East of Eden

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF JOHN STEINBECK

Steinbeck grew up in a rural town, and spent his youth working on ranches alongside migrant laborers. In 1920, he began attending Stanford University, but never graduated, choosing instead to move to New York and try his hand at a career in writing. He had trouble getting his work published, however, and returned to California to work a series of manual jobs, writing all the while. In 1935, Steinbeck first found literary success with *Tortilla Flat*, which follows the exploits of a group of Mexican-Americans in Monterey, California. In the following years, Steinbeck wrote several novels that focused on farming life and its discontents. The most famous of these is 1937's *Of Mice and Men*. In 1939, Steinbeck published the *Grapes of Wrath*, which garnered him significant critical acclaim, including a Pulitzer Prize and a National Book Award. Following his success with *The Grapes of Wrath*, Steinbeck went on to publish other notable works, including the 1952 novel, *East of Eden*. In 1962, Steinbeck was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature. Steinbeck, a lifelong smoker, died in New York City in 1968, at age 66.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Steinbeck wrote this book in the years following World War II. The violence and scale of the war, along with the horrifying atrocities committed by Hitler and Stalin and the staggering death toll following the atomic attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, raised questions about human capacity for evil and violence. In many ways, *East of Eden*, Steinbeck's mythic magnum opus, is an answer to these questions. Ultimately the book serves as an affirmation of human goodness and virtue in a time when worries about human evil and depravity were more potent than ever.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

The book takes its title and much of its plot from the story of Cain and Abel. In the Bible, Cain and Abel are the sons of Adam, and Cain learns to farm the fruit of the land while Abel learns to herd livestock. One day they each make a sacrifice to God; Able offers the fat of a lamb, and Cain offers the fruit of his harvest. God loves Abel's gift but not Cain's. He tells Cain not to be angry, and to overcome sin. Cain, however, cannot control his anger and kills his brother out of jealousy. God banishes Cain "East of Eden" as punishment.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *East of Eden*
- **When Written:** Late 1940s, early 1950s
- **Where Written:** USA
- **When Published:** 1952
- **Literary Period:** Postwar
- **Genre:** Autobiographical fiction; Postwar fiction; Biblical allegory
- **Setting:** Salinas, California
- **Climax:** Cal gives his father a gift of 15 thousand dollars and his father rejects it, inspiring a dangerous kind of anger in his son.
- **Antagonist:** Catherine Trask
- **Point of View:** John Steinbeck narrates in 1st person; but parts of the novel are told in 3rd person omniscient.

EXTRA CREDIT

Visitors Welcome. Steinbeck's childhood home in Salinas has been preserved and is open to tourists and visitors.

PLOT SUMMARY

East of Eden is the story of two families, the Hamilton family and the Trask family, both of whom migrate to the Salinas Valley in California. The Hamiltons are a poor family living on dry, barren land, but Adam Trask and his wife Cathy Trask are rich from inheritance and live on a fertile and rich piece of land with a large quantity of **water** available. But the Trasks material wealth is undermined by their moral poverty. Cathy Trask was born without a conscience, and though Adam loves her, he is blind to her evil. She only marries him because it is convenient for her at the time, but after she bears him two sons she shoots him in the shoulder and leaves.

Catherine changes her name to Kate and works her way up in a whorehouse in the city of Salinas. She manipulates the owner of the whorehouse, Faye, so effectively that Faye wills the house and all of her belongings to Catherine. Catherine then slowly poisons Faye and, when she dies, takes over the business. She becomes the owner of the most depraved and degenerate whorehouse in all of Salinas.

After Catherine leaves him, Adam goes dead inside, going a year without giving his newly born sons names. Sam Hamilton and Adam's Chinese-American servant Lee are responsible for Adam's rehabilitation. Sam literally beats sense into Adam, who, as if awakened from a long sleep, begs Lee and Sam for help getting to know his children. They consider naming the twins "Cain and Abel" but after discussing the story of the Biblical

Adam's sons at length they opt not to, instead calling the boys Caleb and Aaron.

As they grow older Caleb asks to be called Cal and Aron drops the extra "a" from his name. Aron is a good boy, beautiful and blonde like his mother, and beloved by everyone. Cal is darker, and at a young age realizes he has cruel impulses, and prays to God not to make him mean. He finds out his mother is alive when he is only about ten years old while eavesdropping, but keeps this secret from Adam, who believes his mother is dead and buried on the east coast.

One day Sam, who has grown old and more bold in his old age, tells Adam that Cathy is in a whorehouse in Salinas. Shortly after Sam's death, Adam goes to see Cathy, and when he does he realizes she has no hold over him anymore. His joy makes her furious and he tells her she is not fully human, and hates the good in people because she cannot understand it.

