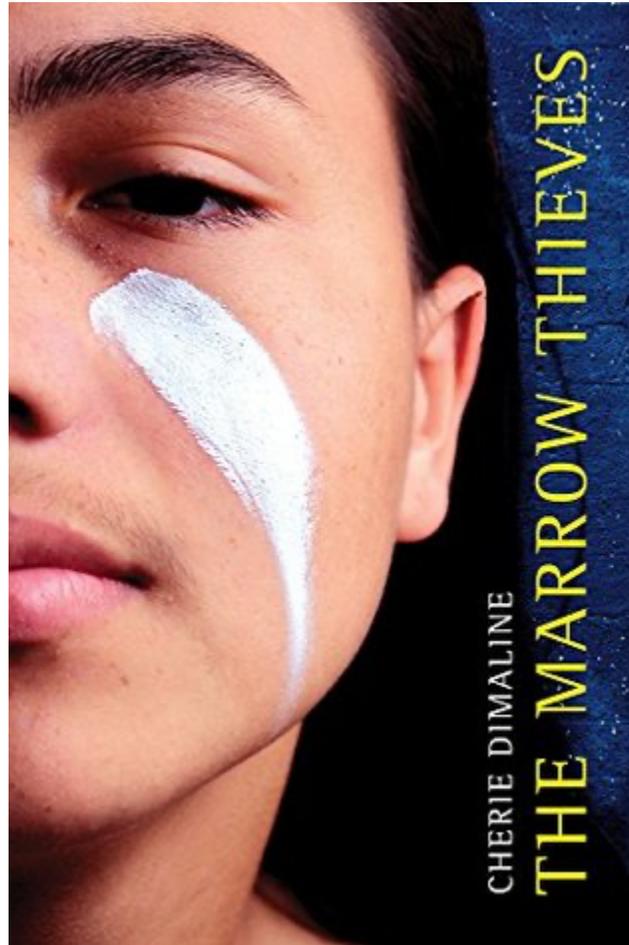


***The Marrow Thieves.* Cherie Dimaline**



***The Marrow Thieves* © Cherie Dimaline**

Story: Part One (novel excerpt)

“Anishnaabe people, us, lived on these lands for a thousand years. Some of our brothers decided to walk as far east as they could go, and some walked west, and some crossed great stretches of narrow earth until they reached other parts of the globe. Many of us stayed here. We welcomed visitors, who renamed the land Canada. Sometimes things got real between us and the newcomers. Sometimes we killed each other. We were great fighters—warriors, we called ourselves and each other—and we knew these lands, so we kicked a lot of ass.”

The boys always puffed out their chests when Miig got to this part. The women straightened their spines and elongated their necks, their beautiful faces like flowers opening in the heat of the fire.

“But we lost a lot. Mostly because we got sick with new germs. And then when we were on our knees with fever and pukes, they decided they liked us there, on our knees. And that’s when they opened the first schools.

“We suffered there. We almost lost our languages. Many lost their innocence, their laughter, their lives. But we got through it, and the schools were shut down. We returned to our home places and rebuilt, relearned, regrouped. We picked up and carried on. There were a lot of years where we were lost, too much pain drowned in forgetting that came in convenient packages: bottles, pills, cubicles where we settled to move around papers. But we sang our songs and brought them to the streets and into the classrooms — classrooms we built on our own lands and filled with our own words and books. And once we remembered that we were warriors, once we honored the pain and left it on the side of the road, we moved ahead. We were back.”

Minerva drew in a big, wet sniff, wiped her nose across her sleeve, and then set about chewing the fabric once more.

“Then the wars for the water came. America reached up and started sipping on our lakes with a great metal straw. And where were the freshest lakes and the cleanest rivers? On our lands, of course. Anishnaabe were always the canary in the mine for the rest of them. Too bad the country was busy worrying about how we didn’t pay an extra tax on Levi’s jeans and Kit Kat bars to listen to what we were shouting.

“The Great Lakes were polluted to muck. It took some doing, but right around the time California was swallowed back by the ocean, they were fenced off, too poisonous for use.”

