

Hunters in the Snow



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF TOBIAS WOLFF

Tobias Wolff was born in Alabama in 1945 to Rosemary Loftus and Arthur Samuels Wolff, who separated when he was five. Wolff's older brother, Geoffrey Wolff, went to live with their father, while Tobias Wolff lived with his mother. After moving around a lot, Tobias Wolff's mother eventually remarried and settled in Seattle, Washington. Wolff attended Concrete High School in the North Cascades and then The Hill School in Pennsylvania, though he was later expelled for forging parts of his application. After serving in the Army during the Vietnam War, Wolff studied English at Oxford, graduating in 1972. He completed a Creative Writing M.A. in 1975, and then took up teaching, first at Syracuse University, and then at Stanford. In the midst of his teaching career, Wolff made time for writing, publishing his first novel, *Ugly Rumors*, in 1975, and his first collection of short stories, *In the Garden of the North American Martyrs*, in 1981. This collection featured the short story "Hunters in the Snow." In 1985, he published a novella, *The Barracks Thief*, which won the 1985 PEN/Faulkner Award. In the years following, he published two memoirs, three collections of short stories, and a novel. Wolff now lives with his wife and three children in California.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

"Hunters in the Snow" is presumably in dialogue with Pieter Bruegel the Elder's 1565 painting "The Hunters in the Snow," which is also referred to as "The Return of the Hunters." The oil painting depicts a group of men and dogs on the outskirts of town, returning home after a hunt in the snow. Similarly, in Wolff's short story, a group of men hunt on the outskirts of town (the snowy woods outside of Spokane, Washington). In the short story, the dog plays an important role in the plot, echoing the way that the dogs are prominently featured in the Pieter Bruegel the Elder's painting. In addition, Wolff's short story was published in 1981, at the dawn of the Reagan-Thatcher era—a time in which the social safety net and value of community were beginning to corrode. This era was marked by an ethos of ruthless competition, which is reflected in the three hunters' social dynamic.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Hunters in the Snow
- **When Written:** 1981
- **Where Written:** Syracuse University, when Wolff was a writer in residence.

- **When Published:** 1981
- **Literary Period:** Twentieth-century literature
- **Genre:** Short story
- **Setting:** The woods outside of Spokane, Washington
- **Climax:** When Tub shoots Kenny in the stomach
- **Antagonist:** Kenny
- **Point of View:** Third person limited

EXTRA CREDIT

What's In a Name? The short story "Hunters in the Snow" appears in Wolff's 1981 collection of short stories, *In the Garden of the North American Martyrs*. However, in the UK, the entire collection is titled *Hunters in the Snow*, suggesting the story's prominence in the group.



PLOT SUMMARY

On a cold, snowy day in Spokane, Tub (who, as his name suggests, is tubby) is waiting, armed with a rifle, on the side of the road. Suddenly a truck swerves around the corner and mounts the curb, nearly running Tub over. He drops his rifle and two sandwiches and some cookies fall out of his pocket.

The truck eventually comes to a halt and Tub goes over to it. The driver of the truck, Kenny, is laughing hysterically at having scared Tub by nearly running him over. Tub is angry with Kenny and Frank, who is in the passenger seat, because they are an hour late picking him up. Though Frank doesn't join in with Kenny's laughing, he doesn't take Tub's side, but tells him to "be mellow." Tub gets into the truck with Kenny and Frank, and the three of them drive into the country, towards some woods where they are to go hunting. The truck is freezing because the windshield has been broken by "juvenile delinquents," so they have to stop twice for coffee to warm up.

They arrive at the woods—the same woods they've hunted in, unsuccessfully, for the last two years. Cold and restive, the three men squabble and Kenny threatens to divulge a secret that Frank has told him about "a certain babysitter." Frank is angry but Kenny only laughs.

They set off hunting. Tub trails behind, struggling to get through the fences and trudge through the **snow**. Rather than helping him, Kenny and Frank simply watch him struggle. After two hours and no success, they stop for lunch. Tub barely eats anything because he is trying to lose weight. Frank makes fun of Tub for being fat and Kenny laughs hysterically, again. Tub blames his fatness on his "glands." They continue hunting, Frank and Kenny looking for tracks along one bank of a creek, with

Tub on the other bank. Still unable to keep pace, Tub stops looking for tracks and just tries to catch up. With daylight fading and no sign of deer, they all decide to walk back along Tub's side of the creek. Almost immediately, Kenny spots some tracks and reproaches Tub for missing them.

They follow the tracks, and when they come to a no hunting sign, they decide to go to the farmhouse to ask the farmer's permission to hunt on his land. Heading back to the truck, Tub falls behind again. Tired and dispirited, Tub sits down alone and eats the sandwiches and cookies that he didn't eat for lunch. Kenny and Frank have already started driving, and Tub has to run to catch the truck. While Kenny goes into the farmhouse, Tub chides Frank for failing to stick up for him. He asks Frank about the babysitter, but Frank tells him to "mind your own business."

Kenny re-emerges having gotten permission to hunt on the farmer's land. The farmer's dog snarls at them, and Kenny, pretending to be a dog, snarls back until the dog retreats. They start following the deer tracks again, but lose them in the woods. Kenny is furious and argues with Frank. They walk back to the farmhouse and the farmer's dog runs out again. Kenny says, "I hate that dog" and shoots it. Then Kenny turns to Tub and says, "I hate you." Believing that Kenny is going to shoot him, too, Tub shoots Kenny in the stomach. Kenny crumples to the ground, while Frank barely reacts and Tub weeps. Tub suggests they call an ambulance. Leaving Kenny bleeding in the snow but taking his rifle, Tub and Frank go into the farmhouse to find a phone.

The farmer, somehow guessing what has happened, is unsurprised and unfazed, but lets them in. In the house, there is a pale and sweating woman holding a sleeping child. While Frank goes to call the ambulance, Tub confesses to the farmer that Kenny shot his dog. To Tub's surprise and horror, the farmer reveals that he asked Kenny to shoot the dog because it was old and sick. There are no available ambulances and so Frank and Tub decide to drive Kenny the fifty miles to the nearest hospital. The woman gives them some complicated directions for a shortcut.

Frank and Tub carry Kenny to the truck on some boards. It is dark and slippery and Tub falls, dropping Kenny who screams in pain. Frank calls Tub a "fat moron" and Tub, enraged, grabs Frank by the collar and tells him to stop talking to him like that. Frank apologizes.

They lift Kenny into the back of the truck and set off. Once driving, Frank tells Tub that he would have shot Kenny, too, if he'd been in Tub's position. Freezing because of the truck's broken windshield, they stop at a tavern to warm up, leaving Kenny in the truck. In the tavern, Frank confesses to Tub that he is leaving his wife and kids because he is in love with Roxanne Brewer, a fifteen year-old babysitter. Frank worries that Tub will think him a "complete bastard," but Tub tells him that he will always take his side because they are friends.

They set off again. Tub has left the directions to the hospital at the tavern but Frank assures him he can remember the way. They get cold again and stop at a roadhouse to warm up. This time it is Tub's turn to make a confession. He tells Frank that his being fat has nothing to do with his glands, but that he overeats compulsively. In response, Frank orders Tub four plates of pancakes, slathers them in butter and syrup, and then watches Tub eat them all. They drive on and Tub reveals to Frank that the farmer had asked Kenny to shoot the dog. They both laugh. Meanwhile, Kenny is in the back of the car, bleeding, freezing, and being driven in the wrong direction.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Tub – As his name suggests, Tub is fat, slow, and the butt of Kenny and Frank's jokes. He is the story's protagonist, but he has none of the heroism or charisma of a traditional leading character. Although he is the story's most sympathetic character, Tub is more pathetic than admirable, unable to stand up to Kenny's bullying and gratefully accepting Frank's friendship after Kenny is out of the picture, even after Frank has failed to stick up for him. Tub has kids but doesn't have the self-possession or maturity one expects from a responsible adult. He is ostracized for being overweight, but this is not what he is ashamed of: he is ashamed of his "double life"—his compulsive overeating when alone—so he lies to Kenny and Frank and diets in front of them, pretending he is overweight because of his "glands." Unlike Kenny, Tub is neither malicious nor aggressive, but he does snap when pushed: first, from fear, when he shoots Kenny in self-defense, and second, from anger, when, unable to take any more abuse about his size, he grabs Frank by the collar. Tub is the only character in the story who shows any real loyalty: he expects Frank to stick up for him, and when Frank confesses to him that he is leaving his wife and children for a fifteen year-old babysitter, Tub says that, as Frank's friend, he'll always be on his side. Tub's intentions are good, but his theory of friendship seems misguided when one considers Frank's treatment of him—making fun of him under Kenny's influence, and only switching his loyalty to Tub once Kenny has been shot.