Adam and his sons move to Salinas, where the boys attend a larger public school. Aron begins courting Abra Bacon, a girl he plans to marry. They are still only children however, and Aron asks Abra to pretend to be his mother, and cries in her lap when she agrees. Cal grows into a lonely and somewhat troubled boy. One night he ventures out with a drunk and sees what goes on in his mother's whorehouse. He knows that if Aron ever found out about Catherine, it would destroy him. In the meantime, Adam becomes interested in refrigeration, and devises a plan to ship fresh lettuce across the country in a train. Due largely to bad luck, the project fails, and Adam has wasted almost his whole fortune on the enterprise.

Cal decides he will earn his father's money back, and partners with Will Hamilton to profit from the need for imperishable foodstuffs during the war by contracting for beans. Cal saves up the money while Aron graduates from high school early and goes off to Stanford. Adam is immensely proud of Aron and Cal hopes his father will be proud of him, too. When Aron is home for Thanksgiving, Cal gives his father the money he has earned from his venture, but his father is disgusted by the gift, saying he doesn't want money earned from the cheating of farmers and a bloody war. That night, consumed by anger, Cal shows Aron the whorehouse belonging to Catherine. The next day, Aron lies about his age to enlist in the army.

While he is gone, Abra and Cal fall in love—Abra thinks her relationship with Aron was a sham, for he had fallen in love with an idealized version of her, not the real her. She loves Cal because Cal is both good and bad, and Abra knows she is both good and bad, too. Adam's health begins to fail, and when news of Aron's death arrives, Adam has a stroke. Despite this tragedy, the novel ends on a redeeming note—with Lee's help, Cal obtains his father's blessing and rids himself of the guilt of causing his brother's death.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Adam Trask – Adam is the son of Cyrus Trask and the brother of Charles Trask. Adam was forced into the army by his father, whom he respected but did not love. After getting out of the army, he meets and marries Catherine and with her conceives twin sons (Cal and Aron) after he moves to the Salinas Valley in California. He is a peaceful man who hates violence, and when he meets Catherine, he falls for her and cannot see that she is evil. He makes her into an ideal, and is thrown into a deep depression when she leaves him (and shoots him in the shoulder) just after she gives birth to the twins. His character's redemption is one of the central story arcs in the novel. He learns to take refuge in the love of his sons, and absorbs the wisdom of men like Sam Hamilton and Lee. At the end of the novel, his act of forgiveness (he forgives his son Cal for driving his other son Aron into the army, where he dies) evidences the redemption and resilience of his spirit.

Catherine Trask (Kate) – Catherine is born without kindness, empathy, or any goodness at all. She learns to manipulate people at an early age, taking pleasure in the destruction and degradation of other people's lives. She eventually runs away and becomes the lover of Edwards, a man who runs a whorehouse. She makes him fall in love with her and then drains him of his wealth and dignity and he finally lashes out and tries to kill her. She survives, and crawls to the doorstep of the Trask brothers, Charles and Adam. Adam helps her recuperate, marries her, and moves her to California with him. There, she bears him two sons, and then almost immediately leaves him. She then works her way up in a whorehouse in Salinas, blackmailing, abusing, and manipulating her way into ownership of the establishment. Eventually her lies and crimes catch up with her, as she grows old and feeble. She finally kills herself with morphine, leaving her fortune to her son Aron.

Caleb "Cal" Trask – Cal Trask is the most obvious figure for the Biblical Cain in the novel: his father Adam loves his twin brother Aron best. Though his father hides Catherine's identity from the boys, Cal eventually figures it out, and worries that her evil is reproduced in him. Over the course of the novel Cal struggles to learn that his fate—his decisions, his virtue, his goodness—is in his own hands. He succumbs to his more base impulses and reveals his mother's identity to his brother. Aron (as Cal knew he would be) is distraught. Aron subsequently joins the army and is killed. At the same time, Cal falls in love with Abra, the girl Aron planned to marry, and she falls in love with Cal, believing her relationship with the "purely good" Aron is not at real as the one she shares with Cal. Cal is thus responsible for his brother's death—but at the end of the novel, it is suggested that he is not beyond redemption. His father forgives him and blesses his marriage to Abra, and Cal knows he can choose to be good going forward.

Aron Trask – Aron is the beautiful blonde son of Adam and Catherine Trask. He grows up longing for the love of a mother, and his mind is not as complicated as that of his twin brother Cal. His view of the world is innocent and on the verge of naïve. He becomes engaged at a young age to a girl in his class named Abra—he often asks Abra to pretend to be his mother, and he develops an idealized image of her that she recognizes is not true love. When Aron learns the truth about his mother, he is devastated and joins the army. He is killed in the war.