I’d seen the Great Lakes: Ontario when we were in the city and Huron when we lived on the New Road Allowance. The waters were grey and thick like porridge. In the distance, anchored ships swung, silent and shuttered, back and forth on the roll of methodical waves.

“The Water Wars raged on, moving north seeping our rivers and bays, and eventually, once our homelands were decimated and the water leached and the people scattered, they moved on to the towns. Only then were armies formed, soldiers drafted, and bullets fired. Ironically, at the same time rivers were being sucked south and then east to the highest bidder, the North was melting. The Melt put most of the northlands under water, and the people moved south or onto some of the thousands of tiny islands that popped up out of the Melt’s wake across the top of our lands. Those northern people, they were tough, though, some of the toughest we’ve ever had, so they were okay, are still okay, the takes tell. Some better than okay. That’s why we move north towards them now.”

Migg stood, pacing his Story pace, waving his arms like a slow-motion conductor to place emphasis and tone over us all. We needed to remember Story. It was his job to set the memory in perpetuity. He spoke to us every week. Sometimes Story was focused on one area, like the first residential schools: where they were, what happened there, when they closed. Other times he told a hundred years in one long narrative, blunt and without detail. Sometimes we gathered for an hour so he could explain treaties, and others it was ten minutes to list the earthquakes in the sequence that they occurred, peeling the edging off the continents back like diseased gums. But every week we spoke, because it was imperative that we know. He said it was the only way to make the kinds of changes that were necessary to really survive. “A general has to see the whole field to make good strategy,” he’d explain. “When you’re down there fighting, you can’t see much past the threat directly in front of you.”

“The Water Wars lasted ten years before a new set of treaties and agreements were shook on between world leaders in echoing assembly halls. The Anishnaabe were scattered, lonely, and scared. On our knees again, only this time there was no home to regroup at. Meanwhile, the rest of the continent sank into a new era. The world’s edges had been clipped by the rising waters, tectonic shifts, and constant rains. Half of the population was lost in the disaster and from the disease that spread from too many corpses and not enough graves. The ones that were left were no better off, really. They worked long hours, they stopped reproducing without the doctors, and worst of all, they stopped dreaming. Families, loved ones, were torn apart in this new world.”

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For more about the author



Cherie Dimaline is a member of the historical Métis community of Georgian Bay in the territory now known as Canada. On her website, her biography states: “I come from hunters and women who told stories and made their own remedies when they weren’t purchasing salves from the ‘peddler’ who would come across the Bay once in a while. Some remedies used holy water from the Shrine in town, others used water collected from the Bay on Easter Sunday. Many were based around onions and pine. To this day, my family hunts and harvests.” Dimaline is the author of six books but *The Marrow Thieves*, published in 2017, was declared by *TIME* magazine one of the best books for young adults of all times, among other prestigious prizes that the novel received in North America. This science fiction novel for teenagers presents

a future when Indigenous peoples are being hunted for their bone marrow. Dimaline presents an eclectic group of characters that get together and collaborate to hide from the danger; at the same time she presents the social and environmental problems that have led to the dystopian context of the novel’s reality. The second volume of this saga, titled *Hunting By Stars*, came out in 2021.

- Author’s website: <https://cheriedimaline.com/who-i-am>
- “[Indigenous Writers in Canada](#)”. An Interview with Carla Douglas for *Publishing Perspectives*.

The translator



Sophie M. Lavoie is professor in the Department of Culture and Media Studies at the University of New Brunswick in Fredericton, Canada, in the unceded territory of the Wolastoqiyik. She teaches language, literature, film and culture classes. She has published various academic articles in scholarly on Central-American and Latino-Canadian women's literature, among other topics, in French, English and Spanish. With Hugh Hazelton, she was cotranslator into English of *The Vertical Labyrinth* by Argentinean poet Nela Rio, she translated the book of poetry *We Are the dreamers* by Mi'kmaq poet Rita Joe into French, and the autobiography of the two spirit cri and ojibwe elder, Ma-Nee Chacaby, also into French (2019). She is on the editorial board of *Candela Review* and is director of the Creative Registry of the Canadian Association of Hispanists.