

Fools Crow



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF JAMES WELCH

Welch was born to James Phillip Welch, Sr. of the Blackfeet tribe and Rosella Marie O'Bryan of the Gros Ventre People. Both his parents were also of Irish ancestry but grew up in tribal life. Welch lived his early childhood years on reservations and attended elementary school on the Blackfeet and Fort Belknap reservations. He later moved to Minneapolis, Minnesota, and graduated from Washburn High School in 1958. Welch attended the University of Montana, where he began to write poetry, and earned a B.A. in liberal arts in 1965. After college, he worked a series of odd jobs, including a short stint as a firefighter for the United States Forest Service, before turning to writing fulltime. In 1968, Welch married Lois Monk, a professor of comparative literature and head of the English department at the University of Montana, and they remained together until his death in 2003. Welch wrote mainly poetry in his early career, publishing his first and only collection of poems, *Riding the Earthboy* 40, in 1971. *Winter in the Blood*, Welch's first novel, was published to critical acclaim in 1974, and this success was continued with the 1986 publication of *Fools Crow*. Winning the American Book Award, Los Angeles Times Book Prize, and the Pacific Northwest Book Award, *Fools Crow* is widely accepted as Welch's greatest work. He was later awarded Honorary Doctorates from Rocky Mountain College in 1993 and the University of Montana in 1997. That same year Welch was presented with a lifetime achievement award by the Native Writers' Circle of the Americas. He died in Missoula, Montana, at the age of 62 from a heart attack, leaving behind a rich legacy of Native American literature.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

At the climax of *Fools Crow*, Welch writes about the historic Marias Massacre, also known as the Piegan Massacre or Baker Massacre, in which nearly two hundred Blackfeet Indians were slaughtered by the United States military. In the early morning hours of January 23, 1870, Major Eugene M. Baker led 150 soldiers and three scouts in an attack against Chief Heavy Runner's camp in an effort to defeat Mountain Chief and his unruly band member, Owl Child, who'd killed a white rancher named Malcolm Clark. Of course, just as in Welch's novel, neither Mountain Chief nor Owl Child were part of Heavy Runner's camp, and instead, the army opened fire on approximately two hundred and thirty sleeping elderly men, women, and children. Despite public outcry, there was never an official investigation into the massacre, and General Baker, widely known as an alcoholic who tried to cover up the severity

of the slaughter, did not suffer any consequences. He was later promoted to command Fort Ellis; after being arrested in 1872 for heavy drinking, Baker was demoted to purchasing horses for the army troops. The massacre did prompt President Ulysses S. Grant's "Peace Policy," however, and the tension between the Blackfeet Indians and the United States government lessened.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

James Welch is generally considered to be one of the writers who prompted the Native American Renaissance, a term created in 1983 by critic Kenneth Lincoln to describe the prolific outpouring of Native American literature beginning in the 1960s. *Fools Crow* is a prime example of this work. The Native American Renaissance, which seeks to reclaim native heritage and voice through literature, brought about a renewed interest in tribal life and history. Other notable works of the Native American Renaissance include the 1969 winner of the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn*, and *Darkness in Saint Louis Bearheart* by Gerald Vizenor. An Anishinaabe scholar and critic, Vizenor also coined the Postindian theory of *Suivance*, a concept that explores native presence and absence, in his 1999 book *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Suivance*. These earlier works by Welch and others paved the way for a continued native presence within literature, including *The Round House* by Louise Erdrich, winner of the 2012 National Book Award for Fiction, and Erica T. Wurth's *Crazy Horse's Girlfriend*. Welch was also greatly inspired by Richard Hugo, a famed American poet under whom Welch studied at the University of Montana. Like Welch, Hugo was a regionalist and his work is set primarily in the state of Montana. Hugo, like Welch, pays close attention to the natural world within his poetry.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Fools Crow*
- **When Written:** 1980s
- **Where Written:** Montana
- **When Published:** 1986
- **Literary Period:** Native American Renaissance, contemporary
- **Genre:** Contemporary American Fiction
- **Setting:** The Montana Territory, 1870
- **Climax:** The Marias Massacre, in which nearly 200 innocent Pikuni Indians are slaughtered by the blue-coat seizers in retaliation for Owl Child's murder of rancher Malcolm Clark
- **Antagonist:** Fast Horse

- **Point of View:** Third-person omniscient

EXTRA CREDIT

On parole. For over ten years, Welch sat on the Montana Board of Pardons and Parole and served as the Vice Chairman of the committee.

Self doubt. James Welch described his career as “lucky” and believed that his success was more indicative of “being in the right place at the right time” than talent.



PLOT SUMMARY

White Man’s Dog is an “unlucky” and “weak” member of the Lone Eaters’ band of Blackfeet Indians. Wealthy and successful warriors, such as White Man’s Dog’s father, Rides-at-the-door, have many horses and wives, but White Man’s Dog has only three scrawny horses and no wives. He also lacks the strong medicine of the other warriors and his spirit animal refuses to talk to him.

White Man’s Dog is soon invited by Fast Horse, a fellow young Pikuni, to join a horse raid on the Crow camp organized by Yellow Kidney, an accomplished warrior and horse-taker. Fast Horse’s father, Boss Ribs, possesses the coveted **Beaver Medicine bundle**, the most powerful of all the Pikunis’ medicine, and Yellow Kidney believes that the bundle will bring them all luck. Both White Man’s Dog and Fast Horse are plagued by disturbing dreams and visions in the lead up to the raid, however, and while White Man’s Dog proves himself a brave and powerful warrior during the event, it goes catastrophically wrong. The greedy and “reckless” Fast Horse boasts loudly during the raid, giving away the Lone Eaters’ location. Yellow Kidney is subsequently captured and tortured by the Crows, who cut off his fingers.

In Yellow Kidney’s absence, White Man’s Dog begins to hunt blackhorns for the older man’s family and soon falls in love with his daughter, Red Paint. White Man’s Dog also unwittingly becomes an apprentice to Mik-api, the Lone Eaters’ many-faces man, and learns the magic of healing and purification. Mik-api leads White Man’s Dog to Skunk Bear, his elusive spirit animal, who gifts White Man’s Dog the power of the wolverine in the form of a battle song.

White Man’s Dog quickly becomes a respected member of the tribe, while Yellow Kidney, who has finally made it home to his family, lives the remainder of his life in shame. Having married Red Paint and thus become Yellow Kidney’s son-in-law, White Man’s Dog joins a raiding party that advances on the Crows to avenge Yellow Kidney’s attack. He is selected to kill Bull Shield, the Crow who tortured Yellow Kidney. As he moves in for the kill, however, he is shot by Bull Shield and loses his balance, falling to the ground. Bull Shield is momentarily distracted by

Fox Eyes, another advancing Pikuni warrior, and shoots and kills him, giving White Man’s Dog time to recover. White Man’s Dog then shoots Bull Shield and takes his scalp, but the other Pikunis’ believe that he had been playing dead all along to fool Bull Shield; they thus grant him the new name of Fools Crow. Of course, Fools Crow was not pretending—he really had been knocked to the ground—and feels his new name is a lie.

As Fools Crow, now revered by his people, takes part in more raids, he grows disillusioned with war; he regrets taking lives and doubts that the benefits of war outweigh the risks. This feeling only becomes stronger when Red Paint tells him that she is expecting a son.

Fools Crow’s life is further complicated by the increasing presence of Napikwans on Pikuni lands and the violence of the blue-coat seizers. The already strained relationship between the Blackfeet Indians and the United States government is worsened by the violent acts of a few rogue Pikuni outcasts, and after Owl Child, a feared and hated member of the Many Chief’s band, robs and kills a respected rancher named Malcolm Clark, the government and the seizers vow to make the other Pikunis pay.

With the Pikunis’ traditional way of life threatened, Fools Crow embarks on a vision quest to discover how to save his people and their way of life. Guided in his quest by Skunk Bear, Fools Crow finds himself in the magical presence of Feather Woman, the mortal Pikuni wife of Morning Star, the son of Sun Chief and Night Red Light. Feather Woman begins to paint on a yellow hide, on which a series of visions begin to form that foretell the end of the Pikuni way of life.

In the hide, Fools Crow sees the devastation of his camp as his people succumb to an outbreak of white-scabs disease; he sees the blue-coat seizers mobilize in the direction of Pikuni lands; he sees the blackhorn driven from his land, along with the other large game; and he sees the forced assimilation of the Blackfeet people and the future boarding schools that litter the Montana Territory. By the end of his vision quest, Fools Crow mourns the loss of his culture on behalf of future Pikunis. However, Feather Woman reminds him of the power of storytelling in preserving his traditional way of life.

The white-scabs disease does indeed break out in the Lone Eaters’ camp, killing nearly half of their people. Soon after, while hunting for much needed food, Fools Crow comes across the grisly remains of another Pikuni camp, in which men, women, and children had been brutally massacred by the seizers.

Eventually Fools Crow, Red Paint, and the surviving members of the Lone Eaters’ band make their way north toward the Canadian border to continue living their way of life to the best of their abilities for as long as possible. As they do, outlying Pikuni bands likewise try to move on after the decimation of disease and the violence of the United States government

threatens their way of life. All around, animals big and small carry on as well—just as the Pikunis do.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

White Man's Dog/Fools Crow – A young Pikuni of the Lone Eaters' band and the protagonist of *Fools Crow*. He is also the son of Rides-at-the-door and Double Strike Woman, the brother of Running Fisher, and eventual husband to Red Paint. Fools Crow is first introduced as White Man's Dog, an "unlucky" and awkward youth on the cusp of manhood. He proves himself during Yellow Kidney's horse raid on the enemy Crows, and soon grows into a respected and wealthy member of the tribe. White Man's Dog serves as Mik-api's apprentice and learns the magic of the many-faces man, later successfully employing his healing magic when Red Paint's brother, One Spot, is mauled by a rabid wolf. He assists Mik-api in other acts of healing as well, including when the white-scabs disease devastates their camp. White Man's Dog is renamed Fools Crow at a naming ceremony after he tricks Bull Shield by pretending to be dead before killing him, but Fools Crow knows that his new name is a lie: he'd never intended to trick Bull Shield (he'd simply lost his balance after being shot). As a warrior, Fools Crow grows disillusioned with the violence of war, and he feels that the risks—Yellow Kidney's capture and torture, his own killing of a young night-rider, and the death of Fox Eyes—outweigh any benefits of war. Fools Crow is also troubled by the invading Napikwans and the growing hostility of the blue-coat seizers, and after Red Paint becomes pregnant with their son, Sleep-bringer, Fools Crow completely loses his taste for war. Instead of fighting, he embarks on a vision quest to discover how to best save his people from the invading Napikwans, and with the help of his spirit animal, Skunk Bear, Fools Crow finds himself in the magical world of Feather Woman, who paints upon a mysterious yellow hide. In this yellow hide, Fools Crow sees the devastation of the Pikuni people; their slaughter at the hands of the seizers, their decimation by the white-scabs disease, and their subsequent assimilation into white, European culture. Feather Woman reminds Fools Crow of the power of storytelling in the preservation of Pikuni culture. By the end of the novel, Fools Crow and his family move north, away from the seizers and disease, determined to live their way of life to the best of their abilities.

Fast Horse – A young Pikuni warrior of the Lone Eaters' band and the antagonist of *Fools Crow*. He is the son of Boss Ribs and a member of Owl Child's gang of outcasts. Fast Horse serves as a foil to Fools Crow, and in addition to their obvious physical differences (Fast Horse is taller and more muscular), Fast Horse is reckless and greedy where Fools Crow is retrained and kind. Fast Horse's father possesses the powerful **Beaver**

Medicine bundle, and because of this, Yellow Kidney invites Fast Horse on the horse raid of the Crows. Fast Horse behaves badly during raid—he ignores a foreboding dream, scorns Cold Maker, and boasts loudly in the center of the Crows' camp, alerting them to their presence and leading to Yellow Kidney's subsequent capture. Yellow Kidney and the other Lone Eaters blame Fast Horse for Yellow Kidney's hardships, and he banishes himself from their camp. Fast Horse turns his back on the Pikuni people and refuses to learn the magic of the Beaver Medicine Bundle, instead choosing to run with Owl Child and his gang. Fast Horse robs and kills Napikwans, including a rancher who shoots him, and is partially responsible for the troubled relationship between the Pikunis and the United States government. While it is Owl Child's murder of Malcolm Clark that leads to the massacre of Heavy Runner's camp, Fast Horse is complicit in Owl Child's actions and guilty by association. When Fast Horse comes upon the dead body of Yellow Kidney in the abandoned war lodge late in the novel, he anonymously returns the warrior to his people and thus finally takes responsibility for the role he played in Yellow Kidney's downfall. By the end of the novel, Fast Horse regrets his decision to leave his tribe but is still unable to return to it; Fast Horse had placed his own desires for wealth and revenge above the collective needs of his people, and that has serious consequences. Haunted by his shame and failure, Fast Horse escapes north across the Canadian border and never sees his people again.

Yellow Kidney – A respected warrior of the Lone Eaters' band and husband to Heavy Shield Woman. He is also the father of Red Paint, One Spot, and Good Young Man, and eventual father-in-law to Fools Crow. Yellow Kidney organizes the horse raid on the enemy Crows, and after Fast Horse boasts loudly in the center of camp, Yellow Kidney is captured by the Crows. Before they find him, however, Yellow Kidney hides in a darkened lodge and rapes a young girl suffering from the white-scabs disease. Bull Shield chops off Yellow Kidney's fingers as a warning to other Pikunis, and straps him to a ragged horse, turning him out in the wilderness to die. He is later taken in by the Spotted Horse People, who nurse him back to health after he also falls ill with the white-scabs disease. He eventually makes it back to the Lone Eaters' camp but is a shell of his former self. In his disfigured and disgraced state, he can no longer hunt or war and feels he has been sentenced to a life worse than death as his punishment for raping the young girl and stealing her virtue. The remainder of Yellow Kidney's life is plagued by his shame, and his relationships with his wife and children suffer, yet he does begin to show signs of life. He fashions a sling and trigger-pull that allows him to again shoot his gun, and while every task takes more time, he learns that he is still able to do most things. Sadly, Yellow Kidney's realization comes too late, and after abandoning his family, he is shot and killed in an empty war lodge by a Napikwan looking to kill an Indian for spot. Fast Horse finds his body and anonymously

returns him to his people. While Yellow Kidney's life and death are tragic, he is a powerful example of the resilience of the Pikuni people. His life seems hopeless, and it appears as if he has been beat, but he is able to find a way to continue living his way of life—even if it must be adapted.

Rides-at-the-door – Father to Fools Crow and Running Fisher, and husband to Double Strike Woman, Striped Face, and Kills-close-to-the-lake. Rides-at-the-door is a respected war chief of the Lone Eaters and has a special relationship with Three Bears, the band's chief. He is highly intelligent and has been involved in past treaties with the Napikwans. As the only Lone Eater who speaks the English language, Rides-at-the-door is indispensable to his band and the Pikuni tribe as a whole. The Lone Eaters frequently look to Rides-at-the-door for guidance and advice. He is in favor of banishing Fast Horse from the Lone Eaters for his role in Yellow Kidney's capture by the enemy Crows, and he also supports the capture and killing of Owl Child as punishment for the murder of Malcolm Clark. Rides-at-the-door supports peace with the Napikwans if they don't expect anymore land, but he is willing to fight for the Pikuni way of life should it come to that. Rides-at-the-door accompanies Heavy Runner and the other chiefs to the Four Horns agency to discuss Owl Child's fate, but since he is only a war chief, the Napikwan refuse to let him speak. He is devastated when his son, Running Fisher, betrays him and has an affair with Kills-close-to-the-lake, and he banishes him to the lands of their relative Siksikas as punishment; however, he doesn't punish Kills-close-to-the-lake, his third and youngest wife. Instead, he gives Kills-close-to-the-lake her freedom in the form of a divorce and asks for forgiveness for stealing her youth. Rides-at-the-door told himself he married her as a favor to her father, a poor friend of the Never Laughs People, but he suspects he took the young wife as an outward display of his own wealth and power. He is deeply ashamed by this realization, which he views as his punishment for his selfish actions. In this way, the character of Rides-at-the-door is critical of traditional patriarchal customs of multiple wives as symbols of wealth and power. When Three Bears dies during the white-scabs outbreak, he gives his red-stone pipe to Rides-at-the-door and selects him as the new chief of the Lone Eaters. He lives through the outbreak and is among the procession that leaves the winter camp at the end of the novel.

Red Paint – The daughter of Yellow Kidney and Heavy Shield Woman, and the eventual wife of Fools Crow. She is also the sister of One Spot and Good Young Man. Red Paint is young, beautiful, and madly in love with Fools Crow. The two first notice each other when Fools Crow begins hunting for her family after Yellow Kidney's disappearance during the horse raid against the Crows. After Yellow Kidney's return, Mik-api negotiates their marriage on Fools Crow's behalf. Red Paint is quiet and reserved, and she tirelessly serves her husband. She longs for the quiet seclusion of the Backbone, an isolated

mountain range where she and Fools Crow can pick chokecherries and fish for "slippery swimmers." Red Paint is devastated when her father is returned to camp dead after deserting his family, and she is further broken when her brother, Good Young Man, dies during the outbreak of white-scabs disease. Despite this, she is among the procession of Pikunis who leave the Lone Eaters' camp and head north at the end of the novel, and with their infant son, Sleep-bringer, Red Paint and Fools Crow continue the Pikuni way of life.

Owl Child – A Pikuni warrior and member of the Many Chiefs band. A violent outcast, Owl Child is rejected by many in his own band and by the Pikunis as a whole. He forms a gang of fellow isolated outcasts, including Fast Horse, and vows to "make the Napikwans cry" for invading their lands and way of life. When Owl Child is caught stealing horses from Malcolm Clark, an important rancher among the Napikwans, Clark slaps Owl Child in front of his gang, humiliating him. Owl Child exacts revenge and kills Malcolm Clark, and act for which the United States government intends to make Owl Child's chief, Mountain Chief, pay. Owl Child's killing of the Napikwans—and his repeated stealing of their horses—worsens the already strained relationship between the Pikunis and the United States government. While Owl Child claims that he doesn't intend any harm to come to the Pikunis, his actions lead directly to the massacre at Heavy Runner's camp by the blue-coat seizers. Owl Child becomes ill during the white-scabs outbreak and presumably dies of the virus.

Kills-close-to-the-lake – Rides-at-the-door's third wife and near-mother to Fools Crow and Running Fisher. Kills-close-to-the-lake is a young and beautiful girl from a poor family of the Never Laughs People, and Rides-at-the-door marries her as a favor to her father. Double Strike Woman and Striped Face, Rides-at-the-door's first and second wives respectively, treat Kills-close-to-the-lake like a slave, and she spends most of the novel lusting after Fools Crow. After Fools Crow marries Red Paint, Kills-close-to-the-lake turns her attention toward Running Fisher. Rides-at-the-door soon discovers their affair and gives Kills-close-to-the-lake her freedom by divorcing her. He feels guilty for stealing her youth and questions if he married her to help her survive, or as a symbol of his own wealth and power. When Rides-at-the-door rejects Kills-close-to-the-lake, he also rejects the traditional Pikuni custom of multiple wives—especially young, beautiful ones—as a form of wealth and a reflection of power.

Mik-api – The many-faces man of the Lone Eaters' band. Mik-api is the physical and spiritual healer of his tribe, and he takes Fools Crow on as his apprentice. He is first taught the art of healing by his aunt, a healing woman from the Never Laughs band, and after he falls in love and marries a Black Paint slave, Mik-api continues to learn healing under the direction of a Black Paint many-faces man. Mik-api's young wife dies after just two years of marriage; claiming to be "satisfied with his

memories of his Black Paint wife,” he never remarries. Mik-api’s spirit animal is an aptly named Raven, and he often speaks through Mik-api to help guide Fools Crow. After forty winters as the Lone Eaters’ many-faces man, Mik-api leads the procession that takes the surviving Pikuni north.

Heavy Shield Woman – Yellow Kidney’s wife and mother to Red Paint, Good Young Man, and One Spot. When Yellow Kidney disappears during the horse raid on the Crows, Heavy Shield Woman pledges to take the vow of the Sacred Vow Woman at the summer ceremony in exchange for her husband’s safe return. He does return, and she successfully fulfills her vow, a role that ensures the health and prosperity of her people by way of her virtue; however, Heavy Shield Woman begins to question her role as Sacred Vow Woman, and by extension, she begins to question her virtue. A series of tragedies means that she has felt little peace since taking her vow, and she even considers renouncing her role. She ultimately remains in her role and is presumably killed in the outbreak of white-scabs disease.

Boss Ribs – A heavy-singer-for-the-sick and Fast Horse’s father. Like Mik-api, Boss Ribs tends to the physical and spiritual needs of the band, and he is the keeper of the **Beaver Medicine bundle**, a bag of totems that represent the songs and prayers of the beaver—and the Pikuni people. The bundle is the most powerful medicine of all the Pikunis, and Boss Ribs plans to pass it on to his son. Fast Horse ultimately rejects the bundle and his father, and by the end of the novel, Boss Ribs and the Beaver Medicine bundle are rendered powerless in the face of the white-scabs disease.

Three Bears – Chief of the Lone Eaters’ band. Three Bears is a harsh but fair leader, and after Fast Horse is found responsible for Yellow Kidney’s capture and torture by the Crows, Three Bears advocates to banish him. He also supports the capturing and killing of Owl Child when he continues to rob and kill Napikwans and attract the deadly attention of the blue-coat seizers. However, Three Bears is still prepared to go to war with the Napikwans to preserve the Pikuni way of life. He has a special relationship with Rides-at-the-door, who often counsils him on tribal matters, and when Three Bears dies during the white-scabs outbreak at the end of the novel, he presents Rides-at-the-door with his red-stone pipe and makes him his successor.

Running Fisher – Fools Crow’s brother and Rides-at-the-door’s son. When Running Fisher is first introduced, he is a promising young Pikuni, and his father sees him as an honorable warrior-in-the-making. On his first war raid, however, Running Fisher is terrified when a solar eclipse causes the “Sun to hide his face,” and he only pretends to fight, riding along the outskirts of the camp and yelling. Afterward, Running Fisher is consumed by his shame and begins to withdraw from family life and resent his brother’s success. He ultimately has an affair with his father’s third wife, Kills-close-to-lake, and is sent to live with relatives in

the Siksikas tribe to the north as punishment for dishonoring his father’s lodge.

So-at-sa-ki/Feather Woman – The mortal Pikuni wife of Morning Star, a Pikuni deity, and mother to Star Boy. According to Pikuni legend, Feather Woman is banished back to earth along with her son by Sun Chief after she disobeys Night Red Light and digs up the sacred turnip, creating a hole in the sky. She dies of a broken heart shortly after, and her people do not mourn her. Sun Chief punishes Feather Woman for her transgression by placing her in a magical realm where she is forced to watch Morning Star and Mistake Morning Star, her husband and son’s respective constellations, rise in the sky each day and mourn them for eternity. Fools Crow’s vision quest leads him to So-at-sa-ki, where he sees the end of the Pikuni way of life in a magical yellow hide. So-at-sa-ki reminds Fools Crow of the power of storytelling in the preservation of the Pikuni way of life, and her own story mirrors that of Lone Eaters. Each day they are forced to look to the stars and mourn the loss of their people.

Star Boy/Poia/Mistake Morning Star – The son of Morning Star, a Pikuni deity, and So-at-sa-ki, a mortal Pikuni woman. Star Boy is banished to earth by his grandfather, Sun Chief, along with his mother after she digs up the sacred turnip, and a scar begins to form on his face. He later appeals to Sun Chief to remove his scar, and after Star Boy saves his father’s life from a flock of deadly birds, Sun Chief removes his scar and makes him a star in the sky, hence the name Star Boy. He gives the Pikunis the summer ceremony so that they can properly honor Sun Chief, and Star Boy is the Above One who is most like the Pikuni people. He is represented by a constellation called Mistake Morning Star, most likely referring to Jupiter or Saturn.

Eagle Ribs – An experienced horse-taker and warrior of the Lone Eaters band, and a member of Yellow Kidney’s horse raiding party against the Crow. He is a talented scouter and can slip in and out of enemy camps undetected. When Yellow Kidney disappears during the raid, Eagle Ribs has a dream about a white horse, the death horse, and a face he can’t quite identify. He suspects his dream means that Yellow Kidney is either dead or dying, but this isn’t confirmed until Yellow Kidney returns to the Lone Eaters’ camp moons later riding a scrawny and injured white horse.

Malcolm Clark/Four Bears – A Napikwan whitehorn rancher and husband to Cutting-off-head Woman. Malcolm Clark catches Owl Child stealing his horses and slaps him, embarrassing him in front of his people. Owl Child swears revenge and later kills Clark, further upsetting the United States government and the blue-coat seizers. The Marias Massacre that takes place at the end of the novel, in which nearly two hundred innocent Pikunis are slaughtered by the seizers, is the government’s retaliation for the murder of Malcolm Clark.

Bull Shield – Chief of the Crow Indians. Bull Shield chops off Yellow Kidney’s fingers as a warning to other Pikunis after he is caught raiding the Crows’ camp, and he is later killed by Fools Crow as revenge on Yellow Kidney’s behalf. Fools Crow earns his name by tricking Bull Shield and pretending to be dead before killing him, although this is a misunderstanding; Fools Crow never fools Bull Shield, he simply falls and is spared in the time it takes for Bull Shield to kill Fox Eyes.

Skunk Bear – A wolverine and Fools Crow’s spirit animal. Only the grizzly bear is more powerful than Skunk Bear, and Fools Crow is endowed with the power of the wolverine. Skunk Bear also bites of Kills-close-to-the-lake’s finger in a dream as a reminder of her “wickedness” for lusting after Fools Crow, her husband’s son. Most importantly, Skunk Bear directs Fools Crow on his vision quest, and leads him directly to Feather Woman.

Double Strike Woman – Rides-at-the-door’s sits-beside-him wife and mother to Fools Crow and Running Fisher. Double Strike Woman is also the sister of Striped Face, Rides-at-the-door’s second wife. She comes from the northern Siksikas tribe, and by the end of novel, when most of the Lone Eaters have been killed by the white-scabs disease, Double Strike Woman is among the survivors.

One Spot – Yellow Kidney and Heavy Shield Woman’s son and younger brother to Red Paint and Good Young Man. Fools Crow saves One Spot’s life when he is mauled by a rabid wolf, and he again escapes the Shadowland when he survives the white-scabs disease. One Spot is among those in the procession at the end of the novel when the Pikunis leave their ancestral lands and head north to evade the blue-coat seizers.

Raven – Mik-api’s spirit animal. He also assists Fools Crow and helps him find Skunk Bear, Fools Crow’s own spirit animal. Raven often speaks through Mik-api to guide Fools Crow as he searches for a way to save his people and the Pikuni way of life from the violence of the seizers.

Fox Eyes – A powerful Pikuni Warrior. Fox Eyes fights alongside Fools Crow and Rides-at-the-door when they attack the Crows and avenge Yellow Kidney’s capture. Fox Eyes is a highly respected warrior among the Pikunis, although he lost his taste for violence three years earlier when he killed the enemy warrior, White Grass, during a raid. His people celebrated the kill, but Fox Eyes regrets it. He no longer wishes to punish his enemies; instead, he wants to grow old peacefully. Fox Eyes’s struggle mirrors Fools Crow’s own struggle with violence and killing, which is worsened after Fox Eyes is killed by Bull Shield during the raid that earns Fools Crow his name.

Joe Kipp – An Indian half-breed who knows the Pikuni language. Joe Kipp brings John Gates and Captain Snelling to the Lone Eaters’ camp in search of Mountain Chief and Owl Child in connection to Malcolm Clark’s murder, and he later tells Three Bears and the other Lone Eaters that the

Napikwans would like to meet at the Four Horns agency to discuss Owl Child’s arrest and the return of the Napikwans’ stolen livestock. Joe Kipp struggles with his torn identity, and the Lone Eaters do not respect him—they feel as if Joe does the white man’s bidding.

Akaiyan – One of the orphan brothers associated with the story that Boss Ribs tells Fools Crow about the history of the **Beaver Medicine bundle**. The wife of Akaiyan’s brother, Nopatsis, grows tired of her brother-in-law and falsely accuses him of abuse. Nopatsis then abandons his brother on a deserted island, and after resigning himself to death, Akaiyan is taken in by a family of beaver. When his brother comes back to find his bones, Akaiyan tricks him and deserts him instead. Because of his brother’s betrayal, however, Akaiyan forms a close friendship with the beaver and he teaches him the songs and prayers of his people. He gifts Akaiyan a Sacred Pipe, the first totem of the bundle, and Akaiyan asks the other animals to contribute to the bundle as well, becoming the **Beaver Medicine Bundle**. Akaiyan hands the bundle down to his son, and it has been handed down ever since.

Nopatsis – One of the orphan brothers associated with the story of the **Beaver Medicine bundle**. In Pikuni legend, Nopatsis’s wife grows tired of his brother, Akaiyan, and after falsely accusing him of abuse, Nopatsis leaves his brother for dead on a deserted island. He later comes back to search for his bones, and Akaiyan, who has been taken in by a family of beaver, tricks him and in turn leaves his brother for dead. Nopatsis dies on the island and Akaiyan later comes back to find his bones.

Heavy Runner – A Pikuni chief who advocates for peace with the Napikwans. Heavy Runner goes to the Four Horns agency with a few other Pikuni chiefs and Rides-at-the-door to negotiate peace after Owl Child kills trader Malcolm Clark. While at the agency, Heavy Runner asks General Sully for a “piece of paper” that officially declares him and his camp non-hostile. General Sully signs the paper, but Heavy Runner is later killed in the Marias Massacre.

General Sully – The Napikwan in charge of Indian policy on behalf of the United States government in the Montana Territory. General Sully issues an arrest warrant for Owl Child for the murder of Malcolm Clark, and he meets with Heavy Runner and the other Pikuni chiefs at the Four Horns agency to negotiate peace. General Sully signs and dates Heavy Runner’s “piece of paper” that identifies him and his camp as non-hostile, which is later ignored when his camp is attacked and slaughtered by the United States government.

Sturgis – A white man and heavy-singer-for-the-sick, presumably a doctor, for his own people. Sturgis marries a Pikuni woman who later dies of the white-scabs disease, and he visits the Lone Eaters’ camp with Pretty-on-top to tell them about the “juice” (that is, the vaccine) that can be injected into

the body to prevent the disease.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Mountain Chief – The chief of the Many Chiefs band of Pikunis. The blue-coat seizers hold Mountain Chief responsible for Owl Child’s killing of Malcolm Clark, and they search for him throughout much of the novel. Mountain Chief evades the seizers, running north of the Canadian border.

Striped Face – Rides-at-the-door’s second wife and Double Strike Woman’s sister. Striped Face discovers Kills-close-to-the-lake and Running Fisher’s affair and tells her husband about their dishonor.