Charles Trask – Charles is Adam's brother. Charles is a violent young boy who does not consider the effects of his actions; though he loves his brother, he beats him up badly and once tries to kill him. Charles is a devoted son to his father, Cyrus, and grows into a capable yet lonely farmer. When he dies he leaves his small fortune to Adam and Catherine, though he always hated Catherine, because he could see the evil in her (likely because he felt that same kind of evil in himself).

Lee – Lee is the son of two Chinese railroad workers and Adam's servant. Though he was born in California and speaks perfect English, he chooses to speak pidgin-English for most of his young life, because he knows that people would be confused by a Chinese man who sounds American. Lee feels a deep kinship with Sam Hamilton, and the two often spend hours talking about the meaning of the Bible and the nature of the human soul.

Sam Hamilton – Sam Hamilton is the larger-than-life patriarch of the massive Hamilton family. His land in California is dry, and though Sam is better than anyone at finding **water** in the ground, he has never been able to find any on his own land. He has made a living as a well-driller and a blacksmith, and enjoys making and inventing things for the fun of it. He is a humorous, deep, curious, and highly intelligent man who is admired by almost everyone in Salinas, and whose wisdom proves especially valuable to Adam. His eventual aging and death saddens many, though his memory lives on in the hearts and minds of most of the other characters.

Tom Hamilton – Tom is the youngest son of Sam and Liza Hamilton. He is thoughtful and introverted, and deeply dependent on his father's guidance and wisdom. When Sam dies, Tom is left in charge of the ranch, and loneliness disturbs his mind and nearly drives him crazy. Tom eventually kills himself after he accidentally poisons his sister Dessie with incorrect medicine for a stomachache.

Dessie Hamilton – Dessie is the unmarried daughter of Sam and Liza, who runs a successful dressmaking business in town. She is deeply funny and entertaining, and her dress shop is a haven for women. Around Dessie, women can act human, and do not have to be feminine, ladylike, or dainty. Dessie has her heart broken by a mysterious man, and is never the same afterwards. She is accidentally killed by Tom when he gives her the wrong medication for her stomachache.

John Steinbeck – John Steinbeck is the son of Olive Hamilton and Ernest Steinbeck, and the grandson of Sam Hamilton. This character shares a name and much of a family history with the actual author of the novel. He occasionally narrates the story, but the novel also refers to John in third person.

Mary Steinbeck – Mary is John's sister. She is an athletic child, in fact the best athlete in the county, and wishes desperately to be a boy. She grows out of this desire eventually, but one of John's clearest memories of his childhood is helping his sister figure out how to be a boy.

Abra Bacon – Abra is the love interest of Aron Trask from a very young age. They court for a long time, but Abra begins to recognize that Aron loves an idealized version of her, and doesn't love her for who she really is. She develops a close relationship with Lee, whom she adopts as a father figure, for she has always felt rejected by her own father. Eventually she falls for Cal, because he is both bad and good, and can understand that she is both bad and good too.

Faye – Faye is the owner of the whorehouse that Catherine eventually takes over. Faye is a lonely woman, and Catherine manipulates Faye into thinking of her as a daughter. Faye trusts Catherine, and writes her into her will. When Catherine discovers this, she slowly poisons Faye, successfully killing her and inheriting the business.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Liza Hamilton – Liza is Sam's wife. She is a remarkably dedicated and capable woman whose devotion to the Bible is unquestioning. She condemns Sam's curiosity and believes the Bible is not meant to be questioned or even understood: simply obeyed. Despite their differences, Sam and Liza Hamilton have a happy marriage.

Will Hamilton – Will is Liza and Sam's most business-savvy son, and perhaps the only Hamilton child who never bore any great affection for Sam Hamilton.

Olive (Hamilton) Steinbeck – Olive is the mother of John and Mary. She is a devoted and capable woman who is fiercely intelligent but also hopelessly stubborn. She is remembered fondly by John who narrates select stories about her.

Earnest Steinbeck – Earnest is John's father, who marries Olive and takes her away to the city.

Joe Valery – Joe is Catherine's henchman. He is an escaped convict who has never caught a break in life. Catherine blackmails him, and eventually gives his secret away to the sheriff. He is shot and killed while fleeing the police.

Cyrus Trask – Cyrus is the father of Adam and Charles Trask. He lies about his role in the Civil War and ascends the ranks in government, amassing a sizeable fortune that was likely built on theft and dishonesty. When he dies he leaves his money to his sons.

Alice Trask – Charles Trask's mother, who also raises Adam as her own son (though Adam was born of a previous marriage). She is a deeply obedient wife to Cyrus.