Frank – Frank is, in many ways, the most powerful of the three friends, profiting from Kenny and Tub's evident dislike of each other by switching sides when it is convenient. He believes that "[t]here are all these forces" which "you just have to go with." Kenny calls this Frank's "hippie bullshit," but it could equally be seen as Frank's philosophy of opportunism and his slightly Machiavellian passivity. Likewise, he could be seen as the most romantic and passionate of the three men—he tells Tub he is in love with his "whole being"—but Frank's supposed sensitivity is what leads him to the selfish and destructive plan to desert his wife, Nancy, and their children, in pursuit of the underage

Roxanne Brewer, who is a fifteen-year-old babysitter. His response to Tub's confession about his compulsive overeating is also morally dubious. He orders Tub four plates of pancakes and watches with evident pleasure as Tub eats them all. Frank says it is "[b]eautiful," as if indulging Tub's damaging habit gratifies Frank's aesthetic sensibility.

Kenny – Bullying, cunning, and brutal, Kenny is the ringleader of the friend group, but he is a genuine friend to neither Frank nor Tub. He obviously dislikes Tub, whom he mocks mercilessly for being fat, and, though he recruits Frank to gang up against Tub, he seems to have little regard for Frank either, threatening to betray Frank's shameful secret about his illicit infatuation with "a certain babysitter." Kenny has his mind set on violence and cruelty, and, unable to find a deer to shoot, he takes out his frustration by shooting the farmer's dog. But he is not only aggressive, he is also sly: he doesn't tell Tub and Frank that the farmer actually asked him to shoot his old, sick dog, and, pretending to shoot it out of hatred, he makes Tub think he is going to shoot him, too. Kenny's prank backfires, literally and dramatically, when Tub shoots Kenny in self-defense. Although there is nothing redeeming about Kenny and some justice in his fate, by the end of the story one feels sorry for him: severely wounded, freezing, and reduced to reciting the sentence "I'm going to the hospital," Kenny is totally neglected by Tub and Frank who, carried away by their revived intimacy, have unwittingly (or, perhaps, half-wittingly) taken a wrong turn on the way to the hospital.

Farmer – Described as "a thin man with lank hair," the farmer owns the land on which Kenny, Frank, and Tub want to hunt. Although his dog whom he loves is too old and sick to eat, he is unable to put the dog out of his misery and so he asks Kenny to shoot the dog for him. He blames his inability to shoot his dog on the fact he lacks a gun, but the woman with the sleeping child (presumably his wife) tells him that he is simply spineless. The farmer simply shrugs at this accusation of weakness—as if he is too weak-willed even to defend himself.

Woman With Sleeping Child – This woman, who is pale and sweating, is sitting by a smoking stove in the farmhouse with a sleeping child on her lap. Presumably, she is the farmer's wife but she is never explicitly referred to in these terms. Other than giving Tub and Frank directions for a shortcut to the hospital, the only time this woman speaks is when she tells the farmer that he is too weak to shoot his dying, suffering dog. This intolerance for and heartless exposure of weakness parallels the preying on each other's flaws that characterizes the Tub, Frank, and Kenny's relationships with each other.

Farmer's Dog – The farmer's dog is big, black and so old that he can't "chew his food anymore." Like the human characters in the story, his frailty makes him aggressive: he runs out and barks at the three men as they pass, but when Kenny, pretending to be a dog, snarls back, the dog retreats, "peeing a little" as he goes, incontinent through fear or age. Kenny shoots the dog dead at

the request of the farmer who is unable to do the deed himself.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Roxanne Brewer – A fifteen year-old babysitter with whom Frank is in love. Frank tells Tub that she "is something special," and that she has "opened up whole worlds to me."

Nancy – Frank's wife and the mother of his kids.



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.



FRIENDSHIP AND CRUELTY

"Hunters in the Snow" is the story of a three-way friendship that is based on exclusion and harm. Tub, Frank, and Kenny are three friends who go on a hunting trip together, but from the very beginning their friendship is characterized by cruelty: at first, Frank and Kenny gang up on Tub, and then Tub and Frank align against Kenny. The story thus raises the question of whether the three men really are friends, or whether they are, as Wolff's title suggests, merely three "Hunters in the Snow," loosely bound by their annual tradition of hunting in the woods outside of Spokane, Washington. As the hunting trip unfolds, Wolff suggests that friendships or alliances that are based on shared aggression rather than affection are unfulfilling and harmful and are not genuine friendships at all.

While Kenny, Frank, and Tub are supposedly friends, all of them mistreat each other. From the beginning of the story, Kenny and Frank are late in picking Tub up (leaving him waiting in the **snow** for an hour), and when they do eventually arrive, Kenny tries to scare Tub by nearly running him over with the truck. Though Tub bears the brunt of Kenny's abuse, Kenny is also nasty to Frank: he makes fun of Frank for his "hippie bullshit" and threatens to betray Frank's secret about "a certain babysitter" (fifteen-year-old Roxanne Brewer, whom Frank has fallen in love with).

The men's friendship is held together by exclusion and betrayal rather than kindness and goodwill. The story's scenario itself—a hunting trip—emphasizes that the men's friendship is based on harm rather than affection: they are bonding over an activity that includes trying to kill something else for fun, and in the absence of deer, they turn on one another. In addition, Kenny and Frank's alliance against Tub illustrates how the men's friendship rests on ridicule and disloyalty. The two men bond by calling Tub rude names, laughing at him for being overweight,

and intentionally walking ahead of him, leaving him to struggle on his own through the fences and deep snow in the woods. Furthermore, although Kenny is the ringleader of this behavior, he is not its source. This becomes clear when the men's alliances shift and Tub and Frank gang up on Kenny. Rather than becoming kinder, their dynamic becomes even crueler, with Tub and Frank abandoning a freezing and severely wounded Kenny in the back of the pickup truck in order to eat pancakes together and chat.

Perhaps the most insidious aspect of Kenny, Frank, and Tub's friendship is that the rare moments in which the characters seem to make genuine overtures to intimacy are when they are most vulnerable to abuse. Frank, for example, confides in Kenny prior to the story's start about the underage babysitter he's in love with, but Kenny leverages the secret by threatening to tell Tub, thereby gaining power over Frank. Similarly, Tub confides in Frank that the source of his weight problem is not a complicated medical issue involving his glands, but rather his compulsion to overeat. Frank then uses this knowledge to harm Tub, ordering four plates of pancakes, slathering them with butter and syrup, and then watching Tub eat them all. While Frank seems at first to be signaling to Tub that he doesn't need to hide his addiction, it becomes clear that the pancakes are Frank's way of proving his superiority and power over Tub by feeding Tub's addiction and tempting him into behavior that makes him feel bad about himself. Even the moments that appear to be reflective of a healthy, compassionate friendship, then, are still rooted in maliciousness. This demonstrates that toxicity in relationships is not always blatant—it often is disguised, which can make it even more pernicious.



NARCISSISM, NEGLECT, AND THE DERELICTION OF DUTY

In "Hunters in the Snow," Tub tells Frank that he doesn't "pay attention very much," and this description could be applied to almost all the other characters—including Tub, whom Frank scolds for thinking he is "the only person with problems." Throughout the story, Wolff highlights the ways in which friends and family members fail to fulfill their duties to each other, and people who seem to love each other actually neglect each other, generally by doing nothing at all when some kind of response is called for. Ultimately, Wolff suggests that the neglect that punctuates the story is rooted in self-absorption and it has dangerous and even deadly consequences.

