. But Rat wasn't done for the night. She saw the lights of Times Square and convinced Bob to leave their backpacks behind and walk over to the Square.

### Chapter Twelve

Bob and the Rat were in absolute awe of the lights and crowds in Times Square. There were plenty of characters out that night. They encountered a hustler who was trying to con money out of people by telling them his pregnant wife was ill and needed help. Rat asked him if they could hang with him. She told him they scammed people all the time. The man, Tommy, thought for a minute and decided they were too young. He turned toward a well-dressed couple with his sad tale. They weren't interested until Rat rushed up crying and claiming that her mother was dying. The man was dubious but the woman was suckered in and gave them money. The man split the \$20 with the Rat. But the Rat insisted on keeping the whole \$20 with the promise that she'd work with him.

Bob, of course, didn't want the Rat to hustle people but she was sure that the man had a good spirit. The Rat and the man worked quite successfully for a while but then a rivalry developed. He told her she was overacting. She asserted herself and told him she was a member of the Luxton drama class. Tommy's problem was that the Rat was out-hustling the hustler – professional jealousy.

Then they put on a real spectacle. Rat told a woman that Tommy was hustling that her mother was already dead. Tommy shouted back that she died because the Rat was



such a bad kid. She was crazy. She said he made her work in a sweatshop. She claimed that he was an alcoholic. He shouted back that she had killed her mother. A crowd gathered as they argued back and forth. He called her a liar when she said that her mother was having his brother's baby. To the surprise of the crowd, they then held hands and bowed to them. As the applause grew, Tommy passed his hat around a made a killing. Tommy disappeared as two cops were heading toward them. Bob and the Rat turned and quickly ran away and made their way back to their little den in the park.

### Chapter Thirteen

The Rat wanted to stay in the park until they found Uncle Jerome. It was free and it made their quest more like an adventure. After a quick breakfast, they began stopping by apartment buildings. Bob asked a doorman if Jerome lived in the building but the doorman told him that he couldn't divulge any information about the tenants. The next doorman was more cooperative. The name, Jerome DeBillier, was familiar but he didn't live in his building. He told them to talk to Connor in the next building over. Connor didn't know Jerome and told them to try Patrick in the next building. Patrick said that a Jerome DeBillier didn't live anywhere on the entire block. They walked into a lobby and pressed a few buttons. They got lucky when one man who answered said that he did know Jerome. But he wouldn't tell him where he lived because they woke him up. Tired, they took a break and went to the Metropolitan Museum. Rat loved Van Gogh and any paintings with angels. It didn't matter if angels weren't good looking or old or fat. You don't have to be beautiful to be an angel, she said.

When they left the museum, the Rat immediately spotted "Ice", a famous rapper and Rat's favorite entertainer. She decided to invite him to coffee and ran and introduced herself but he totally ignored her. She kept after him until he stopped and told her she was being rude. But she insisted she knew him – knew everything about him. She quoted some remarks he made in an article, but he wasn't impressed. She told Ice that they were staying in the park until they were able to find their uncle. Ice questioned what kind of parents they had who would let them live on the street. Bob got his dander up and charged at Ice warning him not to disparage their parents. Ice turned and left and the Rat immediately texted Harold and told him what happened. She told Harold to tell Gabriela how brave Bob had been.

They went to a coffee room in the Plaza. Rat ordered coffee and chocolate cake for both of them. They rode their bikes down by the shore to take a ferry boat ride around the bay. Bob bought the tickets and when he came back to find the Rat, she was lying on the bench. She wasn't sleeping; she was having a convulsion. She was having only mild tremors and they soon passed. She asked Bob if she went crazy would he still want to be her brother. He'd be her brother no matter what, he told her.

They were riding alongside Central Park when the Rat's cell phone beeped. It was a text from Joey. He would be away one more night. They happened to spot Ice posing for photographers with a couple of girls in front of an apartment building. He saw the kids and gave Bob a long look – but it wasn't a mean look. They crawled into their den and



pulled their bikes in behind them. Bob said he'd try to figure out how to find Uncle Jerome.

#### Chapter Fourteen

The Rat found the park's swimming pool on her map. They saw Ice standing on the balcony of his Fifth Avenue apartment. He was watching them. The Rat still wanted to be friends with Ice but Bob told her to forget it. They found the swimming pool and were able to take showers there. Bob ran into a black man named Erwin who was lived in Harlem. He invited Bob to stay at his place for a night or two. The Rat came out wearing her soccer gear and carrying her soccer ball which she pumped up with a hand pump she brought from home. They found a soccer field that was set up with goals and nets. Bob played goalie while Rat took some foul shots. Suddenly, the Rat's eyes grew wide. Ice was walking directly toward them.

Ice apologized for being rude and disrespecting their parents. The Rat ran at him, threw her arms around him and apologized, too. She tried to talk him into playing soccer. Just to quiet her down, Ice kicked the ball around a bit. Ice told the kids that they shouldn't be sleeping in the park. The police could find them a place to sleep. But the Rat said the cops would put them in a home and that the homes were full of pedophiles. She felt safe from pedophiles with Ice because he was an angel. She told him he'd be the next king of rap. He pointed out that rap was art when the words were great like the poetry of Langston Hughes. Ice was impressed when Bob recited a line from a Langston Hughes poem. Ice got Bob aside and told him that he had to find a place for them to stay. It was dangerous in the park.

It was pure magic for Bob and the Rat when they walked out onto the observation deck of the Empire State Building that night. When they walked back to the park, they barely escaped notice of a cruising police car. As they ran toward their den, they noticed a man sitting on a nearby park bench. After they passed him by, he began to chase them. Bob grabbed Rat's hand and ran. They were able to elude the man but it scared Bob enough that he vowed to find a cop and turn himself and the Rat in. But the Rat talked him out of it. She said they'd be safe in their den. The Rat told Bob that she had a dream in which Mad Mike was hugging Bob with a big crowd around. She told him that her dream was a sign that they'd return home and that everything would be okay.

The Rat was still sleeping when Bob woke up with rain falling in his face and a hooded man was standing over him. Bob was prepared to fight but the man pulled his hood off; it was Ice. He told Bob to get his things together and come with him. At that moment, Bob was sure that Ice really was an angel.

## Analysis

#### Chapter Eleven

The Rat continues her domination of her older brother. She usually gets her way even though her "logic" isn't always logical. Bob is a more flexible and passive person than



his sister is and has a healthy enough ego that he doesn't have to always get his way. Bob kept a watchful eye out for his sister because there is always the possibility that her mouth and manner might get her into trouble.

Things didn't bode well for the youngsters. They were not able to stay in the hostel and had no choice but to sleep in the park – not the best place for two pre-teens to be staying; sleeping in the dark night made them vulnerable to many dangers.

#### Chapter Twelve

The Rat draws on her acting ability and proves her proficiency in scamming people out of money – not the best pursuit for a 10-year-old. Her boldness and quick-thinking, however, wins her the praise of her fellow conman and the applause and adoration from her street-side audience, not to mention \$20. After her “performance” with Tommy the Hustler, Bob spots a cop heading for them and grabs his sister and runs. Not only does Bob have to worry about where they're staying and how they will continue to eat when their money runs out, he has to keep the cops away or their adventure in Gotham City is over and they'll wind up in foster homes. Bob is a 12-year-old boy with adult-sized problems.