Sam the Sheriff – The town's sheriff, who knows Catherine's whereabouts before Adam Trask does, but keeps the information silent to protect Adam and avoid causing a stir.

Una Hamilton – Una is a daughter of Sam and Liza. Una's husband invents color photography, but Una is accidentally poisoned by his chemicals. Her death is taken hardest by Sam Hamilton, who is uncomfortable with mortality in general.

Joe Hamilton – Joe is the youngest son of Sam and Liza Hamilton. He leaves the ranch after getting a degree at Stanford to go into advertising on the east coast.

Mollie Hamilton – Molly is the youngest and prettiest daughter of Sam and Liza Hamilton.

Mr. Edwards – Edwards is the brothel owner who falls in love with and subsequently attempts to murder Catherine after she runs away from home.

Ethyl – Ethyl is a broken down prostitute who suspects that Catherine had something to do with Faye's death. She is framed by Catherine, run out of the county, and is found dead in the ocean.

George Hamilton – George is one of Sam and Liza Hamilton sons. He is a very minor character.

Lizzie Hamilton – The eldest daughter of Sam and Liza Hamilton, named for her mother.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

GOOD, EVIL, AND THE HUMAN SOUL

At the heart of *East of Eden* is the conflict between good and evil; evil people struggle against good people, kindness struggles against cruelty, a man's good intentions are constantly at odds with his foul and depraved impulses. Steinbeck suggests that this struggle between good and evil is what makes us human—that, in fact, the triumph and redemption of the human soul consists of this struggle.

Catherine Trask is evil incarnate—she was born without any good in her (the narrator calls her a "monster") and her very humanity is repeatedly put in question. Her husband Adam, meanwhile, is thought by his Chinese servant Lee to be almost too much good in the way that Catherine is too evil—and because of this he is incapable of seeing Catherine for what she is, and goes dead inside when she leaves him. Adam must then struggle to become whole again with the help of Lee and Sam Hamilton, both of whom possess a remarkable optimism when it comes to the resilience and virtue of the human spirit. In this sense, the entire Trask marriage is a metaphor for the struggle between good and evil.

The novel often depicts characters who recognize evil in themselves and wonder if they can overcome it. Charles Trask loves his brother Adam but cannot help but wish evil things on him, out of jealousy. And Adam's son, Cal Trask, once he discovers who is mother is, believes that her evil is reproduced in him. He sees his twin brother Aron as perfectly good, and doubts if he has any of the same goodness in him. His inner turmoil is the central conflict in the latter half of the book. Abra (Aron's fiancé who eventually falls for Cal) knows her father has stolen from good men who trusted him, and knows a thief's blood runs in her veins. She says she loves Cal because he is not "all good." When she tells Lee about this, he remarks that Cal is "full" of everything—goodness, badness, joy, sorrow, meanness and kindness.

East of Eden repeatedly refers back to the Biblical story of Cain and Abel, and to the moment where God tells Cain, "thou mayest [overcome sin]." Lee says that the word "mayest" is one of the most important words in the Bible. Having the choice—between sin and virtue, anger and acceptance, good and evil—is what makes mankind truly great. In this way, Steinbeck suggests that to be fully human, a person must (like Cal Trask) contain everything. Every human soul is a kind of contradiction; there is a monster like Catherine Trask in everyone, and there is naïve purity in everyone as well. Our very humanity depends upon being able to choose whether we are good or evil.

TIME

East of Eden covers an immense stretch of time—from the American Civil War to World War I. Accordingly, the novel displays a profound interest in the passage of time, the progression of history, and the relentlessness of change. The book opens with, and repeatedly returns to, an almost laborious cataloguing of the differences between seasons. This preoccupation with seasonal transitions, year after year, is a facet of the novel's investigation of the relentless and yet cyclical nature of time and change.

In the same way that Steinbeck carefully records the physical change of the earth, air and sky over time, he records the changes of the body over time. We learn a great deal about how Sam Hamilton's body ages—his wrinkled face and silver beard are dwelled upon by the narration at length. Notably Sam and his family can hardly believe that he is even capable of growing old. Time's effect comes as a kind of shock to them. Adam's mental sickness following the departure of his wife gets better

over time—Sam notes that time is the perfect "tonic" for him. Catherine's arthritis, in contrast, is a gruesome physical manifestation of time's passage. She resents the aging and twisting of her face and body so much it inspires a manic kind of anger in her. Thus illnesses (which sometimes worsen and sometimes improve over time), aging, and death play a huge role in this multigenerational epic. They remind the reader of times inevitable passage and of the inescapability of change.