Good Young Man – Yellow Kidney and Heavy Shield Woman’s son and brother to Red Paint and One Spot. Good Young Man dies from the white-scabs disease.

Head Carrier – A famous Pikuni warrior whose life Mik-api saves with the medicine of the frog people, prompting Mik-api to become a many-faces man. Fast Horse wears an old war shirt belonging to Head Carrier to give him power during the horse raid on the Crows.

Little Bird Woman – The daughter of Crow Foot and the girl Fools Crow’s mother would have him marry instead of Red Paint. Little Bird Woman ultimately marries the son of a great chief, and Fools Crow sees her in the yellow hide belonging to Feather Woman, clinging to a bucket of intestines.

Crow Foot – Double Strike Woman’s cousin and Little Bird Woman’s father. Crow Foot is the powerful chief of an outlying Pikuni band.

Little Dog – The former chief of the Black Patched Moccasin band. Little Dog is killed by his own people after he betrays them by placing the Napikwans before the needs of his tribe.

Mad Plume – A member of the Black Patched Moccasins. Mad Plume tells Fools Crow about the murder of Little Dog, the former chief of the Black Patched Moccasins, at the hands of his own people.

Pretty-on-top – A Pikuni Indian from an outlying band who visits the Lone Eaters’ camp with Sturgis, a white man and doctor, to tell them about the magic “juice” that keeps them from getting the white-scabs disease.

White Grass Woman – The Lone Eaters’ camp gossip and wife of Skunk Cap. White Grass Woman tells Fools Crow’s mother, Heavy Shield Woman, that her son has gone off to look for Fast Horse on behalf of Boss Ribs.

Skunk Cap – The husband of White Grass Woman, the Lone Eaters’ camp gossip.

Lone Medicine Person – A Pikuni war chief who is killed during the raid on the Crows to avenge Yellow Kidney’s abduction and torture.

Sleep-bringer – Fools Crow and Red Paint’s infant son.

Riplinger – A white trader and owner of the trading houses frequented by the Lone Eaters. Riplinger gifts Rides-at-the-door a many-shots gun, which he in turn gives to Fools Crow when he marries Red Paint.

White Grass – An enemy warrior of the Pikuni, killed three years earlier by Fox Eyes during a battle.

Mad Wolf – Kills-close-to-the-lake’s father and member of the Never Laughs People.

Cutting-off-head Woman – Malcolm Clark’s wife.

John Gates – One of the Napikwans who, along with Captain Snelling, accompanies Joe Kipp to the Lone Eaters’ camp in search of Mountain Chief and Owl Child in connection to the murder of Malcolm Clark.

Captain Snelling – One of the Napikwans who, along with John Gates, accompanies Joe Kipp to the Lone Eaters’ camp in search of Mountain Chief and Owl Child in connection to the murder of Malcolm Clark.

TERMS

The Above Ones – The collective sky Gods worshipped by the Pikuni people, often depicted as the stars and constellations. When praying, the Pikunis give thanks to the Above Ones, the Below Ones, and the Underwater People, an act which often involves smoking to the four directions of north, south, east, and west.

The Below Ones – The collective Gods of the earth worshipped by the Pikuni people, usually depicted as different spirit animals. The Pikunis pray to the Below Ones, as well as to the Above Ones and the Underwater People, while smoking to the four directions of north, south, east, and west.

Blackhorn – The Pikuni term for buffalo. Blackhorns are a staple in Pikuni life and are the Lone Eaters’ main source of food. The Pikuni people harvest and utilize each part of the blackhorn—including the hair for sewing, hooves for glue, and the hide for clothing. As the Napikwans move onto native lands and raise whitehorns, they push the blackhorns away from Pikuni lands. The blackhorn population is also negatively affected by the introduction of the many-shots gun and trading posts. Blackhorn hides are used as currency within *Fools Crow*, and the repeating rifle makes hunting them easier. Without blackhorns, the Pikuni people are unable to sustain their way of life.

Blue-coat seizers – The United States military. At the climax of the novel, the seizers open fire on a non-hostile Pikuni camp, resulting in the Marias Massacre, a historical event in which nearly two hundred innocent Pikunis are slaughtered. The blue-coat seizers support and assist the Napikwans as they move West.

Buffalo-runner – A strong and powerful horse used by the

Pikunis to hunt blackhorns. Buffalo-runners are usually stolen during horse raids and are a symbol of wealth and status within Pikuni communities.

[Cold Maker – The spiritual entity responsible for cold and snow. Cold Maker resides in Always Winter Land with his two daughters, both of whom do not have eyes—only empty sockets. Cold Maker visits Fast Horse in a dream and offers him assistance during a horse raid if Fast Horse can find his favorite ice spring and remove the boulder that blocks it. Cold Maker also asks Fast Horse to gift his daughters prime bull robes and coal for their eyes. Fast Horse fails Cold Maker’s task and the raid ends badly.](#)

Day Star – Another Pikuni term for the sun. When the Lone Eaters attack the Crows’ camp to avenge **Yellow Kidney**, the warriors witness a solar eclipse, in which “Day Star hides his face.” The Pikuni people believe that when Day Star hides his face a great warrior must die, and, indeed, **Fox Eyes** is killed by **Bull Shield** during a raid after the eclipse.

Healing woman – A medicine woman and the spiritual and physical healer of the sick. **Mik-api**’s aunt, a healing woman in the Never Laughs band, is the one who teaches him the ways of healing.

Heavy-singer-for-the-sick – A spiritual and physical healer of the Pikuni people, like a many-faces man, only not as powerful. **Boss Ribs** is a heavy-singer-for-the-sick.

Many-faces man – A medicine man and the physical and spiritual healer of the Pikunis. **Mik-api** is a many-faces man, and **Fools Crow** is his apprentice. Healing is usually accomplished with a combination of prayers, ceremonies, and medicines derived from the natural world. As the Lone Eaters’ many-faces man, Mik-api also serves as the band’s spiritual leader and heads the procession as they leave their ancestral lands for the north after being pushed out by the Napikwans.

Many-shots gun – The repeating rifle, which is brought to the Montana Territory by the Napikwans during westward expansion. The repeating rifle changes how the Pikunis hunt and war, and because of it, they are no longer solely dependent on bows and arrows. Only the wealthiest Pikunis possess many-shots guns, however, and they are often gifted to important chiefs by the Napikwans to encourage peaceful trade.

Medicine Woman/Sacred Vow Woman – A spiritual position taken on by one Pikuni woman during the annual summer ceremony. If a Sacred Vow Woman is found to be virtuous, then the people will prosper; if not, then the people will suffer and be plagued by bad luck. A Sacred Vow Woman is considered virtuous if the Medicine Pole erected in the center of the Medicine Lodge stands straight during the ceremony. **Heavy Shield Woman** takes the vow of the Sacred Woman and is declared virtuous.

Morning Star – The son of Sun Chief and Red Night Light, the

husband of **Feather Woman**, and the father of **Poia**. Depicted as a star constellation that appears right before dawn.

Napikwans – The Pikuni word for the white settlers. As Napikwans move West and invade Pikuni territory, they effectively push the Lone Eaters off their ancestral land. After the Civil War, a massive influx of white settlers arrives on Pikuni land to work as ranchers, traders, or gold prospectors, and they are supported and assisted by the blue-coat seizers. They wish to “exterminate” the Pikuni people and take their land.

Night Red Light – The spiritual entity associated with the moon; also Sun Chief’s wife and Morning Star’s mother. Within Pikuni spirituality, Night Red Light warns her daughter-in-law, **Feather Woman**, not to dig up the sacred turnip and becomes enraged when she disobeys her. Night Red Light also lights the way for **Yellow Kidney** and the other Pikuni warriors as they travel by night to raid the enemy camp of the Crows.

Old Man, Napi – The primary spiritual entity and creator of the Pikuni people. The Pikunis frequently pray and smoke to Old Man.

Real-bear – The Pikuni term for grizzly bear. Only the real-bear is more powerful than the wolverine, **Fools Crow**’s spirit animal.

Shadowland – The Pikuni afterlife and the home of the Sand Hills. After death, the Pikuni people believe that the spirit goes to the Shadowland, where they live in eternal happiness with their ancestors.

Sun Chief – The spiritual entity associated with the sun; also Night Red Light’s husband and Morning Star’s father. Sun Chief banishes **Feather Woman**, Morning Star’s wife, back to earth after she digs up the sacred turnip and creates a hole in the sky. Each year, all Pikunis meet at Four Persons Butte for the summer ceremony in which they honor Sun Chief with prayer, song, and dance.

Sun Dance ceremony/summer ceremony – An annual ceremony in honor of Sun Chief. The summer ceremony was given to the Pikuni people by **Poia**, or Scar Face, **Feather Woman** and Morning Star’s son, so that humankind would know how to properly honor the Sun Chief.

The Underwater People – The collective Gods of the water worshipped by the Pikuni people, commonly depicted as fish, frogs, or slippery swimmers. Usually, the Pikuni people pray to the Underwater People along with the Above Ones and the Below Ones, while also smoking to the four directions of north, south, east, and west.

Whitehorn – The Pikuni term for cattle. The Napikwans raise whitehorn cattle on the Pikunis’ land, which negatively impacts the blackhorn population. With less room to roam, the blackhorns move away from Pikuni lands. The Napikwans want the Pikuni people to stop hunting blackhorns and instead farm

and graze whitehorn cattle.

White-scabs disease – The Pikuni term for smallpox. Napikwans bring the white-scabs disease with them as they move westward, and the virus is responsible for killing more than half of the Pikuni people. The Pikunis learn of a magical “juice,” or immunization, that can prevent the disease; however, they must surrender to the Many Houses lodge, or reservation, to get it.

Wood-biter – The Pikuni term for beaver. **Boss Ribs**, a heavy-singer-for-the-sick, possesses a **Beaver Medicine bundle**, the oldest and holiest medicine of the Pikuni people.

White man’s water – The Pikuni term for alcohol, usually whiskey. Napikwans trade and run illegal whiskey westward along the Whiskey Trail to Canada. The Pikunis claim that white man’s water makes their enemies “lazy,” and it is the cause of

Fools Crow’s boastful behavior after he kills **Bull Shield**.



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don’t have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



THE INDIVIDUAL VS. THE COLLECTIVE GOOD

Fools Crow chronicles the coming of age of White Man’s Dog, later Fools Crow, a member of the Blackfeet tribe of Indians during the 1860s. As they live and hunt along the western plains of the Montana Territory, the Pikuni people face harsh conditions and daily challenges, and each individual decision must be weighed against the good of the tribe. The communal nature of Pikuni life leaves little room for self-interest or greed, and when members of the tribe behave selfishly or ignore the needs of others, it often means trouble for the Pikunis as a whole. Through this representation of tribal life, author James Welch argues the importance of native community and the need to always balance personal desires with the greater needs of the group.

Throughout *Fools Crow*, the Pikuni people often forego their personal desires or needs for the sake of the tribe. After Yellow Kidney, a Pikuni warrior, disappears during a horse raid against the Crow, White Man’s Dog begins to hunt for Yellow Kidney’s family. Without Yellow Kidney, his family has no way to feed themselves, and White Man’s Dog takes on this responsibility in addition to his own hunting to ensure their survival. When Heavy Shield Woman, Yellow Kidney’s wife, fulfills the role of Sacred Vow Woman, a spiritual ritual which brings good luck and prosperity to the Pikuni people, she does so at great personal risk. In addition to fasting for several days and

embarking on an arduous journey across the plains, Heavy Shield Woman must sell all her possessions to obtain the supplies needed for the vow and her success is not guaranteed; if the spiritual world deems her not powerful or virtuous enough, great harm will come to the Pikuni people, and she will be cast out despite her efforts.

Once Fast Horse, another young Pikuni warrior, is found to be at fault for Yellow Kidney’s capture and torture, the tribal elders must convince Boss Ribs, a respected member of the tribe and Fast Horse’s father, to banish his own son. Three Bears, the chief of the Lone Eaters, claims Fast Horse must be banished “for the good of his people,” as well as for the young man’s own safety. He fears retaliation by other tribal members for Fast Horse’s actions, and his presence in camp causes widespread unrest. To calm this conflict, Boss Ribs must turn away his son for the good of the people.

Lastly, as white settlers continue to encroach on Pikuni land, several tribal members wish to fight. Rides-at-the-door, White Man’s Dog’s father and a respected war chief, insists they stand down, fearing the violence of the United States military. Rides-at-the-door knows that his people won’t survive an attack by the seizers, stating, “If we treat wisely with them, we will be able to save enough for ourselves and our children. It is not an agreeable way, but it is the only way.” Rides-at-the-door too wishes to fight for their land, but for the good of the tribe, he must quell his desire and instead encourage peace with the white settlers. Each of these instances underscores the value of working towards the collective good.

Conversely, when members of the tribe act in self-interest, there are often dire consequences for all. Owl Child, a young Pikuni warrior, ignores his elders’ warnings to avoid the advancing settlers and begins to kill Napikwans (white settlers) and steal their horses. His behavior is an act of resistance, but it also serves to increase his own wealth, and Three Bears fears that if “these foolish young men continue their raiding and killing of the Napikwans, we will all suffer. The seizers will kill us, and the Pikuni people will be as the shadows of the land.” Owl Child’s greed and vengeance thus endangers them all.

Similarly, it is Fast Horse’s boastful behavior that directly leads to Yellow Kidney’s capture and mutilation. When the Pikunis enter the Crow camp during a horse raid, Fast Horse loudly scoffs at the Crow and gives away the Pikunis’ location. Subsequently, Yellow Kidney is captured, and his fingers are savagely chopped off as a warning to future Pikuni who wish to rob the Crow. Fast Horse’s excessive pride effects not only Yellow Kidney, but the future of the tribe as well: without his fingers, Yellow Kidney can’t pull a bow or a trigger, and he won’t be able to hunt game or war enemies.

After Yellow Kidney returns to the Lone Eaters’ camp, White Man’s Dog is ordered by the chief to alert the outlying bands. As he approaches the camp of the Black Patched Moccasins, White Man’s Dog learns that the band’s chief, Little Dog, has

been murdered by his own people. Little Dog had befriended the Napikwans and “put the interests of the Napikwans before those of the Pikunis.” Little Dog’s lone actions threatened the tribe’s way of life, and while the men who killed him certainly betrayed him in death, “it was [Little Dog] who betrayed the people.” The Black Patched Moccasins killed their chief for the good of the tribe and their sacred way of life.

Ultimately, it is Owl Child’s selfish actions that lead to the senseless massacre of nearly two hundred Pikuni. After Malcolm Clark, a local rancher, catches Owl Child stealing his horses and slaps him, humiliating him in front of his people, Owl Child kills Clark to save face. Owl Child’s violent revenge further strains the already tense relationship between the Blackfeet and the United States government, and the military responds by opening fire on the camp of Heavy Runner, a Pikuni chief who had previously been promised protection by the government. It is not long after the massacre, known historically as the Marias Massacre, that the Lone Eaters are forced to move north and abandon their ancestral lands. While Owl Child’s self-interest is surely not to blame for westward expansion, Welch implies that had Owl Child not sought revenge on Malcolm Clark, perhaps Heavy Runner’s camp would have been spared. Owl Child fails to act in the best interest of his people, and it is in this way that Welch argues the importance of the tribe over the importance of individual desire.



COLONIALISM AND WESTERN EXPANSION

As White Man’s Dog and the other Pikuni Indians live, hunt, and war on the western plains of the Montana Territory, they are surrounded by signs of encroaching white settlers. The white man, or Napikwan, first appeared on Pikuni lands years earlier—even Rides-at-the-door, White Man’s Dog’s father, “picked up [English] from a missionary” as a child—but by White Man’s Dog’s eighteenth winter, the white presence has increased considerably and presents new dangers. The end of the Civil War brings traders, ranchers, and prospectors, and with it the end of the Pikunis’ way of life. From small pox infections to the arrival of alcohol known as white man’s water, the Napikwans are everywhere, and they are supported by the United States government and the violent blue-coat seizers. As more Pikuni land is stolen by the Napikwans, it becomes clear to White Man’s Dog, later deemed Fools Crow, that his people cannot withstand the power of the seizers. Yet despite the odds, Fools Crow and his people, the Lone Eaters, are determined to carry on their way of life. Through the resistance and resilience of the Lone Eaters, Welch at once condemns colonialism and western expansion as forces of destruction while celebrating the strength of the Pikuni people to survive in the face of oppression.

The invading Napikwans affect the Pikunis in many ways, most of which are detrimental to their native way of life. The white settlers want the Pikunis to stop hunting blackhorn, or buffalo, and instead graze their “puny” whitehorn cattle. Not only do White Man’s Dog and his people prefer the meat of the buffalo, but “only the blackhorn can provide for all the needs of the family.” The Pikunis use the entire buffalo from the hair to the hooves, and the smaller whitehorn is a poor substitution. As the Napikwans bring in more whitehorn, the plentiful blackhorn population is pushed further away from Pikuni land, making them more difficult to hunt. The Napikwans also force the Pikunis to “dig and plant seeds in the breast of Mother Earth.” White Man’s Dog and his people are accustomed to foraging for berries and digging up wild turnips; they are not native farmers, and the meager vegetables the Napikwan teach them to grow do not go far in feeding the tribe. Thus, the Pikunis are forced to continue hunting the dwindling blackhorn population.

Additionally, of all the goods that the Pikunis have come to trade with the Napikwan, the many-shots gun is the most coveted. The repeating rifle changes the way White Man’s Dog and his people war and hunt, and with the arrival of the trading houses, hunting is no longer just for subsistence but also for profit. More prime buffalo hides bring more goods at the trading houses, and a single rifle can cost several hides. The Pikunis’ desire for the white man’s luxuries continues to thin the waning buffalo population, moving them even further away from their native way of life.

Despite the oppression and violence of western expansion, however, the Pikuni people continue to resist the invading Napikwan presence. The Pikuni entered a treaty with the Napikwans some thirteen years earlier, and in exchange for needed goods and supplies, they granted the Napikwans use of large areas of their land. One of the conditions of the treaty was that the Pikuni stop warring against enemy tribes, but when the Napikwans fail to uphold their end of the treaty, the Pikuni continue to war for horses and honor. Fox Eyes, a Pikuni warrior, claims, “[The Napikwans] spoke high words that day, but they proved to be two-faced.” The Pikunis refuse to give the dishonest Napikwans more land and won’t be forced live on the white man’s terms. Owl Child forms a gang of disgruntled outcasts and vows to “make the Napikwans cry.” The gang robs and kills the white settlers every chance it gets, and while these violent actions ultimately lead to the slaughter of many Pikunis as well, their resistance to the Napikwans is clear. Owl Child and his gang won’t give up their land and way of life to the white man, and they are prepared to fight no matter the cost. After Owl Child robs and kills rancher Malcolm Clark and the Pikuni chiefs must go to the Four Horns agency to negotiate peace with the “white chiefs” of the United States military, they send only minor chiefs as an insult to the Napikwans. The Pikuni chiefs have little faith that the Napikwans will honor any agreements for peace, and they know that the government will

be slighted by the absence of their major chiefs. The Pikunis stand little chance against the seizers and their attack is inevitable, but by insulting the white chiefs, they resist the Napikwans the only way they can.

By the end of the novel, nearly two hundred innocent Pikunis are slaughtered by the seizers despite having been promised protection by the United States government. A vision quest further reveals to Fools Crow that his way of life won't survive the invasion of western expansion and that his people will have to leave their ancestral lands. Joe Kipp, a Pikuni half-breed, notes, "the [Pikuni] people have not changed [...] but the world they live in has," yet it is the Pikunis' willingness to change that ultimately ensures their survival. Many of the Lone Eaters are hesitant to move north to the land of Siksikas because there are no blackhorns there. Not only do the Pikuni people revere blackhorns and prefer the wild meat above else, they are scornful of those who eat fish, the primary food of the Siksikas. After all, Red Paint fashions a bone hook while she and Fools Crow are away at the Backbone so that they can taste the flesh of "silver creatures" away from the judgement of the tribe. Moving north means adapting to this diet, and this is implied when the Lone Eaters leave their ancestral lands at the end of the novel. Through this willingness to change on their own terms, the Pikuni people resist near annihilation by the United States government, and it is with this resistance that Welch suggests that the Pikuni people can survive anything.



DREAMS, VISIONS, AND STORYTELLING

As White Man's Dog hunts and wars his way to becoming Fools Crow, an honored and respected member of the Lone Eaters, his journey is guided, and at times complicated, by numerous dreams and visions. Other Pikunis also experience dreams and visions, which hold great significance within their native culture. Although their meanings are usually obscure and understood only in hindsight, dreams and visions are often harbingers of death. They also serve as a connection to the spiritual world—a metaphorical highway that allows Pikunis access to the Sand Hills of the Shadowland, their native afterlife, or to the magic and "strong medicine" of their elusive spirit animals. Dreams and visions help the Pikuni people understand their world and surroundings. Above all, dreams and vision within *Fools Crow* relay Pikuni history and stories, and it is this storytelling that serves to preserve the traditional Pikuni way of life.

Several characters within *Fools Crow* experience dreams and visions, and each one foretells danger in some way. When Yellow Kidney leads White Man's Dog and the other Pikunis on a horse raid to the Crow camp, Fast Horse has a dream that Cold Maker, the Pikuni spirit of winter, demands his assistance in exchange for a blessing of their raid. Cold Maker says that a large boulder has fallen into his favorite drinking spring, and Fast Horse must locate it and remove it. If Fast Horse fails,

Cold Maker says they must turn back, or he will make the entire party pay. Fast Horse does fail, and Yellow Kidney fails to take his dream seriously; in the end the raid goes horribly wrong for both Fast Horse and Yellow Kidney.

While on the Crow horse raid, White Man's Dog also repeatedly dreams about a strange white-faced girl who beckons him into a dark lodge. He is tempted to follow, but he never does—somehow, he senses "there is danger in that direction." He doesn't quite understand the significance of the dream and keeps it to himself. Later, Yellow Kidney hides in a darkened lodge after their raid goes wrong, and he slips under the robes of a white-faced girl. Overcome by desire for her body, he rapes her, discovering after that she is suffering from small pox, or the white-scabs disease. White Man's Dog never understands the dream until Yellow Kidney returns and tells his story.

Prior to Yellow Kidney's return, Eagle Ribs, a warrior in Yellow Kidney's horse raiding party, tells the others about a dream he had in which he saw a small white horse, the "death horse," along with a face "in the sky behind it." Eagle Ribs suspects that Yellow Kidney is either dead or in trouble, but this dream doesn't completely make sense either until Yellow Kidney returns to the Lone Eaters' camp months later riding a small white horse after being captured and tortured by the Crows.

Lastly, during the Sun ceremony, a religious festival that honors the Above Ones, White Man's Dog dreams that Skunk Bear, his spirit animal, visits him at the foot of a strange riverbed covered with white rocks and frost. Skunk Bear gifts him "powerful medicine" in the form of a **white rock** and a battle song, and when White Man's Dog asks his animal why everything is so white, Skunk Bear replies, "Because that's the way it is now." The white rocks and frost of White Man's Dog's dream metaphorically represent the presence of the white settlers and the dangers of westward expansion. Together these examples underscore the importance of listening to and respecting dreams and visions in Pikuni culture.

Additionally, when White Man's Dog, now Fools Crow, fears that the encroachment of the white settlers will lead to the end of the Pikunis, he embarks on a vision quest to learn how to best help his people. After walking for days, Skunk Bear finally leads Fools Crow to Feather Woman, the mythical wife of Morning Star, the son of the Sun Chief and Night Red Light, the moon. Feather Woman possesses a magical hide which reveals multiple visions to Fools Crow. Fools Crow's visions reveal the decimation of his tribe by the white-scabs disease, and they foretell the violent massacre of the Pikuni people perpetrated by the United States government. The danger that Fools Crow suspects is headed for his people is confirmed in his vision. Furthermore, through his vision, Fools Crow sees the continued displacement of the blackhorn buffalo from Pikuni land by the future presence of white settlers, and sees his people moved to boarding schools and assimilated through

forced haircuts and education.

In addition to the short-term dangers awaiting the tribe, then, Fools Crow's vision quest also reveals the long-term fate of the Pikuni people and the end of their traditional way of life.

Though visions often foretell danger and tragedy, they also imbue the Pikuni people with strength. Fools Crow is ultimately reminded by his vision quest that his people and their way of life will live on indefinitely through the power of their stories. Indeed, Welch turns to dreams and visions throughout the novel as means to tell such stories that risk being forgotten. In describing Feather Woman and her in-laws, the Above Ones, Welch exposes Pikuni culture and history despite the best efforts of white settlers, or Napikwans, to erase it.



WAR

[Throughout protagonist White Man's Dog's transformation into Fools Crow, he and the other warriors of the Lone Eaters band of the Pikuni](#)

[Indians frequently war with enemy tribes. Warring holds great significance within Pikuni culture, and it provides warriors with wealth in the form of horses and power; Pikuni society is patriarchal, and authority over other men—and women—is obtained through warring. Only successful warriors have many horses and wives, which leads to higher social standing. The Pikuni people war to defend their honor and win bragging rights, and they war to defend their land from invading white settlers. Despite the cultural importance of war, however, the Pikuni warriors are often destroyed by the fighting and grow to regret previous attacks on their enemies. Welch's representation of war and its spoils in Fools Crow places its violence in a critical light and suggests that the devastation of westward expansion is hastened by the warring of both the United States and the Pikuni people. In this way, Welch questions the usefulness and morality of war. War may present a momentary means to honor, power, and glory, but constant warring is ultimately an untenable and destructive way of life.](#)

[War is central to Pikuni life, and it is a means to various ends for the Blackfeet Indians. When Fools Crow is first introduced as White Man's Dog, he has only "three horses and no wives," and he hopes that joining a raiding party against the enemy Crow with Yellow Kidney, an experienced Pikuni warrior and horse thief, will turn this misfortune around. Fools Crow looks to war to gain wealth and respect. After Yellow Kidney is captured and tortured by the Crow during the raid, Fools Crow and the other Lone Eaters vow revenge. They plan to attack the Crow camp and target Bull Shield, the chief of the Crow and the warrior who mutilated Yellow Kidney by chopping off his fingers. The Pikunis pledge that Bull Shield's head "be cut off so that our friend Yellow Kidney may sleep well in his lodge." The Crow have stripped Yellow Kidney of his honor, and the Pikunis plan to retrieve it through war.](#)

As white settlers continue to move west, and the United States

government pushes the Pikuni people from their native lands, Owl Child and Fast Horse, two young Pikuni warriors, begin warring against the white settlers. With the help of a small gang of fellow Pikuni outcasts, the young warriors rob and kill the white settlers as frequently as they are able, to resist continued westward expansion and avenge the theft of their land. Each of these instances reflects the importance of war within Pikuni culture to secure wealth and honor, and to resist oppression.

However, as the Pikunis continue to wage war in various forms, the aging warriors lose their taste for violence, often becoming embittered by this tribal responsibility. After the raid on the Crow camp, in which he is forced to kill a young Crow night-rider to avoid being discovered, Fools Crow is haunted by his decision to take the young warrior's life. This disillusionment and distaste for war is deepened after Fools Crow's marriage to Red Paint, Yellow Kidney's daughter. By the time she becomes pregnant with their child, he no longer wishes to risk his life for wealth and glory. "I have never had such responsibility," Fools Crow says to Red Paint, "and it makes me cry to think of you alone." Fools Crow's growing family causes him to question the act of war.

As Fox Eyes, a respected and experienced war chief, readies the Pikuni warriors to attack the Crow and avenge Yellow Kidney's dishonor, his heart isn't in it. Fox Eyes reflects on a previous war in which he killed White Grass, a famed warrior of the enemy Entrails People, and now he feels "a mild regret that his old enemy is no longer around. With his victory, Fox Eyes had lost something, the desire to make his enemies pay dearly, to ride among them with a savage heart." Fox wants to live the remainder of his life in peace, and when he is killed in the war with the Crow, his own questions over the act of war become much more powerful.

After Fast Horse is found to be responsible for Yellow Kidney's misfortune, and subsequently banishes himself and joins Owl Child's gang of outcasts, his own distaste for war grows with his body count. Surprisingly, Fast Horse too is affected by the all the death, and when he finds Yellow Kidney shot dead by a white settler, Fast Horse delivers his body back to the Lone Eaters' camp and heads north to Canada, never seeing his people again. Despite his initial excitement for war, even Fast Horse cannot tolerate the repeated violence.

Unlike the Pikunis, the United States military strives for utter destruction during war. The blue-coat seizers are not interested in horses or honor; instead, they are concerned with the deadly pursuit of the Pikunis' ancestral lands, and in their desire for more, the government justifies the genocide and forced assimilation of countless Blackfeet Indians. The relationship between the United States government and the Blackfeet people further deteriorates as the Pikunis' continue to war with enemy tribes and Owl Child's gang responds to white settlers with violence. While the Pikunis are certainly not responsible for the heinous acts of the United State military,

Welch suggests that the Marias Massacre, the slaughter of nearly two hundred innocent Pikunis in response to Owl Child's violence against the white settlers, may have been avoided with less readiness to turn to mass violence. In the Pikunis' case, the risks of war certainly outweigh the benefits.



SPIRITUALITY AND THE NATURAL WORLD

[Throughout *Fools Crow*, protagonist White Man's Dog, later Fools Crow, is guided both literally and metaphorically by the natural world. The sky and the stars take center stage, and against the familiar backdrop of the constellations, Fools Crow and the other Pikuni Indians search for meaning on the vast western plains of the Montana Territory. As hunters and gatherers, the Pikuni people have a deep appreciation for nature, and the rich history of their ancestors leads to a profound connection with their native land. Napi, the Pikuni creator and principle deity, is often represented as the sun—along with the Sun Chief—and other lesser spirits are likewise represented in the sky, the earth, and the water. The link between Pikuni spirituality and the natural world suggests a powerful respect for and appreciation of nature, which, in turn, is essential for the preservation of Pikuni life.](#)

[The natural world is a principal feature in Pikuni life and a primary source of power throughout *Fools Crow*. As an inexperienced warrior at the start of the novel, Fools Crow is without "good medicine" and looks to his spirit animal for power and courage. Fools Crow sweats, prays, fasts, and smokes to summon his spirit animal, and while he does finally succeed, "he only comes to look at \[Fools Crow\]." While Fools Crow's spirit animal proves elusive, Fools Crow claims that "one day he will come to me and offer up his strength. Perhaps he is testing me to see if I am worthy." Even though his spirit animal does not easily give him strength, Fools Crow is determined to continue searching for this power.](#)

When Fools Crow and the other Pikuni warriors ready themselves to attack the enemy Crow, Yellow Kidney paints his face with the "familiar pattern" of Seven Persons, or the big dipper. As he colors "the left half of his face white with a series of small blue dots," Yellow Kidney finds his own power and "medicine" in the unwavering guidance of the constellation. Mik-api, a powerful many-faces man, or healer of the sick, mentors Fools Crow as he learns the art of healing. Mik-api frequently speaks to Fools Crow through Raven, an animal helper, and it is through this bird that Fools Crow finally connects with Skunk Bear, a wolverine and his own spirit animal. Because of Raven and Skunk Bear, Fools Crow can finally harness his "strong medicine" and become a respected member of the Pikuni tribe. Again, the natural world is a primary source of power and courage within Pikuni life.

