

## Part 3 Readings

### The Marrow Thieves: Pages 194-203

#### WORD ARRIVES IN BLACK

I WOKE UP early the next morning still in my clothes from the day before. As was my habit, I slung my rifle onto my back before leaving the tent. Before I could stop myself, I crept over to Rose's tent, unzipped the doorway not more than an inch, and peeked inside. She was alone, curled in her fetal sleeping position on her bedroll. I sighed. Thank God.

I tiptoed out of the camp, not wanting to run into anyone yet and have to answer the "where were you last night" or "why'd you storm away" questions.

"Hey, French. Over here." Halfway up the incline of the westward-facing hill Clarence held his hand up above his head to get my attention. He was with Miig and General and a few other men I didn't recognize. They were all wearing shades of green and brown, and two of them had

leafy branches stuck through their hats.

I waved and made my way over.

"You gotcher gun on ya?" Clarence shook my hand and nodded at the gun barrel over my shoulder. I nodded.

"All right then, let's go. Hunting day." Miig clapped me on the back and smiled, happy to see me there so early. I didn't want to tell him it had been a fluke. That I'd fallen asleep in fits and spurts and gotten up when I couldn't force my wandering mind to stay stationary anymore.

I spent the day in complete silence, trying to emulate the grace of the older men through the woods. Out here there was water, you could smell it in the air. The more north we got, the more life was left in the woods. I inhaled big.

"Closer you get to the coasts," Clarence whispered, pointing east, west, and then north, "the more water's left that can be drunk. The middle grounds?" He made his hand stiff and made a striking motion. "Nothing. It's like where the bomb landed and the poison's leeches into the banks, everything's gone in all directions till you get further out."

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I didn't know what to say. I knew that had been Clarence's traditional territory. "Sorry," was all I could manage.

If he heard me, he didn't let on. "All we need is the safety to return to our homelands. Then we can start the process of healing."

I was confused. "How can you return home when it's gone? Can't you just heal out here?"

Miig and General gave each other knowing looks, and Clarence was patient in his answer. "I mean we can start healing the land. We have the knowledge, kept through the first round of these blasted schools, from before that, when these visitors first made their way over here like angry children throwing tantrums. When we heal our land, we are healed also." Then he added, "We'll get there. Maybe not soon, but eventually."

A high whistle came through the trees, and General pulled me to the ground with him. I was frantic. Was it the Recruiters? I tried to claw my gun strap to pull the weapon into my hands and to the ready. On the other side of me, Miig turned around and put a finger to his lips, shushing my small noises.

I heard footsteps, a deep echo in the ground, and then branches breaking. Finally, there was silence and then another whistle, this one shorter.

From around me came the sudden sounds of breath, and I realized we'd all been holding ours, then movement, as everyone scrambled to their feet.

"Was it Recruiters?" I asked out loud. "Did they get anyone? General answered, "No, no, little brother. That was the scouts letting us know they had an animal in sight, one that was the right age to be taken. Sounds like they got it, too."

I coaxed my heart back into normal rhythm and followed the group to where they had, indeed, taken down a good-sized buck. Miig was preparing the ceremony when I got there to send it off in a good way. We allowed the deer to take his dreams with him so he had all the magic he would need to find the next world.

We returned mid-afternoon as heroes. I was more than a little smug, trundling down the hill, helping to maneuver the weight of a full-grown buck on the travois we'd strapped together out of branches and sinew. Even though I'd done nothing but tag along and then panic when the kill was actually made. Still, I was there. I was damn

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near giddy when I saw the look on Derrick's face as we passed by where he was leg wrestling with his friends. He had his shirt off and tucked into his back pocket, and I couldn't help but notice the definition of his muscles. I flexed under my sweater.

"Uncle, I told you to wake me up," he whined, jogging alongside us to speak.

"I shouldn't have to wake you up. You should be awake and ready like the rest of the men. Like French, here." I tipped an imaginary hat in his direction and watched the color blossom in his cheeks. He stopped following us, and we made our way to the outdoor kitchen near the mouth of the cave.

"Oh, French, that's a beautiful buck." It was Rose. She ran over from the clothes-washing area and put her hand on my arm. It made me shiver, and I had to try real hard to remember why I was angry with her. But once I had that image of her and Derrick the Dink two-stepping right in front of me, I pulled away from her.

"Yeah. Why don't you go watch Derrick wrestle over there." I pointed with my lips. "I'm sure he'd love to have a cheerleader."

