

Mysteries in the bones

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As we move forward in life, we strive towards a better future even as we struggle in the present, and we each leave something behind: the past. These pasts, however great or small, traumatizing or dull, are a piece of all of us. It is impossible to truly escape and abandon one's past. Inevitably, there will always be parts one must hide from others. The main premise, the main mystery of *The Bone People* by Keri Hulme is the uncovering of each character's dark past. Through the investigation and revelations in the gradual reveals of each character, the theme of rebirth, of a new life, can be found sprouting a new future from a dark and broken past. The introduction of the novel, with each character mired in his or her own mysterious past, sets the premise of misgivings surrounding broken and misunderstood people. Each of the characters is respectively alone in his or her suffering. Kerewin enjoys the solitude she has in her tower journeying only to drink and for food, and her only connection to the outside world is her private radiophone. From the very beginning we see that she is a complex creature who uses biting sarcasm and confusing vocabulary and knowledge to distance herself from others. There are hints of a past that scarred her and made her the way she is, but nothing is revealed to us or to the other characters. Joe, similarly, also seems to bear a heavy burden behind his wide smiles and easy nature. This, however, is nothing in comparison to Simon's mystery. Little is known about the strange child covered in bruises, who is mute, has terrible mood swings, yet is oddly eager to communicate. His habits, of curling up in a ball while sleeping, of a defensive stance, are curiously noted by Kerewin, who, like many others, has no clue what happened to make Simon this way. The introduction of these mysteries is with three broken and confused people. As the novel progresses, the

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mysteries unravel and the bits and pieces that are shared not only relieve the carrier of their burden, but also connect the listener in a new way. The more time Simon, Joe, and Kerewin spend together, the more they learn. Simon and Joe both learn that Kerewin hates physical affection and both infer that she has been hurt in the past. Kerewin learns more about how Joe found Simon and the struggles Joe faces in rearing a complicated child. More and more is revealed about his odd fear of needles and his intense seasickness and then love for music. As they become more and more comfortable with each other, the secrets are slowly unveiled and their hearts are slowly but surely intertwined together. Once Kerewin learns of Joe's past, with his dead wife and son, of his crippling polio disease, she comes to empathize with him and share her own past, of pain and abandonment, of lost skill at painting, of fear of attachment. Simon's past is also carefully uncovered as we uncover unrelenting nightmares, soul shadows and a possible Irish heritage of an abusive family. As the characters discover more about each other, and the fog is lifted, they become closer. Although they do fight, they always come back to each other. Kerewin, once cold and thorny, softens and admits to herself that she misses and needs them. Simon and Joe are quick to accept and embrace Kerewin, who helped them in their times of need, whether it be with needed advice and a warning beating or with a welcoming home and patient attitude. As the mystery is uncovered, the characters begin a path of self-healing. As the final strands of the mystery are uncovered, the characters approach a full rebirth. Each was missing something that the others provided. After unearthing the mystery surrounding each of the characters, they are then thrown apart. The truth is painful and eventually is what separates them. Joe's uncontrollable anger is his unresolved past in the

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conflict between embracing his Maori heritage or being beaten by his uncaring grandfather for not being European. This inner turmoil of the past is reflected in his treatment of Simon, a cold righteous hatred of a son who loves him. Only once Joe sees the truth, and makes the connections and accepts the blame does he become healed. Only after he embraces his Maoriness by becoming keeper of the little god is he able to put away his past with Hana and the resentment he had for Simon's differences to move forward into the future. Kerewin, similarly, had to rediscover in herself the joy of living. She had to see that life was one chance, through the devastating cancer in her stomach. With her past fully uncovered she had to face her mistakes and fears and actively work at living her life with other people and opening her heart to them. Simon perhaps as well needed to adopt a new sense of self-preservation of control in his emotions to become older and more adept at protecting himself from harm. All the characters have their covers thrown off and the mysteries and pasts they wish to hide and avoid come forward into the glaring light. The uncovering and facing of their dark secrets was, however, what allowed them to heal themselves, with the help of others, and finally in the embracing and awareness in themselves. Only after they and the other characters understand their respective mysteries can they truly pursue a new beginning, as a healed family of broken people. A new day begins as the dawn rises and each of them is able to move forward to a brighter future because they acknowledge and then let go of the past. Pasts are filled with ugly truths, horrifying secrets, and intimate pains. In *The Bone People* by Keri Hulme, each character's past is a mystery. Others cannot truly understand them due to walls put up, and they themselves can never move on without appropriate

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acknowledgement of the pain. Only once the mysteries have been unraveled and all the pasts come to light can Kerewin Joe, and Simon become whole again. Through sharing and reflecting on their pasts, they were able to overcome present and past pains and emerge to a new beginning, a rebirth as not three broken people, but as one family.