#### Chapter Thirteen

The Rat is tenacious in her hunt to find Uncle Jerome. Although Bob helps her, he seems to be just going through the motions. Even though he is in New York and went along with the Rat's big plan, he has never truly bought into the caper. The Rat is fascinated by the Van Gogh paintings and the paintings of angels. She makes a revealing comment that provides insight about how she feels about herself. She tells Bob that you don't have to be beautiful to be an angel. The Rat is just as aggressive when she is making friends as when she is standing up to an adversary. When she sees Ice, her favorite rapper, she can barely contain herself. Even though Ice rejects her friendship, he is touched by the homeless little girl and her brother.

Bob is concerned when the Rat has another convulsion. He is relieved when the convulsion is over but at just 12 years of age he doesn't think much past her temporary recovery. He is either too immature to give her condition more thought or he doesn't want to face what might be wrong with her. Rat appears rattled and vulnerable after her convulsion and again worries about her sanity.

#### Chapter Fourteen

Thoughts of the two orphaned children staying in the park must have been troubling Ice. He finds them in the park and apologizes to them for disrespecting their parents. The Rat thinks of everything she can to keep him there – she hugs him much longer than he is comfortable with and bugs him to play soccer with her. The Rat thinks of Ice as an angel and feels safe from pedophiles with him. Again, the focus on pedophiles and angels is always at the forefront of her thoughts. Is Ice the protector of the towers?



The kids, especially the Rat, are getting to Ice. He demonstrates his concern for their welfare by getting Bob aside and strongly advising him to find a place for them to stay. Bob has a big scare when a man seems to be chasing them in the park in the dark night. When he wakes, he is ready to fight again when he sees a man standing over him and his sleeping sister. But it is Ice and they have been rescued at least temporarily. Ice apparently couldn't bear the thought of the two homeless kids. He doesn't say where he's taking them but both of the youngsters will rebel if he tries to take them to the police. Maybe he'll let them stay in his Fifth Avenue Apartment. The Rat would be in her glory.

## **Discussion Question 1**

Why are Bob and the Rat forced to stay in Central Park? What possible dangers do they face?

## **Discussion Question 2**

How does the Rat demonstrate that her acting skills could earn her some money?

## **Discussion Question 3**

What adult-sized problems does 12-year-old Bob have?

## **Vocabulary**

hostel, menacing, predator, hustler, insensitive, rivalry, cowering, camouflaged, manipulate, seascape, accost, vivacious, dynamic, waif, adrenaline



# Chapters 15 - 18

## Summary

### Chapter Fifteen

The next morning, Bob opened the bedroom door to find Ice making breakfast for them. He offered to help but Ice told him to have a seat. He had everything under control. Ice's apartment was posh; his music system probably cost as much as a car. The Rat came out wearing her Armani dress. It was obvious that Ice actually hadn't cooked much. He forgot to use an oven mitt to take the pan of hash browns out of the oven. The Rat insisted that Bob finish the cooking.

Ice made it clear that they couldn't stay there. His girlfriend, Mia, would be home the next day. They showed him Uncle Jerome's photo but he didn't know him. Ice had to leave for some promotional interviews for his new CD at the Marriott Hotel on Broadway. He told them they could tag along. The Rat suggested that Ice tell everyone that they were his godchildren.

The paparazzi were lying in wait for Ice when his limo pulled up. Bob got out first and rushed inside the hotel. But Ice and the Rat were cooler; they donned their sunglasses and waved to the crowd. Once inside, the Ice got Julian, one of his staff members, to keep an eye on Bob and the Rat. They had a great day. Julian took them to lunch and one of the music producers gave them iPods. After his interviews, Ice took them out for a lobster dinner. They were sitting by the window and Bob spotted Tommy the Hustler just outside. Bob was relieved when the Hustler was stopped from entering the restaurant.

As they drove away in the limo, the Rat suddenly screamed for the driver to stop. She jumped out and ran to Tommy who was pinned to the ground by a group of guys. She yelled at them to leave him alone. One of the guys shoved her and Bob and Ice rushed to her aid. Ice flattened the guy with one punch. He was attacked by the other guys but held his own with Rat cheering him on the entire time. Finally, the guys backed off. People gathered around. Tommy said he'd been mugged and that the Iceman saved him. Ice was a hero. Tommy told the kids he'd buy them breakfast in the morning. He'd make some good money selling this story to the papers.

### Chapter Sixteen

Back in his apartment, the Rat, Bob and Ice rehashed the fight. The Rat was sure that Ice enjoyed it although he denied that he did. Ice didn't like to have people over because they always wanted something. Real friends like Bob and the Rat didn't try to use him. Rat decided to tell Ice the Native legend about the Bear and the Windigo. It was a silly story that made Ice laugh. The Rat said that since she entertained him with her story he had to sing for her. He was a rapper, he told her, he didn't sing. But she





insisted. In fact, she wanted him to sing a Frank Sinatra song. He had only one Sinatra song on his lap top. He attempted to sing “That Old Black Magic” but couldn’t sing one note in tune. The Rat and Bob soon joined in. They collapsed in laughter.

Ice revealed that he hadn’t laughed that much in years. He hadn’t been really happy since his mother died. She was a loving and caring woman but she was strict with him. He had to go to church, work hard at school and couldn’t hang out on the street. She died from cancer when he was fifteen. He wished she could have lived to see him succeed. All the material possessions he had were meaningless to him although they were everything to Mia. Ice told the kids he would try to find their uncle for them.

Bob woke in the middle of the night to see Mia standing at the bedroom door looking in on them. She and Ice got into an argument about the kids. She couldn’t believe he found two white kids in the park and brought them home. He told her it was the right thing to do. She was concerned that the media would get hold of the story. It could ruin his career. He wasn’t going to let them sleep on the streets like he had to do after his mother died. Mia wanted to call the police and get rid of them right then. Ice said he’d call the police in the morning.

The kids knew they had to leave. They gathered their things and Rat left a thank you note for Ice. They took the elevator to the lobby and sneaked past the sleeping doorman. They decided not to go back to their den because it was the first place that Ice would look for them. It was pouring down rain again. They found shelter under a large tree in the park, huddling up with their sleeping bags around them.

Bob was frightened and sad. It was a harsh transition to be in the park again after being in Ice’s penthouse. He stayed awake while the Rat slept. He couldn’t wait for daybreak.

## Seventeen

The next morning, Bob woke to see the Rat standing with her back to him. He spoke to her but she didn’t answer. She grew wobbly and collapsed. She was having another convulsion. This time the tremors were violent. Her ashen face turned blue. Bob held her and shouted at her to breathe. He talked her through the spell reminding her of all the good things in her life. Finally, color returned to her face and the spasms stopped. When she could finally talk, she told Bob to take her home. Something bad was going to happen. He said he would text Joey and Tommy. They’d help them find Uncle Jerome. She was frightened that Bob would leave her there by herself. Bob assured her he would never leave her.

