

Heroes - Chapter summaries

Chapter 1

Summary

Francis describes in stark and brutal detail his injuries sustained during the war, and how after the war he came to lodge with Mrs Belander in Frenchtown where he lived as a boy. He visits the church and says prayers for various important people in his life; thus we are introduced to some major and minor characters: Enrico, his mother and father, whom we learn are dead, and Nicole Renard and Larry LaSalle. Tension is created- he states his intention of killing Larry, but at this stage we do not know why. A flashback to the war introduces the theme of heroism- Francis has a Silver Star Medal, although he refuses to believe himself heroic – and reveals his love for Nicole.

Chapter 2

Summary

Leading on from the last chapter, Francis reminisces about meeting Nicole for the first time, and his adolescent desperation to talk to her. This leads to a description of his childhood in Frenchtown.

Chapter 3

Summary

Francis disguises himself to walk through the town he grew up in- he fears recognition. He visits the building where Nicole lived as a child. In a flashback, he recalls discussing Nicole with a soldier from his hometown. During his time at war. We learn that he joined the army at 15, lying about his age. Back in the present, Francis is told that Nicole's family left the area some time before. Back in his lodgings, Francis talks with Mrs Belander who feels sorry for his injuries. Francis goes to bed and dreams of his war time experiences- describing them in graphic detail. His description of the time of losing his face is particularly stark and brutal.

Chapter 4

Summary

Francis introduces the Wreck Centre- a key place in his childhood and in this story. Francis meets Arthur Rivier who buys him a drink, and he describes the conversation with the local men, who reminisce about their school days. None of them recognises him, and he talks very little, wanting to glean information about Larry LaSalle. At the end of the conversation he heads for the Wreck Centre, despite having told himself that he will not go there.

Chapter 5

Summary

Francis describes the Wreck Centre- it is now boarded up and run down. In reminiscence he recalls the 'tragic story' that caused the Centre to be closed down, before Larry LaSalle started activities for the local children there. The

flattering description of Larry comes as a surprise and wrong-foots the reader, as we know Francis' intention of killing him. Further surprises come- Larry, it transpires was an inspirational figure to the children and helped to bring out the best in each individual. Note however the foreshadowing- there are rumours that Larry has "gotten into trouble in New York City". This raises questions in the mind of the reader as to his past. Back in the present, Francis recalls that Joey LeBlanc felt a sense of doom about the place, and that he died in the war. He now feels that Joey was right about the place- again creating suspense and raising questions in the mind of the reader.

Chapter 6

Summary

Francis has now been in his hometown for a month and he watches for Larry. He asks about him in the bar he frequents, and we learn of Larry's heroism during the war and the medal he was awarded for bravery. The concept of heroes is further explored as Arthur declares Francis a hero for his actions in the war. The themes of **disguise** and **appearance and reality** are explored- Francis wishes his identity to remain secret while Larry's actions have made headlines. The chapter closes by introducing Francis' skill at table tennis.

Chapter 7

Summary

In a flashback, Francis recalls Larry's encouragement of his ability as a table tennis player at The Wreck Centre. Larry allows Francis to win a competition in a totally selfless act, and tells him that he and Nicole are "special" to him. Nicole is delighted to see Francis win and they appear to be becoming closer.

Chapter 8

Summary

Francis finds Arthur drunk; he comments that no one will talk about the war. The theme of heroism continues as Arthur states that there were no heroes in the war just scared, homesick boys. The cold weather mirrors the sombre mood of this short chapter.

Chapter 9

Summary

Again in the past, Francis describes that Larry was one of the first men to enlist in the war. This again creates conflict in the reader's mind as Larry is once again described in glowing terms. Thus the theme of appearance and reality is touched upon once again. With Larry gone the Wreck Centre is closed and preparations for the war are stepped up. Francis becomes closer to Nicole as the townspeople discuss the war's progress. Nicole tells Francis of Larry's heroic actions; in contrast to Francis' later hiding of his face, Larry's stares out at them from a cinema screen on a newsreel.

Chapter 10

Summary

Francis describes how he came to **hide his face**, after realising the horror it caused those who saw it. He doesn't care about healing- his only concern is to track down Larry LaSalle. Touching on the theme of **Appearance and Reality**, Francis stars into the mirror and sees only a stranger. This symbolises the changes in him owing to the war, and furthers the theme of **War's Consequences**. This theme is further explored as we learn of Enrico's decision to commit suicide as a result of his appalling injuries. Francis creates suspense by commenting that Larry's homecoming "changed our lives for ever."

Chapter 11

Summary

As Francis reminisces, Larry is described in a heroic manner as he comes home for his first leave. He wishes to spend time with his "Wreck Centre gang", and he plays table tennis with them. But then Larry expresses his wish to have one last dance with Nicole. He dismisses Francis and rapes Nicole, who feels Francis has betrayed her by leaving the room.

Chapter 12

Summary

Still in the past, during a heat wave, Francis waits for Nicole outside her house for three days, wracked with guilt that he did nothing to protect her. When he finally sees her, Nicole is disgusted with him and tells him to leave. He goes to church, thinking to commit suicide by leaping from the steeple, but instead enlists in the army. Note how the concept of heroes is referred to increasingly often. The themes of **Love and Hate** and **Guilt** are touched upon.

Chapter 13

Summary

Back in the present, Francis finally tracks down Larry by eavesdropping into a conversation between Mrs Belander and a neighbour.

Chapter 14

Summary

Francis finds Larry and confronts him. Larry is initially pleased to see him, and they discuss the idea of heroes. Francis dismissed the idea of himself as a hero as 'fake', and quickly confronts Larry with his actions against Nicole. Larry attempts to explain his actions, but Francis (and the reader) find his explanation repugnant. The idea of heroes takes on a different slant as we are reminded that Larry was not just a war hero, but also the children's hero. Larry wipes out any chance to redeem his heroic status by remaining unrepentant – he thinks that his many good points outweigh his sickening actions: "Does that one sin of mine wipe away all the good things?" Francis does not kill Larry, who tries to assure him that he is indeed a hero. It seems pointless, when Larry frequently contemplates suicide.

Chapter 15

Summary

Back in the present, Francis attempts to discover Nicole's whereabouts by asking at the convent he attended as a child. He lies about the severity of his injuries to a nun who gives him her address.

Chapter 16

Summary

Francis finds Nicole and again lies about his injuries. She apologises to him for the way she treated him on the day she was raped, and Francis tells her that Larry is dead. Nicole has not told anyone about the rape, and she appears damaged by her experience. Nicole calls him a hero, although Francis again denies it. She urges him to write about his experiences. The two part and he knows that they will not meet again.

Chapter 17

Summary

Francis is at a railway station, watching soldiers and reminiscing about his old platoon. He considers that many of them who received no honours were the real heroes. The novel ends on a positive note as Francis considers the possibilities of recovery and of a future life.