The novel also takes stock of the rapid technological progression and change that took place in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Steinbeck goes to great lengths to include myriad new technologies. Railroads, cars, planes, refrigeration, drills, windmills, conveyor belts, color photography, and advances in military technologies are all included, all given a kind of history in this book. Technological progress—and the excitement and anxiety surrounding it—also evinces the (often fearsomely rapid) advancing of time.

Steinbeck wrote this novel in the early 1950s. This was a deeply transitional era. Coming out of the Second World War, Americans demonstrated an enthusiasm and optimism for the future, but it was also a time of great nostalgia for a "simpler" past. New technologies were exciting testaments to American ingenuity, but (as in the case of the atom bomb) they could also gesture towards an even more violent future. This sense of instability, this constant question about what the future might hold, pervades this novel. What's more, Steinbeck's health was beginning to suffer around the time he wrote *East of Eden*. He was a lifelong smoker, and would die of heart disease in 1968, just over 15 years after *East of Eden* was published. The anxiety of the nation with respect to time and change is coded into this novel but so too is the anxiety of the individual; in many ways the book's discussion of time reflects universal worries and questions about aging, illness, and mortality.

FAMILY, LOVE, AND LONELINESS

East of Eden is a novel about families—marriage, parenthood, succession, inheritance, and sibling rivalry make up the bulk of the book's conflict. Underlying all of these conflicts is the repeated suggestion that there is no love without pain, rejection, and loneliness. Numerous subplots in the novel involve parental love—children seek love from their parents and parents seek it from their children. Charles is furious that his father loves his brother Adam more than him. Charles loves his father, while Adam only admires him, but Adam is nevertheless the favorite. This pattern persists into the next generation. Cal also suffers feelings of rejection and loss because his twin brother Aron is clearly the favorite of his father Adam. When Adam tells Cal he trusts him, Cal is so happy that Lee thinks he's found himself a girlfriend—in this sense his love for his father replaces romantic love. Aron, on the other hand, longs deeply for his absent mother; he doesn't know she is the depraved and abusive madam of a whorehouse.

Tom Hamilton never marries, and his dependence on his father's love and guidance is greater than that of any of his siblings. When Sam dies, Tom never fully recovers. He finds momentary relief in the company of his sister, but he accidentally kills her by giving her the wrong medicine for her stomach pains, and kills himself out of grief. The Chinese-American Lee, meanwhile, says one of his main regrets is never having kids. Though he raises Aron and Cal, he cannot act as a father to them. Adam forbids him to teach the boys Cantonese, and this puts distance between he and them. However, when he leaves the family to start his bookstore, he only stays away six days—the loneliness he feels without them is unbearable. Eventually he tells Abra he wishes she were his daughter, and she tells him she feels the same, as her father never cared for her because he wanted a boy.

Romantic love also plays a prominent role. Sam Hamilton had a lost love in Ireland—the details never emerge, but it is clear he lost his great love somehow, and has never been the same since. Adam's love for Catherine is, though terribly misguided, all consuming. He becomes truly alive when he meets her, and feels dead when she leaves him. Aron's love for Abra is an idealized love. He has made her into a pure and perfect kind of idol, and he loves this imaginary person dearly, but Abra believes he does not know or love her for who she is. Catherine, meanwhile, runs a particularly seedy whorehouse after leaving Adam (and changing her own name to Kate)—in running such an establishment she offers a kind of perverse replacement for romantic love, exploiting the loneliness of men for her own satisfaction and gain.

In his discussion of love and family, Steinbeck tends to locate human strength in love, and human weakness in loneliness. Adam is weak when Catherine leaves him, but strong again when he knows and loves his sons. Men who fall in love with imaginary women (as Aron and Adam do when they begin to think of the women they love so idealistically as to make themselves blind to their faults)—and in so doing basically fall in love with themselves—are destroyed by a particular kind of loneliness. But family in the novel is a recurring source of strength and virtue. In a novel that is so much about human nature, love and loneliness take a place alongside good and evil as primary elements of human existence itself.

RELIGION, MYTH, AND THE POWER OF STORIES

East of Eden takes its name and its general storyline from the Biblical story of Adam's sons, Cain and Abel: Cain believes God loves his brother Abel better than him, because God accepts a sacrifice from Abel but not from Cain. Cain then kills Abel out of anger and jealousy, and God banishes Cain "east of Eden" as a result. The book repeatedly thinks

about religion and myth as a kind of storytelling, and affirms the value of stories when it comes to understanding difficult truths about life and human nature.