Her face fell, and I started to feel flustered. "What are you doing, Francis?" She said it low since there were others around.

"Why don't you just call me French? Only people I respect can call me Francis." I couldn't stop myself. I wasn't even sure how much of this I meant.

She grabbed me by my elbow and led me through the kitchen and around the perimeter of the hill, back over towards our camp. When we reached the first tent I shook loose and she turned on me.

"What in the hell is your problem?" She was only six inches from my face, and I could see anger flash in her dark eyes.

"What do you mean, what's my problem? I'm not the one who's mooning after some jerk with a drum." It was louder than I'd meant it to be, and she flinched.

"You're the jerk around here. You wouldn't even talk to me yesterday and you expect me to just follow you around or something?" She pursed her lips together when she was done, like she had to struggle to keep back some words.

"Oh, I'm sorry I can't be at your beck and call all the time." I wasn't

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sure why I'd said it. It's not like she actually expected that. I even screwed up my face and flounced my hands about, as if imitating her snobby behavior. Well, this managed to unpurse her lips.

"You know what, French? You're different. At first I thought it was because of RiRi and Minerva, but no, you're even more different here." Her voice broke on the names a bit, but she took a breath and kept going. "I should just leave. After we find Minerva, I should just go. I don't want to stay around here when you're being such an ass." I'd regret this next line forever.

"What, and leave your new boyfriend, Derrick, behind? Whatever. Don't expect me to chase after you."

Her eyes filled with tears, and I was ashamed. So ashamed I dropped my head and looked at the ground so that all I saw of her retreat was the movement of her shoes as she took off, sobbing.

I waited until I couldn't hear her, until I was able to move my heavy limbs and drooping head. I couldn't go to my tent. I was scared to be alone in there right now. So I trudged the path back to the cave, past the celebrations in the outdoor kitchen, up the corridor and into my father's room. I flopped face first on his bed and stayed that way until he came in an hour or so later.

He rustled about for a few minutes and then, satisfied that I was awake, began to speak.

"Did I ever tell you about how I ended up in the city?"

I shook my head. I couldn't remember even hearing stories about my dad outside of him being my dad. I hadn't really considered him anything other than that.

"I ran away."

I should have sat up, showed some interest. But I just couldn't.

I heard his calloused palm rub at his moustache, an old habit. The sound made me feel safe and very young.

"Yup. I was thirteen when I decided."

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"That young?"

"Uh-huh. I remember that day, too. It had rained in the morning, but the sun came out after lunch." I tilted my head towards his voice, so that I held my face in the palm of one hand, listening.

"Painted wood, when you leave it alone, works itself out. Like it needs to get back to an honest shade. It'll fade blue to skinny green. The church where I went that day, it had rubbed itself grey. It made the birch around it seem real stark by comparison, like bone splinters sticking out of the ground like that."

He settled his weight on the bed beside me and continued. "I remember the old people used to say that the church was a medicine house. I sat there that day on top of my backpack in the aisle between two rows of pews so rough they'd cut your legs if you wore shorts to service and thought, this doesn't look like no medicine house to me. They used to say that men who came in left as something entirely different, something with hands that wouldn't obey natural law and hearts heavy and empty at the same time.

"Me, I needed something to change. Maybe that's why I went out there to that church. Nothing seemed solid to me anymore. Like everything was a drawing of what it was supposed to be, you know? I felt like my hands would pass right through the door when I showed up. But that day my hands needed to touch something real."

He extended his arthritic fingers out in front of him, throwing shadows over the bedspread.

"That church sat in the woods behind our rec center; it was like a small comma in a long sentence. It was shallow and narrow, not much bigger than the portable where Mrs. Gunther taught English with READER'S DIGEST magazines. When it was used it held about twenty people or so, that's at best - fifteen if the Boire boys were at service. Me, I didn't give a shit about God or the Jesus one way or another. But I knew this would be the last place they'd look. If my mère decided to get up that day, and if she knew me anymore, she might come. I didn't care. She'd be better off talking to the wood bugs outside. She'd get a better response. They wouldn't think up new swears to yell at her or jab her with sticks sharpened by Grandpa's old hunting knife. But then, I might not either. But you never could tell by then ... I couldn't guarantee anything."

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His voice sounded far away. I turned so that I was facing him now. He spoke to a spot over my head and nearer to the wall, like this was a story that was written in the space between us.

"The rages came at the weirdest of times then: eating Cheerios, watching music videos, hanging out. A garbage can got set on fire outside the school. I couldn't even tell you for sure it was me." He kind of laughed there, a laugh with no joy in it.