They walked to a coffee shop and Bob spent the last of his money on a mocha for the Rat. Bob texted Joey and Tommy for help and told the Rat that they’d give it two more days. If they hadn’t found Uncle Jerome by then, they’d go home. But the Rat was her old self again and said they’d stay in New York until it snowed. Tommy called and told them to meet him at a diner for dinner. Joey called and said he’d pick them up at six that evening where he’d left them off by the Brooklyn Bridge. They met Tommy who was disappointed that they’d let Ice slip through their fingers. He held up a copy of the New





York Post which had a headline about Ice saving an elderly man from being mugged. There was a photo of Ice, Tommy and the Rat. She was elated and grabbed the paper – “Fame at last!” He was paid \$2,000 for the story but he was going to sue them for calling him “elderly”. Little Joe texted Bob telling him that Gabriela had seen them on TV when they entered the hotel with Ice. Tommy promised to help them find Uncle Jerome. The name did seem familiar to him. But first, he wanted to patch up their relationship with Ice. That was where the money was!

Tommy decided to go with them to meet Joey. He had a sad tale himself. He had been an attorney but got in with the wrong crowd. He was convicted of jury tampering. It destroyed his marriage and his kids – three daughters – never talked to him again. Tommy got a call on his cell phone. He had to go to Hell’s Kitchen and told the kids to come with him. They took a cab and the Rat engaged the Sikh cab driver in a discussion about religion. After they got out of the cab, the Rat told Bob that she was sure the cab driver was an angel. They went into a bar where they were met by Sonny, a big burly man with multiple tattoos. He told Tommy that Big Frank would see him in a few minutes. He asked if Tommy brought all the money that he owed Big Frank with him. Tommy had most of it but was a thousand dollars short. Tommy had apparently owed Big Frank a big gambling debt. Sonny told Tommy he’d have to face the consequences.

Sonny told the kids to leave but the Rat refused. She would only leave when Tommy was able to leave with them. She and Bob accompanied Tommy into Big Frank’s office. There were several big thugs standing around. Big Frank was fed up. Tommy was a hustler who would never pay him back. Two of the men dragged the kids out of the room while the other men grabbed Tommy as Big Frank stood before him wielding a hammer. The Rat bit the finger of the man who was holding her and ran into Frank’s office. She told him that the Iceman was their godfather and he was paying Tommy ten grand to track down their uncle, Jerome DeBillier. Sonny had heard of him but couldn’t recall who he was.

He agreed to let Tommy pay him the rest of what he owed him later but insisted on another thousand dollars before he’d let him go. Bob and the Rat ran outside and got their BMX bikes. They were each worth \$500 they told Frank. He agreed to take them for his kids. But he wanted the rest of his money in two days. He threatened to break both of Tommy’s hands if he didn’t come up with the entire amount. Tommy told the kids he’d replace their bikes. The Rat, Bob and Tommy made the long walk to the Brooklyn Bridge. Joey didn’t have enough room for Tommy to stay in his trailer but said he could sleep outside in his camp bed.

## Chapter Eighteen

They drove to Joey’s silver trailer which was in a woodsy part of the Bronx. Joey picked up some groceries and grilled steaks and hamburgers. Tommy told the kids about being in prison. The Rat told Joey about meeting the Iceman and staying at his penthouse. The Rat asked Joey how his cigar business was going. He had given some of his earnings to his step-parents and used the rest to buy watches that he planned to sell.



Rat said that Tommy was a good hustler and could sell them for him. Tommy suggested they split up and each take one of the kids down to Times Square. They could double his money. Joey didn't love the idea of getting the kids involved but finally agreed.

Once they got to Times Square, Bob and Tommy worked one side of the street as a team and Joey and the Rat worked the other. Bob gave the Rat a stern warning to stay right with Joey and not get into any trouble. Tommy and Bob got lucky right away. They sold six watches to a couple of sailors for \$100 each. Tommy wound up selling the watches like hotcakes. A mugger tried to take Bob's backpack away from him but Tommy produced a black-jack that convinced the guy to back off.

Joey came running toward Bob and Tommy asking if the Rat was with them. He lost her about a half-hour before and couldn't find her anywhere. They searched up and down the street for her through a crowd of literally thousands of people. Tommy got his car and cruised up and down the streets looking for her. Bob was panicked and horrified. They had to find her! Suddenly Tommy spotted her. She was in the back of a police cruiser being taken away.

## Analysis

### Chapter Fifteen

The Iceman lives among the tall buildings in New York and is certainly protecting the Rat and Bob. Perhaps he is the protector that the Rat had a premonition about. But their time with the Iceman is obviously temporary. The kids have a great time with Ice. He has taken them from a homeless den in Central Park to a Fifth Avenue penthouse. He treats them with great kindness and concern and exposes them to the finer things in life.

The Rat demonstrates her loyalty to a friend when she sees Tommy being mugged by a group of men. She rushes to save him. But when she is shoved by one of the men, Ice reacts instinctually and rushes to her defense. Tommy appreciates being saved from a mugging almost as much as he appreciates being saved by a celebrity. Thinking like a hustler, he figures he can cash in on the incident.

### Chapter Sixteen

The Iceman's treatment of the homeless kids stems from his own childhood. He loved his mother who taught him to have good values. Despite all his fame and wealth, he hasn't been happy since his mother died when he was sixteen. He is able to relate to the Rat and Bob because he'd been through a similar upset in his young life. He genuinely feels for them. When the kids overhear Mia's reaction to Ice taking them in, they know they have to leave. She wants to turn them into the police. Ice agreed to call the cops in the morning. Whether Ice really planned to call the police or if he was just telling Mia he would to calm her down is not clear. The kids take off and leave him a thank you note. Ice will probably feel horrible when he finds that they left and will again be living on the street.



## Chapter Seventeen

The Rat's physical condition is deteriorating. The convulsion she has once they are back in the park is more violent and lasts longer. She needs medical attention and should not be living on the streets. Bob is at a loss about what to do but he knows that she needs a doctor. Bob is shocked and dismayed when the Rat appears to be giving up. She tells him to take her home – something bad was going to happen. Her premonitions have come true in the past. He's afraid that this one will as well. Bob needs help so he contacts the only two friends they have – Tommy and Joey. Surely they can help them. When the Rat recovers, she is her old self and seems to completely forget about her spasm and about her dire premonition.

Tommy and Joey both come to the rescue. Joey is trying to help find Uncle Jerome. He placed an ad in the paper so if there is Jerome DeBillier and he sees the ad, he could call Joey and the Rat and Bob could finally be in contact with him.

The kids prove that they are loyal friends when they help get Tommy out of a serious scrape. They even give their bikes up to help pay a gambling debt to a thug who is ready to beat him with a hammer. Things are becoming hopeless. They have no bikes and no money and no place to live. They have reached the nadir of their adventure. Hopefully, the only way to go now is up.

## Chapter Eighteen

The Rat figures out a way for Tommy to make money to pay off his gambling debt. But the inevitable happens. The cops must have spotted the little 10-year-old trying to hustle watches on the street and took her into custody. It is doubtful that she'll be able to use her considered acting skills and quick thinking to get out of this one. Will Bob turn himself in, too? He doesn't have many options since he is out of money and has no transportation. Perhaps the premonition she had about something bad happening had come true. But her dream about her protector among the tall buildings has yet to come true. Maybe it's time this protector emerged. The candidates for this mysterious protector include: Ice, Tommy, Joey, Uncle Jerome or someone yet to appear in the story. Could her real protector even be Bob? He has vowed to never abandon her.