The Pikuni emphasis on nature in their religious beliefs stems from their reliance on nature in everyday life, as well as the necessity of respecting, understanding, and honoring the natural world in order to survive. The Pikuni people worship their creator, Napi, and the Above Ones, Below Ones, and the Underwater People. The Above Ones are represented in the sky and the stars, and the Below Ones and the Underwater People are represented by animals and fish. The Pikunis frequently give thanks to these deities, and they pray to their representations within the natural world. As a powerful heavy-singer-for-the-sick, Boss Ribs, spiritual leader of the Pikuni people, possesses one of only three **Beaver Medicine bundles**. Boss Ribs's medicine bundle is the strongest in the Pikuni tribe, and the objects and totems inside it represent hundreds of songs and prayers inspired by the magic of the sacred wood-biter, which are used to fulfill the spiritual needs of the tribe.

Each summer, the bands of the Pikuni tribes of the Blackfeet Indians meet on the flat plain beneath Four Persons Butte and worship the Above Ones during the Sun Ceremony. It is during this ceremony that Yellow Kidney's wife, Heavy Shield Woman, takes the vow of the Sacred Woman, and Fools Crow undergoes a purification ritual in which bad spirits are cast out of his body as he prays to Sun Chief.

The fate of the Pikuni people is thus tied to nature and this is reflected in the way their life depends on living in harmony with nature. Their spirituality reflects this appreciation of and respect for the natural world. White settlers, by contrast, lack this respect and destroy the natural world on which the Pikunis depend. The Napikwans force the Pikuni to grow crops unsuitable for the Montana soil and raise whitehorn cattle instead of hunting blackhorns. They even endeavor to dig up large sections of Pikuni land looking for gold. The Napikwans' approach to the natural world inherently destroys the Pikuni way of life.



SYMBOLS

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



THE WHITE STONE

The white stone, which first appears in Fools Crow's dream with Skunk Bear, is symbolic of western expansion and the whitewashing of Pikuni culture. In Fools Crow's dream, he finds himself at the bank of a river he has never seen before, where white water washes over white stones. The ground is also covered in white frost, and when Fools Crow asks Skunk Bear why everything is so white, Skunk Bear replies, "That's the way it is now." The white stones and frost in Fools Crow's dream reflect the increasing presence of the white settlers on Pikuni land and their attempts to control

and assimilate the native Blackfoot Indians.

The white stone is also symbolic of Kills-close-to-the-lake's betrayal of her husband, Rides-at-the-door. Kills-close-to-the-lake lusts after Fools Crow, who is Rides-at-the-door's son, and Skunk Bear punishes her as a reminder of her "wickedness." In her own dream at the strange white river, Kills-close-to-the-lake is visited by Skunk Bear, who "ravishes her" before biting off her finger. He then throws the finger, which turns into a white stone when it hits the ground. Kills-close-to-the-lake picks the stone up and later gives it to Fools Crow, who rubs it and finds power in it. Ironically, Fools Crow associates the white stone with the battle song given to him by Skunk Bear during his dream by the river, and he sings this song to find courage during the vision quest he takes to save his people from the invading white settlers. That Fools Crow and his people must eventually leave their land in order to survive suggests that the stone, while indeed helping Fools Crow come to this conclusion in order to survive, still represents the erasure of Pikuni culture from their own land.



SEVEN PERSONS

Seven Persons is the Pikuni term for the constellation the Big Dipper and is symbolic of the Pikunis' spirituality and their connection to the natural world. The Pikunis worship the Above Ones, or the spiritual entities represented in the stars, and they pride themselves on being just like the deities they worship. Seven Persons is the most frequently mentioned constellation in *Fools Crow*, and it guides the Pikuni people both literally and metaphorically. Seven Persons helps the Lone Eaters to navigate at night and is also a sign of good fortune and power. For instance, Yellow Kidney's war paint consists of painting his face in the pattern of Seven Persons. Later, when Fools Crow embarks on his vision quest, he knows he is in the right place when Seven Persons is clear in the sky—even though he doesn't know where he is going. Fools Crow also prays to Seven Persons for forgiveness when he betrays Rides-at-the-door, his father, by lusting after his near-mother, Kills-close-to-the-lake. When the constellation is not visible, it is often associated with betrayal or deceit. On the night of Fools Crow's wedding to Red Paint, when Kills-close-to-the-lake approaches Fools Crow to congratulate him, he is unable to see Seven Persons in the night sky. As she walks away, Fools Crow has tears in his eyes because, as always, it is difficult for him to resist his father's wife. Similarly, Seven Persons is hidden by the clouds the night that Kills-close-to-the-lake visits Running Fisher in his tipi and Striped Face discovers their affair. All of these instances underscore the importance of Seven Persons—and, as such, of spirituality built on the natural world—within Pikuni culture.



THE BEAVER MEDICINE BUNDLE

The Beaver Medicine bundle is a bag of totems and objects that collectively represent over four hundred songs and prayers associated with the sacred wood-biter. The songs and prayers fulfill the spiritual needs of the Lone Eaters, and the bundle itself is symbolic of the strength and power of the Pikuni people. The Beaver Medicine bundle is the oldest and holiest medicine of the Blackfoot Indians. Only three such bundles exist, one of which is possessed by Boss Ribs, a heavy-singer-for-the-sick and member of the Lone Eaters' band. Fast Horse, Boss Ribs's son, sits and stares at the Beaver Medicine bundle and tries to harness its power when he feels lost after his actions lead to Yellow Kidney's abduction and torture by the Crows. Later, Boss Ribs hopes to strengthen and renew Fast Horse's place in the tribe after he banishes himself by teaching him the songs and prayers of the bundle. Boss Ribs also turns to the bundle for power when the white-scabs disease devastates the Lone Eaters' camp and threatens their very existence. Like the Pikunis themselves, the Beaver Medicine bundle is powerless against the deadly virus, and as Boss Ribs removes the totems from the bundle, the empty bag is symbolic of the Pikunis' hopelessness.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin edition of *Fools Crow* published in 1986.

Chapter 1 Quotes

☝☝ White Man's Dog raised his eyes to the west and followed the Backbone of the World from south to north until he could pick out Chief Mountain. It stood a little apart from the other mountains, not as tall as some but strong, its square granite face a landmark to all who passed. But it was more than a landmark to the Pikunis, Kainahs, and Siksikas, the three tribes of the Blackfeet, for it was on top of Chief Mountain that the blackhorn skull pillows of the great warriors still lay. On those skulls Eagle Head and Iron Breast had dreamed their visions in the long-ago, and the animal helpers had made them strong in spirit and fortunate in war.

Related Characters: White Man's Dog/Fools Crow

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 3

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs at the very beginning of the novel as

White Man's Dog, a young Pikuni warrior, is first introduced. The Pikuni people are deeply spiritual and have a profound connection to their ancestral lands, and this quote is a reflection of this connection. Chief Mountain, a sacred and holy site to the Pikuni people, is a physical representation of White Man's Dog's spirituality. The mountain is located deep in Pikuni lands near the Canadian border, and while it is a familiar landmark because of its unusually wide "square granite face," it also serves as a site for the Pikunis to fast, pray, and invite visions to guide them in life and war.

This quote also establishes the importance of dreams and visions within Pikuni culture. White Man's Dog experiences several dreams throughout the novel and embarks on a final vision quest in an attempt to discover how to best save his people from the invading white settlers. This is a practice that has been handed down for generations, and Eagle Head and Iron Breast, White Man's Dog's ancestors, climbed to the top of Chief Mountain to fast and pray. This tradition is continued and highly respected by the Pikuni people.

☞ [White Man's Dog] had never touched the body of a woman. His friends teased him and called him dog-lover. [...] [A friend] offered White Man's dog some of his Liars' Medicine to make himself attractive but it did no good. Even the bad girls who hung around the forts wanted nothing to do with him. Because he did not own a fine gun and a strong horse they ignored him.

Related Characters: White Man's Dog/Fools Crow

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 4

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs during White Man's Dog's introduction, and it establishes him as a weak and unimportant member of the tribe. On the cusp of manhood, White Man's Dog is stuck in an awkward spot—he is not quite a man, but he is far from a child. In Pikuni culture, which is patriarchal and polygamous in nature, a man's wealth is defined by how many guns, horses, and women he has. White Man's Dog is poor by tribal standards, and this is a source of his constant ridicule and torment by others in the tribe. The "bad girls" who want nothing to do with White Man's Dog are particularly insulting. The girls hang around the trading forts trying to catch the attention of the Napikwans, or white settlers, yet even these girls are not interested in him. White Man's Dog begins the novel with little wealth and

even less respect, which makes his transformation into Fools Crow, a respected and feared member of the tribe, all the more significant.

Chapter 3 Quotes

☞ Yellow Kidney watched the young men as they chopped down some small spear-leaf trees. These are good human beings, he thought, not like Owl Child and his bunch. His face grew dark as he thought this. He had been hearing around the Pikunis that Owl Child and his gang had been causing trouble with the Napikwans, driving away horses and cattle, and had recently killed a party of woodcutters near Many Houses fort. It would be only a matter of time before the Napikwans sent their seizers to make war on the Pikunis. The people would suffer greatly.

Related Characters: Owl Child, Yellow Kidney

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 16

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Yellow Kidney is leading a party of young Pikuni warriors on a horse raid of the Crows' camp. Raiding another tribe's camp for horses is common practice among the tribes. Wealth is gained in the value of the horses, and honor is also gained in the form of courage. Casualties are common, yet usually minimal, and to be killed during wars or raids is considered an honorable and desirable way to enter the afterlife. Owl Child's attacks on the white settlers, on the other hand, are not considered honorable. He steals from them every chance that he gets and kills them indiscriminately—he even strikes near the Many Houses fort, the main meeting place for the Napikwans and the violent blue-coat seizers. Yellow Kidney's concern that Owl Child's behavior will result in the Napikwans responding with war on the Pikunis foreshadows the massacre at the climax of the novel. Just as he suspects, the people will "suffer greatly" when an innocent band of Pikunis is made to pay for Owl Child's selfish actions.

●● [White Man's Dog] pulled back the entrance skin and saw several dark shapes around the perimeter of the lodge. As his eyes adjusted, he saw that the shapes weren't breathing. Then, opposite him, of the shapes lifted its sleeping robe and he saw that it was a young white-faced girl. She beckoned to him, and in fright he turned to leave. But as he turned away he looked back and saw that the girl's eyes desired him. Then all the dark shapes began to move and he saw that they were all young girls, naked and with the same look in their eyes. The white-faced girl stood and held out her arms and White Man's Dog moved toward her. It was at this point that he would wake up.

Related Characters: Yellow Kidney, White Man's Dog/
Fools Crow

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 17

Explanation and Analysis

This quote describes the reoccurring dream that White Man's Dog experiences while traveling with Yellow Kidney's raiding party. He experiences the dream several nights in a row, and White Man's Dog suspects that it is a warning of some kind, although he doesn't quite know how to interpret it. The breathless shapes inside the lodge suggest death and suffering, and the white-faced girl is just as menacing. The color white, like the settlers, has a particularly negative connotation throughout the novel, and the girl's white face represents the dangers of colonialism and western expansion. She "beckons" him and "desires him," just as the settlers desire the Pikunis' land, and the obvious death that surrounds her reflects the fate of the people.

White Man's Dog's dream also foreshadows Yellow Kidney's rape of the young girl suffering from white-scabs disease, but White Man's Dog is not yet able to make this connection. Still, he senses danger in the white-faced girl and stays away. Of course, Yellow Kidney does not share White Man's Dog's restraint, and he is punished with a fate worse than death after he violates the Pikunis' natural law and steals the young girl's virtue.

Chapter 4 Quotes

●● [White Man's Dog] prayed to Sun Chief, who watched over the Pikunis and all the things of this world. Then he dropped his head and made a vow. He vowed that if he was successful and returned home unharmed, he would sacrifice before the Medicine Pole at the next Sun Dance. Finally, he sang his war song, his voice low and distinct. When he lifted his head he saw that the other men had painted their faces. Yellow Kidney had painted the left half of his face white with a series of small blue dots in a familiar pattern. Seven Persons, thought White Man's Dog.

Related Characters: Yellow Kidney, White Man's Dog/
Fools Crow

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 27

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs as White Man's Dog and the other members of Yellow Kidney's raiding party ready themselves to enter the Crows' camp. White Man's Dog's prayer to Sun Chief is evidence of his deep spirituality and the role the natural world plays in that spirituality. The Pikunis are intensely connected to their natural surroundings, and their spirituality implies an appreciation and respect for nature. The vow that White Man's Dog makes to Sun Chief in exchange for his safe return from the raid is later realized at the summer ceremony, and this too is evidence of his dedication to his spirituality and the Pikuni way of life. Like White Man's Dog, Fast Horse also vows to give thanks and sacrifice for the party's safe travels, but he is not willing to carry through on his promises, and his connection to the people is likewise weak. White Man's Dog sacrifices his flesh and blood to Sun Chief, and in doing so he preserves the Pikunis sacred way of life.

This quote also emphasizes the strength the Pikuni people find in their natural surroundings. Sun Chief is a principal Pikuni deity represented by the sun, and White Man's Dog finds courage in his image. Yellow Kidney likewise finds strength and guidance in Seven Persons, the spiritual entity represented by the constellation known as the Big Dipper. Seven Persons is frequently mentioned throughout the novel and is a constant source of spiritual guidance and power for the Pikuni people.

Chapter 5 Quotes

“I have had a bad dream and it troubles me. I came and went so fast, I could make little of it. In my dream I saw a small white horse wandering in the snow. Its hooves were split and it had sores all over. It was wearing a bridle and the reins trailed after it. But it was the eyes. I looked into the eyes and they were white and unseeing. As I drew closer I saw across its back fingers of blood.”

Related Characters: Eagle Ribs (speaker), Yellow Kidney

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 35-6

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Eagle Ribs has just rejoined the raiding party after their attack on the Crows. Yellow Kidney and Fast Horse have not yet returned, and Eagle Ribs fears that his dream means that Yellow Kidney is dead or badly injured. This quote further emphasizes the importance of dreams within Pikuni culture, but it also imparts a sense of dread and danger. Like White Man’s Dog’s dream, this dream relies on a negative connotation of the color white and Eagle Ribs understands very little of the encrypted message. The “small white horse” also has biblical connotations and is reminiscent of Revelations and the pale horse who brings death. While Eagle Ribs does equate the small horse with death, exactly whose death is unclear. Of course, the dream foreshadows Yellow Kidney’s return to the Lone Eaters’ camp astride the lame white horse, and the sores represent the white-scabs disease that Yellow Kidney catches during his rape of the young girl. Eagle Ribs’s dream thus employs the color white to impart danger and death. The horse’s eyes, “white and unseeing,” represent the blind violence of the Napikwans as they systematically eliminate the Pikuni people from their native lands.

Chapter 6 Quotes

White Man’s Dog had settled down into the routine of the winter camp but there were days when he longed to travel, to experience the excitement of entering enemy country. Sometimes he even thought of looking for Yellow Kidney. In some ways he felt responsible, at least partially so, for the horse-taker’s disappearance. When he slept he tried to will himself to dream about Yellow Kidney. Once he dreamed about Red Old Man’s Butte and the war lodge there, but Yellow Kidney was not in it. The country between the Two Medicine River and the Crow camp on the Bighorn was as vast as the sky, and to try to find one man, without a sign, would be impossible. And so he waited for a sign.

Related Characters: Yellow Kidney, White Man’s Dog/
Fools Crow

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 47

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs after White Man’s Dog returns home from the raid on the Crows’ camp, and it represents the duality of his individual desires and the responsibilities of tribal life. The daily routine of camp life is consumed with ensuring the needs of the tribe are met, largely through hunting and gathering, which leaves very little time for White Man’s Dog to focus on himself. Going on Yellow Kidney’s raid has given White Man’s Dog a taste of freedom from these daily responsibilities, and that exciting life holds a certain level of allure for the young warrior. However, this quote also highlights White Man’s Dog’s deep sense of commitment to his tribe. He is not responsible for Yellow Kidney’s disappearance, yet he still feels that he is. The fact that White Man’s Dog wills himself to dream about Yellow Kidney underscores the significance of dreams within Pikuni culture, and his vision of the war lodge on Red Old Man’s Butte foretells Yellow Kidney’s death later in the novel. Yellow Kidney takes cover in the old war lodge during a snow storm and is killed by a Napikwan passing through.

●● But [White Man's Dog] killed many animals on his solitary hunts and he left many of them outside the lodge of Heavy Shield Woman. Sometimes he left a whole blackhorn there, for only the blackhorn could provide for all the needs of a family. Although the women possessed kettles and steel knives, they still preferred to make spoons and dippers out of the horns of the blackhorn. They used the hair of the head and heard to make braided halters and bridles and soft-padded saddles. They used the hooves to make rattles or glue, and the tails to swat flies. And they dressed the dehaired skins to make lodge covers and linings and clothes and winding cloths. Without the blackhorn, the Pikunis would be as sad as the little bigmouths who howled all night.

Related Characters: Heavy Shield Woman, White Man's Dog/Fools Crow

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 48

Explanation and Analysis

Here, White Man's Dog provides for the needs of Yellow Kidney's family after Yellow Kidney fails to return home from the raid on the Crows. The division of labor in the Pikunis' patriarchal society is such that the men hunt and provide game, while the women process the meat, the hide, and other usable parts of the animal. Without Yellow Kidney, his family is unable to hunt for themselves, and White Man's Dog willingly steps in to fill this role. In this way, this passage highlights White Man's Dog's commitment to his people and the good of the tribe. If not for him, Yellow Kidney's family would likely find it difficult to survive.

This quote also reflects the Pikunis' intense respect for nature and animals, which in turn serves to preserve their native way of life. The blackhorn provides all of the Pikunis' needs, and they utilize each part of the animal with little to no waste. Nearly every aspect of Pikuni life is made possible by the blackhorn—it feeds them, keeps them warm and comfortable, and provides material for saddles and bridles. The Pikuni could not survive without the blackhorns, and therefore a life without them would make them as sad as a "little bigmouth," or coyote, howling at the moon in despair.

●● "It surprises you that I speak the language of the two-leggeds. It's easy, for I have lived among you many times in my travel. I speak many languages. I converse with the blackhorns and the real-bears and the wood-biters. Bigmouth and I discuss many things." Raven made a face. "I even deign to speak once in a while with the swift silver people who live in the water—but they are dumb and lead lives without interest. I myself am very wise. That is why Mik-api treats me to a smoke now and then."

Related Characters: Raven (speaker), Mik-api, White Man's Dog/Fools Crow

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 57

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs as Raven comes to lead White Man's Dog to his spirit animal, Skunk Bear, and it reflects White Man's Dog's connection to nature. White Man's Dog has been unable to find his spirit animal on his own, and Raven guides him to the animal's location. Raven's ability to speak White Man's Dog's language is a testament to the closeness of their relationship, and it also establishes his proximity to the other animals as well. The Pikuni people are connected to all animals, not just their designated spirit animals, and their stories and songs, including the Beaver Medicine bundle, are proof of this connection.

White Man's Dog's interaction with Raven also introduces the Pikunis' aversion to fish. Just as the Pikunis scorn those who eat fish, Raven only "deigns" to speak with them, which reflects his own disgust of fish. He refers to the "swift silver people" as "dumb" and claims that they "lead lives without interest." Raven's dislike of fish parallels the Pikunis' hesitancy to move north to the land of the fish-eating Siksikas to escape the violence of the blue-coat seizers and western expansion.

Chapter 7 Quotes

●● Three Bears turned to Fast Horse. "We do not want trouble with the whites. Now that the great war in that place where Sun Chief rises is over, the blue-coat seizers come out to our country. Their chiefs have warned us more than once that if we make life tough for their people, they will ride against us." He pointed his pipe in the direction of Owl Child. "If these foolish young men continue their raiding and killing of the Napikwans, we will all suffer. The seizers will kill us, and the Pikuni people will be as the shadows on the land. This must not happen."

Related Characters: Three Bears (speaker), Heavy Runner, Owl Child

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 61-2

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs as Owl Child rides into the Lone Eaters' camp astride a stolen Napikwan horse, and it foreshadows the devastation of the massacre at Heavy Runner's camp. Owl Child raids and kills the Napikwans with complete disregard for the safety of the Pikuni people. With each new attack on the Napikwans, Owl Child adds to the strain on the relationship between the Pikuni people and the United States government, and Three Bears knows that it will not be long before the seizers attack the people. Owl Child's only concerns are increasing his wealth through stolen Napikwan horses and avenging the theft of his land, and when he continues to act in self-interest, the tribe pays, just as Three Bears fears. The end of the Civil War has brought increasing numbers of white settlers to Pikuni lands, and the Napikwans are supported by the United States military in their manifest destiny—or their God given right to conquer and colonize the western frontier.

Chapter 8 Quotes

☞ But all that had changed now because Fast Horse had changed. He had become an outsider within his own band. He no longer sought the company of others, and they avoided him. The girls who had once looked so admiringly on him now averted their eyes when he passed. The young men considered him a source of bad medicine, and the older ones did not invite him for a smoke. Even his own father had begun to look upon him with doubt and regret. As for Fast Horse, the more he stared at the Beaver Medicine, the more it lost meaning for him. That would not be the way of his power. His power would be tangible and immediate.

Related Characters: Boss Ribs, Fast Horse

Related Themes:    

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 71

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs after Fast Horse returns home from the

raid on the Crows' camp and it is significant because it highlights the progression of his character from a promising young warrior to a shunned outcast. Fast Horse has taken a path of selfishness, and that path leads him away from his tribe. He is tormented by his boastful behavior that night in the Crow camp, and he knows that he is responsible for Yellow Kidney's disappearance. Fast Horse's shame is the primary source of his "bad medicine," and the tribe isolates him as if he is contagious. Fast Horse is an example of what becomes of a Pikuni who puts his own needs before the needs of his tribe, and his social status declines considerably because of his poor choices. What's worse, Fast Horse no longer finds power in the Beaver Medicine bundle, and when he rejects it, he likewise rejects his people and their history.

☞ "[...] It was there, that day while looking at my scars and my hands, that I knew why I had been punished so severely. As you men of the warrior societies know, in all things, to the extent of my ability, I have tried to act honorably. But there in that Crow lodge, in that lodge of death, I had broken one of the simplest decencies by which people live. In fornicating with the dying girl, I had taken her honor, her opportunity to die virtuously. I have taken the path traveled only by the meanest scavengers. And so Old Man, as he created me, took away my life many times and left me like this, worse than dead, to think of my transgression every day, to be reminded every time I attempt the smallest act that men take for granted."

Related Characters: Yellow Kidney (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 82

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Yellow Kidney has finally returned after the raid on the Crows and he tells the Lone Eaters about raping the young girl in the sick lodge. Yellow Kidney is deeply ashamed of his violent assault on the girl, and he is convinced his life was spared only as punishment for his wicked act. Yellow Kidney's mangled body is an outward reflection of his inner turmoil and pain. The deep scars remaining from his nearly fatal bout of white-scabs disease are as ugly as his despicable deed, and his fingerless hands mean that he will be a burden on his tribe for the rest of his miserable life—a particularly tough pill for a Pikuni man to swallow.

Yellow Kidney's deformed state means that he lives most of the rest of his life in utter agony. His wife no longer looks at

him with affection and he must watch Fools Crow teach his sons how to hunt and be men. He is miserable, and he only achieves a small glimmer of hope before he is killed by a Napikwan. Welch's depiction of Yellow Kidney is quite tragic, and it serves as an example of what happens when a patriarch abuses his power. Yellow Kidney had no right to steal the girl's virtue and he used his power to evil ends.

Chapter 9 Quotes

☞ White Man's Dog looked into the wrinkled face and tried to read the emotions there. For while the lips were curved into a smile, the eyes had become wet. It was as though Mad Plume remembered Little Dog both fondly and sadly. Yet there was something else there, something in the way the lips trembled, as though he wanted to say something more. White Man's Dog remember the reason given for the killing of Little Dog, and now he wondered if some part of Mad Plume not only understood that reason but perhaps condoned it. The killers of Little Dog felt the head chief had put the interests of the Napikwans before those of the Pikunis. It was he who betrayed the people.

Related Characters: Little Dog, Mad Plume, White Man's Dog/Fools Crow

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 97-8

Explanation and Analysis

Here, White Man's Dog is visiting the camp of the Black Patched Moccasins on his ride to alert the outlying Pikuni bands of Yellow Kidney's return. Mad Plume's mixed emotions as he tells White Man's Dog about the murder of Little Dog is another reflection of the duality of the individual and the community. Little Dog was killed because he made a lone decision to treat with the Napikwans, and he did so at the expense of his tribe. Mad Plume too is torn between his personal feelings over the loss of his friend and his commitment to and support of the rest of the tribe. Of course, Mad Plume remembers his friend fondly, but he also remembers that Little Dog took the side of the Napikwans against his own people, and that has consequences. Little Dog's murder is another warning of what happens when a Pikuni acts with disregard for the rest of the tribe. While Little Dog's death is undoubtedly tragic, it was necessary for the greater good of the tribe. The Napikwans' presence is a direct threat to the Pikuni way of life, and Little Dog's relationship with the white settlers increased this threat.

Chapter 10 Quotes

☞ "It is good to see you again, brother," [Skunk Bear] said. "I have got myself caught again and there is no one around but you."

"But why is it so white, Skunk Bear?" White Man's Dog had to shield his eyes from the glare.

"That's the way it is now. All the breathing things are gone—except for us. But hurry, brother, for I feel my strength slipping away."

Related Characters: White Man's Dog/Fools Crow, Skunk Bear (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 119-20

Explanation and Analysis

This quote takes place in White Man's Dog's dream the night he makes his vow to Sun Chief before the Medicine Pole. White Man's Dog dreams of a strange river and Skunk Bear is there. The fact that White Man's Dog dreams about his spirit animal is further proof of his spirituality and deep connection to the natural world, but this dream also symbolizes the threat of the invading Napikwans on Pikuni land. For the second time, Skunk Bear is caught in a steal Napikwan trap, which itself is evidence of the white settlers. The Pikunis do not trap this way, and the Napikwans' traps are already threatening the native beaver population—another animal that is sacred to the Pikunis and their way of life. The white stones and water that White Man's Dog refers to in this quote are symbolic of the presence of the Napikwans on the Pikunis' ancestral lands, and Skunk Bear's reply—"that's the way it is now"—underscores the hopelessness of their situation. There is nothing the Pikunis can do to stop the whitewashing and assimilation of their people. Instead, they are forced to watch as their land is stolen and the blackhorns and other wild game are pushed away to make room for crops and cattle.

Chapter 11 Quotes

☞ In six days White Man's Dog would ride with the war party against the Crows. As she rubbed her neck and looked off to the Sweet Grass Hills, she felt again the dread that came whenever she allowed herself to think. She had tried to stay busy, but even a momentary lapse in concentration allowed that dreaded thought to steal through her whole body. She knew that war parties were part of a man's life and she knew that she should be proud that White Man's Dog had been selected to count coup on behalf of her father, Yellow Kidney. But it was because of Yellow Kidney that she felt so fearful.

Related Characters: Yellow Kidney, White Man's Dog/Fools Crow, Red Paint

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 131

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs right before White Man's Dog rides against the Crow to avenge Yellow Kidney's torture, and it highlights the effects of war on the tribe. Red Paint has already lost her father, for all intents and purposes, because of needless warring, and she is fearful that her husband, White Man's Dog, will meet the same end. These feelings are particularly difficult for Red Paint because war is so important to the Pikuni people. She even knows she should be proud, but Red Paint feels no pride. Her father's broken state certainly does not inspire feelings of pride in war. White Man's Dog has "been selected to count coup on behalf of her father," which means that he will attempt to physically touch his enemy as a display of his courage and honor. Just as White Man's Dog implies after Yellow Kidney's disappearance during the Crow raid, the reward for counting coup hardly seems worth the risk, and Red Paint's thoughts underscore this obvious truth. White Man's Dog's courage and honor is not worth his life, and it is not worth Red Paint's continued stress and worry. With this representation of war, Welch ultimately implies that constant warring is an untenable and destructive way of life.

☞ He had hated White Grass then, and it had been this hatred which gave him the strength to kill him. Now he felt a mild regret that his old enemy was no longer around. With his victory, Fox Eyes had lost something, the desire to make his enemies pay dearly, to ride among them with a savage heart. He had lived forty-three winters, and he wished to live forty-three more in peace.

Related Characters: White Grass, Fox Eyes

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 141

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Fox Eyes, a respected Pikuni warrior chief, reflects on his previous kill as he prepares to attack the Crows to avenge Yellow Kidney. Fox Eyes dutifully discharges his role as a warrior chief—he leads the young warriors, sets a respected example, and even rallies the warriors with inspirational speeches of glory and honor—but his heart is not in it. Fox Eyes has lost his taste for the violence of war, and the "mild regret" he feels for White Grass is proof of his disillusionment. Welch's use of the term "savage heart" conjures images of violent Indians raiding and taking scalps, but it is precisely this image that Fox Eyes rejects. Like White Man's Dog and Red Paint, Fox Eyes is expected to find value in war, but what he really wants is to go home and be left alone. Ironically, this widespread rejection of war undermines the community of the tribe, even though it undoubtedly adds to the community through spared lives. The tribe desires war to uphold their honor, while Fox Eyes desires peace. In this way, Fox Eyes struggles like Fast Horse and White Man's Dog to balance his individual desires with the needs and desires of the tribe.

Chapter 12 Quotes

☞ White Man's Dog stood and watched the burial and thought of the afternoon a few days before when Sun Chief hid his face. And he thought of Fox Eyes riding down on Bull Shield instead of taking the simple shot that would have killed the Crow. White Man's Dog couldn't shake the feeling that Fox Eyes knew he was going to die, perhaps even wanted to. Only great chiefs died when Sun hid his face.

Related Characters: Bull Shield, Fox Eyes, White Man's Dog/Fools Crow

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 151

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs after Fox Eyes is killed during the attack on the Crows. White Man's Dog doesn't understand the solar eclipse he and the other warriors witnessed before their attack on the Crows, and he turns to Pikuni storytelling to explain his natural surroundings. As the one

of the Pikunis' primary deities, Sun Chief is physically represented by the sun, and when the eclipse blocks the rays, the Pikunis' believe that Sun Chief has "hidden his face." White Man's Dog's grandfather once told him a story about another time Sun Chief hid his face, and the natural event coincided with the death of a respected chief. From that day forward, the Pikunis have associated the eclipse with the death of their chief and considered it an earthly consequence of Sun Chief's actions.