In the story, indifference to other people's needs comes from self-absorption, or being overly preoccupied with one's own problems. When Tub shoots Kenny in an act of self-defense, for example, the three men rush to the hospital. However, on the way to the hospital, Tub and Frank stop twice—first for coffee, then for an indulgent stack of pancakes—leaving the Kenny to bleed and freeze in the back of the truck. In prioritizing their

own comfort, Tub and Frank seriously and dangerously neglect Kenny. There are also other smaller, less obvious, instances of inattention peppered throughout the story. The woman with the child in the farmhouse sits by a stove that is "smoking badly"—yet the woman does nothing. The smoking stove—especially in proximity of the child—could be dangerous. However, the woman seems lost in her own world and fails to take action.

In this story, people do not just fail to notice what is going on around them—they also fail to react to what they do notice. The most profound cruelties in "Hunters in the Snow" do not derive from blindness, but rather from passively looking on and failing to intervene. For example, when Kenny maliciously makes fun of Tub, Frank "smile[s] and looks off," laughs along, or accuses Tub of being sensitive. Later in the story, when Tub shoots Kenny as an act of self-defense, Tub and Frank respond inadequately to the fact that Kenny is severely wounded. Even the farmer lacks a sense of urgency, as he calmly (and almost without interest) observes Kenny's gunshot wound and states, "I suppose you want to use the phone." Furthermore, the men find out that the nearest hospital is fifty miles away, and there are no ambulances available to come and retrieve Kenny, suggesting that even the local institutions are indifferent to the community's needs. Later, having carelessly forgotten the directions to the hospital at a tavern, Tub and Frank end up taking a wrong turn on the way to the hospital. The story ends without Kenny getting to a hospital—and with little assurance that he ever will, considering Tub and Frank's blissful unconcern for Kenny's rapidly declining health.

Neglect and derelictions of duty are particularly harmful when they proceed from love. For example, the farmer's deep affection for his dog means that he can't put the dog out of its misery, even though it is "old and sick" and can't "chew his food anymore." The farmer seems to use his love for the dog, then, as a justification for neglecting it. In addition, later in the story, Frank tells Tub that he is in love with fifteen-year-old Roxanne Brewer and is considering leaving his wife for the underage girl. Love is thus invoked as both the cause and the justification for Frank abandoning his duties to his family. Wolff focuses on these kinds of cruelty—neglect, inattention, and passivity—in order to show that they are no less cruel for being less obvious or direct.



SECRETS AND DECEPTION

In "Hunters in the Snow," Kenny, Frank, and Tub all keep and share shameful or sensitive secrets, such as the real reason for Tub's weight problems, or Frank's love for his kids' fifteen-year-old babysitter. The characters form alliances with one another by sharing these secrets, punish others by withholding secrets, and leverage secrets to gain power over others. In this way, Wolff shows that establishing intimacy through sharing secrets is risky, as

secrets can be betrayed or weaponized.

While Frank and Kenny's alliance against Tub is clear from the beginning, their shared secrets simultaneously cement and undermine their relationship. Prior to the story's start, Frank has told Kenny his secret—that he is in love with a fifteen-year-old babysitter—which seems to demonstrate a closeness between the two men that Tub does not share. However, when Frank tells Kenny that he “talk[s] too much,” the secret becomes less a bond than a faultline. In order to reassert power over Frank, Kenny threatens to divulge Frank's secret to Tub, thereby turning an emblem of their friendship into a weapon.

By contrast, when Frank and Tub share their shameful secrets with each other, they both seem to accept their friend's secret. Tub thinks that Frank will conclude he is “[p]retty disgusting” for confessing that he is overweight due to overeating, but Frank doesn't. Likewise, Frank fears that Tub will think he is “a complete bastard” for being in love with the babysitter, but instead Tub says that “when you've got a friend it means you've always got someone on your side, no matter what.” While this might seem positive and accepting, it's also worth considering whether these reactions are appropriate. After all, being in love with an underage girl and compulsively overeating are not necessarily things that ought to be uncritically affirmed or endorsed. Besides, having a friend “on your side, no matter what” is ominous: after all, Tub and Frank are “on the same side” with regards to neglecting wounded Kenny, and Frank and Kenny were “on the same side” when mocking Tub. Perhaps these friendships would be stronger, actually, if the characters thought independently and acted according to what they thought was right.

Furthermore, even though Frank doesn't try to leverage Tub's secret by telling it to anyone, he *does* use it to manipulate Tub. When Tub reveals to Frank his deepest secret (that he is overweight because he compulsively overeats and not because of a problem with his “glands”), Frank baits Tub into overeating in order to control and humiliate Tub by exploiting his weaknesses. After watching Tub demolish four plates of pancakes, he says that it is “Beautiful.” This might look like being supportive but, by encouraging Tub to do something that makes him feel bad about himself, Frank does not seem to have Tub's best interests at heart.

There is, however, an aspect of this sharing of secrets that is not uniformly negative, but is instead potentially redemptive. Frank's response to Tub's secret, for instance, is potentially helpful in that Tub says he is most tormented not by his weight, but by keeping his overeating a secret. It is possible, then, that Frank—by making Tub perform his secret in public—has released some of Tub's shame (this may be why Tub says he has “never been so full”). Furthermore, there is an element of justice in Kenny's fate. Kenny's secret (that he killed the dog because the farmer asked him to) is different from the other secrets in that it does not point to Kenny's personal weakness:

it is the farmer who is presumably ashamed of not having the strength to shoot his suffering dog. Kenny therefore keeps this secret not out of shame, but rather because he wants to scare Tub into thinking he is going to shoot him, too. Kenny's purely malicious deception quite literally backfires, and so Kenny is, in this sense, punished for his secrecy by his injury.



MAN VS. NATURE

“Hunters in the Snow,” a story of three men taking to the woods for a deer hunt, highlights how mankind is a threat to nature. Although the hunt

itself is inherently violent, it is Kenny's aggressive behavior at the end of the fruitless hunt that specifically showcases the way that humans treat nature with violence and aggression. However, since the hunters are constantly thwarted by and forced to submit to nature—such as when the freezing cold winds make the men prioritize stopping for hot coffee over rushing Kenny to the hospital after he has been shot—the story ultimately asserts that nature is more powerful than humans.

During the hunt, Kenny is violent towards nature. He aggressively states, “I hate that tree,” and shoots a nearby tree. When the farmer's dog runs out into the woods, Kenny claims, “I hate that dog,” and shoots the dog, who is instantly killed. Kenny's assertion of dominance over the tree and the dog represents his general attempt to assert human primacy over the natural landscape and animals through violence. The hunt itself also demonstrates mankind's violence toward nature, as the men kill deer for sport and entertainment. Although this particular hunt proves fruitless for the three men, other people have better luck—seen by the cars topped with deer carcasses outside of the tavern—suggesting that mankind's aggressive treatment of the natural world is widespread.

Despite mankind's violence, nature is still the more powerful force, since the men must constantly submit to the demands of nature. As Tub, Kenny, and Frank struggle to tromp through the heavy **snow** (earning Tub several bruises on his shins from the icy snow crust), it is clear that nature has the upper hand. Although the men discover deer tracks, they are unable to find the deer, demonstrating nature's ability to outwit the incompetent hunters. Nature even has the power to end the men's hunt entirely—as darkness falls, the men know they have no choice but return to the truck. Later, on the way to the hospital, the icy wind dictates when the men stop for food and warmth. Even though Kenny has just been shot and needs medical treatment immediately, it is the weather, not the men themselves, that decides if and when that will happen. By detailing the three men's ill-fated hunt, Wolff encourages his readership to recognize and respect nature's power and be cognizant of humankind's impact on the natural world.



