

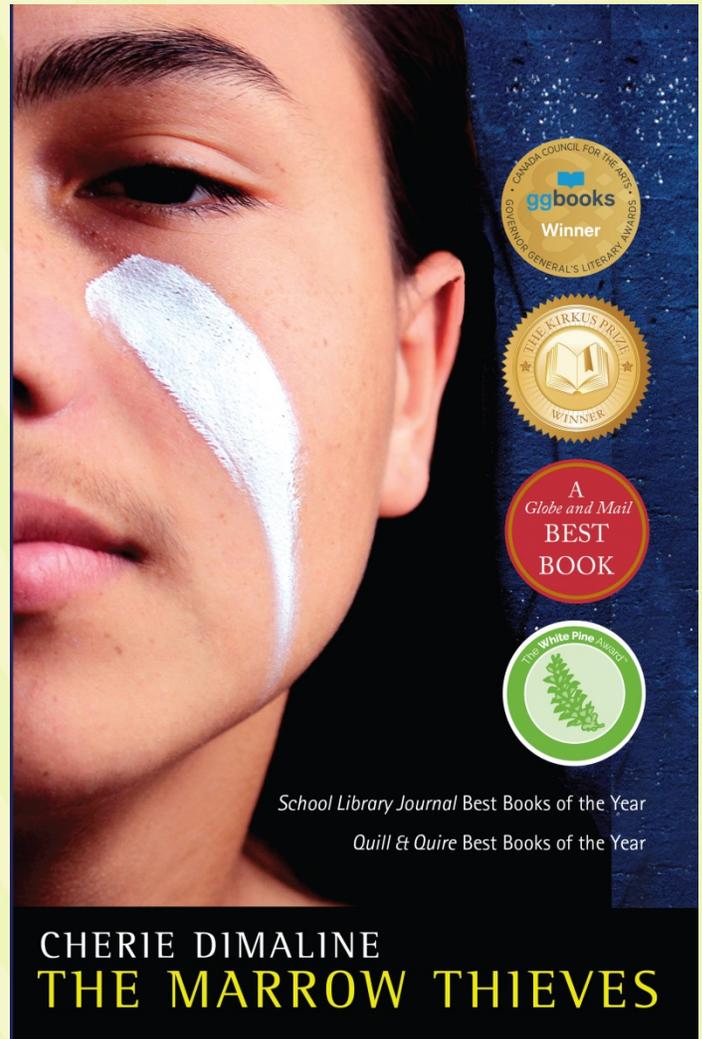
An excerpt from **THE MARROW THIEVES** by **CHERIE DIMALINE**

“The Earth was broken. Too much taking for too damn long, so she finally broke. But she went out like a wild horse, bucking off as much as she could before lying down. A melting North meant the water levels rose and the weather changed. It changed to violence in some cases, building tsunamis, spinning tornados, crumbling earthquakes, and the shapes of countries were changed forever, whole coasts breaking off like crust.

“And all those pipelines in the ground? They snapped like icicles and spewed bile over forests, into lakes, drowning whole reserves and towns. So much laid to waste from the miscalculation of infallibility in the face of a planet’s revolt. “People died in the millions when that happened. The ones that were left had to migrate inward. It was like the second coming of the boats, so many sick people and not enough time to organize peacefully.

“But the powers that be still refused to change and bent the already stooped under the whips of a schedule made for a population twice its size and inflated by the need to rebuild. Those that were left worked longer, worked harder. And now the sun was gone for weeks at a time. The suburban structure of their lives had been upended. And so they got sicker, this time in the head. They stopped dreaming. And a man without dreams is just a meaty machine with a broken gauge.

“People lost their minds, killing themselves and others and, even worse for the new order, refusing to work at all. They needed answers, solutions. So, up here, the Governors turned to the Church and the scientists to find a cure for the missing dreams. In the meantime, those who could afford it turned to sleep counselors, took pills to go to bed and pills to wake up, and did things like group hypnosis to implant new dreams.



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“At first, people turned to Indigenous people the way the New Agers had, all reverence and curiosity, looking for ways we could help guide them. They asked to come to ceremony. They humbled themselves when we refused. And then they changed on us, like the New Agers, looking for ways they could take what we had and administer it themselves. How could they

best appropriate the uncanny ability we kept to dream? How could they make ceremony better, more efficient, more economical?

“That was the first alarm set off in the communities. We thought that was the worst of it. If only.

“We were moved off lands that were deemed ‘necessary’ to that government, same way they took reserve land during wartime. Because no one cared about long-range things like courting votes for the next election and instead cared about things like keeping valued, wealthy community members safe; there were no negotiations. We were just pushed off. The new migration from the coastlines was changing geography daily.

“And then, even after our way of life was being commoditized, after our lands were filled with water companies and wealthy corporate investors, we were still hopeful. Because we had each other. New communities started to form, and we were gathering strength. But then the Church and the scientists that were working day and night on the dream problem came up with their solution and everything went to hell.

“They asked for volunteers first. Put out ads asking for people with ‘Indigenous bloodlines and good general health’ to check in with local clinics for medical trials. They’d give you room and board for a week and a small honorarium to pay for your time off work. By then our distrust had grown stronger, and they didn’t get many volunteers from the public. So they turned to the prisons. The prisons were always full of our people. Whether or not the prisoners went voluntarily, who knows? There weren’t enough people worried about the well-being of prisoners to really make sure. “It began as a

rumor, that they had found a way to siphon the dreams right out of our bones, a rumor whispered every time one of us went missing, a rumor denounced every time their doctors sent us to hospitals and treatments centers never to return. They kept sending us away, enticing us to seek medical care and then keeping us locked up, figuring out ways to hone and perfect their ‘solution’ for sale.

“Soon, they needed too many bodies, and they turned to history to show them how to best keep us warehoused, how to best position the culling. That’s when the new residential schools started growing up from the dirt like poisonous brick mushrooms.

“We go to the schools and they leach the dreams from where our ancestors hid them, in the honeycombs of slushy marrow buried in our bones. And us? Well, we join our ancestors, hoping we left enough dreams behind for the next generation to stumble across.”