The Pikuni legend of the eclipse underscores the Pikunis' profound connection to the natural world, but it also gives a weary warrior an honorable excuse to die. White Man's Dog can't "shake the feeling" that Fox Eyes wanted to die because, in a way, he *did* want to die; he was exhausted from the constant death and warring, and he wanted nothing more to do with it. Fox Eyes saw no other way to avoid war. Surely it will not be long after this raid that another reason to war will be found, and Fox Eyes does not want to live this way.

Chapter 14 Quotes

☞ "You saw our war party attack the camp of Bull Shield!"
 "Oh, yes. You killed twenty-three men. Alas, you also killed six women and one child." Raven sighed. "Such is war."
 "Then you saw me kill the two warriors!" Fools Crow exclaimed.
 "You saw me trick Bull Shield!"

Raven reached down and picked at the silver bracelet. It jingled on the rock, the tiny sound echoing around the basin. "I don't think you fooled him, do you? The one you got your name for?"

Fools Crow felt his face grow hot with shame. "I fell," he said weakly. "I thought I had been shot. I *had* been shot, but..."

Related Characters: White Man's Dog/Fools Crow, Raven (speaker), Bull Shield

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 164

Explanation and Analysis

This conversation between Raven and Fools Crow occurs after Fools Crow counts coup on behalf of Yellow Kidney. Fools Crow is initially excited that Raven has witnessed their attack of the Crows. Pikuni culture is rooted in war and warriors are often proud of their exploits, but Raven's detailed list of the casualties puts a damper on Fools Crow's excitement. After all, it was not only Bull Shield who was killed. The killing of Bull Shield, the Crow responsible for

Yellow Kidney's torture, can surely be excused if not condoned, but twenty-three men seems a mighty high price for one man's honor and pride. Worse still are the six women and one child who were also killed in the raid, and this is emphasized by the irony of Raven's reply— "Such is war." War is a poor justification for the loss of innocent lives.

Raven's bluntness also exposes Fools Crow's new name as a sham. Fools Crow was not cunning or brave—he was lucky—and it was the death of Fox Eyes that effectively saved Fools Crow's life. Bull Shield was distracted when Fox Eyes rode down on him during the raid, and this gave Fools Crow enough time to recover from the gun shot and kill Bull Shield. Raven is the only one, other than perhaps Fox Eyes and Bull Shield, who knows the truth about that day, and doesn't let Fools Crow forget that his name, and his honor, is a fraud.

☞ [Red Paint] sat back on her heels and watched the slippery swimmer that had stationed himself in an eddy behind a yellow rock. [...] She had been tempted for three days now to catch him and taste his flesh. Her own people scorned those who ate the underwater swimmers, but she had a cousin who had married into the Fish Eaters band of the Siksikas, and he had become fond of the silver creatures. [...] Today she would make a bone hook. She would catch him for Fools Crow. In the solitude of the Backbone they would taste the flesh of this swimmer together.

Related Characters: White Man's Dog/Fools Crow, Red Paint

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 169-70

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs when Red Paint and Fools Crow escape to the mountains, or the Backbone of the World, to be alone after the raid. The couple again is struggling to balance their personal needs and desires with those of the tribe, and they are relishing in the privacy of the mountains. Red Paint's desire to taste the flesh of the fish represents her willingness to modify her traditional diet to maintain the Pikuni way of life. The invading Napikwans have affected the blackhorn population and hunting is not as plentiful as it once was. In addition to this, the seizers and the Napikwan chiefs have stolen large portions of Pikuni land, and the Lone Eaters cannot maintain their way of life much longer. Several members of the tribe have suggested moving north to the land of the Siksikas, a band of Blackfoot Indians who

live beyond the Canadian border. However, moving to Canada implies that they will also eat fish and no longer be able to hunt blackhorns. Many of the tribal members are not willing to make this sacrifice, but Red Paint's willingness to sample the fish foreshadows her own willingness to relocate and continue the Pikuni way of life—in any way possible—and this reflects the strength of the Pikuni people to survive in the face of oppression.

Chapter 18 Quotes

☛ The thought came into [Fools Crow's] mind without warning, the sudden understanding of what Fast Horse found so attractive in running with Owl Child. It was this freedom from responsibility, from accountability to the group, that was so alluring. As long as one thought himself as part of the group, he would be responsible to and for that group. If one cut ties, he had the freedom to roam, to think only of himself and not worry about the consequences of his actions. So it was for Owl Child and Fast Horse to roam. And so it was for the Pikunis to suffer.

Related Characters: Owl Child, Fast Horse, White Man's Dog/Fools Crow

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 213

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Fools Crow has been ordered by Boss Ribs to find Fast Horse and return him to the tribe. This passage is significant because it clearly establishes Fools Crow's own internal fight over the duality of his own desires and the responsibility of tribal life. Fools Crow is empathetic to Fast Horse's feelings, and he too appreciates the allure of living only for one's self. If anyone understands, it is Fools Crow. After all, he is the one who assumed the responsibility of caring for Yellow Kidney's family, even before he committed to marrying Red Paint. Fools Crow also assumed the responsibility of the tribe's physical and spiritual needs when he became Mik-api's apprentice and started learning the magic of a many-faces man. Fools Crow has numerous responsibilities within the tribe, and he rarely has time to think about himself. This quote also firmly cements Fools Crow's dedication to his tribal community. His life caring for the tribe may be difficult, but he can't imagine it any other way, and he also understands that leaving the community has negative consequences on the tribe. Just as the tribe would suffer if Fools Crow cut his own ties, the people suffer because Fast Horse and Owl Child have turned their backs on them.

Chapter 22 Quotes

☛ These people have not changed, thought Kipp, but the world they live in has. You could look at it one of two ways: Either their world is shrinking or that other world, the one the white man brought with him, is expanding. Either way, the Pikuni loses, and Kipp—well, Joe Kipp is somewhere in the middle—and has a job to do. He slipped a big gold Ingersoll from his waist-coat pocket and sprung the lid. One o'clock. He could deliver his message to the Lone Eaters and make the Hard Topknots' camp by nightfall.

Related Characters: Joe Kipp

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 254

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs when Joe Kipp, a half-breed Pikuni, arrives at the Lone Eaters' camp to tell Three Bears that the Napikwan chiefs desire a meeting to discuss the arrest of Owl Child. Joe Kipp represents the assimilation of the Pikuni people by the Napikwans. Joe speaks the language of the Napikwans, he dresses like a white settler, and even tells time like a white man. Instead of looking to Sun Chief for guidance, he consults a pocket watch. One o'clock means very little to the Lone Eaters, but Joe's day revolves around these arbitrary numbers, underscoring his dependence on the Napikwan way of life. Joe is a stark contrast to Fools Crow and the other Lone Eaters who refuse to live on the Napikwans' terms. Like Three Bears, Joe Kipp knows that the Pikunis' days are numbered. The Napikwans will eventually take them over, and in the meantime, Joe has ingratiated himself to the white settlers. While this will likely ensure his survival, he has been rejected by his people.

☛ “We will lose our grandchildren, Three Bears. They will be wiped out or they will turn into Napikwans. Already some of our children attend their school at the agency. Our men wear trousers and the women prefer the trade-cloth to skins. We wear their blankets, cook in their kettles, and kill the blackhorns with their bullets. Soon our young women will marry them, like the Liars and the Cutthroats.”

Related Characters: Rides-at-the-door (speaker), Joe Kipp, Three Bears

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 257

Explanation and Analysis

These lines spoken by Three Bears occur after Joe Kipp delivers his message about the meeting with the Napikwan Chiefs. Both Rides-at-the-door and Three Bears know that they cannot possibly maintain the Pikuni way of life in the face of the blue-coat seizers, and the term “wiped out” implies the total devastation that comes along with the Napikwans’ westward expansion. Rides-at-the-door fears the assimilation of their children and the whitewashing of their Pikuni ways. In short, Rides-at-the-door fears their children will turn into Joe Kipp.

His reference to the agency schools is a broader reference to the government boarding schools that strip young Indian children of their native identity and give them Christian names and short haircuts. To the Pikunis, being forced to live as a Napikwan is a fate worse than death. Rides-at-the-door’s words reflect the Napikwans’ slow take-over of the Pikunis’ way of life. From their cookware to their ammunition, the white settlers have infiltrated Pikuni life, and they won’t stop until the natives are eliminated or assimilated. Rides-at-the-door’s quote reflects the hopelessness of the Pikunis’ situation, which makes their continued perseverance even more powerful.

Chapter 33 Quotes

☝☝ “I do not fear for my people now. As you say, we will go to a happier place, far from the Napikwans, this disease and starvation. But I grieve for our children and their children, who will not know the life their people once lived. I see them on the yellow skin and they are dressed like Napikwans, they watch the Napikwans and learn much from them, but they are not happy. They lose their own way.”

“Much will be lost to them,” said Feather Woman. “But they will know the way it was. The stories will be handed down, and they will see that their people were proud and lived in accordance with the Below Ones, the Underwater People—and the Above Ones.”

Related Characters: So-at-sa-ki/Feather Woman, White Man’s Dog/Fools Crow (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 362-3

Explanation and Analysis

This is an exchange between Fools Crow and Feather

Woman that occurs at the end of Fools Crow’s vision quest. Dreams and visions are significant in Pikuni culture, and Fools Crow turns to his dreams to help his people survive the invading Napikwans. As a brave and honorable warrior, Fools Crow does not fear dying at the hands of the Napikwans. He has lived an honorable life and he is sure to live a glorious eternity in the afterlife. The real tragedy is not only the death of the Pikuni people, but the end of their sacred way of life. Those who survive are sure to be assimilated into to the Napikwans’ white culture, and the Lone Eaters’ children will never know their native ancestors’ way of life. Fools Crow is convinced that his people are helpless, but Feather Woman argues otherwise. She reminds Fools Crow that the Pikuni way of life will never die as long as their stories, such as the story of So-at-sa-ki, are handed down to their children. The power to continue their sacred way of life lives in their stories, and this is also reflected in the Pikunis’ spirituality and their connection to the natural world.

Chapter 35 Quotes

☝☝ “We must think of our children,” [Fools Crow] said. He lowered his eyes to the red puppy and it was quiet all around. The few survivors stared at the red puppy, who had rolled onto his back, his front legs tucked against his chest. They had no children.

Related Characters: White Man’s Dog/Fools Crow (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 388

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs after Fools Crow comes upon the devastation of the massacre of Heavy Runner’s people perpetrated by the United States military, and it emphasizes the heartbreaking nature of this historic mass murder of the Pikuni people. Fools Crow claims that they must think of their children and find a way to preserve their way of life. Through teaching their children the stories and ways of their people, the Pikuni lifestyle lives on indefinitely—as long as there is someone left to tell their stories to. Tragically, most of the children from Heavy Runner’s camp are dead. When the blue-coat seizers opened fire on the camp in the early morning hours, the Pikuni men had already left for a hunting trip. The only people in the camp were women, children, the elderly, and those still recovering from the recent outbreak of white-scabs disease. Heavy

Runner's camp was never a threat to the Napikwans, but it certainly was not a threat that morning in its bare and weakened condition. The attack on Heavy Runner's camp highlights the unspeakable violence done onto the Pikuni people by the United States government, and it emphasizes how helpless the Pikunis are to stop the advancing forces.

Chapter 36 Quotes

☛ From the fires of the camps, out on the rain-dark prairies, in the swales and washes, on the rolling hills, the rivers of great animals moved. Their backs were dark with rain and the rain gathered and trickled down their shaggy heads. Some grazed, some slept. Some had begun to molt. Their dark horns glistened in the rain as they stood guard over the sleeping calves. The blackhorns had returned, and, all around, it was as it should be.

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 392-3

Explanation and Analysis

This passage constitutes the closing lines of *Fools Crow* and it represents the Pikunis' connection to the natural world. When the Lone Eaters leave their winter camp in an elaborate ceremonial procession, it is implied that Fools Crow and the surviving Pikunis are heading north to the land of the Siksikas. There, the Pikunis will have a better chance to live their native lifestyle away from the oppressive force of the white settlers and the violence of the United States government. The Pikunis life will be different in Canada, and they will no longer be able to hunt the blackhorns, but their way of life will continue on their own terms. As the Pikunis leave their camp, the animals go about their business living and dying, and everything is "as it should be." Since the Pikuni people believe themselves to be one with the animals and their natural surroundings, these closing lines imply that everything is as it should be with the Pikunis as well. Fools Crow and his people will live on through their sacred stories and their connection with nature, and where that life leads them is not as important as they once thought.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1

White Man's Dog is "restless" as Cold Maker churns the dark clouds in the distant northern sky. In the near dark, White Man's Dog looks down the Two Medicine River to the quiet lodges of the Lone Eaters. He looks at the expansive range of the Backbone of the World mountains and notices Chief Mountain. This smaller mountain is the sacred landmark of the three tribes of the Blackfeet—the Pikunis, Kainahs, and the Siksikas. At the top of Chief Mountain are the blackhorn skull pillows of the great warriors, where their ancestors dreamed visions and were made "strong in spirit and fortunate in war" by the animal helpers.

At eighteen winters, White Man's Dog has little wealth and no tribal respect. Unlike his father, Rides-at-the-door, who has three wives and many horses, White Man's Dog has no women and only three "puny" horses. He doesn't own a many-shots gun and his animal helper is "weak." He prays to the Above Ones for stronger medicine, but White Man's Dog must find his own power—he is only allowed the help of a many-faces man.

White Man's Dog thinks of his father's youngest wife, Kills-close-to-the-lake, and the way she looks at him. He often catches her staring at him, and it makes him uncomfortable. White Man's Dog has never been with a woman and his friends tease him and call him a dog-lover. Most women ignore him because he does not own a gun or strong horses.

White Man's Dog looks to the sky and watches as **Seven Persons** rises high above Chief Mountain. Despite the brisk wind, White Man's Dog thinks that Cold Maker will remain in Always Winer Land for a bit longer. As he makes his way to his father's lodge, White Man's Dog asks Seven Persons and the Above Ones to forgive his impure thoughts about his father's wife.

The Pikuni people have a deep connection to the natural world, and White Man's Dog's restlessness mirrors his natural surroundings. Cold Maker, or winter, is eager to make himself known—just like White Man's Dog. This connection to the natural world manifests in Pikuni spirituality as well, and Chief Mountain is the holiest of sites. For generations, warriors have gone to the mountain to fast, pray, and experience visions, which in turn give them power.



Pikuni society is patriarchal and polygamous, and a man's status is directly related to how many women and horses he has. Wealth is usually obtained by warring, and when White Man's Dog prays for "stronger medicine," he is looking for courage. Medicine is often gifted by animal helpers, and without a strong spirit animal, White Man's Dog's best hope for courage is a medicine man.



White Man's Dog's masculinity is directly related to his wealth, or lack thereof. Owning a repeating rifle is an indication of great wealth—more horses can be taken at gunpoint than with a bow and arrow. Kills-close-to-the-lake is also an indication of Rides-at-the-door's wealth. She is young (roughly the same age as White Man's Dog) and beautiful, and she means that Rides-at-the-door is a very rich man.



Seven Persons, or the Big Dipper, holds great spiritual significance for the Pikuni people. White Man's Dog looks to the heavenly figure for guidance. He also looks to the Above Ones—the other heavenly bodies that are represented by constellations in the sky—as a source of strength and guidance.



CHAPTER 2

The next day, Fast Horse approaches White Man's Dog. Despite being one winter younger than White Man's Dog, Fast Horse teases him tirelessly because he doesn't have a woman. Fast Horse tells him about Yellow Kidney's plan to lead a party against the Crow horses. The Crow, already threatened by the Napikwans, are weak and have no many-shots guns.

Fast Horse says that Yellow Kidney has invited him on the raid because he has strong medicine, which his father inherited from the wood-biter. Fast Horse has convinced Yellow Kidney to allow White Man's Dog to come along to cook and tend to the horses. Yellow Kidney believes that White Man's Dog has "much heart" but is "unlucky." If White Man's Dog joins the party, he will be given several horses as payment.

White Man's Dog is hesitant to join the party. He does not have Fast Horse's medicine (his father's **Beaver Medicine bundle** is the most powerful among the Pikunis), and White Man's Dog's own animal helper refuses to speak to him. Fast Horse suggests that he seek another animal helper, but White Man's Dog believes that this animal is testing his worthiness.

Fast Horse tells White Man's Dog that Mik-api, a powerful many-faces man, has strong medicine and has agreed to perform a ceremony. White Man's Dog agrees and is excited at the thought of Mik-api's help. Fast Horse tells White Man's Dog to keep their plans a secret—their journey is long and dangerous, and the others will try to talk them out of it.

Later that night, Rides-at-the-door notes that White Man's Dog is in better spirits than he has been for some time. Rides-at-the-door fears his elder son is a coward. His younger son, Running Fisher, shows much more promise of becoming a respected member of the tribe. Now, as Kills-close-to-the-lake serves White Man's Dog roasted meat, Rides-at-the-door has a renewed sense of optimism that his son will grow into a brave man after all.

The Napikwans, or white settlers, have been moving West for some time now, and they are encroaching on Crow land. The Napikwans have already taken tribal lands to the east with the help of the United States government, and the Crows are weak from resisting this oppressive force. Yellow Kidney hopes to capitalize on this weakness.



Yellow Kidney's belief that Fast Horse has strong medicine is a reference to the Beaver Medicine bundle, a bag of sacred objects that each represents individual songs and stories of the Pikuni people. Even though Fast Horse does not technically possess the bundle himself (his father does), Yellow Kidney still hopes that the warriors can harness some of that power by proxy.



White Man's Dog's dedication to his silent animal helper reflects his dedication to the Pikuni way of life. Fast Horse, on the other hand, is quick to abandon the spirit animal to find something better, and this largely reflects his own behavior toward the Pikuni way of life throughout most of the novel.



As a many-faces man, Mik-api has the power to endow White Man's Dog with "strong medicine," or courage in the form of ceremonial prayers and songs. These prayers and songs—a type of storytelling—are sacred in Pikuni culture.



Rides-at-the-door's initial assessment of his sons and their abilities is highly ironic. White Man's Dog, of course, becomes a respected member of the tribe, whereas Running Fisher is ultimately banished for dishonoring his father's lodge. White Man's Dog, like the Pikuni people, is a deeply spiritual young man, and the mere mention of Mik-api's medicine is enough to help him find his strength.



CHAPTER 3

Yellow Kidney looks up to **Seven Persons** as he waits for Fast Horse and White Man's Dog. The raid party, consisting of four other men, has gathered and is ready to depart. Other than Yellow Kidney, Eagle Ribs is the most experienced horse-taker. Known for his strong scouting skills, Eagle Ribs can slip undetected through enemy camps.

Yellow Kidney is the only member of the party who has a many-shots gun; the others are armed with only bows and knives. As Fast Horse and White Man's Dog approach, Yellow Kidney is struck by two main concerns—White Man's Dog is “unlucky” and Fast Horse is greedy and “reckless.”

As they walk, Yellow Kidney leads the men in the direction of Red Old Man's Butte, where he knows of a war lodge where they can rest. Near the Bear River, a fox runs across their path, and Yellow Kidney takes this as a good sign. A fox sighting is known to give men cunning, and to see one in a dream makes a man a strong leader.

As Red Old Man's Butte comes into sight, Eagle Ribs goes ahead to scout, as the area is popular among enemy tribes of the Snakes and the Flatheads. As the other men rest, Fast Horse tells them about a dream he had two sleeps ago. In this dream, Cold Maker came down from Always Winter Land on a white horse and promised to aid the men in their raid if they remove the boulder from his favorite ice spring on the side of Woman Don't Walk Butte.

In Fast Horse's dream, Cold Maker told him that if he finds the boulder and moves it, he will make the snow fall behind them to cover the party's tracks after the raid; but if he doesn't, Cold Maker will punish Fast Horse and the entire party. Since Cold Maker has offered his help to Fast Horse, he must bring Cold Maker two prime bull robes for his daughters during the helping-to-eat moon. Yellow Kidney is troubled by Fast Horse's dream. He knows that the dream cannot be ignored, and he fears that they won't be able to find the spring.

Yellow Kidney looks to Seven Persons for strength and direction before the raid, much like White Man's Dog does to help navigate his inappropriate feelings for Kills-close-to-the-lake. Most of the warriors in the raiding party have never warred before, and Yellow Kidney needs all the help he can get.



Yellow Kidney's concerns are realized with Fast Horse's display of hubris during the raid, which is ultimately the cause of Yellow Kidney's capture. Yellow Kidney's apprehension is the first of many signs (which he ignores) that the raid will end badly.



Yellow Kidney's fox sighting reflects the Pikunis' connection to nature. The Pikunis consider themselves one with nature and the animals, and to simply see a fox bestows them with its characteristics. The belief that seeing a fox in one's dream makes one strong also underscores the significance of dreams in Pikuni culture.



Cold Maker's white horse foreshadows Eagle Ribs's own dream about the death horse after Yellow Kidney fails to return from the raid. Fast Horse's dream and his failure to find Cold Maker's spring are further signs that the party should turn back, yet Yellow Kidney does not heed the warnings.



Yellow Kidney is troubled by Fast Horse's dream because he is likewise troubled by Fast Horse. Yellow Kidney doesn't trust him, and he knows that he should turn the party back; however, Yellow Kidney is determined to raid the Crows' camp and increase his own material wealth. Ultimately, the risks do not outweigh the benefits, and it is in this way that Welch is critical of war.



As their journey continues, the party comes upon the head of Little Prickly Pear near the land belonging to Malcolm Clark, a whitehorn rancher known as Four Bears who has a history of trading with the Pikunis. He married Cutting-off-head Woman, and despite his bad temper, he has a lot of say with the Napikwan chiefs. Yellow Kidney is not afraid of Four Bears, but he wants to steer clear of the Napikwans.

The Napikwan want to “exterminate” the Pikunis. They wish to take over Pikuni lands and graze whitehorns, and they have already taken much of the Pikunis’ territory. In exchange for land, the Napikwans have given the Pikunis goods—knives, tobacco, blankets, and some of their “strange food,” like the “white sand that makes things sweet, the white powder, the bitter black drink.” Everyone has been happy with this arrangement; the Napikwans have access to Pikuni lands and the Pikuni can also graze whitehorns and “plant seeds in the breast of Mother Earth,” and this makes the white chiefs happy.

By the ninth day, the party reaches the land of many enemies and must switch to travelling at night. White Man’s Dog thinks of the dream that he has had the last three nights in a row. In this dream, he walks through an enemy camp and is led by a dog to a lodge decorated with star clusters. In the lodge are several naked women, and a young white-faced girl beckons him. White Man’s Dog can sense that the young woman desires him, but he is frightened and runs off. White Man’s Dog is troubled by his dream and believes that it is a sign—only he doesn’t know how to interpret it.

CHAPTER 4

The next day, the men camp at the foot of Woman Don’t Walk Butte and Eagle Ribs goes out to scout for enemy war parties. Yellow Kidney, who is beginning to feel his thirty-eight winters, rests while the younger men go in search of Fast Horse’s ice spring. As Sun Chief washes the hills in light, Yellow Kidney offers a prayer of thanks for the pleasant day and for Night Red Light’s glow, which had eased their nighttime travels. Despite how useful this light has been, Yellow Kidney knows that it will work to their disadvantage when they reach the Crow camp.

Malcolm Clark is a product of European colonialism and western expansion. He moved in on native land and introduced large herds of beef cattle—effectively displacing local blackhorn herds. Clark has completely infiltrated native land and life, and has even taken a native wife, which is particularly insulting to Pikuni men.



If the Napikwan chiefs control the Pikunis’ food source, then they effectively control the Pikunis. Whitehorn cattle and the crops that the Napikwans introduce to the Pikunis are not naturally occurring—they must be supplied by the government, and the Pikunis have no other way to obtain them. Clearing land for farming vegetables and raising cattle eliminates the natural habitat of game animals, which also eliminates the Pikunis’ native food source and their self-reliance.



The white-faced girl in White Man’s Dog’s dreams carries two connotations. First and foremost, it foreshadows Yellow Kidney’s rape of the young girl dying of white-scabs disease, but it also represents the dangers posed by European colonialism. The white-faced girl beckons and desires White Man’s Dog, just as the white settlers desire native land and wish to assimilate the native people into white European culture.



Welch’s references to Sun Chief, or the sun, and Night Red Light, the moon, are evidence of Pikuni spirituality, which is often called on to explain the natural world. The sun doesn’t simply rise and set in a continuous cycle; it is a blessing from Sun Chief, a principal deity in Pikuni culture. Similarly, Night Red Light (Sun Chief’s wife) blesses the party with moonlight to travel by at night. When the party’s circumstances change and they are no longer desirous of this light, it will become a curse.



Yellow Kidney still questions Fast Horse's dream. He thinks that the young man is foolish, and Yellow Kidney only allowed him to come on the raid because he has great respect for Fast Horse's father, Boss Ribs, a powerful heavy-singer-for-the-sick who possesses a **Beaver Medicine bundle**. Only three bundles exist among the Blackfeet tribes; the one possessed by Boss Ribs, and two others kept by the Kainahs and Siksika people.

The men return without finding the ice spring and Fast Horse grows morose. Yellow Kidney can sense that even Fast Horse doubts his dream, and Yellow Kidney prays to Cold Maker to take pity on them. He doesn't trust Fast Horse, and he fears that the raid will go wrong, so he decides that he will turn the party back at the first sign of trouble or bad luck. Surprisingly, despite White Man's Dog's reputation for being unlucky, Yellow Kidney is encouraged by his steadiness and calmness.

After four more days, the men rest in the valley of the Elk River, near a Napikwan trading fort. Many Crows trade there among Spotted Horse People and Parted Hairs. The tribes are not usually peaceful, but the white traders make them get along and refuse to trade if there is violence. The men are only two sleeps away from the Crow camps, and Yellow Kidney tells Eagle Ribs his plan to take the camp of Bull Shield, the Crow chief, and steal his buffalo-runner.

Meanwhile, White Man's Dog examines a small pouch of yellow pigment given to him by Mik-api. Before setting out on their journey, the many-faces man had invited White Man's Dog and Fast Horse to his sweat lodge. The men sang and prayed as the purifying sweat exited their bodies, and White Man's Dog felt the bad spirit leave his body. Afterward, the men had smoked to the four directions and to the Above Ones, the Below Ones, and the Underwater People, and Mik-api gave White Man's Dog the yellow paint, claiming that it would bring him strength and cunning during the raid.

As Eagle Ribs scouts the area, he sees the Napikwan tents in the distance surrounded by traders' wagons. White men didn't usually come to the Crows to trade—usually the Crows go to the trading houses. Eagle Ribs can tell that there is much white man's water being passed around the camp, and he is glad that the Crow will be clumsy and slow; however, he worries that the traders' wagons mean that there will be many new rifles in the camp.

Interestingly, it is only Yellow Kidney and Fast Horse who doubt Fast Horse's dream—and the raid ultimately leads to their downfall. White Man's Dog, however, takes the dream very seriously (he even makes offerings to Cold Maker's daughters when Fast Horse fails to do so), and the raid marks the beginning of his strength and good fortune in war.



Ironically, it is the "unlucky" White Man's Dog who serves as a source of good luck to the raiding party. His competence during the raid despite his low social standing underscores the obvious problems in finding one's personal worth in their material possessions. White Man's Dog is poor yet invaluable on the raid. Fast Horse, for all intents and purposes, is rich and has the power of the Beaver Medicine, yet he is of little value during the raid.



Yellow Kidney's desire to take the camp of Bull Shield is evidence of his greed. It would be much easier and safer for the Lone Eaters to take a different camp—other warriors are sure to have fine horses too—but Yellow Kidney wants to hit the chief, thereby securing the best horse and proving himself to be a great warrior. Yellow Kidney acts in his own best interest and ignores the needs of the group, and he is made to suffer greatly after he is captured by the Crows.



Mik-api's ceremony is another reflection of Pikuni spirituality. White Man's Dog and Mik-api smoke to the four directions to center themselves within their environment, and their prayers to the stars and animals underscore their appreciation of the natural world. White Man's Dog associates the yellow pigment, or war paint, Mik-api gives him with this ceremony. In essence, White Man's Dog's strength is in his spirituality.



The fact that the Napikwans don't usually come to Crow lands to trade is evidence of their increasing presence on native lands. The white traders use their modern luxuries and conveniences to gain safe entrance to the land. Much like planting crops and cattle, the Napikwans gain control of the native people through introducing a dependence on alcohol and firearms.



Yellow Kidney is becoming infected with the nerves of the other men. The younger men are nervous about Yellow Kidney's plan to attack Bull Shield, and he is beginning to doubt his ability to lead them. Still, Yellow Kidney is thankful for the clouds coming in from the north; the clouds will block Night Red Light's glow and ease their movements within the Crow camp.

Meanwhile, White Man's Dog readies himself for the raid. He dips his fingers into the yellow paint just as Mik-api had taught him and prays to Sun Chief. He vows to sacrifice before the Medicine Pole at the next Sun Dance if the raid is successful, and he quietly sings his war song. Yellow Kidney too paints his face in the pattern of **Seven Persons**, and Fast Horse ties three eagle feathers in his topknot.

Yellow Kidney and the other men are distracted by Fast Horse's shirt—it is the old war shirt once belonging to Head Carrier and it holds much power. Fast Horse's father had recently purchased the shirt, which seemed strange since the heavy-singer-for-the-sick does not war, but now Yellow Kidney understands that perhaps Boss Ribs gave his son the shirt to bring protection to them all.

With Night Red Light shining through the clouds and **Seven Persons** at its highest point, the party makes their way toward the Crow camp. Yellow Kidney points out the Crow horses and instructs White Man's Dog to take the other young warriors down to the valley and secure as many horses as they can safely drive. He tells him to take only the strong horses and to drive them to Black Face and down to Woman Don't Walk where they will meet after the raid.

For the first time, White Man's Dog feels the responsibility of his charge and he orders the younger men down the valley where there are over one hundred horses. There are no night-riders, and White Man's Dog easily selects and secures only the strongest horses and drives them out of the valley.

Suddenly, a night-rider comes down the valley and White Man's Dog fears that they will be discovered stealing the horses. He approaches the rider in the darkness, and catching him unaware, White Man's Dog jumps onto the rider and stabs him deep in the back with his knife. After killing the young rider, White Man's Dog rejoins his party and heads towards Black Face. It is beginning to snow.

The natural world responds to Yellow Kidney's needs, and this highlights his connection to nature. If Night Red Light is bright in the sky when the Lone Eaters enter the Crows' camp, it will be difficult to remain undetected.