Re-enactments of the story of Cain and Abel are everywhere in the book. Their initials even appear in the names of Steinbeck's characters: Charles almost kills Adam because his father loves Adam's gift more than his. Catherine shoots Adam (nonfatally) because she cannot stand how good and loving he is. Cal knows his twin brother Aron is better loved, and fights the urge to destroy him. Eventually, Cal tells Aron the truth about their mother, and Aron runs away to war and dies: Cal kills Aron as Cain killed Abel. These resonances don't just exist between the novel and the Biblical story. Rather, the story of Cain and Abel is important to the characters within *East of Eden* as well. Lee interprets the story of Cain and Abel with a great deal of clarity, saying that one needn't be Christian to understand the importance of stories that tell important truths—he believes the story of Cain and Abel is a story about a man's ability to choose between sin and virtue.

These kinds of discussions about religion and myth in the novel thus open up into discussions about the importance of storytelling (and story-interpreting) itself. The book alternates between first and third person, and after hundreds of pages the reader finally learns the name of the character narrating in the first person: John Steinbeck. This kind of self-reference (or "metafiction") draws the reader's attention to the fact that they, too, are reading a story—a story meant to teach them important truths if they are willing to investigate it thoroughly enough. Though *East of Eden* is deeply invested in a discussion of Christianity, it does not necessarily endorse the Christian faith. Rather, it construes the Bible as an important kind of mythology through which people can know themselves and their souls better if they are curious and diligent enough. What's more, it conceives of fiction, too, as a kind of mythology—laden with the same kind of truth and meaning that can be found in religious texts.

IDENTITY

East of Eden features many crises of identity through which Steinbeck examines the meaning of various identities over the course of the book. Lee is one of the most interesting examples of complex identity in the book. He is Chinese, and though he was born in California and speaks perfect English, he chooses to speak pidgin English (a simplified version of English) with a thick Chinese accent for most of his life. He believes people have trouble reconciling his Chinese appearance with his American way of speaking and finds it easier to conform to expectations. Sam Hamilton does something similar: everyone expects an Irishman to be riotous and funny—though Sam often feels somber and serious, he hides it, because he knows what is expected of him and finds it easier to meet expectations.

Steinbeck also interrogates sex and gender, and what kinds of effects they have on a person's identity. Catherine, because she is pretty and feminine, is not taken seriously by many people she meets (especially men) and she uses this to her advantage. Because people underestimate her, she is able to manipulate them without being detected. Mary Steinbeck, the first-person narrator's sister, is the best athlete in the county as a child, and wishes desperately to be a boy. Dessie Hamilton's dress shop is so popular among women because it is a place they can go and be themselves: they swear and belch and laugh riotously. The narration explains that in the shop they are under no pressure to be "women" – they are simply human. Lee's mother pretends to be a man so that she can come with Lee's father to work on the railroads in America. She works just as hard and just as effectively as a man would, and is only discovered to be a woman when she goes into labor—and is killed.

Steinbeck wrote *East of Eden* in a time when America was beginning to re-evaluate racial and sexual identity. The civil rights movement would reach its peak within a decade and countercultural feminism was gaining traction. Much of Steinbeck's work in *East of Eden* is geared towards exposing simplifications of identity as just such simplifications, and replacing these simplifications with a more complicated and nuanced picture.

MONEY, WEALTH, AND THE VALUE OF WORK

One of the central differences between the two families in the novel (the Trasks and the Hamiltons) concerns wealth: The Trasks are rich and have good land, the Hamiltons are poor and their land is barren. This basic opposition is a gateway into a complicated and enduring discussion of the meaning of money, what constitutes "wealth," and the role that work plays in a meaningful life.

Inheritance—the willing of money to someone who hasn't necessarily earned it—repeatedly comes into play in this novel. Adam inherits a great deal of money from his father, and accepts it, though he knows it was probably stolen. He also inherits his brother Charles' fortune, but half of this must go to Catherine even though she has left him, for they are still married. Catherine inherits the whorehouse and a small fortune from the previous madam Faye, whom she secretly poisoned for precisely that purpose. And Catherine finally wills her fortune to Aron, who dies in the war before he can accept it.

It is repeatedly said that Adam would be called lazy if he weren't rich—but since he is rich he is above criticism. Still, working class characters in the novel—like Lee and Sam Hamilton—suspect that Adam was corrupted by his fortune. They perceive the rich to be fundamentally less happy than the poor, because they have no work they must do. There is also a

distinction drawn between work for money and work for love: Sam loves to invent, but he loses money on his patents and greedy lawyers take all the profits. Tom also likes to invent without thinking about money, and so does Adam (his experiment with transporting refrigerated lettuce across the country is a spectacular failure, and loses him his fortune, but he doesn't mind). Will Hamilton, who is intelligent in business but nowhere else, is scornful of such ventures. He believes money is the only thing worthy of pursuit. When Cal partners up with Will to make his father's money back, he thinks the gift of money will be well received by his father—but Adam is disgusted with the gift because of how Cal's success negatively affected others, and Cal ends up burning the money.