"Then I thought, jeez, what if it isn't my mom that finds me here? The thought made the back of my knees prickle. What if it was one of them in a pickup truck, on a dirt bike, in a shiny government-black car, one hand outstretched, the other hidden behind a back?"

His body went rigid. I read the stress in the veins that popped anxious Braille into his neck. His eyes looked at something I couldn't see. "And what was there even to keep me safe? What, a broken crucifix, maybe? My pocket knife? I was thirteen then, not old enough to fight a grown man. So I did the only thing that came to mind just then, something I'd done only once or twice before when shit got real bad. I got to my knees, pressed my fingers so tight the skin around my bitten nails ached, and prayed. I needed an answer. I prayed and prayed, closing my eyes so tight I saw constellations on my eyelids. And I listened for an answer.

"I listened and I heard a bird. I heard a cricket, and I heard some kids yelling for someone to pass the ball. And then there it was, the answer. It was the smooth swoosh of metal and rubber on the Trans-Canada, tied like a ribbon of tar over the bush. Old Highway 11. So I nodded my thanks to the blind Christ and threw my backpack over one shoulder. I was scared, but more scared of staying. I knew at least on the other side there could be a place, anyplace, where hands couldn't reach." We were quiet for a minute. He was so still it frightened me. Then he pulled away from wherever he had gone and smiled at me.

"I went to the city after that. Bummed around for a bit, tried to stay away from the cops and then the military when they took over. I found your mom there. She was the most beautiful girl in the world. And mean as dirt when she wanted to be. But not to me."

He smiled real big then. And there was joy in that.

"I was so happy, French. She made me feel like I was important, like a captain of

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industry or a scientific genius, and that was just from the look she'd give me when I was doing nothing special at all. It was amazing, really. Now that's medicine. Don't need no damn house to keep it in." He nodded his head, as if convincing me of the truth of it.

Then from out in the cave came the shuffle of feet down the corridor and voices getting louder into the valley.

"Jean, astum!" It was Clarence shouting for my dad. We both stood, and I helped him up and out. I slung my rifle forward as we made our way down the hall and into the valley. Chi-Boy popped out the shadows as if he'd been waiting there all along on a spring.

"They're on the move. Tomorrow." It was an old man in black robes, waving his arms while he shouted, half out of breath.

The sound of air being punched out of a gut came from Miig. He'd come from the kitchen to stand behind me. "Priest," he managed. I raised the rifle so he was in my sight. Chi-Boy rushed towards the man, lowering his shoulder in tackle position. "French, wait! Chi-Boy!" It was my dad, yelling with his hand up towards us. Chi-Boy stopped his charge midway. "This is Father Carole. He's our guy on the inside." I lowered the gun and turned instead to brace Miig, who was bent over with his hands on his knees, pale with the shock of seeing a school official.

"Carole has news about Minerva."

The older man sighed his relief and tried again. "They're moving her tomorrow morning. They'll be taking her to the airstrip just west of here to fly her into the Capital."

My heart sank. The Capital? How would we get there on time? "Well, I guess that's it, then." I kicked a rock that skidded to a stop just in front of the priest.

"No, son." Dad was smiling. "That's great news."

I squinted at him. "How do you figure?"

It was Father Carole, confident he wasn't about to be mowed down by a bunch of angry Indians, who answered.

"Because, my dear boy, they must pass right by here on the Trans-Canada to get

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from Espanola to the airstrip. They'll be bringing her right to us."

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#### LOCKS MEAN NOTHING TO GHOSTS

DERRICK. ROSE. CLARENCE. The twins. Bullet. Me. Seven of us. Miig was considering coming but, at the last minute, decided to stay back.

"You're just as good with that gun as I am. And Clarence and Bullet can track. I'm getting too old for this kind of thing." He settled in with my dad to annotate maps with new information: construction sites, the burnt-out school ...

"All right. I'll leave you old grandpas to it, then," I sassed. "The real warriors will take care of this."

They chuckled as I sauntered away. I smiled, but it was fragile. I felt an acute pessimism at the back of my throat when they were together. How could anyone be so lucky as to have two fathers at this horrible time? Something had to give.

"Last chance, Miig. I'll give you a head start if you need it," I called over my shoulder.

"Nah, you go. There's no adventure out there left for me anymore. I'm done."

We rolled out of camp within the hour. We didn't have much light left in the day and needed to find them before dark. Leaving it to the next day might mean we'd lose track of them, or worse, they'd discover us first.