White Man's Dog's vow to Sun Chief is significant because he later fulfills this vow at the Summer ceremony, where he gives thanks to Sun Chief and begs forgiveness for his transgressions. Yellow Kidney's own spirituality is likewise reflected in his facial paint—he too is guided by the heavenly body represented by Big Dipper.



Fast Horse's strength and spirituality is lacking compared to White Man's Dog and Yellow Kidney. Instead of finding power in a religious deity, he relies on the power of the famed warrior's shirt. Boss Ribs seems to suspect that his son's true power, or spirituality, is rather weak. Fast Horse wants more tangible power, and Head Carrier's war shirt is an example of this.



White Man's Dog easily steals the Crows' horses largely undetected. Overall, his horse raid is successful, and Seven Persons' highest point in the sky reflects this success. Yellow Kidney, on the other hand, waits for Seven Persons to begin to fade before raiding the camp, and his mission goes tragically wrong.



White Man's Dog's ease with the horses implies his connection with nature and animals. The horses are comfortable with White Man's Dog because he is one with them.



The killing of the young night-rider haunts White Man's Dog for the rest of the novel. He is convinced he has no choice in the matter—the night-rider will alert the other Crows to the Lone Eaters presence—but White Man's Dog never forgives himself for taking the rider's life, and in this way, Welch implies the immorality of war.



Meanwhile, Yellow Kidney, Fast Horse, and Eagle Ribs ready themselves to enter the Crow camp. They plan to each go their separate ways, steal a buffalo-runner, and head to Woman Don't Walk Butte to meet White Man's Dog and the others with the horses. As Fast Horse and Eagle Ribs head off in different directions, Yellow Kidney prays to the Above Ones for strength and quietly sings his death song.

Yellow Kidney's death song foreshadows his capture and subsequent torture by the Crows. Presumably, had he not made the fateful decision to rape the young girl, he would have been killed during the raid and died honorably in war.



CHAPTER 5

Later, the young men huddle together near Woman Don't Walk Butte. They have secured over one hundred and fifty Crow horses, but Cold Maker has made travel difficult. White Man's Dog has again dreamt of the white-faced girl, and he is growing concerned because Yellow Kidney and Fast Horse have not yet returned. Eagle Ribs has found the young men near Elk River—he was able to get in and out of the Crow camp quickly with a strong buffalo-runner.

Cold Maker unleashes a winter storm because Fast Horse did not make good on his promise to him. Fast Horse failed to find the ice spring and remove the rock, and he has no intention of making the offerings to Cold Maker's daughters. Thus, instead of a light snow to cover the warriors' retreat, he has made a blizzard to complicate their travel.



Eagle Ribs hopes that Yellow Kidney and Fast Horse are simply waiting out the weather, but he tells the other men about a disturbing dream he had the night before. In his dream, he saw a small white horse covered with sores and split hooves. He saw a face in the sky behind the horse, along with some hair and two owl feathers. Eagle Ribs and the other men fear that this dream means that Yellow Kidney is dead.

Eagle Ribs's dream of the white horse carries biblical connotations. In Revelations, the pale horse brings death, and owl feathers are also symbolic of death in Native American culture. Eagle Ribs suspects that his dream means that Yellow Kidney is either dead or injured.



Later that night, Fast Horse arrives and tells the other men that he has not seen Yellow Kidney since the raid. After stealing his own buffalo-runner, Fast Horse and taken refuge in a cave to wait out the snow. Then Cold Maker appeared and took him to his home in Always Winter Land. Cold Maker was angry that Fast Horse did not find the ice spring, but he has given the men one more chance. To appease Cold Maker, Fast Horse had to promise to bring his daughters two prime robes during the helping-to-eat moon along with red coals for their eyes—Cold Maker's daughters have no eyes, only holes where their eyes should be.

As eyes are often viewed as the window to the soul, the fact that Cold Maker's daughters do not have eyes suggests that they are soulless—and relying on Fast Horse to make them complete. Of course, their faith in Fast Horse is misguided, and while he promises to bring them eyes, his promises are empty. Fast Horse cares only about himself, and he will agree to anything to ensure that the raid is successful for him.



Eight sleeps later, the men return home to the camp of the Lone Eaters. Eagle Ribs divides the horses up between the men, giving Yellow Kidney (or his widow) the most. White Man's Dog returns home to his family. His mother, Double Strike Woman, is thankful for his return, and Rides-at-the-door asks his son about Yellow Kidney. White Man's Dog tells his father about Eagle Ribs's dream, but he does not believe that Yellow Kidney is dead. His father agrees.

As Yellow Kidney's only wife, Heavy Shield Woman gets all Yellow Kidney's share. Yellow Kidney has many horses and a many-shots gun—he is a wealthy man—yet he has only one wife. This is a testament to the closeness of their relationship, which makes it all the more significant when their relationship falls apart near the end of the novel.



Three days later, Heavy Shield Woman, Yellow Kidney's wife, emerges from her lodge having cut her hair, slashed her arms and legs, and painted her face white with ash. That night, she makes Yellow Kidney's favorite soup of dried sarvisberries and meat, and sets out five bowls; one for herself, one for her daughter, Red Paint, two for her sons, Good Young Man and One Spot, and one for Yellow Kidney. Heavy Shield Woman tells her children that their father is still alive. He had come to her in a dream, wearing old skins and rags, and told her that he will return once she performs a virtuous task.

Later, Heavy Shield Woman goes to visit Three Bears, the chief of the Lone Eaters, and requests that, should her husband return safely to her, she be allowed to be the Medicine Woman at the Sun Dance ceremony in the summer. The men agree, much to Three Bears' surprise. Usually, the tribe does not like a woman to declare this role—if she fails, it will bring dishonor to them all. Rides-at-the-door silently voices his support as well, although he does not speak, much to the disappointment of Three Bears and the others.

CHAPTER 6

White Man's Dog settles into the routine of winter, but he longs for excitement and adventure. He considers looking for Yellow Kidney, but he knows finding him without a sign will be impossible. Instead, White Man's Dog spends his time hunting blackhorns with Rides-at-the-door and Running Fisher. Not even Rides-at-the-door possesses a many-shots gun and the men hunt with bows and arrows.

At times, White Man's Dog hunts alone, and he kills many animals. He has begun to bring Heavy Shield Woman and her family blackhorns, and one day, Red Paint catches him dropping off a fresh kill. He speaks to her quickly and awkwardly before running off. White Man's Dog is sure that Red Paint thinks he is foolish.

White Man's Dog has not spoken to Fast Horse since the raid, and Boss Ribs fears that a bad spirit has entered his son. Fast Horse has remained sullen since the raid—he rarely hunts, and he has allowed most of his horses to wander off. White Man's Dog is troubled that Fast Horse has not made yet made good on his deal with Cold Maker and the helping-to-eat moon is nearly over.

Heavy Shield Woman cuts her hair and slashes her flesh as a sign of mourning. To the Pikuni people, the hair is an extension of the spirit, or soul, and when it is cut after the death of a loved one, it signifies a break within one's spirit. The slashes are likewise an outward reflection of Heavy Shield Woman's inner pain. Even though she wants to believe her dream that Yellow Kidney is still alive, Heavy Shield Woman continues to mourn her husband in the traditional way.



A woman is only considered for the role of Sacred Vow Woman if her prayers have been answered. Having one's prayers answered is considered proof of one's virtue, and since the success of the vow relies on the woman's virtue, the Sacred Vow Woman must be above reproach. Heavy Shield Woman's prayer has not yet been answered, so her virtue remains questionable to the tribe.



White Man's Dog's desire for excitement and adventure suggests that, subconsciously at least, he desires to be free from the responsibilities of tribal life. However, unlike Fast Horse, White Man's Dog chooses the tribe over his own desires, and instead spends his time hunting and fulfilling the needs of the tribe.



White Man's Dog's awkward behavior is a reflection of his developing feelings for Red Paint. He is beginning to fall in love with her, and he hunts for her family to impress her as much as he does to support his tribe.



The Pikunis keep track of time and seasons by way of lunar cycles—the time from one new moon to the next. They name each cycle, or moon, to help keep track of each cycle, which is roughly one month. Since the helping-to-eat moon (likely, the month of October or November when wild game is most plentiful) is nearly over, Fast Horse has had an entire month to fulfil his vow to Cold Maker, and he has done nothing.



White Man's Dog offers to help Fast Horse hunt blackhorns so that he can fulfil his vow to Cold Maker. Fast Horse responds angrily and tells White Man's Dog that he doesn't need his help to fulfil his vow. As White Man's Dog watches Fast Horse ride away, he realizes that while Fast Horse is preoccupied by his debt to Cold Maker, something else is going on inside of him. White Man's Dog suspects that it has to do with Yellow Kidney.

Fast Horse's behavior is evidence of his guilt and feelings of responsibility over Yellow Kidney's fate. Fast Horse knows deep down that his actions directly led to Yellow Kidney's capture and torture; however, he is slow to accept this, and in the meantime, he further isolates himself from his tribe.



Meanwhile, White Man's Dog gives five of his best horses to Mik-api and visits the old man frequently. Mik-api soon asks White Man's Dog to prepare the sweat lodge, and with this task, he becomes his apprentice. White Man's Dog assists the old man as well as he can, and when Mak-api goes to the sick person's lodge, White Man's Dog carries his healing paraphernalia. White Man's Dog realizes that the other men no longer tease him. Ever since the raid, the others in the tribe have begun to respect him.

When White Man's Dog's gives the horses to Mik-api, this is further evidence of White Man's Dog's dedication to the collective good of the tribe. He could easily keep the horses, but White Man's Dog's views Mik-api's magic as a major source of his success. White Man's Dog's efforts to repay Mik-api and take care of Yellow Kidney's family earns him more respect from his tribe.



Later, Mik-api tells White Man's Dog about a dream he had. In this dream, Raven came down from the Backbone of the World and told him that behind Chief Mountain, a four-legged is stuck in a Napikwan trap. Raven could not release the trap, and he came to ask Mik-api if his young helper, a man "both strong and true of heart," would release the trap for him. If White Man's Dog releases the trap, Raven promised to teach him how to use the animal's power, which is more powerful than all but that of the real-bear.

Raven is Mik-api's spirit animal, or animal helper, and he is evidence of Mik-api's own connection to the natural world. However, Raven's message also represents the dangers of the encroaching white settlers. Trapping is not a native practice of the Pikuni people, and the four-legged stuck in a metal trap is a powerful image.



In the meantime, Red Paint sits outside her mother's lodge sewing beads onto the moccasins Heavy Shield Woman will wear at the Sun Dance ceremony. Since her request to be Medicine Woman, her mother has thought of little else and has begun to neglect her children. One Spot and Good Young Man have become unruly, and Red Paint worries that White Man's Dog will grow tired of providing them with meat.

Yellow Kidney's need to advance his fortune and honor through warring has negative consequences for his family. If White Man's Dog were to stop hunting for Yellow Kidney's family, they likely will not survive. Heavy Shield Woman's neglect of her family is an understandable result of her preoccupation with her husband's safe return. Despite this, however, women do not hunt in Pikuni society, and One Spot and Good Young Man are too young. Yellow Kidney has left them with few options in the event of his death.



Up on Chief Mountain, White Man's Dog sets out searching for the four-legged caught in the trap. He thinks that it is a wolverine, although Mik-api refused to confirm this. He comes across a fat raven and begins to follow it. At the top of the ridge, White Man's Dog stops and prays to Old Man, Napi, his creator, and suddenly the bird begins to speak. "I speak many languages," he says. Raven tells White Man's Dog that while he is powerful, he is not strong, and he can't free Skunk Bear, who has been slowly dying for four days, from the trap.

The fact that Raven begins to speak only after White Man's Dog prays highlights the deep connection between spirituality and the natural world within Pikuni culture. Nature is sacred to the Pikunis, and it is essential to their way of life. When White Man's Dog saves Skunk Bear from the Napikwan trap, he symbolically saves his Pikuni way of life—for the time being, that is.



White Man's Dog quickly frees the wolverine from trap. Raven instructs him to feed Skunk Bear some of his meat and tells him to sleep that night on his left side, away from the door. He orders White Man's Dog to dream about what has happened and tells him that he alone will now possess the magic of Skunk Bear. White Man's Dog will fear nothing and have much wealth, but he must not abuse his power, Raven says. He then tells White Man's Dog to always listen to Mik-api, as he will speak through him.

Raven's insistence that White Man's Dog give Skunk Bear food represents respect and repayment to the animal. Skunk Bear, as White Man's Dog's spirit animal, nourishes him by gifting him power, so White Man's Dog must likewise nourish the wolverine with meat from his last kill. In this way, White Man's Dog and Skunk Bear have a symbiotic relationship, further underscoring the Pikunis' connection to nature.



CHAPTER 7

Near the end of winter, three young riders approach the village of the Lone Eaters from the south, driving twelve large horses, like the kind the Napikwans use to pull their wagons. Fast Horse recognizes Owl Child, a member of the Many Chiefs band. Owl Child has a many-shots gun in his lap and a hand gun tucked near his waist. He is an outcast even in his own village, and while he is feared and hated by many, Fast Horse admires his ferocity.

Presumably, Owl Child has stolen the horses and the guns from white settlers—whom he may or may not have also killed. The guns and horses are more of the tangible power that Fast Horse desires. Like Fast Horse, Owl Child does not rely on his spirituality or magic to secure his power; he demands it at gunpoint.



Three Bears comes out of his lodge, and Owl Child asks to feast with them. Three Bears questions the ownership of the horses and suspects that they are stolen from the Napikwans. "What difference does it make?" asks Fast Horse. Since the white man steals their land, Fast Horse considers stealing from the Napikwans fair. Three Bears disagrees. Stealing from the Napikwans will bring trouble. Now that the great war is over in the East, the blue-coat seizers have moved West. The white men have warned Three Bears that if they make life difficult, they will ride against the Lone Eaters.

Like Fast Horse, Owl Child places his own desires ahead of the collective good—robbing the Napikwans is sure bring the Pikunis trouble but he does it anyway. Owl Child is concerned only with expanding his own wealth and making the white settlers pay for stealing his land. He cares very little about what his actions mean for the greater good of the tribe.



Three Bears gives Owl Child a package of boiled meat. As the young men ride away, Owl Child invites Fast Horse to visit their camp in the south: "We will show you what real Pikunis do to these sonofabitch whites," Owl Child says.

Three Bears gives Owl Child the package of boiled meat as a snub. Usually, visitors from outlying bands are invited to feast, but Three Bears refuses to share a meal with Owl Child because of the danger he poses to the tribe.



Later, White Man's Dog visits with Mik-api. Winter is over, and he is excited to go to the trading fort and secure his own many-shots gun. Still, White Man's Dog thinks about Yellow Kidney and feels that his loss outweighs any benefit of Crow horses. Like the others, White Man's Dog suspects that Fast Horse is to blame for Yellow Kidney's disappearance. White Man's Dog also feels guilty about killing the young rider. He had little choice but to kill, but he is still remorseful about the attack.

White Man's Dog's thoughts about Yellow Kidney underscore the obvious downside of warring. Of course Yellow Kidney's life is not worth the horses that his family gained from the raid, and this in addition to White Man's Dog's guilt over killing the rider reinforces Welch's overall argument that frequent war is an untenable way of life.



White Man's Dog tells Mik-api about his dreams of the white-faced girl. After a purifying sweat, Mik-api performs a ceremony over White Man's Dog's body. He sings cleansing songs and places a magical paste made of roots and leaves on White Man's Dog's body, and then he blows his medicine whistle. With this ceremony, Mik-api drives the bad spirit from White Man's Dog's body—but he warns him that it is still floating around the village and can infect another.

White Man's Dog asks Mik-api how he became a many-faces man. Mik-api tells him that as a young man, he heard crying by the river. He suspected it was a coyote, and when he went to investigate, he discovered that it was Head Carrier—the very warrior whose shirt Fast Horse now wears—shot through with two arrows.

Head Carrier told Mik-api to let him die in peace, and Mik-api left him. As he walked along the river, a big frog person came up from the water and asked Mik-api why he seemed so sad. Mik-api told the frog person about the dying Head Carrier. The frog person dove back into the water and resurfaced with a ball of green mud. The mud was given to him by the chief of the Underwater People and had powerful medicine.

After Mik-api applied the mud to Head Carrier's wounds, he made a full recovery. Mik-api later told this story to his aunt, a healing woman, and she informed him that he was a chosen one. She taught him the ways of healing, Mik-api says, and he has been a many-faces man ever since.

CHAPTER 8

The day before the Lone Eaters are to leave for the trading house, Fast Horse sits staring at his father's **Beaver Medicine bundle**, hoping to feel its power. Boss Ribs has not yet taught his son the songs and rituals associated with the bundle, and its power is "immense." Since the raid, Fast Horse has become an outcast; the others avoid him and consider him a "source of bad medicine."

Fast Horse "scoffs at Cold Maker." Days earlier, he had challenged Cold Maker to kill him and even sang his death song, but nothing happened. Fast Horse feels a growing hate for his people, and he believes that only Owl Child has true power and courage. Suddenly, Fast Horse is distracted by commotion outside.

This is the second time Mik-api drives a bad spirit from White Man's Dog's body (a spirit is also driven from his body during the ceremony involving the yellow war paint). Mik-api's warning foreshadows upcoming events, but it also underscores the deep spirituality of the Pikunis. Bad spirits are a constant threat and must be dealt with swiftly.



The story of Head Carrier is further evidence of the power of storytelling within Pikuni culture. Head Carrier lives on long after his death in Mik-api's stories and in Fast Horse's connection to his war shirt.



Mik-api's story of Head Carrier is further evidence of the connection between the natural world and Pikuni spirituality. Once again, the natural world is holy, or sacred, and Head Carrier is healed by the magic of the Underwater People.



Mik-api was chosen by the natural world to fulfil the spiritual needs of his people, and this too highlights the connection between nature and spirituality within Pikuni culture.



Fast Horse's attempt to feel the Beaver Medicine bundle's power implies that he finds some value in Pikuni beliefs and culture; however, he is unwilling to put in the work. There is much to learn from the bundle's stories, but Fast Horse desires power that is easier to access—like robbing and killing Napikwans with Owl Child.



Cold Maker's failure to strike Fast Horse dead has a negative impact on his spirituality. Fast Horse believes he deserves to die for disrespecting Cold Maker and causing Yellow Kidney's capture, and when he doesn't, Fast Horse turns his back on his spirituality, and his people.



A figure rides into the Lone Eater camp on a scarred and scrawny white horse. The figure takes off his robe—it is Yellow Kidney, holding up fingerless hands. Yellow Kidney quickly begins to tell his story. When he entered the Crow camp on the night of the raid, he easily found Bull Shield's buffalo-runner, and the animal was eager to go with him. As he made his way through town, he heard a voice speaking his language yell: "Oh, you Crows are puny, your horses are puny, and your women make me sick! If I had time I would ride among you and cut of your puny woman heads, you cowardly Crows."

The crowd looks to Eagle Ribs, but Yellow Kidney says that it was not his voice. They look for Fast Horse, and he is nowhere to be found. Yellow Kidney continues his story and tells them that he quickly let the horse go and hid in a tipi. It was dimly lit by a fire, and bodies lined the walls. A young girl stood up and Yellow Kidney slipped beneath her robes. When the Crow searched the tipi, they did not find him.

The tipi was cold, yet the girl was hot, and Yellow Kidney found himself aroused. He raped her, although he found it difficult because she was not yet a woman. When he realized that she never moved, he removed her robes and discovered that she was covered with white-scabs disease. "My dream! My dream!" yells White Man's Dog.

Yellow Kidney tells them that he ran out of the tipi and was shot in the thigh by the Crow. They meant to scalp him, but Bull Shield stopped them and instead cut off each of his fingers as a warning to other Pikunis. They tied him to the back of the scrawny horse and turned him loose. Yellow Kidney says that he was later found by Spotted Horse People, whose medicine woman kindly cared for him. She saw him through the red sores of the white-scabs disease and managed his amputated fingers.

Now, Yellow Kidney is a disgraced and ruined warrior. He tells the crowd that living in this broken state is his atonement for violating "the simplest decencies by which people live." He had taken the young girl's honor and robbed her of the opportunity to die with virtue. Old Man is punishing Yellow Kidney by making him live a life worse than death.

Eagle Ribs's dream of the pale horse, or death horse, is realized in Yellow Kidney's return astride the decrepit white horse. However, Yellow Kidney's fingerless condition is a fate far worse than death—he won't be able to hunt or provide for his family, and he will be forced to watch them suffer and know that he has caused their pain. Living out the rest of his life in despair is not worth the value of the horses Yellow Kidney gained from the raid.



Yellow Kidney's experience in the dimly lit lodge mirrors White Man's Dog's dream about the white-faced girl. Like Eagle Ribs's own dream, it foretells the future, although neither are fully understood until after the fact. White Man's Dog rightfully suspected that his dream was indicative of danger.



Yellow Kidney views the young girl as simply another part of war. She is something to conquer and own, and as a warrior, Yellow Kidney assumes power over her. Of course, his actions have disastrous consequences, and this is the danger White Man's Dog sensed in his dream.



Again, Native Americans frequently view the hair as a physical extension of the spirit, and scalping an enemy disrupts the spirit's journey to the afterlife. Ironically, after Yellow Kidney so thoroughly disrespects and assaults the young girl, it is a woman who treats him with kindness and essentially saves his life.



Through Yellow Kidney's rape of the young girl and his subsequent punishment for stealing her virtue, Welch condemns the gaining of patriarchal power through war. Yellow Kidney was not justified in his assault of the girl, and his punishment is proof of this.



As the crowd disperses, Three Bears approaches Rides-at-the-door. The chief noticed White Man's Dog leaving in the middle of Yellow Kidney's story, and he wants to know why. Rides-at-the-door is ashamed that White Man's Dog left the story, but he doesn't know why he left. Three Bears and Rides-at-the-door fear that some may seek revenge on Fast Horse for Yellow Kidney's misfortune. Both men think that Fast Horse should be banished; however, they pity his father, Boss Ribs. Three Bears orders Rides-at-the-door to convince Boss Ribs to banish Fast Horse himself for "the good of his people—and for the safety of his son."

CHAPTER 9

The next day, Rides-at-the-door asks White Man's Dog about his behavior during Yellow Kidney's story. White Man's Dog tells his father that he blames himself for Yellow Kidney's condition. He had not told him about his dream of the white-faced girl; if he had, he would have taken it as a bad omen and turned the raid back.

Rides-at-the-door reassures White Man's Dog. There is no telling what Yellow Kidney would have done; they were close to Crow land by that time, and he likely would have wanted to go on, he says. Rides-at-the-door tells his son that while he should have told Yellow Kidney about the dream, he must not blame himself.

White Man's Dog tells Rides-at-the-door that he initially blamed Fast Horse for Yellow Kidney's disappearance, but now he is not sure. He tells his father about Mik-api's ceremony and how the bad spirit of his dream is floating about the village. Rides-at-the-door suspects that the same spirit caused Yellow Kidney to enter the death tipi, but he doesn't think that it has entered Fast Horse. "No. I think it is the nature of Fast Horse to be loud and boastful and to hurt others. Some men are just like that."

Meanwhile, White Man's Dog has been ordered by Three Bears to deliver the news of Yellow Kidney's return to the outlying Pikuni camps. As Double Strike Woman gives her son instructions for his ride, Striped Face, her sister and Rides-at-the-door's second wife, braids her hair. Kills-close-to-the-lake cooks and serves them—their husband's youngest wife is little more than their slave. Double Strike Woman tells White Man's Dog to "take a good look" at Little Bird Woman, the daughter of her cousin living near the Two Medicine River, while on his ride. She would make him a good wife, and her father, Crow Foot, is a powerful man.

Through Fast Horse's banishment, Welch argues the importance of native community and the collective good of the tribe. Three Bears and Rides-at-the-door appreciate how difficult it will be on Boss Ribs to banish his own son, but his personal desires must come second to the good to the tribe. Fast Horse's presence poses a threat to tribal life, and as such, he must be eliminated.



White Man's Dog's guilt when he neglects to tell Yellow Kidney about his dream is further proof of his dedication to tribal life. White Man's Dog appreciates that his actions affect others, and he is convinced that he has failed Yellow Kidney by not warning him of the danger in his dream.



Rides-at-the-door's opinion that Yellow Kidney would have continued anyway is probably correct. After all, he ignored several signs along the way. However, this does not absolve White Man's Dog, and his guilt is proof of this.



Rides-at-the-door's opinion of Fast Horse firmly establishes him as an inherently bad person. His wickedness, unlike Yellow Kidney's, is not the work of a bad spirit. Neither White Man's Dog nor Rides-at-the-door want to believe that Yellow Kidney and Fast Horse are capable of such despicable behavior, and instead they try to explain it as a product of bad spirits.



Now that White Man's Dog has gained wealth and honor through war, it is implied that he will also take his first wife. Similar to Rides-at-the-door and Double Strike Woman's relationship, White Man's Dog's first wife will likely be his "sits-beside-me wife," his most important wife. This choice represents an important social decision. To Double Strike woman, it is most beneficial to join Crow Foot's family.



White Man's Dog is not interested in Little Bird Woman, and while Kills-close-to-the-lake frequently looks at him, he is not interested in her either. As White Man's Dog thinks about Red Paint, Running Fisher rushes into the lodge and tells them that Fast Horse has banished himself and has left camp during the night to join Owl Child and his gang.

Rides-at-the-door fears that Fast Horse will be an even bigger problem riding with Owl Child than he would be in camp. They are sure to kill and rob more Napikwans, which will bring the blue-coat seizers to raid Pikuni lands. Running Fisher wants to fight the seizers, but his father warns him that the white man must be left alone. It is better to allow them some of their land to raise whitehorns than to invite war. "It is not an agreeable way, but it is the only way," says Rides-at-the-door.

As White Man's Dog leaves for his journey, Running Fisher notices how his brother has changed. Now, he envies White Man's Dog and does not pity him. Running Fisher notices Kills-close-to-the-lake hand White Man's Dog a package of meat and touch him softly on the shoulder. He notices a quick glance between the two and looks up to see Striped Face smiling at him.

Over the next few days, White Man's Dog visits three Pikuni bands: the Black Doors, the Small Robes, and Crow Foot's people. He sees Little Bird Woman, and while she is a fine woman, White Man's Dog thinks only of Red Paint. That night under the stars, he lifts his hands to the sky and remembers the stories his grandfather told him about the origins of the constellations. In the stories there was only the people, the stars, and blackhorns. Now the people are different; the white man is moving in, and White Man's Dog fears the worst. He remembers his grandfather telling him that if he sleeps with his palms out and a star falls on them, he will be a powerful man.

The next day, White Man's Dog visits the Black Patched Moccasins near the Bear River. The band had previously been the most powerful, and their leader, Little Dog, was the head chief of all the Pikunis. White Man's Dog rides through their camp, which is a shell of its former glory. Tipis are falling, and children wander unattended as rotting meat litters the paths.

When Fast Horse banishes himself, he spares Rides-at-the-door having to convince Boss Ribs to do it himself. This way, Fast Horse is ultimately able to reject his people before they reject him.



Despite his objection to war, Rides-at-the-door is determined to continue the Pikuni way of life at any cost. He knows that the cost will include letting go of more of their land—land which the Pikunis depend on to sustain their way of life. If they are to continue as a people, they must keep some land. If they fight, they are sure to lose it all.



Running Fisher's envy of White Man's Dog foreshadows the future resentment he feels for his brother. Running Fisher is jealous of White Man's Dog's war success, and he is suspicious of his near-mother's behavior. It is not socially appropriate for Kills-close-to-the-lake to touch White Man's Dog.



Pikuni culture is rooted in stories, and the stories handed down from White Man's Dog's grandfather are examples of this. These stories serve to reflect their traditional lives and beliefs—the stars represent Pikuni spirituality and the blackhorns are symbolic of their deep connection to nature. Stories like these are vital to the preservation of the Pikuni way of life, and they are a source of power for White Man's Dog.



The unkept state of the Black Patched Moccasins' camp serves as a warning of what happens when the Napikwans get too close. Muck like Rides-at-the-door, Little Dog favored peace and trading with the Napikwans; inevitably, the settlers took too much, leading to the devastation of the camp.



White Man's Dog arrives at the lodge of Mad Plume, who presents the Otter Medicine bundle at the Sun Dance. Mad Plume notices White Man's Dog looking about the camp in disbelief and tells him that they were once proud people. Mad Plume says the white chiefs had come to camp and taught the Black Patched Moccasins how to plant seeds in the ground to grow food. They wanted them to stop hunting blackhorns and farm instead. The crops were scrawny and the people hungry, so they went back to hunting. This led to unrest between the Moccasins and the Napikwans, who want the land to farm and raise whitehorn cattle.

Little Dog tried to make peace with the Napikwans and refused to fight. He dealt harshly with Pikunis who offended the Napikwans and assisted the Napikwans when he was able. One day, Little Dog was killed by his own people, and since then, the Black Patched Moccasins have been distrustful people.

White Man's Dog suspects that Mad Plume condones the killing of Little Dog. The people felt that Little Dog had put the needs of the Napikwans ahead of the needs of the Pikunis, and he had betrayed his own people. Mad Plume tells White Man's Dog that they are leaderless now and that most of the young people selfishly hunt and drink white man's water. "There is no center here," he says.

CHAPTER 10

Meanwhile, the Lone Eaters camp near Riplinger's trading house, keeping their distance from the other bands trading there. The women trade for cloth, pots, and white man's cooking powder, and the children enjoy candy and dolls. The men trade hides for tobacco, half axes, and the coveted many-shots gun, of which there are only a few.

Only the important men can get a many-shots gun. Riplinger has only eighteen repeating rifles, and he presents them to the chiefs in hopes that it will strengthen their trading relationship. As Rides-at-the-door arrives, Riplinger greets him first in Blackfeet, then in Napikwans' language. Riplinger respects Rides-at-the-door as a smart man; he is one of the few Indians known to speak the English language as well. Still, Rides-at-the-door does not like the Napikwans, and his responses to Riplinger are short and curt.

The Otter Medicine bundle, like the Beaver Medicine bundle, is a source of great Pikuni power, but both bundles prove powerless against the invading Napikwans. Just as many Pikunis have already noted, they will lose no matter what they do. War with the seizers means instant death, but assimilation to Napikwan ways is a slow—and significantly more painful—death. This belief is reflected in the Pikunis' resistance and return to blackhorn hunting against the Napikwans' wishes.



The Black Patched Moccasins are distrustful of people because their chief, the very person who is supposed to always act on behalf of the tribe's best interest, betrayed them. Since they could not trust their chief, it is difficult for them to trust anybody.



Since the Black Patched Moccasins have lost their chief, or their "center," each member of the band acts in their best interest only, and the tribe as whole suffers. Their camp and their lives are in shambles because, like Little Dog, they have ignored the collective needs of the tribe.



Because of trading houses like Riplinger's, the Pikunis no longer hunt for subsistence living only. The blackhorn population is already waning, and now each tribal member is harvesting more hides to buy more merchandise.