SYMBOLS

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



SNOW

In “Hunters in the Snow,” the heavy snow creates a hostile, desolate landscape that mirrors the unfeeling and often cruel dynamic of Kenny, Frank, and Tub’s friendship. Before the hunt, Kenny and Frank are late to pick up Tub, forcing him to wait in the “falling snow” for an hour. This immediately suggests that Tub is the odd one out, and it creates a parallel between the uncomfortable and oppressive falling snow and the uncomfortable (and even outright hostile) behavior of Tub’s “friends.” Furthermore, being less nimble than the other two men, Tub struggles to navigate through the snow during the hunt and he quickly falls behind the others, echoing his difficulty in navigating his friendship with Kenny and Frank. While trying to catch up with the other two, Tub “bruise[s] his shins” on the thick, hard crust of snow. These physical bruises from the snow mirror the emotional bruises that Kenny and Frank inflict on Tub.

sense of humor. Kenny is compared to “a cartoon of a person laughing,” which also highlights how Kenny has a big personality. However, since he is compared to “a cartoon of a person,” and not an actual person, this suggests that Kenny is somewhat inhuman and emotionally detached, which will also be fleshed out later in the story.

Meanwhile, Frank seems dismissive of Kenny’s cruelty. Frank “smile[s] and look[s] off,” which suggests that he’s a little uncomfortable with the situation but would prefer to remain passive. Frank’s reaction to Kenny calling Tub “a beach ball with a hat on” introduces the theme of neglect—Frank clearly hears the mean things Kenny is saying but chooses not to stand up for Tub.

●● They started off across the field. Tub had trouble getting through the fences. Frank and Kenny could have helped him; they could have lifted up on the top wire and stepped on the bottom wire, but they didn’t. They stood and watched him. There were a lot of fences and Tub was puffing when they reached the woods.

Related Characters: Frank, Kenny, Tub

Related Themes:

Page Number: 22

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, the three men travel through the opening of the woods to get to their hunting spot. Tub’s difficulty in climbing over the fences—and the fact that he is left “puffing” afterward from the physical exertion—once again emphasizes that he is overweight and far less nimble than his companions. Frank and Kenny both witness Tub’s apparent difficulty but choose not to help him. Wolff points out that it would have been easy for Frank and Kenny to offer assistance—all they would have needed to do was “lift up on the top wire and step on the bottom wire.” In failing to make a small effort to help their so-called friend, it is clear that Frank and Kenny prefer to watch Tub struggle. Frank and Kenny’s lack of assistance is not just neglectful, but also cruel. This interaction paints a sharper picture of the three men’s friendship, highlighting that Frank and Kenny have a close bond that is founded on maliciously excluding and making fun of Tub.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Vintage edition of *Our Story Begins* published in 2008.

Hunters in the Snow Quotes

●● He looked like a cartoon of a person laughing, except that his eyes watched the man on the seat beside him. “You ought to see yourself,” the driver said. “He looks just like a beach ball with a hat on, doesn’t he? Doesn’t he, Frank?” The man beside him smiled and looked off.

Related Characters: Kenny (speaker), Tub, Frank

Related Themes:

Page Number: 20

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Kenny has almost run over Tub with his truck just for a laugh. Kenny likens Tub to “a beach ball with a hat on,” which immediately characterizes both Kenny and Tub. The comment implies that Tub is overweight and round like a beach ball, which hints at Tub’s later-revealed secret of his struggle with overeating. However, this comment also demonstrates that Kenny is insensitive and has a cruel

☛ The snow was light but the drifts were deep and hard to move through. Wherever Tub looked the surface was smooth, undisturbed, and after a time he lost interest. He stopped looking for tracks and just tried to keep up with Frank and Kenny on the other side.

Related Characters: Frank, Kenny, Tub

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 23

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Tub hunts alone while Kenny and Frank hunt on the other side of the riverbank. Tub struggles to wade through the thick snow drifts, which once again suggests that he is overweight. More significantly, the snow seems to symbolize the three men's friendship, which is also difficult for Tub to navigate and is characterized by isolation and cold behavior. Despite Frank and Kenny's constant ridicule, Tub seems to long for acceptance from them. Here, he "los[es] interest" in the hunt, instead wanting to "keep up with Frank and Kenny on the other side." It seems that Tub cares little for the hunt at all—perhaps he agrees to go on these hunts as a way to spend time with the other two men. His desire to "keep up with" his two companions shows that he desperately wants to be accepted into their exclusive, two-person group, which is emphasized by the fact that Frank and Kenny are "on the other side" of the bank from Tub.

☛ The snow was shaded and had a glaze on it. It held up Kenny and Frank but Tub kept falling through. As he kicked forward, the edge of the crust bruised his shins.

Related Characters: Frank, Kenny, Tub

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 24

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, the three men make their way to a nearby farmer's house to ask for permission to hunt on his land. As the men trudge through the snow, Tub frequently "fall[s] through," which again illustrates that he is overweight. Since he struggles but Kenny and Frank do not, Tub is also depicted as being set apart from his two companions, which points to the lopsided nature of the men's friendship. Tub experiences difficulty in navigating the terrain and is

physically bruised by the hardened crusts of snow, mirroring the way he struggles to navigate his relationship with Kenny and Frank and is subjected to their cold, hardened taunting, which leaves him with emotional bruises.

In addition, this passage suggests that Kenny and Frank don't come to Tub's aid when he falls through, further emphasizing the neglect and lack of interest that characterizes their friendship.

☛ "I came out here to get me a deer, not listen to a bunch of hippie bullshit. And if it hadn't been for dimples here I would have, too. [...] And you—you're so busy thinking about that little jailbait of yours you wouldn't know a deer if you saw one."

"Drop dead."

Related Characters: Frank, Kenny (speaker), Roxanne Brewer, Tub

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 25

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Kenny lashes out at Frank for his go-with-the-flow attitude about the hunt. Kenny calls Frank's feel-good sentiments "a bunch of hippie bullshit," which suggests that even Kenny and Frank aren't genuinely friends. Kenny's comment toward Frank shows that Kenny is abrasive toward everyone—not just Tub, who has had to bear the brunt of Kenny's verbal abuse thus far. Tub is not left unscathed in this instance, however, as Kenny rudely refers to him as "dimples," once again making fun of Tub for being overweight.

Kenny mentions Frank's "little jailbait," which seems to refer to the babysitter from their earlier conversation. Based on the way that Frank tells Kenny to "Drop dead," it's clear that Kenny holds sensitive information about Frank and is using it to assert dominance over him. Meanwhile, Frank's comment also perhaps foreshadows how he and Tub will neglect wounded Kenny, which might lead to his death.

“I hate that post,” he said. He raised his rifle and fired. It sounded like a dry branch cracking. [...] “I hate that tree,” he said, and fired again. [...] “I hate that dog.” [...] Kenny fired. The bullet went in between the dog’s eyes. [...] Kenny turned to Tub. “I hate you.”

Related Characters: Kenny (speaker), Farmer’s Dog, Frank, Tub

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 26

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Kenny is frustrated by a fruitless hunt and takes his anger out on the things around him—a post, a tree, the farmer’s dog, and (nearly) Tub. On the surface, this moment depicts Kenny as violent, heartless, and inhumane, especially when he shoots the farmer’s dog, which is killed instantly. However, it is later revealed that the farmer asked Kenny to shoot the dog, since it is so old and sick. Kenny purposely conceals this from Frank and Tub, perhaps to make himself seem all the more tough and dominant in front of them. Even though Kenny was justified in killing the dog, he is still heartless and inhumane for forcing Frank and Tub to witness the gory scene. He also acts violently by pointing his gun toward Tub, which Kenny later claims was a joke. Once again, Kenny passes his cruelty off as comedy.

Besides trying to appear dominant over his companions, Kenny also attempts to assert his dominance over nature. In shooting the tree, Kenny seems to blame nature for the failed hunt, and his unbridled aggression implies that humans are a threat to the natural landscape and its animals.

“You get anything?” he asked.

“No,” Frank said.

“I knew you wouldn’t. That’s what I told the other fellow.”

“We’ve had an accident.”

[...] “Shot your friend, did you?”

Frank nodded.

“I did,” Tub said.

“I suppose you want to use the phone.”

“If it’s okay.”

Related Characters: Tub, Frank, Farmer (speaker), Kenny

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 27-28

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Frank and Tub knock on the farmer’s door to call an ambulance for Kenny, whom Tub has just shot. This conversation between Frank, Tub, and the farmer plays out slowly, emphasizing the men’s lack of urgency about Kenny’s injury. Frank in particular seems unhurried in directing the conversation toward borrowing the phone to call for an ambulance. In addition, Frank simply states, “We’ve had an accident,” which seems to refer to a small, inconsequential mistake rather than Kenny getting shot. This is the first significant instance of Frank’s neglectful, apathetic attitude toward Kenny, which will eventually have serious consequences. The farmer also seems slow to act and almost uninterested in the fact that someone has been shot on his own property.