## Discussion Question 1

Why does Ice have empathy for the Rat and Bob?

## Discussion Question 2

Why did the kids give up their bikes for Tommy?



## Discussion Question 3

Why might it be a good thing that the cops found the Rat?

## Vocabulary

paparazzi, sashaying, commotion, silhouette, sophistication, informant, lenient, scumbag, rheumatism



# Chapters 19 - 22

## Summary

### Chapter Nineteen

The next day, Bob, Joey and Tommy discussed what to do about the Rat. Tommy, who was a lawyer, said the cops would call in Social Services which would take her to a children's home. Joey said they'd go get her and take her and Bob back to Canada. Tommy said it wouldn't be easy to take her out of the home. Bob felt the Rat was safe at the police station. She was probably joking around with them and making friends. But he did worry about what would happen if she had a convulsion or if she escaped. He also wondered if he should turn himself in. Tommy told Bob that it wasn't time to worry yet. Rat had her phone with her. Bob was anxiously awaiting word from her.

That afternoon Bob got a text message from the Rat. She was in the Don Children's Home. She told him not to leave her there. Tommy said that the home was in New Jersey and that a lot of immigrant kids were taken there. Joey grabbed a crowbar and told Bob to text her back to tell her that they were on their way. Tommy said he'd go with them. On the way there, the Rat sent another message that "they're pedophiles" and that they had guns. The kids were really hurting. She said to bring Ice. Joey wanted to call the cops in but Tommy said they needed to act quickly. The cops would just slow things down. Tommy told Joey to head to Fifth Avenue to pick up Ice. He was sure he'd come because the kid was in trouble.

Ice had company so he stepped into the hallway to see what Bob and Tommy wanted. Bob told Ice what happened to the Rat and that they needed his help, but Mia stepped in and demanded that Bob and Tommy leave at once. They were trying to drag Ice into some kind of game. Ice was torn but decided not to go with them. Bob was hurt and disappointed.

### Chapter Twenty

It was dark when they approached the home. Tommy told Bob to send the Rat a message that they were there. The gate was locked so they had to climb over it. Joey took the crowbar and a couple of aluminum baseball bats from the trunk just in case. They hid in the bushes as they watched a slim blonde woman emerge from the home and open the gate to allow a car to drive in. They went around to the side of the building and looked through a storage room window. Tommy took the crowbar and jimmied the window open. Bob was petrified.

Joey climbed into the storage room but couldn't get out of the supply room that was locked from outside. Upon hearing voices, Joey climbed back out of the window and hid in the bushes with Bob and Tommy. A man entered the supply room and found the window open. He told another man to do a head count. They heard another car screech



to a stop. It was a Range Rover and suddenly it revved up and rammed the gate. It was Ice! Bob had never been so glad to see anyone.

Ice, armed with a couple of Berettas, rushed the front door and burst in. One of the employees, Ben, yelled to Mr. Joshua, the home's supervisor, that the gate had been rammed. Mr. Joshua ordered Ben to call the police. Bob demanded to see his sister, Marie Claire. The blonde woman assured Bob that she was safe. Bob wondered if the Rat had exaggerated everything. The woman told them that the children were all in bed. She asked them to come back in the morning. Everyone felt a little embarrassed. Ice promised to pay for the broken gate. Mr. Joshua wouldn't call the police as long as they promised to return in the morning and pay for the gate. Bob felt bad as they started to walk toward the door. His sister wasn't a liar and he decided that he had to see her right then. Then Mr. Joshua claimed that she had run away.

Ice cocked his Beretta and demanded to see the Rat at once. He shot up the banister to show that he meant business. The woman was frightened and swore they hadn't hurt her. She had acted up and they had locked her in a closet. Mr. Joshua said she was upstairs and that they could take her. He'd just say that she ran away. Tommy and Bob were allowed to go up the stairs. Tommy went down the hall one way and Bob the other way. Bob opened a door and found several little girls dressed with little suitcases sitting by them on the floor. They looked scared. They said that Marie Claire had told them that Ice was coming to rescue them. He told them that Ice was there and that they should run downstairs. He found more little kids and had them run downstairs, too. Finally, he found the Rat who was behind a locked door. After much effort, Bob used the crowbar to get the door open.

The Rat came bursting out and ran down the hall. They had to save Felicia, she said. Bob had to break the lock on Felicia's door. The Rat went into the dark room and walked out with a frail little black girl. Bob and Tommy escorted the Rat and Felicia down the stairs. Ice was holding his Beretta on Mr. Joshua and the others. The Rat said that Felicia had been hurt by Mr. Joshua. Ice became enraged at the thought of the abuse that was taking place at the home. Tommy, Bob and Joey gathered the kids together and went toward the car. They heard a horrible scream and then gunfire. Bob, the Rat and Felicia were in the car. Tommy told Joey to leave. Ice had gotten shot and went down. Felicia ran back toward the house. Bob had to restrain the Rat from jumping out of the car. He wasn't about to let her go back inside that house.

## Chapter Twenty-One

The Rat was playing with the soccer ball when he woke up the next morning at Joey's. She looked pale and slurred her words. Something was wrong with her but she kept insisting she was fine. Joey showed Bob a newspaper with an article about the incident at the children's home. Ice was shot three times but he lived through it. Tommy fought alongside Ice and got stabbed but he had survived, too. The newspaper article confirmed that there was child abuse taking place at the home. One of the employees was dead and two were seriously injured. The article said the FBI had taken over the case and that they were looking for Marie Claire and Bob DeBillier.



The Rat's mouth was twisted and her speech worsened. Bob carried her inside and laid her on the bed. Bob told her he'd take her to the doctor when she woke up. He recalled how his father had said her condition would eventually deteriorate. Bob prayed that she'd be okay. Joey said that maybe Uncle Jerome could help her. He showed Bob another article in the newspaper. To Bob's great surprise, there was a photo of Uncle Jerome who was referred to as the managing director and major shareholder of North America's third largest pharmaceutical company. The article said that his company, Exocome Pharmaceuticals, was having an important meeting that night. Bob and Joey decided to take the Rat to meet Uncle Jerome.

Bob woke the Rat up later and told her that they had found Uncle Jerome and that they were going to take her to him. The Rat still wasn't able to talk. They drove across the bridge into Manhattan and found the Exocome Pharmaceuticals building. The Rat was in a daze and still non-communicative. Bob took her by the hand and walked toward the building. The security guard said that Jerome was holding a meeting on the top floor but they would not be allowed to go upstairs even if they were related to him. They'd have to call his secretary in the morning. But Joey had a gun and convinced the guard that they needed to see Jerome immediately. With Bob on one side of the Rat and Joey on the other, they proceeded to the elevator. A cop had been called and told them to stop. But Bob pulled the Rat onto the elevator. Joey made a break for it and got shot. He collapsed in the corner of the elevator, his chest bleeding profusely. Although she still couldn't talk, the Rat bent down and hugged Joey.