What was left of the day was grey and windy. Wind caused problems out here. With so much moisture in the air and loose dirt from both tectonic upheavals and the new species of flora tearing up the topsoil, it was like thin mud being thrown constantly in your face. I was glad for the bandanas we wore.

Soon enough we passed the place I'd found Rose waiting for me in the trees. I turned back now to watch her walking behind me, red printed fabric over her nose and mouth, a rifle slung on her slender back with a sling crafted from repurposed seatbelts. She gave me a thumbs-up and I returned the gesture. "I hope we find an Elder," Tree said just ahead

"Someone who can help against the schools," Zheegwon finished.

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No one could replace Minerva, but we'd be lying if we said finding someone like her wasn't on everybody's minds these days.

Bullet slowed a bit so that we were walking in tandem. She was wearing three shades of denim and an old fedora over cropped hair. "This is your first welcoming party." I nodded even though it wasn't a question.

"We come in full aggression." She tapped the top of her hat so that it tipped lower on her brow, trying to keep the grit from her good eye.

"But what if there are children in the camp? What if they're friendlies?"

"And what if they're not?" She turned to me slightly. "Better to apologize later than to have to bury a friend. Or worse."

"There's something worse than that?"

"Yeah, not being able to bury them." She tilted her head forward and picked up her pace, passing in front once more.

RiRi's face flashed in front of my eyes. I took a misstep and stumbled over a root, my rifle sliding to my side. I caught it in my hand and readjusted the black paisley swatch over my face. You couldn't let wounds take your focus out here. Soon we were crouched in a line behind a cluster of rock, taking stock of the newcomers.

Four tents, military-style A-frames. A small fire with a metal grate slid ovetop where they were cooking beans in a tin pot. One camper was washing up in an old red mop bucket with a crack down the side. He wore his hair in a floppy mullet shot through with silver. Something about his eyes reminded me of Minerva, and I wondered if they were related. My stomach pinched up.

Two black women sat stirring the beans and talking about a shared memory back from the city, about a play where the main actor had been too drunk to recite his lines. With their loose sentence structure and the melodic give and take allowing a team approach to conversation I knew they were Guyanese. After the weather got violent and the islands were battered, the West Indian population here had swollen.

They laughed together, and I grew nostalgic for my old life.

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There were two other campers standing by one of the tents, and it was them, if I'm honest, that made it easier for us to build aggression before we stormed in. They were having what appeared to be a casual conversation, with a relaxed ease about their posture. Neither of them was armed, and one had a towel wrapped around his head like a turban, having just finished bathing. But it was their paleness that set us on edge. One man had long blonde hair loose across his shoulders. The second, in the turban, had his shirt off, and he was pale except where his sleeves would have ended and the skin was burnt pink.

But no old people.

What to make of this diverse group? We hesitated, swinging between optimism and immediate hate. I wished Miig had come. He always knew what to do. And even when he didn't, he could tell which one of us would have the pitch-perfect instinct for that moment to advise.

It was Derrick who made the call, getting to his feet, pulling his bandana high over the bridge of his nose, stuffing his braid into the back of his shirt. "Frig, let's just go. Day's fading fast."

For once I agreed with him.

We slid from behind the rocks and cut through the trees like moving water, crashing over the camp in ones and twos. I grabbed the mullet guy, who was startled but put up no fight. "Let's go, over to the fire. On your knees."

The women were already on the ground, beans boiling over unattended. They held hands while they lay on their stomachs, Bullet standing over them with a crossbow. "Just relax right there, ladies. Relax and I won't be forced to use this."

Derrick had the long-haired blond man by the back of the neck. He steered him over to the fire and pushed him down hard in the mud near the mullet, who had settled back on his considerable ass by this point.

"Jeez man, watch out, okay? I'm not arguing with you."

"Shut it!" Derrick's eyes were hostile over the horizon of fabric. He pushed the muzzle of his gun into the man's spine, sending him sprawling on his stomach.

"Dude, all right, I'm just gonna stay here, just like this." The man raised his hands above his head and folded them there, seeking reprieve.

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"Boy, astum." Clarence had the other man with the pink arms, hands held behind his back, walking over to the group. "Enough now. We, ugh, have to assess first."

He tried to cover up his careless Cree with English. We worked hard to disguise ourselves, especially our Indigeneity, around newcomers.

"Astum?" The man turned his head back towards his captor, eyes wide, mouth opening to speak again.