“You asked him to?” Tub said. “You asked him to shoot your dog?”

“He was old and sick. Couldn’t chew his food anymore. I would have done it myself but I don’t have a gun.”

Related Characters: Farmer, Tub (speaker), Farmer’s Dog, Kenny

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 28

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, the farmer admits to Tub that he asked Kenny to shoot the dog. Tub’s repeated question, “You asked him to? [...] You asked him to shoot your dog?” shows his disbelief. His repetition also shows that Tub is processing the fact that Kenny was really just messing around (however ill-advised) by pointing his gun at Tub, and that Tub shouldn’t have shot Kenny. In fact, Kenny was kindly helping the farmer by shooting the dog—one of the few moments in the story when people follow through with their duties. This realization suggests that Kenny is more complex than he appears and is not just a bully with an abrasive sense of humor. However, Tub’s disbelief also reemphasizes the fact that Kenny purposefully didn’t tell Tub and Frank that the farmer asked him to shoot the dog. In pretending to be tough and aggressive, Kenny concealed

his good intentions to help the farmer complete an unsavory task that he couldn't do otherwise.

☝ “You fat moron,” Frank said. “You aren’t good for diddly.” Tub grabbed Frank by the collar and backed him hard up against the fence. [...] “What do you know about fat,” Tub said. “What do you know about glands.” As he spoke he kept shaking Frank. “What do you know about me.”

Related Characters: Tub, Frank (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 29

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Frank lashes out at Tub for accidentally dropping Kenny as they attempt to hoist him into the back of the truck to take him to the hospital. Frank calls Tub a “fat moron,” which seems like a comment that should come from Kenny, not Frank. Perhaps now that Kenny is vulnerable and badly injured, Frank feels the need to keep up the hostility that characterizes the men’s relationship. This passage also depicts the first time that Tub significantly stands up for himself, as he acts with uncharacteristic physical aggression. By repeating the phrase “What do you know,” Tub emphasizes that Frank doesn’t actually know much about Tub and thus shouldn’t be making fun of him. This moment anticipates the end of the story, when Tub tells Frank his dark secret about his weight and his “glands.”

☝ “Tub, don’t you see how you’re dividing people up into categories? He’s an executive, she’s a secretary, he’s a truck driver, she’s fifteen years old. Tub, this so-called babysitter, this so-called fifteen-year-old has more in her little finger than most of us have in our entire bodies. I can tell you this little lady is something special.”

Related Characters: Frank (speaker), Roxanne Brewer, Tub

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 32

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Frank confides in Tub that he is in love with a fifteen-year-old girl; clearly, this young girl is the “babysitter” and

the “little jailbait” that Kenny mentioned earlier. Frank’s argument for the righteousness of his love is absurd. He criticizes Tub for calling the girl a fifteen-year-old, claiming that Tub is wrongly trying to categorize her. Frank lists other “categories” of people, which all relate to adult professions—an “executive,” “secretary,” and “truck driver.” Among these, the “category” of “fifteen years old” blatantly sticks out. Frank seems to want to sidestep the illegality of having a romantic relationship with an underage girl, as he calls her a “so-called babysitter” and a “so-called fifteen-year-old,” as if she is actually neither of those things. He also says that she “has more in her little finger than most of us have in our entire bodies,” but he doesn’t clarify what, exactly she has. With his flimsy argument and vague wording, Frank attempts to neglect the law, which bars him from pursuing Roxanne.

☝ “Nobody knows. That’s the worst of it, Frank. Not the being fat [...] but the lying. Having to lead a double life like a spy or a hit man. This sounds strange but I feel sorry for those guys, I really do. I know what they go through. Always having to think about what you say and do. Always feeling like people are watching you, trying to catch you at something. Never able to just be yourself.”

Related Characters: Tub (speaker), Frank

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 34

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Tub confides in Frank about his food addiction and struggle with overeating. Tub stresses that the most painful part of his addiction is the emotional, not physical, impact it has on him. Tub is most bothered by the way that his addiction makes him feel isolated from those around him, which implies that it must have been extra painful for Tub to be excluded by Kenny and Frank during the hunt and (presumably) throughout the course of their friendship. Tub is unbothered by “being fat,” even though his external appearance is what makes him the source of Kenny’s ridicule. Just as Frank’s confession about being in love with a babysitter was somewhat absurd, as is Tub’s confession about his weight. He likens himself to a “spy or a hitman” for overeating in secret and claims to understand “what they go through.”

“No wiping,” he said. Tub kept at it. The syrup covered his chin; it dripped to a point like a goatee. [...] Tub took the fork in his left hand and lowered his head and started really chowing down. “Clean your plate,” Frank said when the pancakes were gone, and Tub lifted each of the four plates and licked it clean. He sat back, trying to catch his breath.

“Beautiful,” Frank said. “Are you full?”

“I’m full,” Tub said. “I’ve never been so full.”

Related Characters: Tub, Frank (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 35

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Frank orders four stacks of pancakes for Tub right after Tub admits his struggles with food and overeating. Frank’s response to Tub’s secret lends itself to two readings. On the one hand, Frank seems compassionate in ordering pancakes for Tub and encouraging him to devour them openly. Frank frees Tub from having to keep his food addiction under wraps. He also encourages Tub to eat until he’s completely full, possibly as a way to curb Tub’s seemingly insatiable appetite for food. Perhaps because Tub feels forced to quickly down his snacks in private, he never eats until he’s actually full, which perpetuates his cycle of overeating. However, on the other hand, Frank enables Tub to indulge in his problematic addiction. Frank’s comments—“No wiping,” “Clean your plate,” and “Beautiful”—are unsettling, as they suggest that he is forcing Tub to engage in the very behavior that makes him feel isolated and ashamed. In this way, Frank might be disguising cruelty as compassion.

Right overhead was the Big Dipper, and behind, hanging between Kenny’s toes in the direction of the hospital, was the North Star, Pole Star, Help to Sailors. As the truck twisted through the gentle hills the star went back and forth between Kenny’s boots, staying always in his sight. “I’m going to the hospital,” Kenny said. But he was wrong. They had taken a different turn a long way back.

Related Characters: Kenny (speaker), Tub, Frank

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 35

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Kenny repeats to himself, “I’m going to the hospital,” which he’s adopted as a mantra to keep his mind off of his pain during the long drive to the hospital. It is significant that the North Star is “always in his sight” during the drive. Historically, sailors used the North Star to guide their ships back home to safety. In this way, Kenny may see the star as affirmation that he is heading in the direction of safety, meaning the hospital. However, since it is clear that Kenny will not be receiving medical attention anytime soon—considering “They had taken a different turn a long way back”—it’s possible that he is nearing death and is about to be guided home in a more spiritual sense.

The “different turn” that Frank takes while driving to the hospital is also ambiguous, as it’s unclear if it was an accidental wrong turn or an intentional one. Upon first glance, it seems that the turn was accidental. Since Tub misplaced the directions to the hospital, Frank has to navigate from memory in a dark, unfamiliar area, so it makes sense that he would make an accidental (and unnoticed) wrong turn. However, Frank’s attitude toward Kenny has grown increasingly dismissive and even cruel over the course of the story, begging the question of whether Frank would go so far as to intentionally keep Kenny from the hospital.



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.

HUNTERS IN THE SNOW

For an hour, Tub has been waiting on the side of the road in heavy **snow**. One driver nearly stops for him, but before Tub can “wave the man on,” the driver sees Tub’s rifle and speeds away.

Suddenly, a truck comes sliding around the corner, blaring its horn. Tub waves it down and the truck comes towards him but doesn’t slow down as it mounts the curb, forcing Tub to jump back so that two sandwiches and some cookies fall out of his pockets.