The very nature of the trading posts undermines the Pikunis' communal lifestyle. The trading posts mean that new ways of amassing wealth have been introduced to the Pikunis and this works to increasingly divide the people by their wealth and status, moving them further away from the center.



Riplinger makes small talk and offers Rides-at-the-door a drink. He declines, and Riplinger presents him with a many-shots gun. As he leaves, Rides-at-the-door notices Riplinger's wife standing in the doorway. She wears a calico dress and is young, near Striped Face's age, and even though she smiles at him, there is fear in her eyes.

Riplinger's wife is evidence of the assimilation of the native people. The fear in the young girl's eyes reflect her discontent with her changing lifestyle.



Back at the Lone Eaters' camp, White Man's Dog returns as Sun Chief ends his journey. He has taken longer than expected, but his horse stepped on a rock on the way back and had become lame. As the villagers gather to hear of White Man's Dog's travels, he is seated in the place of honor next to Three Bears. He tells them that he visited all the bands, except that of the Many Chiefs. Seizers had chased Owl Child and his gang, and Mountain Chief had led them to Canada.

Mountain Chief leads Owl Child and his gang to Canada because the seizers are not authorized to cross the international line. Several native tribes have already crossed the northern border, along with the illegal whiskey runners and runaway soldiers escaping desertion charges.



White Man's Dog sees Heavy Shield Woman and Red Paint in the crowd, and he notices Red Paint watching him. White Man's Dog says the bands have expressed approval of Heavy Shield Woman's vow, and that they each believe her to be a virtuous woman. Three Bears officially invites Heavy Shield Woman to begin her preparation for the ceremony, and he reminds her of her arduous task. "I am strong and glad in my heart to be the Sacred Vow Woman," Heavy Shield Woman says. They all pray for her success.

Three Bears reminds Heavy Shield Woman of the difficulty of her role because she made her initial vow under distress. She wanted her husband back so badly she would have done anything, and now Three Bears fears she is not up to the task. If she fails to be virtuous enough, the tribe stands to suffer greatly. While her prayer has been answered, Three Bears still doubts her.



Later, Mik-api tells White Man's Dog that he has recently been to Yellow Kidney's lodge and that he has expressed his gratefulness over White Man's Dog kindness to his family. Mik-api goes on to tell White Man's Dog that Yellow Kidney is afraid because he is a burden on his family, no man will want to marry Red Paint. White Man's Dog grows excited at the idea of marrying Red Paint and runs home to get his family's blessing.

Any man who marries Red Paint will also be taking on the added responsibility of hunting for her family and teaching One Spot and Good Young Man how to hunt and provide as well. Yellow Kidney tells Mik-api this hoping that White Man's Dog will take on this burden long-term.



Back at White Man's Dog's lodge, Double Strike Woman is upset that her son does not want to marry Little Bird Woman. Her father is powerful, and it will be a strong match. Plus, if White Man's Dog marries Red Paint, he must take care of Yellow Kidney as well. Rides-at-the-door gives his son permission to marry Red Paint. Kills-close-to-the-lake sits nearby, never looking up from her quillwork.

In Double Strike Woman's opinion, if White Man's Dog marries Little Bird Woman, he is guaranteed wealth and success in war. If he marries Red Paint, however, the exact opposite holds true.



Four days later White Man's Dog's family and Red Paint's family gather to exchange gifts. Rides-at-the-door presents his son with his many-shots gun. Red Paint moves her things into a small tipi near Rides-at-the-door's lodge, and the entire camp gathers to celebrate.

The celebration and exchange of gifts reflects the traditions and culture of the Pikuni people. Welch ultimately argues that ceremonies such as this, along with storytelling, have the power to sustain the Pikuni way of life.



During the celebration, White Man's Dog takes a walk outside and looks up for **Seven Persons**, but he can't see it. Suddenly, he hears a voice and looks up to see Kills-close-to-the-lake. "I am happy for you," she says. "I wish you to have this." She gives him a soft-tanned scabbard, decorated with a thunderbird design, for his new rifle. He looks at it with tears in his eyes.

The tears in White Man's Dog's eyes suggest that he has deeper feelings for Kills-close-to-the-lake than he admits. His true feelings, like Seven Persons, are not entirely clear. Thunderbirds typically symbolize strength and power within Native American culture, and once again, White Man's Dog finds the strength to resist his father's wife.



Later, as the summer wears on, the Pikuni people pack camp and begin the journey to Four Persons Butte for the summer ceremony. During the ceremony, the Sacred Vow Woman and her helpers construct a lodge for Sun Chief, and the people honor him with prayer, song, and dance.

The summer ceremony reflects the link between Pikuni spirituality and the natural world. The construction of the lodge is proof of their deep respect and appreciation for nature.



On the first day, after Heavy Shield Woman purchases the sacred medicine bundle from the previous Sacred Vow Woman, the bull blackhorn tongues are obtained. All the Pukuni bands arrive and form a great circle, and Heavy Shield Woman's lodge is constructed in the center. The women helpers hold the tongues up to the sky and ask Sun Chief to affirm that they are all virtuous women. The tongues are then boiled and cut up. Heavy Shield Woman begins to fast.

The use of the bull blackhorn tongues during the ceremony of the Sacred Vow Woman is further proof of the blackhorn's sacred importance within the Pikuni culture. The blackhorn tongues are a vital part of the ceremony, and without them, the women would not be able to properly make their offerings to Sun Chief.



The next day they proceed to a second camp, carrying the sacred bundle and tongues on a sled. They camp in four different places during the next four days, finally arriving on Four Persons Butte. On the fifth day, a young Pikuni warrior rides out into the valley and selects the perfect tree. They chop it down and begin to hack off its limbs "as though they were the arms and legs of their enemies."

The tree that the young Pikuni warriors cut down is symbolic of a sacrificial killing made in the name of Sun Chief, and it is a reflection of the deeply religious nature of the Pikuni people.



In her lodge, Heavy Shield Woman prays to the Above Ones, the Below Ones, and to the four directions. As she prays, her mind drifts, and she thinks of Yellow Kidney. Since his return, she feels only pity for him, and he no longer shows her any feelings of love. She is distracted when the previous Sacred Vow Woman begins to transfer her power.

Heavy Shield Woman is not committed to her vow. She doesn't take the vow to bring health and prosperity to her people—she takes the vow because she must. She made a bargain to get her husband back because it was in her best interest, and in doing so she has put the wellbeing of her tribe at risk.



The husband of the previous Sacred Vow Woman begins to empty the contents of the sacred bundle as he prays and sings. First, he holds up an elkskin dress, followed by an elkskin robe, both of which are placed on Heavy Shield Woman. He then removes the remaining objects: a medicine bonnet made of weasel skins, feather plumes, and a doll stuffed with tobacco seeds and human hair; and the sacred digging stick that So-at-sa-ki used to dig turnips as Morning Star's wife.

The contents of the sacred bundle reflect the Pikunis' spiritual connection to the land and animals. Each totem represents a different animal and is endowed with that animal's spirit and power. Both tobacco and hair also have spiritual connections—most ceremonies and prayers involve smoking as an offering, and hair, of course, is thought to contain parts of the spirit, or soul.



Morning Star had married So-at-sa-ki, a mortal Pikuni woman, and moved her to the sky. But she missed her family, and she dug up the sacred turnip and made a hole in the sky so that she could see them. Night Red Light became angry—she had already told her daughter-in-law not to dig up the turnip. Sun Chief was also angry, and he banished So-at-sa-ki and her son, Star Boy, back to earth to live with her people. She was glad to see them, but she also missed her husband and died of a broken heart.

As Star Boy grew into a man, a scar appeared on his face. His people ridiculed and shunned him, and a many-faces man told him the way to Sun Chief to seek his help. When Star Boy arrived, Sun Chief wanted to kill him, but Morning Star stopped him. Not knowing he was his son, Morning Star taught Star Boy the ways of the sun and the moon. One day, Star Boy saved Morning Star from a group of deadly birds, and Sun Chief rewarded him by removing his scar. He sent Star Boy back to earth with instructions to honor him each summer in return for blessings.

The ceremony continues, and a procession distributes the sacred tongue to the sick and poor. By nightfall, the warriors begin to stand the center pole of the Medicine Lodge; if the pole does not stand straight, Heavy Shield Woman will be accused of not being virtuous. The pole stands straight, meaning Heavy Shield Woman has accomplished her vow. She breaks her fast and the Pikunis sing and dance.

The next day, White Man's Dog wakes at dawn with a terrible dread. In the distance he can hear a single drum. He looks to Red Paint and is amazed by the love he feels for her. He walks outside and looks around the camp, the mountains, and the sky. He feels the strength of the Pikunis and is ready for the task ahead.

Later that day, Mik-api and two other men paint White Man's Dog's skin white with double rows of black dots going down his arms and legs. They place a wreath of sage around his head and wrap his wrists and ankles with sage grass. They then pierce his breasts with a bear claw and push sarvisberry sticks under his skin. The sticks in his breasts are attached to two rawhide lines that hang from the top of the Medicine Pole at the center of the Medicine Lodge.

So-at-sa-ki's longing for her family is symbolic of the community of tribal life. She is missing a large part of herself when she is taken away from her people, and this tragedy parallels the threat currently facing the Pikuni people. Their way of life cannot be sustained in the face of the invading Napikwans, and many of them will be forced to live outside the tribal community.



Star Boy, like the Pikunis, must prove himself to Sun Chief. Sun Chief does not blindly remove Poia's scars; the boy must first impress Sun Chief and earn his assistance. The summer ceremony is the Pikunis' chance to likewise prove their own case to Sun Chief and earn his assistance by impressing him through prayer and sacrifice.



The ceremonial feeding of the sick and poor represents the Pikunis' sense of community and the greater good. Like White Man's Dog, they feed those who are unable to feed themselves. Heavy Shield Woman's virtue is ultimately based on chance. It is a gamble which, luckily, has nothing to do with her own dedication.



White Man's Dog feels the strength of the Pikunis when he looks to the sky and mountains because of his strong connection to the natural world. The single drum he hears is symbolic of a single heartbeat sustaining the tribe.



Sage is a particularly sacred herb in Native American culture and is known for its cleansing and purifying qualities. Sage can drive away negative spirits and energy, and it attracts only positive energy in return. Bear claws are often symbolic of power and courage. This ceremony is a form of spiritual cleansing, as well as a display of White Man's Dog's courage and power.



At the pole, White Man's Dog thanks Sun Chief for assisting him during his raid on the Crows. He asks for forgiveness for his thoughts of Kills-close-to-the-lake, then he backs away from the pole and dances. He dances harder and harder, pulling the rawhide. The pain grows as he dances, and he breaks one of the berry sticks, but the other holds firm. He is in searing pain, and Raven flies into the lodge and caws to him, "think of Skunk Bear, your power—" The stick breaks free.

That night, White Man's Dog sleeps by himself beneath the stars. He watches **Seven Persons** in the night sky and Night Red Light is full. He sleeps and dreams of a river he has never seen before. The water flows white over **white stones**, and the ground is covered with white frost.

Skunk Bear is near the river, again caught in a Napikwan trap. White Man's Dog asks the animal why it is so white. "That's the way it is now," he answers. White Man's Dog frees him from the trap and Skunk Bear gifts him a battle song. He tells White Man's Dog that if he sings the song, he will have power. He then tells him to always leave a chunk of liver behind from every kill for Raven.

As White Man's Dog turns to leave, he sees a figure in white fur by the river. It is Kills-close-to-the-lake. She asks if he desires her, and when he says that it is not right, she reminds him that they are in the dream place. White Man's Dog tries to feel guilt, but there is none, and they lay down in the white grass together.

The next morning, White Man's Dog wakes in the grass. As he stands and adjusts his robes, a small **white stone** falls to the ground. He picks it up before joining Red Paint and the rest of his family.

Later, as Mountain Chief stands to make an announcement, White Man's Dog sees Owl Child and Fast Horse in the distance. Mountain Chief tells the bands that while he doesn't like the Napikwans, he will respect the decision of the other chiefs and stand down. The white chiefs come more frequently now, but Mountain Chief will agree to a treaty if they do not want too much. He says that while his heart is not in it, he will "accede to the wishes of my people." Owl Child and Fast Horse ride off angrily.

Like the tree cut at the beginning of the ceremony, White Man's Dog's pain and blood is a form of sacrifice. He offers himself up to Sun Chief and is cleansed of his sins in return. Once again, as Raven enters the lodge, the natural world responds to White Man's Dog's needs and he finds strength and courage in nature and animals.



The white stones and frost are symbolic of the invading Napikwans. The settlers have begun to whitewash White Man's Dog's world and are slowly replacing his culture with their own.



Again, as Skunk Bear has given White Man's Dog power in the form of the song, he has nourished him, metaphorically speaking. Since White Man's Dog lives in complete harmony with nature, he must feed and nourish Raven in return.



The white fur of Kills-close-to-the-lake reflects the danger that she represents. Like the white settlers, White Man's Dog's feelings for his near-mother are a destructive force.



The white stone is physical proof of White Man's Dog's dream, and it also serves as a symbol of the power gifted to him by Skunk Bear.



Mountain Chief makes a difficult choice for the greater good of his tribe. While he wants to fight, he will not go against the wishes of his people. Owl Child and Fast Horse, on the other hand, remain in the distance because they have rejected the communal responsibility of tribal life. Unlike Mountain Chief, they are not willing to ignore their individual desires.



As White Man's Dog's family prepares to move camp, he sees Kills-close-to-the-lake. He has not seen her at all during the ceremonies and now notices that her hand is bandaged and that she is missing a finger. "You sacrificed a finger," White Man's Dog says. "It is not uncommon," Kills-close-to-the-lake says. "It is done at the Sun Dance honoring ceremony."

Kills-close-to-the-lake tells White Man's Dog that she had a dream about him. She describes the white river and tells him how he watched her in the water. She said her skin began to burn and crawl, and when she turned to White Man's Dog, he was gone. In his place was Skunk Bear. He promised to show Kills-close-to-the-lake his magic but then "ravished her" and bit her finger off. As Skunk Bear threw her finger, it turned into a **white stone**. "Let this always remind you of your wickedness, sister," Skunk Bear said. "You're lucky I didn't bite off your nose."

Kills-close-to-the-lake wept uncontrollably, and then she felt "lighter." She found the **white stone** that had been her finger and placed it where White Man's Dog slept. As Kills-close-to-the-lake leaves White Man's Dog, he takes out the stone and rubs it, singing the battle song. Although he doesn't know why, White Man's Dog believes that Skunk Bear cleansed him and Kills-close-to-the-lake and also had given him more power, in both the song and the stone.

CHAPTER 11

Shortly after the Sun Dance, Red Paint works fleshing blackhorn hides. In six days, White Man's Dog will ride with the war party against the Crows. She knows that war is a part of a young man's life, but she has grown to deeply love her husband, and now she has missed her time of blood. As she considers the baby she believes is growing inside her, a butterfly lands on the cover of the lodge. "Sleep-bringer," Red Paint says.

Heavy Shield Woman approaches, and Red Paint says that her mother looks different since the Sacred Vow. "Someday soon I will appear as I was before, but I will always be different—in here," says Heavy Shield Woman as she taps her chest. She tells her daughter the ceremony has affected her much like childbirth, and then she says that Yellow Kidney has recently fashioned a harness for his right hand. With it he can hold his gun, now he only needs something to pull the trigger.

Kills-close-to-the-lake's sacrificed finger is evidence of her forbidden love for White Man's Dog. Like his ceremony at the Medicine Pole, she too has sought forgiveness from Sun Chief for her feelings. She reminds White Man's Dog that the sacrifice is common so that her actions will not seem suspicious or extreme.



Kills-close-to-the-lake's dream about Skunk Bear reflects the trappings of her patriarchal society. White Man's Dog, like Kills-close-to-the-lake, has behaved in a "wicked" way as well, yet he is not punished. Skunk Bear gives him the rock and a battle song, and Kills-close-to-the-lake loses a finger. Ultimately, she is left with the constant reminder of their wrongdoing and he is rewarded.



Nature again responds to White Man's Dog's needs. He had asked Sun Chief for forgiveness the day before during his cleansing ceremony, and Skunk Bear finishes the job. Skunk Bear also gives White Man's Dog the battle song because he knows that White Man's Dog will soon count coup on the Crows on behalf of Yellow Kidney.



Butterflies are often symbolic of sleep and dreams within Native American culture, and this is in keeping with the significance of dreams throughout Fools Crow. Red Paint resents the fact that White Man's Dog must war. It has taken her father and she fears that it will take her husband as well.



Yellow Kidney's creation of the harness is evidence of his—and by extension, the Pikunis'—resilience is the face of adversity. Yellow Kidney's approach must be modified, but he is still able to hold his gun, and hopefully someday hunt and return to his traditional lifestyle. Yellow Kidney's perseverance inspires optimism for the tribe.



Heavy Shield Woman says that Yellow Kidney has changed since he returned from the raid. He no longer expresses any love for her, and he appears empty. Heavy Shield Woman has too lost desire for him since becoming a Sacred Vow Woman, and she feels guilty that she does not miss her husband's touch.

Heavy Shield Woman has not forgiven Yellow Kidney for his rape of the young girl, and Yellow Kidney has not let himself off the hook either. They are both paying for Yellow Kidney's behavior in the sick lodge.



Mik-api has told Heavy Shield Woman that he can drive the bad spirit from Yellow Kidney, but her husband must be willing. Now, she says, Yellow Kidney is content to dwell on his misfortune, without much thought about how it affects others. At least, she says, his hair is growing back. Red Paint suddenly blurts out to her mother that she believes she is pregnant. Heavy Shield Woman holds her close and weeps happily.

The return of Yellow Kidney's hair represents the slow return of his spirit after his capture and torture, and it is a small piece of optimism in an otherwise bleak situation. While Yellow Kidney has made some progress, he is still consumed by his shame. The answer to Yellow Kidney's problems is family and community, but he is busy thinking of himself.



Crow Foot and his young warriors arrive at the Lone Eaters' camp before riding to Crow territory. Rides-at-the-door is worried that Crow Foot will be angry that White Man's Dog did not want to marry Little Bird Woman, but she has been married to the son of a great chief. That night they celebrate in preparation for their ride.

The Pikunis' celebration before they attack the Crows is a reflection of the importance of war within Pikuni culture. It is celebrated as well as encouraged, and it is a reason for outlying bands to gather.



White Man's Dog and Red Paint talk during the celebration. White Man's Dog admits that he is scared to fight the Crows, but his medicine is strong, and he will be brave. He fears only leaving Red Paint and their unborn son should he be killed, and Red Paint asks him not to go. White Man's Dog says it is not that easy; he is a warrior and it is his duty to fight and get revenge for Yellow Kidney. The couple talks about their baby, and Red Paint says that she would like to name him Sleep-bringer. White Man's Dog agrees that it is a fine name.

White Man's Dog and Red Paint's conversation highlights the personal risks involved in war. White Man's Dog would rather not fight, but he does because it is expected of him. Honor and duty are central to Pikuni life as well, and White Man's Dog is torn between his individual desire to remain with his wife and not war, and his tribal responsibility to avenge Yellow Kidney.



Later, as the men get ready to ride, Fox Eyes, the head Pikuni war chief, looks to the grassy flat near the Yellow River where a treaty had been signed thirteen years ago. One of the conditions of the Napikwan chief was that war must cease; however, the Napikwans did not honor the treaty and it is impossible to avoid war if their enemies continue to insult the Pikunis. It has been three winters since the last war, when Fox Eyes made his enemy, White Grass, cry as he killed him. Since then, Fox Eyes has been feared by the people.

The Pikunis' refusal to stop warring is evidence of their resistance against the Napikwans. This resistance represents the Pikunis' determination to continue their traditional lifestyle despite the pressure of the Napikwans to do otherwise.



Fox Eyes prays to the Above Ones for all his warriors to return home safe, and he tells the warriors that White Man's Dog will ride in place of Yellow Kidney and draw first blood. Fox Eyes thinks back to killing White Grass. He had hated him when he killed him, but now he is regretful. Fox Eyes has lost his "desire to make his enemies pay," and he wants now only to live his life in peace. Yet, he knows that this is not how it is done.

A warrior who had been scouting the Crow territories gives an account of the enemy camps, and Fox Eyes can tell by the warriors' banter that they are ready for battle. He tells them that they will punish Bull Shield. "His is the head that will be cut off so that our friend Yellow Kidney may sleep well in his lodge," he says.

On the fourth day, just as the party arrives north of the Elk River, White Man's Dog looks to the Day Star and thinks that it is very bright. The sky then begins to turn gray, the Day Star becoming a "dark ball with just a rim of glowing gold." All around looks like dusk, and the coyotes begin to howl. This lasts for just a moment before the sun begins again to "grow fire wings." White Man's Dog remembers his grandfather telling him of such a thing. He once saw the sun hide its face, and a few days later, the great chief of the Siksikas was trampled by blackhorns after being thrown from his horse.

Crow Foot calls the sign a catastrophe, and Rides-at-the-door says it cannot be ignored. Another chief suggests that they keep going—they have come too far to turn back now. A scout rides in from the valley, and Fox Eyes goes to meet him. White Man's Dog notices that the scout is Eagle Ribs. He looks to Running Fisher, who is obviously frightened. "A-wah-heh," says White Man's Dog. "Take courage, brother."

CHAPTER 12

At dawn, the Pikunis attack the village of Bull Shield. As he rides through the village, White Man's Dog fires his many-shots gun, killing a man standing in the entrance of a lodge. Suddenly, White Man's Dog sees a strong and beautiful black horse tied to a lodgepole. He takes it, firing a shot into the tipi nearby. A man comes out with a hand gun, and he knows that it is Bull Shield. White Man's Dog sees Fox Eyes appear just as he hears a loud bang and a pain in his side.

Like White Man's Dog, Fox Eyes struggles with the concept of war. He has been deeply affected by war and has lost his taste for violence, but he continues because it is expected of him. Furthermore, considering White Man's Dog's own regret over killing the young Crow night-rider, drawing first blood will be difficult for him.



Fox Eyes's outward behavior does not match his inner turmoil. He keeps up the expected façade of a fierce and courageous warrior.



White Man's Dog the others witness a solar eclipse, and their understanding of this event, like most things, is rooted in their ancestors' stories. The death of the chief will forever be connected to this phenomenon, and this also parallels the Pikunis profound connection to their natural surroundings.



In this moment, Running Fisher permanently loses his courage, and White Man's Dog's steadiness begins his brother's resentment of him. Running Fisher's extreme fear is a product of his deep spirituality. Because he believes in Sun Chief, Running Fisher believes that his wrath is real as well.



Bull Shield has outgunned White Man's Dog and shot him. It is only Fox Eyes' appearance that distracts Bull Shield long enough for White Man's Dog to recover and kill Bull Shield.



White Man's Dog falls, and he sees Fox Eyes ride down on Bull Shield so that he can kill him close. Bull Shield fires the gun and Fox Eyes falls dead at his feet. Bull Shield advances and White Man's Dog shoots him three times. He falls dead. As White Man's Dog assesses his own injury, Rides-at-the-door appears. "Take his hair, son," he says.

After taking his enemy's scalp, White Man's Dog climbs up onto the black horse (his own horse is nowhere to be found) and rides next to Rides-at-the-door, who smiles at his proudly. White Man's Dog looks at the scalp in his hand and vomits.

The next day, far away from the Crow camp, White Man's Dog and Rides-at-the-door ride behind the covered bodies of Fox Eyes and Lone Medicine Person, another Pikuni chief. There are six others dead, thirteen unaccounted for, and seven badly wounded. As they ride, a few of the men light fire to the valley behind them. "Now we make the Crows cry twice," one warrior says. "Their blackhorns will leave them and become someone else's meat."

The warriors bury the bodies and place Fox Eyes beneath a ledge on a tan rock high up a cliff. As White Man's Dog watches, he thinks about Sun Chief hiding his face and Fox Eyes riding to Bull Shield when he had a clear shot from a distance. Fox Eyes could have easily killed Bull Shield. White Man's Dog believes that Fox Eyes wanted to die. After all, "only great chiefs die when Sun hides his face."

CHAPTER 13

Back at camp, Red Paint traces the outline of her husband's wound with her finger—thankfully, his injury is not serious. "Wake up, Fools Crow," she says. He opens his eyes. He had forgotten all about the naming ceremony.

At a celebration the night before, White Man's Dog was renamed Fools Crow—because he had tricked Bull Shield by pretending to be dead before he killed him. Fools Crow had drunk the white man's water with the rest of the men and bragged about his kill, but now he is regretful. He didn't trick Bull Shield, he had stumbled, but he didn't tell the others this.

Rides-at-the-door tells White Man's Dog to take Bull Shield's hair not only as evidence of White Man's Dog's courage and bravery, but to disrupt Bull Shield's exiting spirit and his journey to the afterlife, further punishing him for Yellow Kidney's torture.



White Man's Dog vomits because, like Fox Eyes, he can't tolerate the violence of war. He has no desire to avenge and kill—he would rather go home to Red Paint.



Because of the band's need to avenge Yellow Kidney's torture, the lives and families of nearly thirty men have been irreversibly affected. White Man's Dog has already admitted that Yellow Kidney's life was not worth the horses they stole, yet they continue to war. In this way, Welch implies that the Pikuni way of life cannot be sustained through constant warring.



When Fox Eyes rides up on Bull Shield to kill him up close, he gives White Man's Dog the much-needed time to recover from being knocked to the ground. Fox Eyes would rather die than continue to war and kill when he has no desire to, and this way, his act ensures that White Man's Dog will survive as well.



Red Paint is obviously thankful that her husband has returned to her. More than likely, however, their luck will eventually run out. Women far outnumber men in camps because of casualties of war.



The white man's water is another destructive force of the invading Napikwans which also works against the community of the tribe. The alcohol makes Fools Crow behave in ways that inadvertently alienate members of his tribe.



Fools Crow notices a group of Napikwans riding toward camp, and then he sees the blue-coat seizers. They are accompanied by Joe Kipp, a half-breed who knows the Pikuni tongue. There are more than eighty of them, and one has several yellow stripes on his arms.

Joe introduces two of the men as Captain Snelling and John Gates. They tell Three Bears and the Lone Eaters that Malcolm Clark was recently killed, and that Owl Child has been identified as the murderer. He must be held accountable, and the men are searching for Owl Child and his chief, Mountain Chief.

Fools Crow is upset by this news and wonders if Fast Horse is still riding with Owl Child's gang. Less than a year ago Fools Crow and Fast Horse had raided the Crow to "gain honor and wealth in the traditional way," but there is nothing honorable about the killing of Malcolm Clark.

Three Bears is upset, and he tells Joe that there are better ways to earn a living than riding with Napikwans. He says that Malcolm Clark was a bad man and he won't cry for him, but Owl Child is bad as well. Clark had slapped Owl Child in front of this people when he caught Owl Child stealing his horses, and Owl Child had sworn revenge. Still, Three Bears refuses to help the Napikwans—who had promised rations but didn't deliver—and he won't tell them where to find Owl Child or Mountain Chief.

CHAPTER 14

Fools Crow shoots a white bighorn, which falls down the side of the mountain. He and Red Paint have gone up the Backbone to get away from the Lone Eaters' camp for a while. The seizers are determined to make Mountain Chief pay for Owl Child's crime, and the camp has become a stressful place.

Fools Crow and Red Paint have been on the Backbone for eighteen sleeps. They wouldn't be able to stay much longer though; Cold Maker is beginning to arrive. Fools Crow thinks about how he had made an offering of prime blackhorn hides to Cold Maker not long after Fast Horse left the Lone Eaters' camp. He hopes that it will be enough.

The blue-coat seizers, of course, represent the United States government. The yellow stripes on the man's uniform indicate that he is a high-ranking officer of some kind, and this implies their official capacity.



As Owl Child's chief, the seizers intend to make Mountain Chief pay for the murder of Malcolm Clark. Even though Owl Child has essentially left his tribe, the people are still left to answer for his selfish actions.



"The traditional way" refers to the Pikunis' approach to war and killing. Traditional Pikuni war involves gaining honor and wealth through courage, and Fools Crow sees Owl Child as more of a coward.



Three Bears resents Joe Kipp because he has turned his back on the Pikuni way of life and instead lives the life of the Napikwans. Three Bears feels that Owl Child was justified in his revenge—honor is central to Pikuni life, after all—and Clark had stolen Owl Child's honor. Most of all, though, Three Bears's refusal to help the Napikwans is a clear message of resistance.



Fools Crow and Red Paint escape to the mountains because they too are struggling with their tribal responsibilities. Away from the tribe they can focus on themselves and their own needs and desires.



Fools Crow's offering to Cold Maker on behalf of Fast Horse is a reflection of his dedication to his tribe. Fools Crow may struggle with his responsibilities, but he ultimately chooses his people and their way of life each time he is tested.



Suddenly, Raven arrives just as a real-bear drags off Fools Crow's bighorn. Raven says that he has just flown over the Crows' camp, and when Fools Crow asks him excitedly if he had seen how he killed Bull Shield, Raven says, "Oh, yes. You killed twenty-three men. Alas, you also killed six women and one child. Such is war."

Raven points out that Fools Crow didn't really trick Bull Shield, and that the Lone Eaters only think he did. Fools Crow is ashamed. Raven then tells him that an evil is afoot on the mountain. A Napikwan has been shooting animals and leaving their dead bodies to rot. Raven says that only Fools Crow can kill this evil Napikwan. Fools Crow agrees—the man can't be left to needlessly slaughter animals.

That night, Raven visits the dreams of the Napikwan who has been shooting the animals and tells the man about a beautiful Pikuni woman on the Backbone. He says that the woman is lonely and is sure to fall in love with him, and then tells the Napikwan where he can find her.

The next morning, Red Paint is busy washing pots and bowls in the river. A fish swims by, and she thinks about catching one to eat. She is hesitant to do this; "her people scorn those who eat the underwater swimmers." She thinks about Fools Crow—he had tossed and turned most of the night.

As Fools Crow watches from a distance he senses that something is wrong. The Napikwan sees Fools Crow and, sensing the trap, fires his rifle, hitting Fools Crow in the shoulder. He shoots again and Red Paint screams. Fools Crow prays to Sun Chief and the wolverine before shooting the Napikwan in the middle of the forehead.

CHAPTER 15

The men deliberate as to what to do about the Napikwans. In the last thirteen years they have had two treaties, but the Napikwans have failed to honor them. Now, more and more Napikwans are invading their land, and they have not been properly paid for the land they have already agreed to sell.

Raven's comment underscores that senseless killing involved in Yellow Kidney's revenge. In the end, over sixty people have been killed all for one man's honor, but the six women and the child make this number feel much worse.



In a way, Raven offers Fools Crow a chance to redeem himself and reverse some of his shame. The Napikwan's senseless killing of the animals reflects Fools Crow's own senseless killing of the Crows, but he has the power to stop the Napikwan. Fools Crow has a strong connection to the animals, and he is particularly upset by the settler's behavior.