It was unlike Clarence to be violent, so what happened next was more about his embarrassment over the slip-up than his true nature.

"Never mind, you," he growled, grabbing the man's shoulder and jerking him so violently his towel was knocked off and a shock of dark hair fell over his face. He fell to one knee in the scuffle, landing hard.

"Ow, Jesus!" he hissed.

Rose stamped her foot on the damp ground. "I can't do this."

She helped him to his feet and brought him over to the fire so he could pick rocks out of his bloody knee. He nodded his head at her. "Kinana'skomitin."

Clarence and Derrick exchanged a look. Rose helped the women up next, sitting everyone in a row, one beside the other.

"Are you from the schools?" one of the women asked.

"Are you?" Bullet answered with a question.

"Us? Oh God, no," she scoffed. "We're helping to keep people from the damn schools."

Bullet looked over at the mullet, who was sitting up against a tree trunk, cleaning his nails with a sharp stick.

"And how exactly are you doing that?"

The women explained that they had been nurses at the Sudbury hospital and saw the treatments and "volunteer studies" first-hand. They talked about their first mission, taking children, a brother and sister, out of the program and secreting them away through a series of friends and allies. In the meantime, Clarence had lowered himself to a crouch and was in low conversation with the shirtless man who'd thanked

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Rose in Cree. He couldn't help himself: Clarence was a curator of Cree. He loved his language the way Minerva had loved us, with pride and an enthusiasm of old potential repurposed.

We stood in silence for a few minutes, weapons still pointed at our prisoners. We waited for Clarence or Bullet to tell us what came next, if we were taking them back with us or leaving them here or ... I didn't really want to think about any other alternative.

"Derrick, Tree, Zheegwon, keep an eye on our guests." Clarence spoke up. He called them guests, so that was a good sign. And he was using our real names out loud, too. The knot of anxiety between my shoulders slackened. "Rose, French, Bullet, a word please."

We walked away from the firepit, over behind the tents, Clarence peering into each one as we passed looking for missed bodies or weapons. We stood in a tight circle. I could tell by her face Bullet was annoyed with our gentle-handedness.

"What do we need to talk about? What we'll serve them for a bedtime snack?"

Clarence waved off her sarcasm. "The shirtless one, one of the two pale men? He's Cree."

"Are you certain? It's not all that difficult for a Recruiter to learn one of our languages. He could have just started speaking it when he heard you use it first." Bullet was sharp.

Clarence sighed, kicking a rock by his foot. "I know, that's on me. But I am certain. He's speaking an old Cree I don't even fully know. He's way more fluent than me or anyone else I've met. And walked his lineage back."

"And what about the others? There's only one Native in the bunch, besides this Cree in disguise." Bullet was still skeptical.

"They're allies, real allies. They put their lives on the line. It's not just talk. You heard them," Clarence insisted. "There may be ... "

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"Wait," Rose cut him off. "Is he as fluent as Minerva was?" I saw right away where she was headed, so I stated the obvious.

"But he's not old. I mean, not Elder kind of old."

"Why does he have to be old?" She was excited now. I could see it flashing in her dark eyes like the clouds of fireflies that made summer nights frantic with light. "The key doesn't have to be old, the language already is."

We stood there for a minute. The wrinkles in Bullet's forehead smoothed out like a sheet pulled tight.

"Clarence?" I said. "I need to ask him something. Then we'll know."

He nodded. I walked back to the fire, grabbing a red-checkered shirt from a low branch by the last tent. The twins were standing over the nurses and the Nish, their guns pointed towards the ground. Derrick was watching the two men. He kept his rifle trained on the small space

between their heads. I put my hand on his shoulder and squeezed, letting him know I had this.

I threw the shirt to the man Clarence had spoken to. He nodded gratitude and pulled it on, buttoning the front over his damp skin.

"How do you dream?"

He looked up, and it wasn't so hard to see his nation there. It was there in his light eyes, the way they angled down and avoided roundness just slightly. It was in the right corners of his high cheeks and the smooth flatness of his lips. It was there in the question he posed back with just the movement of his eyebrows.

"I mean, what does it sound like?"

"Come again?"

I sighed. I hoped he wasn't in a mood to stall. "What language do you dream in?"

He smiled, and his lips parted to show rows of bright teeth. I already knew what he was going to say.

"Nehiyawok, big man."

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I watched the word leave his mouth, felt it fall over my face through the cotton damp with breath and mud. It raised the skin on my arms to bumps.

“I dream in Cree.”

I looked back over to the small council and nodded, smiling.