The truck comes to a halt and Tub picks up his sandwiches and approaches the driver’s window. The driver, later identified as Kenny, is laughing hysterically. “He looks just like a beach ball with a hat on,” Kenny says to Frank (the man in the passenger seat), and Frank smiles.

Telling the men that they could have killed him, Tub gets in the car, causing Frank to slide over to the middle seat. Frank reasons that Tub should be “mellow,” since Kenny was simply kidding around, but Tub continues, saying that the men are also an hour late in picking him up. Frank scolds Tub, telling him that he hasn’t “done anything but complain since we got here.” When Tub doesn’t protest, Kenny hits the road.

The truck is freezing because the heater doesn’t work and the windshield has been broken by “juvenile delinquents,” who hurled a brick through it. Keeping warm with blankets, the men head “deep into the country,” outside of Spokane, passing a desolate, motionless landscape. To warm up, they stop twice for coffee before they arrive at the woods in which Kenny wants to hunt—a location they’ve hunted twice before and come up empty handed, but which they’re trying again despite Tub’s desire to try a new spot.

Although it initially appears that Tub is hitchhiking, his intention to “wave the man on” shows he’s waiting on the side of the road for a different reason. Tub’s possession of a rifle also raises questions about what it’s for. The truck driver clearly thinks the rifle is for ominous purposes.



Tub’s wave to the driver suggests that he has been waiting for this truck to arrive. The sandwiches and cookies are the first suggestion of Tub’s unhealthy relationship with food.



It’s initially unclear if Tub actually knows the driver and passenger of the truck, but Kenny’s teasing comment suggests that the three men are friends. In calling Tub “a beach ball with a hat on,” Kenny suggests that Tub is overweight, which may also be why he’s called Tub.



It is immediately clear that the three friends have a lopsided friendship, as Frank and Kenny waste no time in ganging up on Tub. This moment also introduces Kenny and Frank’s tendency to disguise their cruelty as teasing. Frank’s position in between Kenny and Tub is also important, as Frank is often “in the middle”—caught between his competing allegiances to Kenny and Tub.



The icy conditions slow down the men’s trip—making them stop for coffee twice on the way—hinting at nature’s power over humans. Meanwhile, Kenny’s failure to fix his broken window before the hunt introduces the theme of neglect, which will resonate throughout the story. This is also a notable instance of Tub’s powerlessness—he has no say over where they hunt, which shows that Kenny and (to some extent) Frank call the shots.



When they arrive at the woods, Tub says that he's cold and Frank tells him to "stop bitching" and "get centered." Kenny mocks Frank for using the word "centered," and Frank tells Kenny that he talks too much. "Okay," Kenny responds, "I won't say a word. Like I won't say anything about a certain 'babysitter.'" Tub asks who they're talking about, but Frank looks at Kenny and says it's "between us" and "confidential." Kenny laughs, and Frank tells him, ominously, that he is "asking for it."

The three of them set off towards the woods. Tub, who is less nimble than Kenny and Frank, finds it difficult to get through fences and the **snow**, but instead of helping him, they watch Tub struggle. By the time they're ready to hunt, Tub is "puffing."

After two hours and no sign of deer, they stop for lunch by a creek. Tub eats only an egg and a stick of celery because he is trying to lose weight. Kenny teases Tub for being on a diet, and Frank, much to Kenny's glee, tells Tub that he so fat that he hasn't "seen [his] own balls in ten years." Tub replies that he can't help being fat: "It's my glands."

After lunch, they leave the woods and start hunting along a creek, looking for tracks. They split up, Kenny and Frank on one bank and Tub alone on the other. In an effort to keep up with Frank and Kenny, Tub stops looking for tracks. Realizing that that he has lost sight of his friends altogether and hearing only Kenny's distant laughter, Tub speeds up, fighting through the **snow** and breathing hard. Eventually, Tub catches up with them at a bend in the creek, where Frank and Kenny have stopped. Frank asks Tub if he has seen anything, and Tub shakes his head.

With daylight failing, they decide to head back, walking along Tub's side of the creek. Almost immediately, Kenny spots some deer tracks leading from the creek into the woods, which Tub's footprints clearly crossed. Kenny rebukes Tub for missing them. Tub tries to defend himself by saying he was "lost," but Kenny dismisses his excuse: "You were lost. Big deal."

Frank's comment that Tub needs to "get centered" suggests that Frank is somewhat of a hippie. However, instead of spreading love and peace, he rudely tells Tub to "stop bitching." Kenny's comment about the babysitter makes clear two dangers of secrets: they can be used to exclude (as Kenny and Frank have done with Tub) and they can also be weaponized, as happen when Kenny punishes Frank for saying he talks too much by threatening to tell his secret.



Once again, it is implied that Tub is overweight, as he struggles to hoist himself over the fences. Kenny and Frank neglect Tub, even though they see that he is clearly struggling. This is one of the many instances in which people notice but fail to react to situations that require their help.



Instead of eating the two sandwiches and cookies that he had in his pockets earlier, Tub eats a meager lunch, possibly to fend off Kenny and Frank's comments about his weight. Demonstrating their insensitivity, Kenny and Frank proceed to tease Tub about his diet and weight, which he's clearly self-conscious about.



The men's spatial separation mirrors the way that their friendship plays out on a grander scale. During the hunt, Kenny and Frank go one way while Tub goes another, just like how Kenny and Frank frequently gang up on and exclude Tub. In this moment, Tub gets increasingly anxious while separated from his friends, suggesting his nervous nature and his desperate desire to be accepted by Kenny and Frank.



Kenny seems to be the most insensitive and mean spirited of the three. His comment, "You were lost. Big deal," shows that he doesn't care about Tub's emotions. Clearly, Kenny cares more about hunting than being a good friend, which foreshadows his later outburst against nature.



They follow the tracks into the woods but come to a no hunting sign. Kenny wants to ignore the sign, but Frank insists that they ask the farmer who owns the land for permission to hunt on his land. Kenny isn't convinced and thinks they are going to run out of daylight, but Frank tells Kenny to be patient—"You can't hurry nature," he says. "If we're meant to get that deer, we'll get it."

They head back to the truck and Tub lags behind Kenny and Frank again—so far behind that he can't even hear their voices anymore. Tired and dispirited, Tub sits down and eats the sandwiches and cookies he hadn't eaten at lunch with the others, "taking his own sweet time."

When Tub reaches the truck, Kenny has already started driving away, and Tub has to run to catch it. He jumps on just in time and lies in the back, "panting." Kenny grins back at him, but Tub doesn't find this prank funny, so he ignores Kenny and doesn't turn around when one of his companions taps on the window to get his attention.

At the farmhouse, which is old and in need of repainting, Kenny goes in alone to get the farmer's permission. Meanwhile, Tub tells Frank that Frank has "a short memory," because he has evidently forgotten that Tub "used to stick up for" him. Frank, unrepentant, asks Tub: "What's eating you?" When Tub reproaches Frank for leaving him behind in the truck, Frank tells Tub that he is a "grown-up" and "can take care of [himself]." He then hints that he has bigger problems to worry about than Tub's hard feelings. Tub asks Frank if something is "bothering" him and what Kenny meant about the "babysitter." Frank dismisses Tub's question, saying that Kenny "talks too much" and telling Tub to "mind your own business."

Kenny re-emerges from the farmhouse with his thumbs up. As they are starting off towards the woods, the farmer's dog comes out of the barn, barking at them. With each bark, the dog slides backwards. Kenny responds by pretending to be a dog and snarling back, until the dog retreats in fear, "peeing a little as he went." Frank says that the dog is "Fifteen years if he's a day." Kenny says it is "Too old."

Frank highlights nature's power when he affirms, "You can't hurry nature." Even though the men are attempting to assert their dominance over nature by hunting deer, nature has the final say in the matter. In addition, Frank's focus on nature and what's "meant to" happen further depicts him as a hippie.



Tub eats his sandwiches and cookies only when the other two men can't see him, foreshadowing Tub's later confession to Frank that he is addicted to food and he carefully conceals his eating habits from his friends and family. This also suggests that Tub eats out of a sense of despair.



Once again, Kenny teases Tub in a way that is more malicious than lighthearted. It's unclear who taps on the glass—Kenny or Frank—but what is clear is that Tub is yet again excluded from the other men, both emotionally and physically.