Bob knew the cops would take Joey to the hospital. He led the Rat out of the elevator and found the board room. The Rat was growing more fatigued. Bob had to practically carry her down the corridor. Although the receptionist and a couple of cops who had rushed to the top floor tried to stop him, Bob, holding the Rat up, burst in on the meeting. Bob told Jerome that his brother John was dead and that they were his nephew and niece. His niece was very sick and needed treatment. Uncle Jerome was stunned but shouted at the cops to leave the kids alone. They belonged to him. The Rat fell on the floor and passed out.

## Chapter Twenty-Two

That was a long time ago. Bob was now 16 and six-feet tall. He lived with his Uncle Jerome who had become his legal guardian. He still missed Winnipeg but loved New York and the private school he attended. Bob had to head to New Jersey. It was snowing and he had a hard time getting a cab. When he passed Central Park he thought back to the time he was homeless and stayed there with his sister. Joey survived the gunshot wound and the cops never brought charges against him. Uncle Jerome had John's body exhumed and gave him a proper burial. The coroner concluded that he had died of a heart attack.

Ice was charged with one count of murder and two counts of attempted murder. The FBI scoured the country for three girls who had gone missing from the Don Children's Home and uncovered a whole network of pedophiles. The FBI made multiple arrests across the entire country. The worst part of the trial for Bob was seeing Ice handcuffed. He





wasn't allowed to be out on bail because he was considered a flight risk. The FBI searched for Mr. Joshua and the other employees. Joshua was found one day with a bullet in the back of his head. Tommy, who reunited with his ex-wife and daughters, was a star witness for the defense. Joey also had his turn on the witness stand.

The night before Bob was to testify, he was feeling extremely nervous. He was gratified when the phone rang and he heard Gabriela's voice. She encouraged him to be brave and to remember that she'd be watching him on TV. Bob was bolstered by a steady stream of support from his friends in Winnipeg. Bob testified that Ice was defending himself when the woman at the home tried to stab him. Bob was on the stand the entire morning.

After the lunch break, the judge announced that the defendant was taking a plea deal. The judge thanked and excused the jury. He recommended that the Don Children's Home be closed. He praised Ice for defending children but added that he had gone too far by taking the law into his own hands. Ice got six years in a minimum security facility and would be eligible for parole in three years. Tommy and his family moved to Sicily where they ran a successful olive oil business. Bob visited Ice frequently. He appeared to have adjusted well to prison life.

The cab pulled onto the grounds of St. Vincent's Psychiatric Hospital. The nurse reminded Bob to not be too long because Mr. DeBillier was coming that evening. The Rat was sitting on a nearby bench. He had to coax her to stand up to go for a walk. Bob filled her in on school and his writing and drama classes. But the Rat didn't talk – she hadn't been able to talk since the night she collapsed. Uncle Jerome had her examined by top specialists but there was never any definitive conclusion. One doctor told Bob that she had separated herself from reality and found her own little world. Bob held onto the hope that someday she would recover. Uncle Jerome came to see her often and always read stories to her that had happy endings. On their walk, Bob told her news from Winnipeg and how everyone always asked about her.

Bob recalled a song his father used to sing to them about unhooking the moon. He told her that he would do everything to get her back – he'd even unhook the moon.

## Analysis

### Chapter Nineteen

After discussing the situation, Bob, Tommy and Joey all decide to rescue the Rat from the children's home. Bob was particularly alarmed when she texted that the place was run by pedophiles. With her obsession with "pedophiles" he had to wonder if she meant the word in a literal way. The incident does present the opportunity to bring Ice back into the their lives. His girlfriend Mia presents an obstacle in his doing what he thinks is right. He wants to help the Rat but Mia is vehemently against it and he temporarily goes along with her. Bob is bitterly disappointed and hurt that Ice, the man he and his sister thought was an angel, is going to abandon her in her time of need.





## Chapter Twenty

Although Bob does have doubts about the veracity of the Rat's claim, in the end he believed her. She is a lot of things but she isn't a liar. Ice comes through for the Rat and the other kids at the children's home. He was enraged when he realized that the adults there were hurting the children. He probably related to them because of the struggles he faced in his childhood. His violent reaction stemmed from the abusive situation that the Rat and the other children were in coupled with repressed anger and sadness from his own painful past.

Although the two little children from Canada were homeless and had nothing to give but their friendship, they were able to establish close friendships with the unlikeliest trio of men: Joey, a cigar dealer from the Bronx; Tommy the Hustler, a disbarred attorney; and Ice, a famous and wealthy rap star. But who was the protector who lived among the tall buildings that Rat had dreamed about? Perhaps it was all three men or even Bob, who vowed to never abandon her. The Rat's brother and all three men wound up risking their lives to rescue her.

## Chapter Twenty-One

Bob had sensed it all along. The Rat's luck ran out and whatever demon was preying on her finally won. The once vibrant, bright and aggressive young girl could no longer talk. He recalled his father warning him that someday her condition would deteriorate. Bob had tried to ignore it in hopes that it would go away but he knew deep down that it would eventually catch up with them.

Ironically, the famous "drug dealer" Uncle Jerome was actually the wealthy head of a huge pharmaceutical company – a drug dealer of sorts. Joey just happened to see his photo in the newspaper and the timing could not have been more perfect. Many of the people in the kids' search for their uncle thought they heard of him or had seen him. All the butcher kept saying he was the man on TV and he probably was.

But Bob didn't know how Uncle Jerome would react to them. He was a big important executive and he could easily reject them. He really didn't even know them. But the Rat was in such bad shape that Bob had no choice other than trying to appeal to him for help.

## Chapter Twenty-Two

Uncle Jerome came into the Rat's life in her hour of need. Although he had lost contact with his brother and didn't even know his niece and nephew, family ties were obviously important to him. He became their legal guardian and saw that the Rat had the best possible care and diagnoses. The incident at the children's home exposed a national network of child abuse and pedophiles. In that sense, it was fortunate for the many abused children who suffered at the hands of these criminals that the Rat wound up there and that her brother and friends had rescued her.



The incident led to good things for Tommy and for Joey. It was Ice who suffered the most. But ironically, Bob felt that Ice was happier in jail than he had been in his life as a celebrity and rapper. He had said that material things didn't have any meaning for him. He considered his lifestyle shallow and without substance. Even though he received a light prison sentence, perhaps he felt he had finally did something that had good and long-lasting results for the Rat and the other children that were saved that night.

Bob's life changed, too. He was in a private school and would be going to a great college. He had the support and encouragement of Uncle Jerome. Sadly, the Rat did not recover from her last episode, but Bob held out the hope that his bold and bossy little sister would come back. Like he told her, he would never abandon her and he would even unhook the moon if it would bring her back.

## **Discussion Question 1**

What good resulted from the Rat being placed in the children's home?

## **Discussion Question 2**

Who was the protector in the tall buildings that the Rat had dreamed about?

## **Discussion Question 3**

What did Bob mean when he said he would "unhook the moon" for his sister?

