

Heroes

At its heart Robert Cormier's *Heroes* is a love story gone wrong.

Francis, our narrator, hears his girlfriend Nicole being sexually assaulted by a man named Larry, whom they both thought was their friend. Nicole blames Francis for doing nothing to stop it...

...so he joins the army to escape his shame and gets his face blown off by a grenade - after which he travels back to his hometown to confront his past. First he visits Larry to get his revenge but decides against killing him.

Then he goes to see Nicole who forgives him but doesn't love him anymore. In the end he decides that Frenchtown may not be the best place in the world to stay – and he leaves for the railway station.

Perhaps what's most remarkable about the novel *Heroes* isn't its rather grim plot - but the interesting way that Cormier has structured it.

At the start of the book we learn that Francis is on a mission of vengeance,

“like the Hunchback of Notre Dame, my face like a gargoyle and the duffel bag like a lump on my back”.

But we're not told how he was disabled – nor do we know his motive for wanting to kill Larry LaSalle.

Instead, throughout the book, three time periods are cleverly interwoven;

The present...

The immediate past...

And the distant past...

We learn about Larry's rape of Nicole in the distant past just before we read the confrontation scene between Larry and Francis in the present. By using this device Cormier heightens narrative tension - keeping the reader in the dark about key events until the very last minute.

Francis receives a medal for jumping in front of a grenade and saving his comrades. But he only did it because he wanted to die. As a fellow Frenchtown veteran says to Francis;

“We weren't heroes. We were only there...”

Bitesize

Francis wants to kill Larry to make good his cowardice in failing to stop Nicole's rape – but, when he meets Larry, Francis understands that killing him would be the opposite of heroic.

Francis getting on the train at the end is one of the only notes of true heroism in the book. Letting go of his past in order to confront his future as a faceless man.