Tub's mention of the way that he "used to stick up for" Frank shows that the two men used to have a deeper, more meaningful friendship, and that Frank should be showing more empathy than he currently is. By reminding Frank of this—and asking if something is "bothering" him—Tub makes a genuine attempt to repair their friendship. However, Frank rejects Tub's kindness and once again excludes him from the secret. In repeating that Kenny "talks too much," Frank seems to be regretful about entrusting Kenny with his secret.



The interaction between Kenny and the dog points to the theme of man versus nature. Kenny threatens the dog—seen by the way the dog submissively "pee[s] a little" as he runs away. However, Kenny has to pretend to be a dog in order to scare the dog, perhaps pointing to the way that nature is more powerful than humans.



They pick up the deer tracks and follow them into the woods but in the falling darkness they eventually lose the tracks. Kenny swears in frustration and says that “This will be the first season since I was fifteen I haven’t got my deer.” Frank tells Kenny that he can’t blame the deer, but that “There are all these forces out here and you just have to go with them.” Exasperated by Frank’s go-with-the-flow fatalism, Kenny says he doesn’t want to listen to Frank’s “hippie bullshit.” Frank says, “That’s enough,” but Kenny, incensed, tells Frank that he’s too “busy thinking about that little jailbait of yours.” Frank tells him to “drop dead” and walks off.

Kenny and Tub follow. As they are approaching the farmhouse, Kenny starts saying he “hate[s]” things—a post, then a tree—and shooting them with his rifle. Frank tells him to “Knock it off,” but Kenny merely looks at Tub and smiles. Tub hurries to catch up with Frank who is still ahead. Suddenly, the farmer’s dog runs out again. Kenny says, “I hate that dog.” For the second time, Frank tells Kenny “That’s enough,” and he orders Kenny to put his gun down. Ignoring him, Kenny shoots the dog dead. Tub, in shock, asks Kenny what the dog ever did to deserve being shot. Kenny turns to Tub and says, “I hate you.” Thinking Kenny is about to shoot him too, Tub shoots Kenny in the stomach.

Kenny crumples onto the **snow**. Tub calls Frank’s name, but Frank doesn’t react. Kenny, rocking on the snow in pain, says it was only “a joke.” Finally, Frank comes to life and bends down to Kenny.

Frank, as if in disbelief, says to Tub, “You shot him.” Tub, weeping, attempts to exculpate himself, telling Frank that Kenny “made me.” Frank tells Kenny that he’s going to be okay—that he is “lucky,” even—because the bullet “missed your appendix.”

Tub suggests they call an ambulance, but Frank isn’t sure, asking, “What are we going to say?” Tub replies that they will say “what happened”: that he shot Kenny in self-defense. Kenny objects, but Frank tells him to calm down.

Kenny and Frank’s squabble foreshadows an impending change in the men’s dynamic. In making fun of Frank’s “hippie bullshit,” Kenny shows that his ridicule is not limited just to Tub. In addition, this is the second time that Kenny has brought up Frank’s secret—presumably, Frank’s “little jailbait” is the babysitter that Kenny referred to earlier, suggesting that Frank is romantically involved with an underage girl. Kenny uses the secret as leverage, trying to assert his power over Frank and get a rise out of him.



Overcome by aggression, perhaps in response to Frank telling him to “drop dead,” Kenny begins shooting things around him. By specifically targeting the tree and the dog, Kenny demonstrates how humans are a threat to nature. However, by harming nature, Kenny ultimately harms himself. His aggressive behavior toward the dog makes it unclear if Kenny actually intends to shoot Tub as well, which makes Tub shoot Kenny first out of self-defense.



Kenny claims that pretending to shoot Tub was just “a joke,” showing how he masks his cruelty under the guise of teasing.



Even though Kenny has just been shot, Frank and Tub are slow to take action to help him, which shows how neglect pervades their whole friendship. Tub seems childlike when he says that Kenny “made me.”



The men are still slow to get Kenny the medical help he needs and instead worry about how they will phrase the situation to the dispatcher. Frank tells Kenny to calm down, which seems insensitive, if not absurd, considering that Kenny has just been shot.



Leaving Kenny bleeding in the **snow** but taking his rifle in case Kenny “get[s] ideas,” Tub and Frank head towards the farmhouse. They have to knock twice before the farmer answers. He asks if they “g[o]t anything,” and Frank says “No.” The farmer says that’s what he predicted, and when Frank confesses that they’ve had “an accident,” the farmer predicts that Kenny has been shot, and, seeming unperturbed, predicts that they’ll want to “use the phone,” too.

In the farmhouse, there is a woman with a sleeping child. While Frank goes away to phone the ambulance, Tub confesses to the farmer that Kenny shot his dog. Much to Tub’s surprise, the farmer replies that he had asked Kenny to shoot it and that he “should have done it myself.” The woman says that the farmer “loved that dog so much.” The farmer explains that the dog was “old and sick” and “couldn’t chew his food any more.” He adds that he “would have done it myself” if he had a gun, but the woman says that he “couldn’t” have done it “in a million years.” The farmer merely shrugs.

Frank returns with the news that the nearest hospital is fifty miles away and there are no available ambulances. The woman gives them some directions for a shortcut, which Tub writes down. The farmer tells them where to find some boards to carry Kenny on and says he’ll turn on the porch light for them.

It is entirely dark outside now and the wind is up. Frank retrieves the boards while Tub looks for Kenny. Kenny is not where they left him, but rather lying on his stomach up the drive. Tub asks Kenny if it is okay and assures him that “Frank says it missed your appendix,” but Kenny responds that he “already had my appendix out.”

Frank returns with the boards and Kenny makes a joke about hoping that he doesn’t have a “male nurse” at the hospital. “That’s the spirit,” Frank says, as he and Tub hoist Kenny onto the boards. Kenny screams and kicks in pain at the movement. Frank and Tub start carrying Kenny towards the truck, but it is slippery and dark because the farmer has forgotten to turn on the porch light. Tub falls, dropping Kenny, who rolls down the drive, yelling. Frank calls Tub a “fat moron.” This is the last straw for Tub: he snaps and grabs Frank by the collar, shaking him and telling him “What do you know about fat,” “What do you know about me.” “No more laughing,” Tub demands and Frank, trying to placate Tub, says “All right,” promising to stop and apologizing.

Like Frank, the farmer seems unperturbed by the fact that Kenny has just been shot, even though it happened on the farmer’s own property. The entire conversation between Tub, Frank, and the farmer feels slow and drawn out, illustrating that no one feels a sense of urgency in helping Kenny.



The woman, presumably the farmer’s wife, explains how the farmer’s love for his dog was more of a hurt than a help. Even though the dog was in great pain, the farmer couldn’t bring himself to put it down and instead chose to neglect it. This conversation also reveals that Kenny was justified in killing the dog—the farmer actually asked him to do it. However, Kenny concealed this fact for the sake of looking tough and being deceptive.



Even the hospital seems to neglect Kenny, as it’s far away and there are no ambulances. Likewise, the farmer and the woman exert very little effort in helping Kenny, showing their lack of urgency and compassion.



Once again, Tub and Frank seem unhurried. Only Kenny seems to understand the gravity of the situation, considering he has dragged himself up the driveway. Tub’s comment that the bullet missed Kenny’s appendix seems like a flimsy attempt at optimism.



Kenny’s joke shows that he’s still in good spirits and also emphasizes his abrasive, judgmental nature. Meanwhile, Tub and Frank’s squabble indicates a turning point in the men’s relationship. Tub’s emotionally charged response to being called a “fat moron,” foreshadows his later conversation with Frank, in which Tub reveals that he has a serious addiction to food and overeating. It’s also somewhat clear that now that Tub has shot Kenny and lashed out at Frank, he has more power than he had before; both Kenny and Frank must, to some extent, defer to Tub now.