## **Vocabulary**

solitaire, revved, flustered, turnpike, spacious, cavalry, nimble, stealth, mesmerized, shamefaced, dawdle, pleadingly, seething, horrific, footage, scavenging, vengeance, cower, diligence, ecstatic, coax, hibernating



# Characters

## Bob DeBillier

Bob DeBillier is 16-years-old and lives in Manhattan where he attends an exclusive private school. He thinks back to when he was 12 and lived in Winnipeg with his father and sister.

Bob was a sensitive and gentle-natured young boy who liked reading, writing and poetry. He lost his mother when he was very young and at times felt lost and abandoned by her absence. His sister was 10-years-old and was the family dynamo. Marie Claire, who was known as the Rat, was the domineering force between the two siblings. Bob was passive and had a healthy enough ego to generally let the Rat have her way.

Bob's life was thrown into utter chaos when he found his father dead on the kitchen floor after he and the Rat returned home after the last day of the school year. At the Rat's insistence, they buried their father themselves with the help of a few family friends. An old friend of the family told them that they had an Uncle Jerome who lived in New York City. The Rat was convinced that a great protector who lived among tall buildings - which she had recurring dreams about - had to be Uncle Jerome and that she and Bob must runaway to New York to find him.

Bob and the Rat found their way to New York City to begin their search. Bob was passive and didn't necessarily buy into the Rat's dream, although she was known to have eerily accurate premonitions. Bob and the Rat had quite an adventure and made friends with the unlikeliest of New Yorkers. Bob had always kept a watchful eye on his little sister who suffers from recurring convulsions of an unknown origin. Bob was able to locate Uncle Jerome and bring his ailing sister to him just in the nick of them.

## Marie Claire DeBillier

Marie Claire DeBillier was the 10-year-old sister of Bob DeBillier, the story's protagonist. Since she was born on a Native reservation, she was also given the Native name, Wazhushk which means muskrat or Little Rat. The Native name stuck and most people called her the Rat. She was a bright and charismatic little girl who could, given the circumstance, charm or intimidate. She was the dominant sibling in her close relationship with Bob who was passive and gentle.

The Rat had a natural instinct to fight against injustice and abuse. She had a near obsession about pedophiles and would accuse people of being pedophiles at the drop of a hat. She equated demons with pedophiles and sought out angels who could defeat both.



After the untimely death of their father, the Rat's life and that of her brother changed forever. She insisted that they bury their father in the garden and not alert the authorities who would separate them and place them in foster care. She had dreams about a protector awaiting her among tall buildings. When a family friend told her that their Uncle Jerome lived in New York City, the Rat was sure that he was the protector of her dreams. She convinced Bob to run away with her to New York to find Uncle Jerome.

They had quite an adventure wrought with danger, excitement and a myriad of off-beat and unusual characters. The Rat suffered her entire life from convulsions that stem from an unknown and undiagnosed origin. In the end, her condition worsened and Bob was able to find Uncle Jerome when the Rat needed him the most.

## **John DeBillier**

John DeBillier was father of Bob and Marie Claire. He suffered from alcoholism and was not in good health. His only income was from a government farm subsidy. He loved his children and did as much as he could for them with his limited resources.

## **Harold**

Harold was the Rat's boyfriend. He had had numerous operations on his legs and walked with crutches. He helped Bob and Marie Claire find an empty box car on a freight train heading east.

## **Gabriela**

Gabriela was a student teacher from Puerto Rico. She and Bob became good friends during their time at school together. He had a huge crush on her even though she was six years older than him.

## **Joey**

The Rat and Bob met Joey on the side of the road on their way to New York. He gave them a ride the city and proved to be a great friend to them. He understood what they were going through because he had been orphaned as a youngster just like they were.

## **Tommy the Hustler**

Tommy the Hustler was a conman who hustled visitors to Times Square out of their money. He made up a tale of woe about his pregnant wife who needed medical help. He was a disbarred attorney who hung with the wrong crowd and served a stint in prison. However, he proved to be a true and loyal friend to the homeless kids.



## Ice

Ice was a famous and wealthy celebrity. He was the Rat's favorite rapper, whom the Rat and Bob encountered in Manhattan one day. Although Ice at first had no interest in them, he felt great empathy for the youngsters because he had been a homeless kid himself. He came to the rescue when the Rat was in real trouble.

## Mia

Mia was Ice's live-in girlfriend. She was a snob and was caught up in the high lifestyle. She was enraged when Ice brought home the two homeless little white kids. She feared that it could turn into a scandal that would ruin his career.

## Uncle Jerome

After their father died, Bob and the Rat ran away to New York to find Uncle Jerome whom they had never met. They were told that he was a drug dealer, but it turns out that he was actually the head of a large and profitable pharmaceutical company. They found him in the nick of time just when the Rat was in her hour of need.



# Symbols and Symbolism

## Premonitions

The Rat had dreams and premonitions about future events. She had predicted that the family dog would run away and that her father would die soon. Her premonitions proved to be right in both cases.

## The School Play

The Rat was an aspiring actress. She was thrilled when the drama teacher selected her to play the lead in “Romeo and Juliet” in the play at the end of the school year.

## BMX Bikes

Bob and the Rat left home on their BMX bikes with only a few personal items in the backpacks. In New York City, they gave their bikes away to a thug in order to get their friend out of a bad scrape.

## Skyscrapers

The Rat had a recurring dream about a great protector who would defend her among tall buildings. She was sure that her dream was an omen and a sign that she and Bob should run away to New York City.

## Garden Graves

Bob and the Rat lost their mother at a young age. Her ashes were buried in the garden in the back of their house. When their father died, they buried him in the garden beside his wife.

## Armani Dress

The Rat had one good dress that she saved for special occasions. She wore it on the day she was starring in the school play and she wore it when she stayed at the Ice’s penthouse.

## Angels

The Rat thought that angels were everywhere. She thought that Ice was an angel and that the Sikh cab driver they had was an angel, too. Angels were stronger than demons.



## Windigo

If a person was possessed by a demon, they become a Windigo or a pedophile and all he wanted to do was hurt people.

## The Emerald City

The Rat felt that New York City was the Emerald City - an allusion to a wish that she was where her dreams would come true and where she would find her protector among the tall buildings and allusion to the wizard behind the curtain.

## Ground Zero

After arriving in New York City, the Rat insisted on visiting Ground Zero first. She said a prayer there and recalled how saddened her father was by the tragedy. She said there were angels at Ground Zero.





# Settings

## Winnipeg

Bob and Marie Claire were born and raised in Winnipeg. They lived in the rugged outskirts of Winnipeg with their widowed father. Their mother died when they were very young.

## New York City

The kids escaped to New York City after their father died. They were in search of Uncle Jerome, their only living relative. Although they had never met him, they had hopes that he could take them in and give them a home.

## Central Park

When the kids were unable to get a room, they had no choice but to stay in Central Park. They stayed there for several nights despite having to face the elements as well as the dangers that lurk in the park.

## Times Square

Bob and the Rat met Tommy the Hustler in Times Square. It was later when they help Tommy sell watches on the square that the cops spotted the Rat and took her into custody.

## Don Children's Home

After the Rat was taken into custody, the cops placed her in the Don Children's Home. The home was a cover for a network of child abusers and pedophiles, and it was exposed when Bob and their friends rescued the Rat from the horrific place.