The novel repeatedly suggests that money holds only superficial value. It cannot buy love or happiness. The book's discussion of money, wealth, and work amounts to a deeply anti-materialist warning about the danger of working and living only for money. Steinbeck asserts the inherent value of things like honest work, curiosity, and ingenuity—his happiest, wisest, and most fulfilled characters are those who place little stake in pure material wealth.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

WATER

Water governs the lives of almost every character in this book. It makes or break's a man's fortune, it determines the worth of land, it marks the passage of time. What is most notable about water in this book is its ability to bring both happiness and heartbreak. Sam Hamilton is better at finding water than anyone in Salinas, but in a bitter coincidence can find no water on his own land. Even more dramatically, water is capable of bringing both life and death. Water is invaluable to farmers who hope their crops will survive and thrive, but there are also multiple instances of drowning in *East of Eden*, both literal and metaphorical. Water comes to represent in the novel the dual capacity of the human soul for good and evil.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin Classics edition of *East of Eden* published in 1952.

Chapter 2 Quotes

❝ They landed with no money, no equipment, no tools, no credit, and particularly with no knowledge of the new country and no technique for using it. I don't know whether it was a divine stupidity or a great faith that let them do it. Surely such venture is nearly gone from the world

Related Characters: John Steinbeck (speaker), Sam Hamilton

Related Themes:

Page Number: 12

Explanation and Analysis

This passage describes the Hamilton family, who came to America from Ireland with nothing and built a life in the Salinas Valley through hard work and persistence in the face of many obstacles. Sam Hamilton embodies the virtues of work. Hard work is, for him, an outlet for his curiosity and a source of connection to the world and to his community. Importantly, he does not work simply for money. He finds true joy in what he does, though the work is hard.

The narrator expresses confusion about whether the Hamiltons felt capable of building a life from nothing because of "divine stupidity or a great faith." Here, the narrator is gesturing towards the power of stories and myth. Clearly, faith has been the foundation of the Hamilton's decision to live in Salinas, and, though they have succeeded, the narrator is not sure whether this was a well-advised decision. Calling this into question brings to our attention that it was a story the Hamiltons told themselves (that God would protect them) rather than realistically hospitable conditions in the Salinas Valley that enabled them to survive and prevail. The importance of stories in guiding human choices and informing human identities will be central throughout the book.

Chapter 3 Quotes

❝ "You're trying to take him away! I don't know how you're going about it. What do you think you're doing?"

Related Characters: Charles Trask (speaker), Adam Trask, Cyrus Trask

Related Themes:

Page Number: 29

Explanation and Analysis

This quote comes during an argument between Charles and Adam Trask that boils down to Charles' jealousy of Adam's relationship with their father. Charles, like his father, is a complex person, full of rage, violence, and also the desire to be virtuous and loved. Adam is naturally peaceful and generous, and their father seems to prefer him to Charles. In this passage, the boys' father has taken Adam for a walk and told him he is to join the army to learn to overcome his fears, but Charles worries that Adam is trying to manipulate their father away from Charles himself.

Obviously, knowing the two boys' personalities, this is an outrageous assertion, but Charles projects his own personality onto Adam, assuming that Adam is doing what Charles would have done. Charles is so blinded by his own fear and jealousy that he cannot control himself, and he winds up hurting Adam, even though he loves him. This scene showcases the complexity of Charles' character and motives; he is experiencing constant inner turmoil between his fears and impulses and his desire to be good. It's significant, too, that his family brings out the most extreme emotions in him. *East of Eden* seems to posit that family is a uniquely powerful entity that can both soothe our worse impulses and stoke our most harmful behavior.

Chapter 7 Quotes

"The proofs that God does not exist are very strong, but in lots of people they are not as strong as the feeling that He does."

Related Characters: Adam Trask (speaker), Charles Trask, Cyrus Trask

Related Themes:

Page Number: 70

Explanation and Analysis

At this point, Adam has just returned from his vagabond days, and he and Charles are trying to sort out their father's inheritance, which seems to have been ill-gotten. Charles has also learned from Cyrus's army papers that his war stories were likely untrue. Charles, who loved and admired his father, is distraught by this evidence of his poor character, but Adam is unfazed. He claims that this is because he doesn't believe the new information about his father.

This quote, which Adam offers to Charles as justification, shows the lengths to which Adam will go to deceive himself about others. His peaceful and generous nature is not presented here as a virtue; because Adam idealizes people and does not care to know them on a level more complex than that, Adam lives in a fantasy world constructed by his own stories. This is not familial love, but rather a selfish and isolating delusion--similar to believing in God based purely on emotion, even if one's reason says otherwise. It's interesting that, even though Charles seems to be the less virtuous brother, his insistence on taking his father's moral credibility seriously is seen as an act of love, not defamation, and Adam's indifference is painted as callous or naive.