In the Napikwan's dream, Raven offers up Red Paint as bait, and this reflects her powerless status within her patriarchal society.



Red Paint's thoughts about the fish are significant because as the Napikwans invade Pikuni lands and push the people north, the Pikunis are pushed away from the blackhorns and into the country of the Siksikas, the only band who eats fish.



Fools Crow prays to Sun Chief and the wolverine to summon his strength and courage to defeat the Napikwan, which again is a reflection of the importance of nature within Pikuni culture.



The Lone Eaters know that the Napikwans will never honor any treaty they sign. The Napikwans will continue to invade their land, and there is little they can do to fight or resist.



The young braves are eager to fight. To surrender to the Napikwans “is not the way of the Pikunis,” the young men say, and they are ready to drive them from their land. Rides-at-the-door agrees with the young men, but he is hesitant to engage the Napikwans. He says that with the end of the war in the east more Napikwans are headed to their land, and the seizers have already “rubbed out” the Parted Hairs people to the east. “Sun Chief favors the Napikwan,” Rides-at-the-door says. He tells them that it is natural to what to fight the enemy, but they are “up against a force they cannot fight.”

Rides-at-the-door is referring to the Civil War, and now that the government is not otherwise engaged, they have turned their attention to the natives. Additionally, countless settlers have moved West looking for work, land, or gold since the end of the war, and the seizers are eliminating the native tribes along the way. Unfortunately, the Pikunis are next in line, and they are no match for the seizers.



CHAPTER 16

Fools Crow goes out hunting alone. As he thinks about the Napikwans and the seizers, he wonders why Sun Chief has deserted the people. A figure in the distance suddenly distracts him. It is Fast Horse. He tells Fools Crow that he has ridden far and wide, and now he has been shot. Fools Crow helps him home to Boss Ribs, who seems disappointed rather than excited to see his son.

Fools Crow's assumption that the Sun Chief has forsaken his people is evidence of his spirituality. He has just honored Sun Chief before the Medicine Pole and sacrificed his blood and flesh to the deity. The fact that the Napikwans are threatening his people is proof, according to Fools Crow, that Sun Chief has deserted the Pikunis.



Three days later, Fast Horse wakes in Boss Ribs' lodge. Boss Ribs tells his son that Mik-api has healed his body with his magic but couldn't heal his soul. Because of this, Boss Ribs wants to teach Fast Horse the four hundred songs and ceremonies associated with the **Beaver Medicine bundle**. Boss Ribs reminds his son that “there is no room for a man who despises his fellows” in the tribe.

The sacred nature of the Beaver Medicine bundle highlights the importance of storytelling in Pikuni culture. Boss Ribs turns to the stories of the Pikuni people to heal his son, and therefore he reminds Fast Horse about the importance of community. Fast Horse's soul will only be healed when he returns to his people.



CHAPTER 17

As the snow comes, Fast Horse packs his horse to leave the camp of the Lone Eaters for good. He has no desire to learn the **Beaver Medicine bundle**, and he has grown disillusioned with the Lone Eaters' lifestyle. “There are easier ways of gaining wealth,” Fast Horse thinks. He will catch up with Owl Child and take revenge on the rancher who had shot him while he tried to steal his horses. Fast Horse is determined to “make the man die many times.”

When Fast Horse turns his back on the Beaver Medicine bundle, he turns his back on the Pikuni people as well. Instead of focusing on his people and their needs, Fast Horse is concerned with defending his honor and stealing horses. Fast Horse thinks only of himself.



Meanwhile, Fools Crow sits in Boss Ribs's lodge and stares at the **Beaver Medicine bundle**. “[It] is the oldest and holiest of our medicines,” Boss Ribs says, and then he offers to tell Fools Crow the story of the Beaver Medicine.

Fools Crow stares at the bundle because he is deeply concerned with his people and their future considering the advancing Napikwans, and he is hoping to gain power to resist.



Boss Ribs tells Fools Crow about two orphan brothers, Akaiyan and Nopatsis. Akaiyan lived with Nopatsis and his wife, who grew tired of Akaiyan. She tore her clothes and slashed her legs and told her husband that Akaiyan attacked her. Nopatsis knew this was a lie, but he paddled his brother out to an island and left him there anyway.

Akaiyan was convinced that he was going to die on the island, but he tried to make the best of it. He built shelter and hunted, but still it felt useless. He sat down and wept, and then a beaver approached and invited him into his den. Akaiyan met the beaver's family and lived with them through the winter—they huddled around him and kept him warm.

Spring came and Nopatsis returned to the island to find his brother's bones. Akaiyan waited in the bushes, and as soon as Nopatsis left in search of him, he jumped into the boat and paddled away. Later, Akaiyan returned to the island and found his brother's bones.

The beaver began to miss Akaiyan and went to him in a dream. The next day Akaiyan went to the island and brought the beaver back to his village, where the beaver taught Akaiyan the songs, dances, and prayers of his people and gave him a Sacred Pipe to put in a bundle. Akaiyan invited all the four-legs, flyers, and underwater swimmers to add power to the bundle. Each spring he returned to the beaver, who would place a new item into the bundle. Akaiyan gave the bundle to his son before he died, and it has been handed down ever since.

After Boss Ribs finishes the story, he begs Fools Crow to find Fast Horse. "Find him and bring him back," Boss Ribs says. "I will begin to instruct him in the ways of the **Beaver Medicine**. He will learn that it is his destiny as well as his duty. Tell him his father begs him, his people beg him." Fools Crow agrees.

CHAPTER 18

As Fast Horse rides the plains, he comes across Owl Child and his gang. He tells Owl Child that he must take revenge on the rancher who shot him. Owl Child is irritated with Fast Horse. After all, Fast was not humiliated by the Napikwan as he himself was, only wounded. Still, Owl Child thinks any reason is a good reason to kill Napikwan.

Again, storytelling is at the center of Pikuni history and culture. The power of the bundle lies within its stories and its ability to preserve the Pikuni way of life through the history of the Pikuni people.



Akaiyan's relationship with the beaver family is further evidence of the Pikunis' connection to nature. Again, the natural world responds to Akaiyan's needs and nourishes and protects him.



Native American storytelling often involves a trickster—someone who relies on trickery or humor to overcome the trials of any given situation. The trickster is often saved by wit, not strength, just as Akaiyan is.



Akaiyan's connection to the beaver and his family is symbolic of the Pikunis' connection to nature as a whole. The stories of the bundle are also the stories of the animals, and in this way Pikunis and the animals are again one and the same.



Despite Boss Ribs's disappointment in his son's choices, he still holds out hope that he will choose his people instead of his individual desires.



There is very little sense of community among the outcasts. Owl Child only tolerates Fast Horse and agrees to help him because Fast Horse's desire to kill Napikwans aligns with his own.



Later, Fast Horse approaches the rancher's land with Owl Child and his gang. The rancher is working in his corral while his wife and children sit on the porch steps of their lodge. "Let's not keep him waiting," Owl Child says, and they ride toward the ranch.

Meanwhile, Fools Crow is tracking Fast Horse. As he rides away from the Lone Eaters' camp and across the plains, he feels his spirits rising. He enjoys the freedom of being away from camp and his responsibilities and understands Fast Horse's desire to be away the tribe. Still, Fools Crow thinks, if Fast Horse roams away from the tribe, Pikunis will suffer.

Fools Crow soon arrives at the camp of the Many Chiefs and heads towards Mountain Chief's lodge. Fools Crow asks him if he has seen Fast Horse, and Mountain Chief says he is no longer in the camp. He had ridden through, feasted and rested, but he has gone on to find Owl Child.

Fools Crow tells Mountain Chief about the seizers who came to the Lone Eaters' camp looking for him and that they intend to make him pay for Malcolm Clark's murder. Mountain Chief says, unlike the other chiefs, he would like to go to war with the Napikwans. "We have become a nothing-people," he says. Fools Crow is ashamed that Rides-at-the-door and the other chiefs want peace with the Napikwans, and he feels like the Pikunis are "being driven into a den with only one entrance." He wonders again why Sun Chief has ignored the people.

Meanwhile, the rancher's wife screams as Fast Horse empties his rifle into the rancher's body and takes his scalp. Owl Child's gang grabs the woman and, slapping her, rip her clothes from her body. They drag her into the cabin and leave her children crying outside. She emerges shortly after with a blank expression. She doesn't scream or try to cover herself, and she doesn't notice her children who have run to her side. "You tell them Owl Child did this to you," cries Owl Child, knowing she doesn't understand. Fast Horse stands nearby, disappointed—he had killed the rancher too quickly and had "been cheated by his own rage."

Owl Child's eagerness to kill the Napikwans is evidence of his wickedness. He cares about little else apart from raiding and killing the white settlers.



Fast Horse is not the only Pikuni who struggles with the responsibilities of tribal life. Fools Crow too can see the attraction of living for himself, but he ultimately chooses his tribe each time. Unlike Fast Horse, Fools Crow understands that his own actions affect his people.



Fast Horse seems to have no problem going back to his people when he needs them, and this reflects this self-centered nature. He goes to camp only when he is shot, tired, or hungry.



To Mountain Chief, the Pikuni people are nothing if they do not defend their honor through war with the Napikwans. War is an essential part of life, and when they stand down, it is similar to death for Mountain Chief.



The extreme violence of Fast Horse and Owl Child's raid on the settler's ranch is evidence of their wickedness. Owl Child wants the settlers to know who has attacked them, even though they cannot understand his words. Owl Child cares very little that his actions are sure to lead to the suffering of the Pikuni people. Both Owl Child and Fast Horse care only about revenge.



CHAPTER 19

Meanwhile, Double Strike Woman cuts meat in preparation for dinner. White Grass Woman and her husband, Skunk Cap, have come to visit. White Grass Woman is the camp gossip, and she has just told Double Strike Woman that Fools Crow has gone off to look for Fast Horse. She is irritated that her son did not tell her before taking off and that she had to learn it from a gossip. She is concerned about Running Fisher too, as he has been behaving strangely.

Kills-close-to-the-lake listens quietly as White Grass Woman spills her gossip. Kills-close-to-the-lake feels like an outsider in Rides-at-the-door's lodge. She is the daughter of Mad Wolf, a poor man from the Never Laughs people, and Rides-at-the-door had taken pity on them and married Kills-close-to-the-lake as a favor to her father. As she listens to the conversation in the lodge, she feels a nervous twinge in her stomach. She looks toward Rides-at-the-door and quietly slips out of the lodge.

Outside, **Seven Persons** is partially hidden behind the clouds. Kills-close-to-the-lake makes her way to a small tipi nearby and slips inside. Running Fisher lays inside lazily studying an arrow. "Come here, then—where it's warm," he says as he lifts his robes.

Outside, Striped Face sneaks outside the tipi, snooping. She is shocked when she discovers her near-son with his near-mother. After all, she had suspected Fools Crow of behaving inappropriately with Kills-close-to-the-lake, not Running Fisher. She will tell Rides-at-the-door tonight, she thinks.

Striped Face grows angry at the thought of the camp learning about Running Fisher and Kills-close-to-the-lake's betrayal. She can't stand the thought of White Grass Woman gossiping about them, and she decides that she will be sleeping with Rides-at-the-door tonight. She usually teases him before sex; makes him beg to come to her. He always treats her "roughly after she yields," though "they both know that she has the power." She will not tease him tonight.

Double Strike Woman's ignorance of her son's whereabouts is evidence of her powerlessness within her lodge and the patriarchal society of her tribe. As a woman, she is the last one to know about her son and she isn't involved in the decision-making process.



Rides-at-the-door's marriage to Kills-close-to-the-lake is a form of social security. As a woman, she cannot care for herself, and Mad Wolf can't support her forever. As a wealthy member of the tribe, Rides-at-the-door takes Kills-close-to-the-lake on as service to the tribe—after all, he can afford it.



The fact that Seven Persons is obscured reflects the poor judgement of Running Fisher and Kills-close-to-the-lake. Even though Rides-at-the-door is not emotionally attached to his third wife, their affair still dishonors him.



Striped Face views her discovery of the affair as a form of power that she is otherwise lacking in the Pikunis' patriarchal society.



Striped Face's power in her sex life with Rides-at-the-door also suggests that he rejects traditional Pikuni notions of patriarchal power. After all, Rides-at-the-door may play along, but he ultimately knows better. Striped Face has a considerable amount of power—perhaps even more than Rides-at-the-door's first wife.



CHAPTER 20

Three days after leaving Mountain Chief's camp, Fools Crow travels cautiously through Napikwan country. Several ranches line the river and the bluffs, and Fools Crow marvels at how many there are now. There are so many of them that it is growing difficult to avoid them and their whitehorns graze everywhere. He notices buildings in the distance. There is a corral but no signs of life.

Fools Crow rides down to the buildings at dusk. He finds a dead dog near the corral; his shoulder has been crushed and his tongue cut out. He goes into the house and discovers dried blood on the bed. There are Napikwan clothes hanging on the wall, but no one is around. Fools Crow walks back out to the empty corral and "feels himself surrounded by the ghosts of Napikwans."

Back at the Lone Eaters' camp, Yellow Kidney watches his sons, Good Young Man and One Spot, play. He looks at his hands and feels useless. He considers leaving, and this thought does not cause him pain. He knows that Fools Crow will look after his sons and make sure that they grow into men, and he no longer feels any desire for Heavy Shield Woman. His wife is content in her role as the Sacred Vow Woman—she will not miss him.

Yellow Kidney thinks about the camp of the Spotted Horse People who took him in after he was tortured by the Crows. The camp is permanent and made up of mostly elderly people, and he had become one of them while he recovered. As he watches his children play, Yellow Kidney thinks, "I love them but I will not miss them." Later that night, under Night Red Light and **Seven Persons**, Yellow Kidney makes his way toward the Spotted Horse People's camp.

As Fast Horse approaches, Fools Crow grows acutely aware that they are not friends anymore: "They had chosen different lives, and [Fast Horse's] burning eyes told him that the break was as final as death." Fools Crow tells Fast Horse that Boss Ribs begs him to come home and learn the ceremonies of the **Beaver Medicine bundle**.

Fools Crow tells Fast Horse that he has just come from the ranch and that he knows he is responsible for what happened there. He tells Fast Horse that he has betrayed his people and has become a "heartless insect." Fast Horse refuses to go home and tells Fools Crow to tell Boss Ribs that he was unable to find him.

The Napikwans are slowly taking over, and soon they will have all of the Pikunis' land. As long as the Napikwans continue to bring in the whitehorn cattle, the blackhorns—and the Pikunis' traditional way of life—will be pushed out.



Fools Crow knows that the Napikwans who live on the ranch have been killed and he suspects that Owl Child and Fast Horse are to blame. This is further evidence of Fast Horse and Owl Child's disregard for the greater good of the tribe.



The fact that Yellow Kidney knows that Fools Crow will look after his sons and teach them to be men is more evidence of Fools Crow's dedication to the wellbeing of the tribe.



Yellow Kidney did not feel helpless in the camp of the Spotted Horse People. Since most of the people were elderly and likely disabled themselves, his physical shortcomings seemed less apparent in their camp. At home in constant view of his young sons, Yellow Kidney is painfully aware of what the violence of war has done to him and what his decision to dishonor the young girl has caused.



Fast Horse is resolute in his choice to leave the tribe and instead pursue his individual interests. His rejection of his people is so complete that he even rejects Fools Crow, despite their lifelong friendship and connection.



Fools Crow is just as resolute in his own decision to remain part of the tribe. Fast Horse is dangerous to the wellbeing of his people, and Fools Crow is willing to break Boss Ribs's heart for the collective good of his people.



Fast Horse tells Fools Crow that he has been betrayed by Cold Maker. Cold Maker had promised to make him powerful but failed to keep his word. Fast Horse says that he has offended Cold Maker, but Yellow Kidney was captured because he was foolish and shouldn't have entered the camp. "He was a foolish man!" Fast Horse yells as Fools Crow rides off.

While Fast Horse takes full responsibility for smiting Cold Maker, he will not be held responsible for Yellow Kidney's plight. Yellow Kidney's behavior was foolish, and he certainly should not have entered the young dying girl's robe.



CHAPTER 21

Yellow Kidney strikes a flint to steal in an effort to light some moss. He has been gone for six days and he has been waiting out a blizzard in an old war lodge for the last two nights. Despite his missing fingers, he is getting along. He can shoot, albeit slowly, with his trigger-puller, and he no longer feels useless. He has found he can do most things if he works slowly. Yellow Kidney begins to consider going home to his family.

The fact that Yellow Kidney is able to get along despite his disability is a testament to the resilience and perseverance of the Pikuni people to continue their way of life in the face of adversity. Yellow Kidney's missing fingers are certainly not as bad as the invading Napikwans, but they are still something that he has to overcome.



Meanwhile, a rider and his son make their way down the Missouri River. A friend in Fort Benton had told the man about the rancher's murder, and he is growing uneasy out in the snowstorm thinking about hostile Indians. He hopes to reach his destination soon, but he must get out of the storm. He sees the war lodge in the distance and signals his son to stop. Smoke is coming from the lodge, which he worries is coming from an Indian. As the man sneaks closer to the lodge, he thinks that he would like to kill an Indian.

The Napikwan's eagerness to kill a random Indian is evidence of the widespread hate and racism common during early western expansion and beyond. Yellow Kidney does not pose a threat to the man or his son, and the rider must go out of his way to find him. He is anticipating a sort of sick pleasure in killing the Indian, and his actions mirror the widescale actions of the Napikwans and the seizers.



Yellow Kidney sits in the war lodge roasting a rabbit he killed earlier that day. He has decided to return home to his family. He wants to watch his sons grow, and even though his relationship with his wife is strained, he still wants to grow old with Heavy Shield Woman. He thinks about meeting his grandson and name him during his naming ceremony. He is so deep in thought that he doesn't see the rider's gun barrel enter the door of the lodge, nor does he feel a thing as the slug rips through his chest. The rider fires twice more but it doesn't matter—Yellow Kidney's "heart had already exploded."

Ironically, it is in Yellow Kidney's final moments that he finally achieves peace, which suggests that his untimely death is another part of his punishment. Old Man has destined Yellow Kidney to a fate worse than death, and his revelation is not in keeping with this punishment. The image of Yellow Kidney's exploding heart as he dies implies that he was finally able to feel love again for a brief moment before it was snatched away by the Napikwan.



CHAPTER 22

Back at the camp of the Lone Eaters, Mik-api watches Red Paint cook. She reminds him of his own wife who died forty years earlier. She was a Black Paint slave who had been captured during a war with the Pikunis, and Mik-api quickly fell in love with her. She died after just two years, and Mik-api never took another wife—he "was satisfied with his memories of his Black Paint wife." He had learned his own magic from a Black Paint many-faces man and the Pikunis have grown to fear and respect his healing powers.

As the Lone Eaters' many-faces man, Mik-api has substantial power and standing in the tribe. It is not uncommon for a man of Mik-api's status to take multiple wives, but his love for his late wife has sustained him. His refusal to take another wife is evidence of his deep love for her.



Mik-api remarks to Red Paint that she “looks different,” and then he guesses that she is with child. Red Paint tells him that she had hoped to surprise her father; she would like him to name the child during the naming ceremony. Now, however, Yellow Kidney has been gone for sixteen sleeps, and she regrets not telling him sooner. He would have stayed then, Red Paint thinks.

Mik-api has been dreaming for the last three nights, but his dreaming powers are beginning to weaken with age, and his dream is incomplete. Still, he senses the dream has to do with Yellow Kidney, and Mik-api has a bad feeling. Mik-api doesn't tell Red Paint about his dreams. Instead, he tries to comfort her.

Fools Crow enters the lodge, surprising Mik-api. Raven had told Mik-api that Fools Crow was out looking for Fast Horse, and he didn't expect him back so soon. Fools Crow mentions that some Napikwan hunters have been killed near camp and, once again, Owl Child and his gang are the suspected culprits. Red Paint begins to feel uneasy—because Owl Child and his crew continue to kill Napikwans, the seizers are sure to attack. Mik-api smiles at Red Paint but she can see that his eyes are troubled.

Joe Kipp sits overlooking the Lone Eaters' camp. He thinks back to years earlier when he used to hunt with some of the Pikunis. They respected him then, but he knows that they won't after today. As he looks at the camp and watches the people below, he realizes that the Pikunis have not changed, “but the world they live in has.” He looks at his pocket watch and plans the remainder of his day. He can deliver the message and make it back to his own camp by nightfall.

Later that night, the elder Lone Eaters meet to discuss Joe Kipp's message. The seizer chiefs would like to meet with the Pikuni chiefs for a discussion. Three Bears knows that it must be about Owl Child, but he doesn't know what the seizers expect him to do—he can't control Owl Child or the other young warriors. He can't keep them from stealing Napikwan horses, and he can't keep Owl Child from killing.

Again, Red Paint and her child are negatively affected by Yellow Kidney's self-centered actions. Abandoning his family has made his life easier, but he hurts his family in return. Red Paint's regret is a product of Yellow Kidney's selfishness.



Mik-api's magic as a many-faces man means that he senses Yellow Kidney's death. Even in his weakened state, Mik-api's dreaming powers are a reflection of his connection and service to this people.



As a woman, Red Paint does not attend camp meetings and she is not privy to all of Owl Child's offenses and the trouble that he is sure to bring to the Pikunis. Still, Red Paint senses the trouble, and she has sensed for some time that Fast Horse is a bad egg. Even Mik-api tries to placate her with a smile, but she doesn't by it.



Joe Kipp is proof that the Pikunis' world is changing. Unlike the Pikunis, he has assimilated into the Napikwans, but the Pikunis will never agree to change. Joe knows that they are doomed, and he rides from camp to camp delivering bad news to his people.



Three Bears's helplessness in controlling Owl Child and his gang parallels his helplessness in saving his people from the Napikwans. Even if Owl Child were not such a problem, the Napikwan chiefs would find another reason to make war against the Pikuni people.



Rides-at-the-door fears that the proposed meeting with the seizer chiefs is a ploy to get all the Pikuni chiefs in one place so that they can be easily executed. “We are being squeezed, Three Bears,” he says. He tells him that Mountain Chief desires war, and Heavy Runner, another Pikuni chief, wants to negotiate peace and treat with the seizers. All the other chiefs fall somewhere in the middle and could be persuaded either way. Rides-at-the-door suspects that the seizers are attempting to divide them between those who will follow Mountain Chief and those who will align with Heavy Runner. “Either way, we lose,” Rides-at-the-door says.

“Perhaps it is useless to resist?” questions Three Bears. Rides-at-the-door, however, insists they must, but that they also must give something to the seizers to placate them, even that means finding Owl Child and killing him. Both agree that if pressed, they will align themselves with Mountain Chief and will not surrender to the seizers. Three Bears suspects that their days living as they choose are “numbered,” but he will not conform to Napikwan ways. “I will die first,” Three Bears says.

CHAPTER 23

On a sunny winter day, One Spot and the other children in camp drag blackhorn rib sleds to the top of a snowy hill. They are so involved in their play that none of them notice a wolf sneaking in from the tree line. From a distance too great to intercede, a young girl notices the wolf and the frothy whiteness around its mouth. The wolf circles in a confused manner, and suddenly, it is on top of One Spot, biting and snarling. It quickly spends its energy and wanders back into the trees.

In the days following, as Heavy Shield Woman tends to One Spot’s wounds, she wonders about her role as the Sacred Vow Woman. Having felt no peace since taking on the role, she questions her virtue. She considers going to Three Bears and denouncing her role as Medicine Woman.

In the meantime, Fools Crow and Good Young Man return from hunting, and Red Paint runs to tell them about One Spot. She tells Fools Crow about the wolf and the whiteness around its mouth. Fools Crow goes to see One Spot and finds him alert but missing an ear and most of his cheek. The puncture marks are red and angry. Fools Crow tells One Spot not to think of the wolf as his enemy. “He did only what wolves do,” Fools Crow says.

Rides-at-the-door’s comment about their losing fight is further evidence of their dire circumstances. His fear that the meeting is a trick to annihilate his people is a product of what has already happened to the neighboring tribes to the east. The Parted Hair People have already been violently eliminated, and the Napikwan chiefs are surely planning the Pikunis’ destruction as well.



The Pikunis will always resist. Three Bears and Rides-at-the-door will never willingly live the life of a Napikwan, and they would rather die than assimilate. Their willingness to fight even though they are guaranteed to lose underscores their perseverance and determination to continue their way of life.



The Pikunis are deeply connected to the surrounding animals—they rely on them for food and spiritual guidance—but they also pose a serious threat to the Pikunis as well. Their connection to the wild animals does not exempt them from their violent power.



Heavy Shield Woman’s virtue and her role as the Sacred Vow Woman are questionable. Her vow was made under distress, and she was acting in her own best interest when she prayed for Yellow Kidney’s return—the wellbeing of the tribe came second to the life of her husband.



Fools Crow’s speech to One Spot further underscores the inherent dangers of wild animals within Pikuni life. The red and angry puncture marks indicate that One Spot is more than likely becoming sick from the attack, and survival is very uncertain.



Fools Crow asks One Spot if he remembers the story of Poia, or Scar Face. One Spot remembers that the people scorned him because of his scar, but Fools Crow tells him not to worry. The Pikuni honor Scar Face, and now One Spot must think of his own scars as a badge of honor. “Of all the Above Ones,” Fools Crow says, “[Poia] is most like us.”

The next day, One Spot grows ill and begins to have trouble swallowing. He is unable to take any water and his eyes have a blank expression. Mik-api is away from camp visiting another tribe, but Fools Crow remembers a ritual that he had taught him. He quickly wraps One Spot in a blackhorn hide, skin side down, and begins to chant while burning sweet grass. Then, with a burning stick, he burns the hair from the hide. He purifies the air by burning a bundle of sage grass and instructs Heavy Shield Woman to bathe One Spot in warm water.

Fools Crow stays awake all night beating a small drum and chanting. Hours later, Good Young Man wakes to find Fools Crow on all fours, growling and snapping at One Spot’s body like a wolf. He wakes again later to find Fools Crow hunched over the body, and when Good Young Man moves closer to see his brother, One Spot opens his eyes.

CHAPTER 24

The next day, a party of Pikunis rides toward the Four Horns agency to meet with the seizer chiefs. Heavy Runner is with them, along with a few other lesser chiefs and Rides-at-the-door. The major chiefs have not come along, and the Pikunis know that the seizer chiefs will see their absence as an insult. As the men approach the gates of the agency, they are met by seizers who are unaware of their visit.

Finally, the men are allowed into the agency and are introduced to General Sully, the man in charge of Indian policy in the Montana Territory. He tells Rides-at-the-door that since he is not a chief, he will be allowed to sit in on the meeting but cannot speak. The seizers are disappointed that the other chiefs are not present, and General Sully informs them that he has an arrest warrant for Owl Child. The Blackfeet people are expected to aid in his apprehension.

The Pikuni people are reflected in the natural world, including in their spiritual deities, and One Spot’s scars are proof of this. Furthermore, the telling of Poia’s tale is a testament to the power of Pikuni storytelling. One Spot and Fools Crow find strength in the stories of their ancestors.



Fools Crow saves One Spot with his magical ritual, and it is evidence of his power and competence as a many-faces man. Fools Crow has never performed the ceremony before, but he is still successful. Additionally, Fools Crow’s use of the blackhorn hide is further proof of the Pikunis’ connection to and dependence on the buffalo to maintain their way of life.



Again, the single drum beat represents the beat of a single heart that is keeping the Pikunis alive. When One Spot opens his eyes, Good Young Man knows that he will survive—much like the Pikuni people and their way of life.



The Pikunis’ insult to the Napikwan chiefs is evidence of their resistance, but the fact that the seizers are unaware of their visit suggests the Pikunis’ insignificance in the eyes of the Napikwan chiefs. Even though they have been summoned by the Napikwans, the Pikunis are quickly forgotten.



The seizers likewise respond to the Pikunis’ insult by exerting some power of their own. By forbidding Rides-at-the-door a voice during the meeting, they limit the power of the Pikuni people. General Sully can sense that Rides-at-the-door is important, and he is quick to silence him.



The seizers also demand that the two thousand head of livestock that have been stolen from them in the past six months be returned. The Pikunis must stop harassing and killing Napikwans in the area, and General Sully also declares that he is now authorized to bring criminal Indians who have fled justice back from Canada. Rides-at-the-door knows that there is no way his people will be able to meet the conditions of the seizers.

Heavy Runner agrees to find Owl Child but says it will be too difficult to bring him to the agency. It will be easier to kill him instead, says Heavy Runner, and General Sully agrees. Heavy Runner says that they will do their best to recover the stolen livestock, but it will be difficult. Much of it has been traded to Canada, and now there is the added complication of a smallpox outbreak within many of the bands.

As the Pikunis depart, Heavy Runner asks General Sully for “a piece of paper with writing” that states that he, Heavy Runner and his people, are friends of the Napikwans. He wishes there to be no violence between his people and the seizers. General Sully quickly writes on a piece of paper that the men are not to be considered hostile and dates it 1 January 1870.

CHAPTER 25

Fast Horse watches a team of oxen from a distance with Owl Child and his gang. The men quickly open fire on the whiskey runners, killing them all. As they loot the team of many-shots guns and whiskey, Fast Horse thinks they have gone too far—they have struck too close to the Lone Eaters’ camp and it is sure to bring trouble.

Owl Child agrees that they have struck too close to camp. The seizers will surely know that he is to blame, and they will make Mountain Chief pay. They decide to burn the wagons and the bodies, and Fast Horse wonders if Owl Child is losing his nerve. He tells Fast Horse that he never wished the Pikunis any harm; he simply wants to make the Napikwans pay for stealing their lands. As Owl Child rides away, Fast Horse “can’t help but feel that Owl Child’s days are counted.”

Owl Child is surely not responsible for the theft of two thousand head of livestock. This number represents the widespread resistance of the Pikuni people, and it implies that many warriors have been raiding the Napikwans—it is impossible to blame all of this on Owl Child and his gang.



This is the first mention of the smallpox outbreak and it foreshadows the widespread devastation that is to come. It also alerts the seizers to the Pikunis’ weakened state on account of the disease, and it is indeed an inflicted camp that the seizers later annihilate.



This passage is a powerful scene of the Napikwan chiefs’ deception. Despite identifying his people as non-hostile, Heavy Runner’s camp will be burned to the ground in the very near future. This scene also confirms that the Napikwan chiefs never had any intention of keeping peace with the Pikunis—the plan was always to massacre them.



Fast Horse’s concern that they have struck too close to the Pikunis’ camp is evidence that he still somewhat cares about his people. Even if he has no desire to live among them, he does not want to be the reason why they are harmed.



Owl Child seems to care less about the people as a whole and more about Mountain Chief. Still, this is first time Owl Child has shown concern for the Pikuni people, and this makes him appear weak to Fast Horse.