# Themes and Motifs

## Abandonment

One of the main themes in “Unhooking the Moon” by Gregory Hughes is abandonment. This theme threads its way in and out of the story and touches many of its characters. For one, Bob and Marie Claire lost their mother when they were very young. Although she died and didn’t intentionally leave them, they still felt the profound emptiness of not having her. On his last day of school, Bob watched as mothers of his fellow students came to school to join in the festivities. He silently fantasized how it would feel if he had a mother to attend his school functions.

John is Bob and Marie Claire’s father. He was a loving father and did as much as he could for his children although he was limited by resources and physical ability. He was weak and frail and suffered from alcoholism. Although he tried to hide it, he was depressed over the loss of his wife. He never recovered from her unexpected death, and his angst over it is what drove him to drink. But those are adult problems that young children do not readily grasp. To Bob and Marie Claire, their father had abandoned them on another level than just the physical. He gave them money to go to town to treat themselves, but they probably would have preferred that he accompany them.

Ice was a famous rapper, but his material wealth was meaningless to him. He would have given it all up if he could have had more time with his mother who died of cancer when he was just fourteen. He lived on the mean streets after her death. He felt lost and alone, abandoned by a mother who didn’t have the choice of staying with him.

Initially, Joey didn’t want to get involved with Bob and Marie Claire. Picking up two young kids on their own could have spelled trouble for him. But he had been orphaned as a child, too. He was fortunate that someone cared enough to take him in. Therefore, he felt compelled to help them.

Tommy the Hustler had been an attorney who, by his own admission, got involved with a bad element. He was convicted of jury tampering and served time in prison. His wife divorced him and his daughters wouldn’t have anything to do with him. While the case could be made that his family abandoned him, the case could also be made that through his criminal behavior he had abandoned them as a dependable and dedicated husband and father.

Tales of abandonment are plentiful in this story. The abandonment a child feels is difficult to overcome and often stays with him well into adulthood.

## Child Abuse

Marie Claire, or the Rat as she was generally referred to, had a near obsession with pedophiles. Her father had warned her about them – in fact he told her to be on the



lookout for them. She took his message to heart and knew that to be deemed a pedophile was devastating. After a neighbor beat her father up over a money dispute in a poker game, the Rat made it a point to seek him out and warn him that if he ever touched her father again, she would call the cops and tell them that he was a pedophile. It frightened the man enough that he packed up and left town.

The Rat had a theory about pedophiles, demons and angels. When people had demons inside, they become either Windigos or pedophiles whose only purpose was to hurt people. Just like angels, Windigos – a Native language term – weren't always visible. Pedophiles could be spotted by their tendency to hiss when they talked and to be nice especially to kids. She also believed that if a person had both a demon and angel within, that the angel would win the battle for the soul.

The Rat's preoccupation with pedophilia was abnormal for a 10-year-old. Most children her age don't use the word or know what it means but the Rat seemed to be on a crusade against them. She was very close to her father who was an alcoholic and driven by his own demons. She may have thought of her father as having both an angel and demon within. He was sad and depressed ostensibly over losing his wife in an accident years before. There is just a hint that there may have been an unnatural relationship between the Rat and her father. When he died, she didn't cry or grieve. She said he wasn't happy in this life and would now be with her mother.

Ironically, after she is taken into custody by the police the Rat is placed in a children's home that turns out to be part of a network of pedophiles. She is rescued from the horrific people. Her rescue leads to the exposure of a national organization that preyed on children. All her life the Rat suffered from spells that eluded diagnosis. After a severe spell at the story's end, she becomes nearly catatonic. Bob's father had always warned him that her condition would deteriorate. Even the top specialists in the world were unable to discover the cause of her debilitating disease. But one doctor told Bob that she had isolated herself and found her own special world which points to a psychological reason for her problem. Perhaps repressed pain and anger caught up with her and made her decide she didn't want to be face the ugliness of the real world.

## Loyalty

Loyalty is a strong and recurring theme in "Unhooking the Moon" by Gregory Hughes. Bob and the Rat were loyal to their father despite his many shortcomings. He was an alcoholic who was limited in the attention he gave them and in what he could provide for them. But they are loyal to him to the end. Bob and the Rat shared a close relationship that passed the test of many stresses and strains that they encountered on their trek to find their Uncle Jerome. Although Bob was the elder of the two, his younger sister was the dominant sibling. But Bob had a healthy ego that allowed him to let the Rat have her way. When she had her moments of doubt, he always told her that he would never abandon her and always be there for her.



After their father died, the children headed for New York to find their only living relative. Both their parents were dead but the kids remained loyal to their memory. When Ice intimated that good parents wouldn't let them be homeless and alone in New York City, gentle Bob seethed in anger and stuck out at him. The kids had close friendships with members of the Native population in Winnipeg who supported them when their father passed away.

The kids met a variety of off-beat characters in their travels to find Uncle Jerome. Joey gave them a ride to New York and was taken in by the natural charm of the Rat; Joey felt for the homeless kids because he had been orphaned as a youngster. Joey helped the kids find their uncle even though it placed him at great risk. Ice, the famous rapper, had also been a homeless kid before he found fame and fortune. He felt that the Rat and Bob were true friends because, unlike his other "friends", they didn't want to use or exploit their relationship with him. He came to the Rat's rescue when she was in grave danger, although he became severely wounded and wound up being charged with murder.

Bob finally found out who Uncle Jerome was and it was just when Bob needed him the most. The Rat, who had suffered from mysterious convulsions all her life, had become gravely ill and needed medical attention. Bob worried that Uncle Jerome, a wealthy businessman, might reject them since he didn't even know the kids. However, when Jerome realized that they were his brother's children, the loyalty that stems from family ties took over and he assumed full responsibility for them.



# Styles

## Point of View

“Unhooking the Moon” by Gregory Hughes is a work of fiction and is written in the first person from the perspective of the protagonist, Bob DeBillier. The story begins when Bob is sixteen and in New York. He recalls three years before when he lived in Winnipeg with his father, John, and his younger sister, Marie Claire, who everyone called the Rat. Bob is a sensitive person who likes writing and poetry. His sensitivity is particularly sparked over his concern for his sister. She is the polar opposite of Bob. She is bold and aggressive and bossy to Bob’s reticent and passive personality.

Although they are very different, the siblings have a close relationship. Their strong relationship is the heart of the story. Although he does not vocalize his love for his sister because no 12-year old boy would do so, the reader is privy to his deep concern for her. He fears her aggressiveness and sassy mouth will get her in trouble and he always keeps a watchful eye on her. Worse than her boldness and fresh retorts to others, Bob is troubled by a mysterious physical condition she suffers with. The Rat has frequent convulsions that have eluded diagnosis. Bob is frightened when his sister writhes from the tremors and is always relieved when they are over.

Bob loves his father but misses having a mother. He looks around school on the last day of the school year and wishes that his mother was there for him like his friends’ mothers are. He feels abandoned and lost sometimes. He often has to be the adult in the family because his father is an alcoholic and not in good health. He also has the burden of trying to wield in his sister. He never knows what she may say or do.