Frank lifts Kenny back onto the boards and into the bed of the truck and covers him with blankets. Frank starts the truck and remarks that “you’ve got to hand it to the Japanese,” who, he says, “can make a hell of a truck.” Frank and Tub are alone up front together for the first time, and Frank apologizes to Tub again and says that Tub “should have said something” if he felt that way. Tub says that he did say something but that Frank doesn’t “pay attention very much.” Frank replies that he should have been more “sympathetic” and reassures Tub that he doesn’t blame him for shooting Kenny. Frank says that Kenny “was asking for it,” and Frank admits that he “would have done the same thing in your shoes.”

Snow and wind get into the car through the broken windshield, and soon Frank’s fingers are too cold to drive. They stop at a tavern where they see dead deer strapped to the hoods of parked vehicles. Kenny, still lying in the back but with his blankets having blown off, says he is cold. Frank tells him he’s not the only one, that it’s “worse inside” the truck, and that he can’t complain about the cold if he’s not even going to keep his blankets on. Kenny asks why they are stopping and Frank, explaining that they need to warm up, tells Kenny to “hold your horses.”

In the tavern, the waitress brings some coffee over, and Frank says, “Just what the doctor ordered.” Frank concedes to Tub that he doesn’t pay attention enough and explains that he’s been preoccupied. Then, Frank says he is thinking of leaving his wife, Nancy, and their children. Grabbing Tub’s arm, Frank asks him if he has even been in love with his “whole being,” and he declares that he has fallen in love with Roxanne Brewer—the babysitter.

Tub shakes his head and starts to guess how young the babysitter is, but Frank interrupts him, saying she’s “Fifteen.” Tub, shocked and disapproving, says that “she doesn’t have breasts.” Trying to defend himself, Frank tells Tub he is being close-minded and says that “this so-called babysitter, this so-called fifteen-year-old has more in her little finger than most of us have in our entire bodies.” Visibly upset at the thought of leaving his wife and kids, whom he hasn’t yet told of his plans, Frank fears that Tub will think him “a complete bastard.” Tub says that he doesn’t and offers his philosophy of friendship: “when you’ve got a friend it means you’ve always got someone on your side.” Frank is comforted: “You don’t know how good it feels to hear you say that.”

In repeating his statement that Kenny “was asking for it,” Frank implies that he is aware that Kenny’s jokes are thinly veiled cruelty. In asserting that he “would have done the same thing” were he in Tub’s position, Frank demonstrates genuine empathy. This moment is warm and affectionate—despite the fact that Kenny is bleeding in the back of the truck—signaling a positive shift in Tub and Frank’s friendship. However, this newfound friendship seems to happen at Kenny’s expense.



The deer carcasses strapped to the cars parked at the tavern mean that everyone else had a better hunt than Kenny, Frank, and Tub. The deer strapped to cars also echo wounded Kenny, stranded in the back of the truck. His friends are essentially treating him like an animal now. Frank is flippant about Kenny’s pain, showing his failure to be a good friend and react appropriately to the circumstances.



Frank’s comment—that coffee is “just what the doctor ordered”—is ironic, considering the men should be rushing Kenny to the hospital so he can be seen by a doctor. Frank seems to prioritize his own comfort over Kenny’s, further revealing Frank’s failure as a friend. He also seems to prioritize his romantic problems over Kenny’s seriously jeopardized health.



Frank finally explains his secret involving the babysitter, signaling that he has fully accepted Tub as a friend and will no longer exclude him. Although Tub is shocked by the secret, he responds with a declaration of his unwavering friendship and support. However, Tub is perhaps too supportive, as he barely objects to the absurdity and danger of Frank leaving his wife for a fifteen-year-old girl. Tub’s dramatic declaration of support may stem from the way that he was previously left out by Frank and Kenny. Perhaps now that Tub feels accepted, he is willing to say anything to stay in Frank’s good graces. On the other hand, maybe Tub promises his support and friendship because Tub knows what it feels like to be excluded and lonely.



Upon returning to the car, they discover Kenny in a bad way. He is sweating, shivering and straddling the tailgate having tried to escape. They lift him back into the truck and he complains: "It hurts, Frank." Frank says it wouldn't hurt if he "stayed put," and tells him to say the sentence "I'm going to the hospital," which Kenny repeats obediently.

Back on the road again, Tub realizes that he has left the directions to the hospital at the tavern. Frank reassures him that he can remember the way.

Soon, Frank and Tub are too cold to continue again. They pull over at a roadhouse. While they are warming up using the dryers in the bathroom, Tub tells Frank he is touched that Frank trusted him with his secret. "The way I look at it," Frank says, "no man is an island. You've got to trust someone." Tub then confesses to Frank that he doesn't really have any problems with his glands, but that he is overweight because he overeats compulsively when he is alone. Frank asks if Alice—presumably Tub's partner—knows, but Tub says that "nobody knows," which is the "worst" part: he isn't bothered by his appearance, but what he can't stand is "the lying" about being on a diet in public while he "shovel[s] it in" in private.

Tub asks Frank if he thinks he is "disgusting." Frank responds by ordering Tub four plates of pancakes, slathering them with butter and syrup, commanding Tub to "[s]it down," and watching Tub demolish them all—not even letting him stop to wipe his mouth. Frank eggs Tub on, telling him to "Weigh in" and to "Clean your plate." Upon Tub finishing the pancakes, Frank says "Beautiful," and asks if Tub is full. Tub responds that he has "never been so full."

Back at the truck, Kenny's blankets have blown off again. Frank says that they should use the blankets themselves. Kenny is still repeating "I'm going to the hospital."

Frank treats Kenny dismissively, as if Kenny is a child who is annoying his parent in the driver's seat. At the beginning of the story, Frank and Kenny seemed to share a close relationship, but now that Frank and Tub have grown closer, Frank neglects Kenny, pointing to the old saying, "two is company, three is a crowd."



By carelessly leaving the directions back at the tavern, Tub reveals that Kenny is a low priority. Even though Tub clearly messed up, Frank doesn't ridicule him this time, emphasizing their newfound friendship.



In divulging his own secret, Tub seems to thank Frank for his earlier honesty about the babysitter. Tub confides in Frank in order to further solidify the two men's new friendship. In addition, Tub admits that he's been hiding his overeating habit, which explains why he ate a celery stick and a single hardboiled egg in front of Kenny and Frank at lunch but then ate two sandwiches and cookies once his companions were out of sight. His comment that the lying is worse than the problem itself suggests that Tub wants dearly to be understood by others.



Now it is Tub's turn to fear Frank's rejection. Just as Tub responded to Frank's big secret with a comforting declaration of his friendship and support, as does Frank respond to Tub's secret with kindness. However, it's possible that Frank isn't actually being kind in this instance, as he supplies Tub with the very thing that makes him feel tempted and ashamed.



Frank's willingness to take blankets from Kenny shows the extent of his neglect and unconcern for Kenny, even though Kenny is in extreme pain and the two are supposedly friends.



On the road again, Tub tells Frank what the farmer told him: that he had asked Kenny to shoot the dog. Rather than being horrified at the mistake, Frank is tickled by Kenny's cheek: "That Kenny. What a card." They both laugh together.

Once again, Tub and Frank react inappropriately. Instead of recognizing that Kenny was shooting the dog because he was asked to (and that he was actually joking when he pointed his gun toward Tub), Frank and Tub just laugh and call Kenny crazy. They don't seem to realize that Kenny was wrongly shot—nor do they seem to remember (or care) that Kenny is still in the back of the truck, with his health dangerously declining.



Meanwhile, Kenny is lying beneath the stars, saying to himself that he is going to the hospital. He isn't, though; Frank accidentally took "a different turn a long way back."

Since Tub accidentally left the directions to the hospital back at the tavern—and Frank has had to navigate by memory—Frank's "different turn" was likely accidental and went unnoticed. However, considering Frank's glaring indifference toward Kenny, it's possible that Frank's wrong turn was, in fact, intended.





HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Weeks, Rachel. "Hunters in the Snow." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 7 Jun 2018. Web. 21 Apr 2020.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Weeks, Rachel. "Hunters in the Snow." LitCharts LLC, June 7, 2018. Retrieved April 21, 2020. <https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hunters-in-the-snow>.

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

MLA

Wolff, Tobias. *Hunters in the Snow*. Vintage. 2008.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Wolff, Tobias. *Hunters in the Snow*. New York: Vintage. 2008.