CHAPTER 26

On a cold winter day, a Pikuni from an outlying band named Pretty-on-top rides into the Lone Eaters' camp with a Napikwan named Sturgis. Sturgis is a heavy-singer-for-the-sick among his own people, and the two bring news of a worsening white-scabs disease outbreak within the outer Pikuni bands.

Sturgis tells the Lone Eaters that the disease is quickly spreading through the bands, and even his own wife, a Black Patched Moccasin woman, has already died. The disease is coming from the Napikwans who carry it on their move westward. Sturgis tells them about a medicine—a magic “juice” that keeps them from getting sick. The medicine will not cure them of the disease, Sturgis says, but it will keep them from becoming sick. If they go to the Many Houses lodge, they will be able to get this medicine.

The Lone Eaters are distrustful of Sturgis and Pretty-on-top, and suspicious of any Pikuni who takes on the Napikwans' ways as he has. The two visitors are taken to a nearby lodge to rest as the Lone Eaters discuss their options. If they stay put in camp, it is likely that they will die. They can always go to the agency on Milk River, which will take them in, but this holds little appeal to the Lone Eaters. They consider moving camp north toward the country of the Siksikas, but there are no blackhorn there and they will be forced to eat the slippery swimmers. For now, “their world seems hopeless.”

CHAPTER 27

Meanwhile, Fast Horse approaches the war lodge on Bad Horse Butte with Owl Child and his gang. Fast Horse goes to the lodge alone to scout, and as he enters the structure, he sees a man frozen on the floor. He can tell from his clothing that the man is a Pikuni, and as he moves closer, Fast Horse sees a hand with no fingers. The wind blows but Fast Horse feels nothing.

CHAPTER 28

That night, Fools Crow is unable to sleep. He thinks about the men's conversation earlier in the evening, in which Sturgis had told them not to allow Pikunis from other bands to enter their lodges. The white-scabs disease will be carried on their clothing and horses, he'd said, and it is best to stay away. Many of the men refuse to do this—they have family members in the outlying bands and will not deny them entry into their homes.

Sturgis is obviously a Napikwan doctor, and his presence is an attempt to convince the Pikunis to report the agency because of the worsening outbreak of smallpox.



The Many Houses lodge uses the smallpox vaccination as a means to lure the natives onto reservations and into boarding houses to be assimilated into white Napikwan culture. This way, the Pikunis are only guaranteed to live if they turn themselves in to the reservation. Sending Sturgis onto Native lands with the immunization would have saved countless lives.



Clearly, the Pikunis would rather take their chances with the white-scabs disease than live a healthy life at the agency as a Napikwan, and this too is evidence of the Pikunis' determination to continue their way of life no matter the cost. Still, some of the tribal members are hesitant to move north and abandon the blackhorn, and this also underscores their connection to the sacred buffalo.



Fast Horse feels nothing because he knows that this man is Yellow Kidney and he knows that he is ultimately responsible for his death. Fast Horse has tried to convince himself that Yellow Kidney alone is responsible for his own circumstances, but when he discovers Yellow Kidney's body his response implies otherwise.



Here, the Pikunis' deep sense of community is working against them. The Lone Eaters find it impossible to turn their backs on members of their own families and tribes, even if they are sick and contagious. Because of this, the white-scabs disease is sure to decimate their camp.



The men went back and forth all night discussing whether to stay in camp or move, and unable to reach a consensus, they are now at an impasse. Fools Crow notes that it is “as though the men had decided, individually and without thinking about it, that they would not allow the Napikwans to drive them from their land.” He didn’t remind them of the advantages of a move, and the men refuse to return the Napikwan horses.

Fools Crow is troubled that they have made no decisions and knows that no matter what, their way of life is certain to change. If he does manage to convince the others to move to Canada to escape the white-scabs disease, their land will surely be in Napikwan hands by the time they return. Unsure of what to do, Fools Crow turns to his dreams for guidance.

The impasse is a reflection of the Pikunis’ commitment to community and their dedication to their way of life—even if it kills them. As a product of the Napikwans, the white-scabs disease is symbolic of the Napikwans themselves, and the Pikunis will not yield to the virus either.



Fools Crow turns to his dreams because his circumstances seem so hopeless. Dreams hold great power and insight in Pikuni culture, and consulting his dreams is Fools Crow’s best bet to save his people.



CHAPTER 29

The next morning, Red Paint wakes to find Fools Crow has painted his face, but it is not war paint. He tells his wife that his dreams have instructed him to go on a vision quest. He will be gone for seven days, although he doesn’t know where his journey will take him. He will be guided along the way and knows only that he is to arrive at his destination as a beggar.

Fools Crow sets out on horseback. His dreams have instructed him to ride for three days and nights. As he rides, he sees the Backbone in the distance and the buildings of the Four Horns agency. As he moves through Napikwan country, he prays for safe passage. He rides without stopping and begins to daydream, seeing Red Paint and his people in his mind. After three days, he comes to a blocked entrance of a canyon, and with some difficulty, drives his horse through the dense trees and into an open valley. **Seven Persons** is clear in the sky and Fools Crow knows he is in the right place.

Fools Crow sees a small lodge in the valley, which he senses he is supposed to approach. He stands before the door, afraid to knock, when it suddenly swings open. Inside is a woman wrapped in a blanket and she beckons to him.

Later, Fools Crow raises his head from the sleeping platform. There is a dog nearby, and Fools Crow hears a soft sleeping song coming from an unknown source. He sees a slab of meat on the table and eats several pieces along with a glass of chokecherry juice. The juice is tart and makes his stomach feel warm. He doesn’t want to sleep in this strange place, but he can’t keep his eyes open. He drifts off to the continued sounds of the sleeping song.

Culturally speaking, a vision quest is a more deliberate form of seeking answers through dreams. A vision quest usually involves a journey of some type, and the dreamer is typically ignorant of their destination.



The Backbone and the Four Horns agency physically represent Fools Crow’s current dilemma. Either he moves his people north toward the Backbone, the Siksikas, and their fish, or they surrender to the agency, get vaccinated, and become Napikwans. Again, when Seven Persons is clear in the sky, the right choice is likewise clear to Fools Crow. He is guided and reassured by the constellation’s presence.



This portion of Fools Crow’s vision quest vaguely resembles his dream about the white-faced girl, and this infuses the lodge with a sense of dread.



Despite his earlier apprehension, the lodge is exceedingly comfortable and inviting. All of Fools Crow’s needs are met. Presumably, this cabin belongs to Feather Woman, and like Mother Nature, she has everything Fools Crow needs to survive.



Suddenly, Fools Crow is in a meadow full of four-leggeds. He walks quietly through the animals, which don't seem to notice him. The country is beautiful, but he has no idea where he is and fears he has failed. Fools Crow feels foolish for believing that he could somehow help his people by following his dreams. Suddenly, the dog from the lodge runs by and slips between the trees, disappearing. Skunk Bear runs by, hot on the dog's trail.

The animals don't notice Fools Crow as he walks through them because as a Pikuni, he is at one with the animals and therefore they are at ease. This strange place represents ideal Pikuni lands—animals roam freely and there is no sign of the Napikwans. The presence of Skunk Bear further cements Fools Crow's connection to the land.



Fools Crow senses that he should follow and enters a cold, dark tunnel. He sings the song that the wolverine had given him and tries to find his courage. Finally, he emerges in a meadow of thick grass and wonders if he is in summer land. He soon finds a river, and after a swim, Fools Crow notices that Sun Chief has not moved in the sky. In the warmth of the sun, he falls asleep.

Sun Chief does not move in the sky because this land is not the summer land. Fools Crow is in the place of So-at-sa-ki's eternal punishment. Sun Chief is forever present—except during the false dawn of So-at-sa-ki's forced mourning when she is subjected to the early morning constellations of her husband and son.



A woman in a plain doeskin dress watches as Fools Crow sleeps. She is unadorned and wears no jewelry; even her moccasins are plain. The dog is near her side, and as she watches the man, she absentmindedly strokes her short hair.

The short hair and unadorned state of So-at-sa-ki is further evidence of her mourning—her outward appearance must match her inner pain.



When Fools Crow wakes, he is surrounded by nothing but sand. The sun is still high in the sky, but he hears no birds, and as he looks around, he doesn't see any other animals. With a panic, Fools Crow realizes that there are no animals in this strange place, and he wonders what he will eat, although, strangely, he does not feel hungry. The dog from the lodge is running in the distance and Fools Crow can see a white figure standing by the tree line.

Again, the white figure carries a negative connotation. Welch has so closely associated the color white with death and danger that mention of the color white has the effect of instilling a sense of dread and peril.



CHAPTER 30

In the meantime, two day-riders guarding the Lone Eaters' horses see an approaching horse in the distance dragging a sled. As the men approach the horse, they can see that the makeshift sled holds a body. One of the men claims to have seen a rider near the top of a ridge and they fear the enemy is near. As one man goes to warn the other riders, the other rides off to camp to alert the Pikunis.

Surprisingly, Fast Horse has gone to the trouble of returning Yellow Kidney to his people. This is a clear departure from Fast Horse's selfishness, and he instead acts in Yellow Kidney's best interest.



Fast Horse is struck by a desire to go home and beg for Boss Ribs's forgiveness, but too much has transpired, and he can't bring himself to go back. He doesn't belong with the Pikunis, but he doesn't belong with Owl Child either. He looks to the north—the whisky traders in Canada are sure to accept him. After all, many lone men have traveled there. He looks one last time to the camp of the Lone Eaters and heads north.

Ironically, Fast Horse is heading in the safest possible direction. With Napikwans moving in and the white-scabs disease spreading, Canada is again the safest bet. Although he doesn't know it, moving north may just mean eventually reuniting with his family.



CHAPTER 31

The woman in white approaches Fools Crow. He notices her short hair, like the hair of mourners, and asks if he is in the Shadowland. The woman laughs and touches his arm. Women do not usually touch strange men, and he is startled by her directness. She asks if he is hungry, and when he says he doesn't feel hunger, she replies, "No, there is no hunger here." She invites him to her lodge, where she has some tobacco.

The strange woman's lodge is plain and unadorned just as she is, and her tobacco is good and sweet. Fools Crow notices a digging stick standing in the corner and feels strangely content. As he sits back and smokes, he watches the woman painting designs onto a yellow skin. She begins to sing the sleeping song and Fools Crow feels himself relax.

Fools Crow wakes "to the blue light of false dawn." The walls of the lodge and all the surfaces appear blue, and when Fools Crow looks to the yellow hide, he had seen the woman painting on, he discovers that the hide is blank. Confused, he begins to think that it has all been a dream, but he knows that the woman is real. He longs to be near her again.

As Fools Crow exits the lodge, he hears the cries of winter geese. He is convinced that his dreams have tricked him, and he has been sent to this place to die. Skunk Bear has betrayed him too, and he can't understand why his spirit animal would do such a thing. With the sound of the geese closer now, Fools Crow is sure that all his power is gone.

Fools Crow sees the woman in a clearing. She is sitting on the ground and her hands are lifted to the horizon. There is a bulging sack nearby and a digging stick at her feet. She begins to sing a mournful song about Morning Star, and as Fools Crow looks to the sky, he sees Morning Star and Poia above. The woman begins to weep, and the sound of crying geese escapes her mouth. Suddenly, Sun Chief enters the clearing and blankets the area with blinding light.

Fools Crow approaches the woman and asks if she is all right. "I was digging turnips," she says. "I must have lost my way." Inexplicably, Fools Crow feels himself becoming angry. "Who do you mourn?" he asks. "Who are you?"

Fools Crow is insulted when Feather Woman laughs at him and touches him, and this is a product of their patriarchal society. Women don't behave this way, and he is clearly uncomfortable by her display of control and power.



Feather Woman's lodge is also a reflection of her mourning. Like her appearance, her surroundings mirror her inner pain and emptiness. The digging stick is a major clue to her identity as Feather Woman, but Fools Crow is too tired to make the connection.



The disappearing hide is evidence of Feather Woman's magic and spirituality. Fools Crow knows that she is real because she is real. Feather Woman is a mortal Pikuni woman, and while Sun Chief has banished her to an eternal world of mourning, she is just like Fools Crow and his people.



The sounds of geese are out of place—Fools Crow has already established that there are no animals here. His fear and loss of power reflects the lack of animals. Without nature and animals to draw from, Fools Crow is powerless.



This scene is the whole point of Feather Woman's punishment. She is continually reminded of her disobedience by the digging stick at her feet, and she is left in eternal agony at the sight of Morning Star and Poia.



Fools Crow feels inexplicably angry because Feather Woman is the reason why his people suffer. When Feather Woman disobeyed the moon, she unleashed all forms of suffering onto the people for the first time.



CHAPTER 32

Meanwhile, Rides-at-the-door sits at his usual place near the entrance to his lodge. He quietly thinks that he has always tried to do the right thing as far as his people were concerned but he has failed with his own son. Running Fisher has lost his honor. “Honor is all we have,” he thinks, “that and the blackhorns. Take away one or the other and we have nothing.”

Kills-close-to-the-lake enters the lodge and Rides-at-the-door feels the same sadness he felt when Striped Face first told him of her betrayal. He feels guilty for bringing Kills-close-to-the-lake into his family and questions his reasons for doing so. Perhaps it was his own desire to appear wealthy to other members of the tribe. He usually is angered when other men behave in such ways, but now he believes that he was subconsciously motivated by the very same means.

Running Fisher enters the lodge and sits. He openly admits to his affair with Kills-close-to-the-lake and Rides-at-the-door feels sadness enter his body—part of him had hoped that his son would deny Striped Face’s accusations. Rides-at-the-door says that their betrayal is his punishment for being greedy and taking a young wife when he knew it was wrong. He asks Kills-close-to-the-lake to forgive him but says that he does not forgive them. They have brought dishonor to his lodge.

Rides-at-the-door reminds Kills-close-to-the-lake that to dishonor a husband is the worst offense a woman can make. Most bands cut the noses from unfaithful women or kill them and send them to wander the Shadowland. Instead, Rides-at-the-door gives her freedom and tells her that she is no longer his wife, provided they tell no one of what they have done.

As Kills-close-to-the-lake listens to her punishment, her thoughts wander to Fools Crow. “She would have gladly committed this offense with him and accepted the punishment,” but now she feels only “emptiness.” She stands and quietly walks out of the lodge.

Rides-at-the-door looks to Running Fisher. He tells him that he is to travel north to the people of the Siksikas. Double Strike Woman and Striped Face have family there, and they will take him in. He is not, under any circumstances, to tell them what he has done. Running Fisher agrees. “I knew I was a nothing-one,” he says.

Rides-at-the-door’s statement implies that he really has nothing. The blackhorns are waning under the Napikwan invasion and now Running Fisher has dishonored his lodge. By comparing Running Fisher’s dishonor to the loss of blackhorns, the seriousness of his offense is clear.



Rides-at-the-door’s subconscious belief that he married Kills-close-to-the-lake to appear wealthy reflects the patriarchal nature of the tribe. More wives mean more power, and Rides-at-the-door has been greedy. He has put his own desire for wealth before Kills-close-to-the-lake’s best interests.



This is further proof of Rides-at-the-door’s shame for putting his own needs before Kills-close-to-the-lake’s—and Running Fisher’s, for that matter. His third marriage has not been fair to any member of Rides-at-the-door’s lodge, including his other wives and Fools Crow.



When Rides-at-the-door gives Kills-close-to-the-lake her freedom, he rejects the traditional Pikuni custom of multiple wives—especially young, beautiful ones—as a form of wealth and a reflection of power.



Kills-close-to-the-lake feels empty because she has always been in love with Fools Crow. Running Fisher and Rides-at-the-door are merely substitutes for what she can’t have.



Again, moving north is the safest course of action, and it means that Rides-at-the-door and Running Fisher may be a family again someday, although neither know this yet.



Running Fisher tells his father that he lost his courage the day they invaded the Crows to avenge Yellow Kidney. Sun Chief hiding his face had terrified him, and instead of entering the village and fighting with the other men, he lingered on the outskirts, alone with his shame. He has grown to resent Fools Crow for his wealth and respect, and it is “with great effort” that he keeps from “hating his own brother.”

Rides-at-the-door knows that he should banish his son completely, but he can't bring himself to do it. That will cause Running Fisher to be full of hatred, much like Fast Horse. He tells his son that if he makes it to the Siksikas and manages to purify himself with the help of their many-faces man, he may be able to return. Running Fisher agrees. He will leave tonight, he says.

That night, Double Strike Woman mourns the loss of her sons. She is sure neither will return, and even though Rides-at-the-door tells her that it is not time to mourn, she finds it difficult to believe. She gathers her best elkskin robe and a small-bone breastplate, and together, she and Rides-at-the-door place the items near the tree line outside, offering prayers and the gifts to Sun Chief.

Rides-at-the-door is certain that their prayers will be answered. He is convinced that his people will go on. “As long as Mother Earth smiles on her children,” he thinks, “we will continue to be a people. We will live and die and live on. It is the Pikuni way.” He is certain that moving north is the best course of action.

CHAPTER 33

Fools Crow is confused and stares at the woman, and then, suddenly, he understands. “Feather Woman!” he yells. He says that he thought she had died in mourning. Feather Woman confirms that this is true, but instead of going to the Shadowland, Sun Chief had sent her here to mourn for eternity. Each day Sun sends her husband and son to her in the sky so that she is forever reminded of her transgression.

Feather Woman begins to tell Fools Crow her story. One morning, she went out to dig turnips after her mother-in-law, Red Night Light, had warned her not to disturb the sacred turnip. She promised she wouldn't, but as the day wore on, she was compelled to it and started digging. The turnip proved too difficult to dig up on her own, but two cranes flying overhead stopped to help. This time, the turnip popped up, creating a hole in the sky.

Ironically, it is Running Fisher who possesses weak medicine. Rides-at-the-door had always been worried that Fools Crow would be a coward, and instead it is Running Fisher. Running Fisher has isolated himself within the tribe and has contributed very little to their way of life.



Rides-at-the-door's confidence that Running Fisher can be purified by a many-faces man is evidence of his spirituality, and his refusal to formally banish his son is proof of his dedication and commitment to his family and their way of life.



Double Strike Woman and Rides-at-the-door's offerings to Sun Chief reflect their spirituality and appreciation for the natural world, which in turn is essential for their way of life.



The “Pikuni way” is yet another reflection of the Pikunis' spirituality and connection to nature. Their way of life is dependent on their relationship with “Mother Earth.”



Feather Woman's mourning for all of eternity is evidence of the Pikunis' patriarchal culture. Feather Woman alone shoulders the blame for the suffering of her people, and this reflects her own powerlessness at the hands of Sun Chief, the ultimate patriarch.



When Feather Woman created the hole in the sky, it was like opening Pandora's box. Because of the hole, disease, hunger, and suffering were born, and her people would forever suffer the consequences. Feather Woman mourns not only her husband and son, but the Pikuni people as well.



Back on earth, Feather Woman rejected her people and died of a broken heart. Her transgression had caused her misery, and her people would suffer too. Now there is sickness, hunger, war, and Napikwans, and the people do not mourn her. Fools Crow tells her that she should be proud of her son, Poia—he has given the people the summer ceremony, after all—but she doesn't respond. Feather Woman unrolls the yellow hide and walks away.

Fools Crow looks to the yellow hide and again sees nothing. Suddenly, a faint picture begins to take shape. Fools Crow sees lodges and horses and whiteness, and suddenly the horses begin to move. The scene becomes clear and he knows that he is looking at the camps of the Pikuni. The white-scabs disease has struck the camps, and his heartbroken people mourn. Then, just as quickly as the scene appeared, it fades from view.

A new scene begins to form on the hide, and Fools Crow sees the shapes of riders and horses. The figures ride through a snowy valley and he recognizes it as a place north of the country of the Pikunis. The riders are seizers and there are hundreds of them. They carry many-shots guns, and near the front, Fools Crow recognizes Joe Kipp. Fools Crow wonders where they are headed as the scene begins to fade.

Another scene appears. Fools Crow is staring at the land of the Lone Eaters' camp, only the camp is not there. The land is empty, and as he looks around, Fools Crow realizes that there are no animals there—it was as if “the earth had swallowed them.” He sees a square building, and it seems out of place in the landscape. It is like the Four Horns agency, only it is farther north, near Pikuni lands. Many sad people are huddled outside. Fools Crow does not recognize them.

Near the entrance to the building, Fools Crow sees a horse and wagon pulling several wooden boxes. He suspects that the boxes hold dead bodies, but he doesn't know why they died. A woman exits the building carrying a bucket full of guts, and two women follow her. One of the women reaches into the bucket and pulls out a handful of intestines. He recognizes the woman with the bucket as Little Bird Woman, the girl his mother had wanted him to marry. She holds the bucket close and walks away.

Fools Crow is thankful that Poia's own suffering has given them the summer ceremony.



Again, the mention of whiteness infuses the scene with a sense of dread, and the hide reveals the Lone Eaters' outbreak of the white-scabs disease. Feather Woman's hide has begun to reveal to Fools Crow the end of the Pikuni people.



Here, the seizers are on their way to annihilate Heavy Runner's camp with the help of Joe Kipp as retaliation for Owl Child's murder of Malcolm Clark. Heavy Runner and his camp are not hostile, and the seizers know this, but they attack the civilian camp anyway.



This scene represents the Napikwans theft of Pikuni lands. There are no animals because the Napikwans have run them off in order to raise their whitehorn cattle. The square building is a new boarding school on the Lone Eaters' land, and the sad people are assimilated Pikunis. Sadly, Fools Crow does not recognize his own people.



The boxes represent the countless coffins required to carry off the Pikuni people. When it is all said and done, and the dust settles on the Napikwans' westward expansion, the Pikuni death toll will be unimaginable, and the hide reveals this end to Fools Crow as well.



The scene disappears, and Fools Crow thinks that he has seen enough. Once more, a new picture begins to form, and he finds himself staring at a long Napikwan building. He can see inside, and it is filled with children playing and laughing. Outside, more children play, and off to one side stands a small group of dark-skinned children. They wear clothing like the Napikwans and their hair is cut short. The building and the children are surrounded by fencing and barbed-wire, and beyond them, the hills of the plains stretch indefinitely.

“You have seen something,” says Feather Woman. Fools Crow confirms and says that his hope is “futile.” There is nothing he can do for his people now. “I grieve for our children,” says Fools Crow. “They will not know the life their people once lived.” Feather Woman disagrees. They will know, she says. “The stories will be handed down, and they will see that their people were proud and lived in accordance with the Below Ones, the Underwater People—and the Above Ones.” While this is true, Fools Crow still can’t help but think that they are being punished.

CHAPTER 34

As more and more Lone Eaters fall ill, several families head in the direction of the Four Horns agency. Fools Crow has since returned from his vision quest, and he helps Mik-api and Boss Ribs tend to the sick. Fools Crow knows that their magic is useless against the disease, but still he tends to his people.

On the fifth day of the outbreak, Fools Crow finds Boss Ribs staring at the **Beaver Medicine bundle**, which has been emptied of most of its contents. “Are we lost then?” asks Fools Crow. Boss Ribs tells him that they are powerless to stop the disease, which must run its course. He asks Fools Crow how his family is fairing, and when Fools Crow says that they are well so far, Boss Ribs says that his daughter died the night before. Fools Crow thinks of Feather Woman and thousands of wailing geese.

Red Paint returns to her lodge, defeated. She can’t stop thinking about her father. When the men brought Yellow Kidney’s body to the camp, her mother had appeared emotionless. She feels guilty over her happiness with Fools Crow—she would gladly give it all up to have her life back the way it was before her father disappeared and sickness took over their lives. That night, she trembles as she sleeps next to Fools Crow.

This is perhaps the most disturbing of the images. Here, Fools Crow sees one of many Indian boarding schools where Blackfeet children are turned into Napikwans. The fencing and barbed-wire represents their relative imprisonment, and the native children stand away from the white children because they are treated as outsiders. Their distance from the white children represents their continued marginalization within society.



Feather Woman’s reminder that there is power in their stories reflects the sacred nature of storytelling within Pikuni culture. As long as Pikuni stories are told and their spirituality—that is nature—is observed and respected, the Pikuni way of life will continue. Fools Crow is not as helpless to save his people as he first assumes.



The efforts of Fools Crow, Mik-api, and Boss Ribs are evidence of their commitment to their tribe. They know that exposure increases their chances of becoming ill, and they tend to their people anyway.



The empty Beaver Medicine bundle is symbolic of the Lone Eaters’ helplessness. Even the bundle is powerless against the white-scabs disease, and the image of Boss Ribs sitting amongst the scattered contents of the bag is a powerful reflection of their dreadful circumstances.



Red Paint’s willingness to give up her happiness with Fools Crow is evidence of her commitment to community and tribal life. She is deeply in love with Fools Crow, but she would sacrifice her own happiness to make her tribe whole again.



CHAPTER 35

On the thirteenth day of the outbreak, Fools Crow and Rides-at-the-door walked through camp counting the sick and dead. They pass many mourners and it seems as if the Pikunis have “become a different people.” They arrive at the lodge of Three Bears; the chief had died the day before. As he died, he had given Rides-at-the-door his red-stone pipe and chosen him as the new chief.

At Heavy Shield Woman’s lodge, Good Young Man quietly dies. Fools Crow had performed a healing ritual the day before, but he could not help the boy. One Spot has begun to ask for food, and it looks as if he will survive. For the second time, the boy has come back from the Shadowland.

The next day is clear and cold, and the hunting party finally departs. Fools Crow and the others ride down the valley and soon come across the winter camp of the Topknots. Crow Foot welcomes them, but he is thin and frail. Over half of his band has been killed by the white-scabs disease, and now there is no game. He doesn’t invite them to stay and they ride on.

The men ride for days and see no signs of game. As Fools Crow stares blankly down the valley, he sees movement in the distance. He can tell that it is humans on foot—they appear to have children and old people with them, and they carry no weapons. As they move closer, Fools Crow can see that the people are members of Heavy Runner’s band.

Fools Crow immediately senses that something is wrong. He feels instant guilt; he had told no one about the visions he saw in the yellow hide. As they come upon the people, Fools Crow can see that one of the women is shot through the calf. “It was seizures,” she says. They had ridden into camp before daybreak and opened fire on their lodges. Heavy Runner is dead, along with many, many others.

As Fools Crow rides up to Heavy Runner’s camp, he tries to brace himself for what he is about to see, but nothing can prepare him. There is dark smoke everywhere and he can smell burning flesh and hair. He begins to weep as he sees the mangled bodies of his people. The camp is littered with bodies and parts of bodies, and he even crosses a black and lifeless infant. Fools Crow vomits as he rides through the carnage.

The Pikunis are defeated yet Fools Crow and Rides-at-the-door continue to fight on their behalf. Both men are determined to see their people through this and carry on their way of life.



One Spot’s survival is miraculous, and he is a representation of Fools Crow’s healing powers.



Crow Foot’s dismissive behavior is evidence of the Topknot’s hardships. Just as the hide had revealed, many of the camps have been hit by the virus, and Fools Crow suspects the Crow Foot has been hit especially hard.



These are survivors of the Marias Massacres. There are no men present, and they obviously do not pose a threat, just like the paper signed by Heavy Runner stated.



This parallels the guilt that Fools Crow feels when he doesn’t tell Yellow Kidney about his dream on the raid. Fools Crow’s guilt is a reflection of his commitment to the Pikuni people—he feels responsible for the death of Heavy Runner’s people.



Fools Crow vomits because he can’t stomach the violence and senseless killing. All of these people were innocent and non-hostile, and they were killed by the United States military in response to Owl Child’s murder of Malcolm Clark. All of this death is on account of one white settler.



As Fools Crow looks around, a few survivors emerge from the tree line. He suddenly realizes that there are no men among the victims. "Where are the men?" he asks. The survivors tell him that the men had gone out hunting. "A Pikuni does not live without meat," an old woman says. Fools Crow is further saddened by the thought of the men returning home to find their families and homes destroyed. He is certain now that Sun Chief truly does favor the Napikwans.

Fools Crow asks if there are any other survivors. There are some, they say, but most of them are dead. He asks what direction the seizers rode in, and he is told that they headed toward the Many Chiefs camp. Fools Crow remembers hearing that Owl Child had been inflicted by the white-scabs disease and he too is sure to be dead by now.

Fools Crow thinks of the last scene on the yellow skin in which the Napikwan children played while the Pikuni children stood nearby. He tries to find the strength to continue, and he thinks of their children, hoping to find the courage. "[We] have no children," he thinks.

CHAPTER 36

In the moon of the first thunder, Mik-api sits in his lodge alone. He thinks of his late wife and the time he has spent with the Lone Eaters. He is sure that he will not live to see another winter. A young warrior sticks his head in the lodge. "It is time," he says.

Mik-api removes the Thunder Pipe from a bundle and unwraps it. He says a prayer to the Above Ones, the Below Ones, and the Underwater People, then he fills the pipe with tobacco and smokes to the four directions. After a long ceremony of songs, he prays for the good health of the people and steps out of the lodge.

A procession begins with Mik-api at the front. Fools Crow and Red Paint, with a cradleboard on her back, wait to join. The elders join next, including Rides-at-the-door and Double Strike Woman, and One Spot falls in as well. As the procession moves through camp drumming and singing, their voices get louder.

As the procession moves along, they "manage a grave dignity." Only those too old or frail to make the journey remain in the camp. As thunder rolls in the distance, Fools Crow thinks of Feather Woman, and he knows that she is watching. As they walk, he "knows that they will survive, for they are the chosen ones."

The fact that there were not any men present during the massacre somehow manages to make this tragedy even worse. Without the men, the Pikunis had no way to defend themselves. This highlights the wickedness of attacking an unarmed and defenseless camp.



Owl Child will escape the seizers after all, and his people will still be made to suffer. While he may have died of the white-scabs disease, this implies that Owl Child still avoids responsibility for his actions.



Most of the children in Heavy Runner's camp are dead. Who will the Pikunis tell their stories to if their children are dead? Without their children, there is no hope of saving the Pikuni people.



A new moon suggests a clean slate, and with the passage of time, there is a renewed sense of optimism.



Mik-api's ceremony and songs are a reflection of the connection between Pikuni spirituality and the natural world. Mik-api prays to the stars and the animals, and he smokes to the four directions to center himself within his natural surroundings.



The procession's loud voices reflect their excitement to move and carry on the Pikuni way of life. Their movement implies that they will not surrender to the Napikwans.



The Pikunis are down, but they are not out. Presumably, the Pikunis are headed north to the Siksikas where they will be able to carry on their way of life to the best of their abilities for a while longer. Their trouble with the Napikwans has only begun, but they are determined to survive.



In the distance and all around, animals move in the dark. The animals sleep and eat, and molt and guard their young. Even “the blackhorns have returned, and, all around, it was as it should be.”

The animals in the distance are a reflection of the Pikuni people and their deep connection to nature and animals. As long as the animals thrive, the people live as well.





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