By telling the story of Bob and his little sister from his point of view, the reader has an in-depth understanding of the burdens of a young man who unwittingly must take on adult-sized problems. The reader emphasizes with Bob when he discovers his father’s dead body on the kitchen floor and when he runs away with his domineering little sister who insists that their future is in New York City. His passivity and lack of confidence make him appear as a follower or like a leaf in a stream with no direction. However, he has an inner strength that emerges when he needs to take the lead.

## Language and Meaning

“Unhooking the Moon” by Gregory Hughes is the story of 12-year-old Bob DeBillier and his 10-year-old sister Marie Claire. The brother and sister lived outside Winnipeg in a rugged rural area. They had a boat named the Marlin that they had to take in order to attend school in town. The DeBillier family was of French descent. The clever Marie Claire, whose nickname is the Rat, could speak several different languages including French, English and the Native language.



In the part of the story that takes place in Winnipeg, there is a strong influence of the Native culture. The youngsters were good friends with Chief, White Cloud, Little Joe and Running Elk. When their father was buried, the Chief presides over the burial, speaking the Native language and leading a chant for his journey to the afterlife. The root of Marie Claire's nickname stems from the Native culture. She was born at the home of a Native friend of her mother's on a reservation. She was named Marie Claire by her mother and given the Native name of Wazhushk which meant muskrat or Little Rat.

When Bob and the Rat arrived in New York City they were encountered with a completely different culture. Joey, who gave them a ride into the city, was an Italian from the Bronx. He shortened her name to MC. The Rat is good at mimicking accents so he taught her how to talk like an Italian New Yorker. He stresses that "sure" should be pronounced as "shewa" and "what" as "whaaa". The youngsters encounter another colorful figure when they met up with Tommy the Hustler. He hustles visitors to Times Square with a phony story about his pregnant wife who was ailing and needed medical care. The Rat loved to act and was soon at his side telling people whoppers and out-conning the conman.

The Rat referred to New York City as the "Emerald City" a metaphor for escapism and promise. Her dream was to find her protector who lived among tall buildings – an obvious reference to the skyscrapers of New York City. "Unhooking the Moon", the title of the book, stands for just how far Bob would go to keep his sister safe and close to him – he would unhook the moon for her.

## Structure

"Unhooking the Moon" by Gregory Hughes is separated into 22 medium-sized chapters. The story begins when the protagonist Bob DeBillier is 16-years old and living in New York City. The heart of the story is told in flashback format beginning four years before when he was 12 and his sister, the Rat, was 10-years old.

The story begins in Winnipeg when Bob and his sister were living with their widowed father. This part of the story establishes the close relationship that the children had with their father, John, and the close relationship that they shared with one another. Absent the strong ties between the youngsters, the story could not have unfolded as it did. When their father died, they were basically orphans. The more dominant sibling, the Rat, convinced Bob to run away with her to find their only living relative who lived in New York City.

The relationship between the children is an integral part of the story's structure. While the Rat is portrayed as the stronger of the two, it is the gentle and passive Bob who was able to balance her unpredictable behavior. Although he usually let the Rat have her way, he always kept a watchful eye on her. She had a physical condition that was worsening and her bold and aggressive personality always placed her on the precipice of danger.



The story ends with a return to the present day. Most of the loose ends are explained in the final chapter although there are a few issues that were not fully addressed. Will the Rat ever recover from her mysterious catatonic condition? What caused her condition in the first place? Is Uncle Jerome the biological father of one or both of the kids? These questions hint that a sequel may be in the offing.



## Quotes

If you ever have trouble believing in heaven, kids, just look at the stars and you'll see it for yourself.

-- Bob's father (Chapter 1 paragraph Page 9, paragraph 3)

**Importance:** Bob's alcoholic father was frail and not in good health when he gave Bob and the Rat this advice.

I never knew what caused his sadness and he never talked about it. All I knew was that something pained him and he drank to drown the pain.

-- Bob (Chapter 2 paragraph Page 27, paragraph 6)

**Importance:** Bob expressed his anguish over his father's depression and alcoholism.

There's a man, and he's surrounded by tall buildings. He tells me he's going to look after me and he keeps me somewhere safe, like a castle, and he reads to me all the time.

-- The Rat (Chapter 4 paragraph Page 55, paragraph 5)

**Importance:** The Rat tells White Cloud about her dream which is what compelled her to run away to New York to look for her protector among the tall buildings.

I loved Dad and I'll miss him a lot. But he was never happy, not really. He wanted to be with Mom and now he is.

-- The Rat (Chapter 5 paragraph Page 77, paragraph 4)

**Importance:** The Rat gave her explanation why she wasn't sobbing and moaning over her father's death.

We're going to New York City to see our grandma. And Uncle Joey's talking us... We're going to see the Empire State Building and the Statue of Liberty and everything. And our granny's taking us on a ferry ride around Manhattan! And she's going to bake us her very own apple pie so we don't get hungry.

-- The Rat (Chapter 8 paragraph Page 108, paragraph 6)

**Importance:** This quote is an example of the Rat's ability to think on her feet and make up things in an instant and use her acting skills to be convincing. In this example, she was explaining why she and Bob were crossing over from Canada to New York.

I could see the words on my gravestone: Here lies Bob DeBillier who made the mistake of following his crazy little sister. But I followed her anyway.

-- Bob (Chapter 11 paragraph Page 158, paragraph 7)

**Importance:** This quote captures Bob's doubts about running away from home and his tendency to give into his little sister's wishes.





There should be fat angels and old angels and angels that aren't very good-looking. Otherwise people will think you have to be beautiful to be an angel, and you don't. You only have to be good.

-- The Rat (Chapter 13 paragraph Page 176, paragraph 8)

**Importance:** The Rat made a revealing comment about herself. She saw herself as good on the inside even though she was not beautiful on the outside.

Look, there's no such thing as a crazy kid. You have to wait until you're older before you can go crazy.

-- Bob (Chapter 13 paragraph Page 184, paragraph 5)

**Importance:** Bob was reassuring the Rat of her sanity after she had experienced a mild convulsion.

Hold fast to dreams, for if dreams die, life is a broke-winged bird that cannot fly.

-- Bob (Chapter 14 paragraph Page 196, paragraph 2)

**Importance:** When Ice mentioned the poetry of Langston Hughes, Bob recited a line from one of his poems.

The Rat: "Tell them we're your godchildren because that's what you're like, Ice. You're like our fairy godfather." Ice: "Sounds good, but let's drop the fairy part.

-- The Rat and Ice (Chapter 15 paragraph Page 210, paragraph 1)

**Importance:** Ice had rescued Bob and the Rat. He wanted to protect them but he was still keeping them at arms' length.

Youth, they know nothing but act like they know everything. But not you, Bob. You are wise beyond your years.

-- Tommy (Chapter 19 paragraph Page 272, paragraph 2)

**Importance:** Tommy was acknowledging Bob's maturity. Tommy and Joey, who is much younger than Tommy, often found themselves on the opposite ends of matters.

I knew then that the thing that had plagued her all these years had finally come for her.

-- Bob (Chapter 21 paragraph Page 303, paragraph 12)

**Importance:** Bob sensed that the Rat's physical condition had worsened and had become very serious.