“Pack ‘em up,” Clarence called out.

WE WERE GETTING close now, passing the log once more. I slowed down, hoping to walk with Rose the remainder of the trip. Instead I ended up beside the Cree. He smiled, so I tried to make small talk, now that we were able to tuck our aggressive bravado away. Even Bullet had softened, smiling at the back of the line while the nurses laughed and teased each other.

“So, how long have you been in the bush?”

“Oh, years. Too long.”

“Were you always with these people?”

“I’ve been with Talia and Helene, the nurses, since the beginning. They’re the ones who helped me get out of the school. I was brought in to their hospital for blood work to determine my eligibility. And, well, here we are.” He put air quotes around ELIGIBILITY.

“What do you mean, eligibility?”

He pushed air out his nose and smiled full of bitterness. “To make sure my blood wasn’t too mixed. Can’t catch a break for being a half-breed, any way you look at it.”

I stayed silent. My family didn’t really have those problems. No one mistook us for anything other than what we were. I wondered if we were lucky or not. My family, my stolen family.

“How did you stay alive in there?” My voice betrayed the small sliver of hope sliding under my skin. “I heard it’s pretty grim.”

“I had somewhere I needed to be.” He pushed back the hair from his forehead.

“Someone I needed to be with ... ”

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And that's when I saw it, the dark lines curving from his middle knuckle, rounding the ridges of vein, settling just under the cuff of his plaid sleeve. A tattoo of a buffalo on the back of his hand.

"Isaac?"

His eyes grew wide. He dropped his hair so that it swung back into his face, and his feet slowed.

"How do you know my name?"

That bundle I carried in my chest, the one that inflated when I heard about our triumphs, the one that ached with our losses, the same place where my love for Rose nested and the painful memories were enshrined and mourned: from there came the push, and I set off running.

"French! Hey, what's the matter?" Tree yelled after me.

I couldn't answer. I had to get to Miig now.

The moon was hoisted to the center of the sky as I ran, a big stage spotlight among the smaller bulbs of stars. It illuminated the green expanse between trees and the rocky outcroppings that marked the start of our camp. The grass here was waist high with clusters of sleepy blooms nodding their heavy heads in the blue light. I ran into the clearing, pulled my breath in to yell. It burned all the way down my throat into my belly.

"Miigwans!"

A crow, startled by my small commotion, alighted from a branch to the right, cawing his displeasure, a staccato of anxiety stitching the night a darker blue.

A short silence was followed by the quick shuffle of feet and the bouncing strobe of flashlights in hands. A small group came into view from the denser pines by the rock. I bent in two, hands on knees, gasping for the air to call Miig to me, to us.

"Miigwans!"

The group spoke low amongst themselves, and there was movement. I raised a hand to block out the glare and saw Miig pushing through the bodies to the front of the group. "French?"

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I laughed out the next ragged breath. I didn't know I was crying until I closed my eyes and the water dropped onto my cheeks, hitting the backs of my hands.

He took a step towards me, then stopped and shone his flashlight into the trees. There was crashing behind me as the others caught up. I turned my head, still bent over to catch my breath, expecting Derrick or quick Bullet. But it was him. It was Isaac at the head of the party.

He slowed to a walk now, the welcoming party and newcomers falling in behind. He slowed all his movements, as if focusing his eyes and reconciling what they saw took motion from his muscles. I heard a sound like an echo turned inside out, and then Miig, who had been standing still, trying to see, to understand, under the blue smoke of moonlight, finally took a step forward.

"Miigwans? Is that you?" Isaac's words jumped up his throat like heartbeats, each bookended with a pause then settling in the grass like blood coagulating. We couldn't move for it. I couldn't breathe.

Miig opened his mouth. The movement unhinged his legs and he fell to his knees, knocking down the grass like so much chaff. He held his hands out, palms turning upwards in a slow ballet of bone, marrow intact after all this time, under the crowded sky, against the broken ground.

"Isaac?"

I heard it in his voice as Miigwans began to weep. I watched it in the steps that pulled Isaac, the man who dreamed in Cree, home to his love. The love who'd carried him against the rib and breath and hurt of his chest as ceremony in a glass vial. And I understood that as long as there are dreamers left, there will never be want for a dream. And I understood just what we would do for each other, just what we would do for the ebb and pull of the dream, the bigger dream that held us all.

Anything.

Everything.

Source:  
Dimaline, Cherie. (2017). *The Marrow Thieves*. Cormorant Books Inc. pp 194-203; 222-231