Chapter 8 Quotes

And just as there are physical monsters, can there not be mental or psychic monsters born? The face and body may be perfect, but if a twisted gene or a malformed egg can produce physical monsters, may not the same process produce a malformed soul?

Related Characters: John Steinbeck (speaker), Catherine Trask (Kate)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 72

Explanation and Analysis

This passage is a description of Catherine, who will eventually become Adam's wife. She has no regard for others, and she causes harm to people in order to get her way. As this passage suggests, she is an embodiment of the evil extreme of human nature. For Steinbeck, good and evil are innate qualities, and, provocatively, they function best when they are in balance, rather than weighted towards one quality or the other. Kate, who is an example of pure evil, cannot love because she has no empathy for others.

But Adam, too, though he is supposedly an example of pure good, cannot truly love because he is incapable of recognizing others for who they really are. Thus extreme good and extreme evil are seen as almost akin. Steinbeck suggests that real human goodness lies in those who face the complex truth of humanity, who must struggle between good and bad impulses and make choices based on their own personal values and their feelings for others.

Chapter 9 Quotes

Catherine was clever, but even a clever woman misses some of the strange corridors of man.

Related Characters: John Steinbeck (speaker), Catherine Trask (Kate)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 95

Explanation and Analysis

This passage comes in the midst of Catherine's manipulation of Mr. Edwards, the owner of a whorehouse whom Catherine has convinced to love and support her. As Catherine seemingly embodies evil, she moves through the world by reading people (rather than empathizing with them) and exploiting their weaknesses.

Steinbeck presents Mr. Edwards as being a simple and generous man who loves Catherine, but this passage points out that hardly anybody is so straightforward. Mr. Edwards' "strange corridors" come out when Catherine gets drunk and shows him her true cruelty.What had seemed before to be Mr. Edwards' straightforward love convolutes into a vengeful anger that leads him to try to murder Catherine. Steinbeck is here attempting to show that all human beings are complex mixtures of good and evil. He is also showing us the dual edges of love; on the one hand, love can lead to joy and kindness, but, on the other hand, it can produce jealousy and violence. Steinbeck wants us to understand how complicated the human character is; Catherine's downfall is that she misses this.

Chapter 12 Quotes

❝ To hell with that rotten century! Let's get it over and the door closed shut on it! Let's close it like a book and go on reading! New chapter, new life. A man will have clean hands once we get the lid slammed shut on that stinking century. It's a fair thing ahead. There's no rot on this clean new hundred years. It's not stacked, and any bastard who deals seconds from this new deck of years—why, we'll crucify him head down over a privy. Oh but strawberries will never taste as good again and the thighs of women have lost their clutch!

Related Characters: John Steinbeck (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 130

Explanation and Analysis

In this short chapter, Steinbeck meditates on the human relationship to time. He reflects that, at this point in the book, it is 1900, the dawn of a new century, and he details various reactions to this change. This passage embodies the boosterish enthusiasm for the supposed clean slate of a new century and the possibility for a better life implied therein. The last line, though, already gestures towards the nostalgia that such a milestone evokes--some people believe that perhaps the good times are already gone and things will only get worse.

Steinbeck, of course, is partly parodying the extreme emotions that the passage of time tends to evoke in people. 1900 is an arbitrary number--nothing will truly change between 1899 and 1900 more than in any other year, but the psychological effects of the date shift are profound. This chapter seems to advocate a more nuanced attitude towards the passage of time; all times are infused with good and bad, and things are neither getting better nor worse. This mirrors Steinbeck's thoughts on human nature, which he argues is mixed with good and bad. In general, Steinbeck rejects simplistic and reductive views of any phenomenon. Everything is complex and ambiguous.

Chapter 13 Quotes

❝ I don't know how it will be in the years to come. There are monstrous changes taking place in the world, forces shaping a future whose face we do not know. Some of these forces seem evil to us, perhaps not in themselves but because their tendency is to eliminate other things we hold good.

Related Characters: John Steinbeck (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 131

Explanation and Analysis

Like Chapter 12, the opening of Chapter 13 is a meditation on human reactions to the passage of time. This quote in particular is referring to the rise of mass production in the 20th century and people's fears that this was inherently bad or even evil for society. Steinbeck is arguing that this kind of economic and social change is not inherently good or evil.

The fact that changes seem evil to some people is an illusion based on the tendency of change to alter the things we love, sometimes unfavorably. Steinbeck is a realist, though. He wants us to grapple with things as they are (much like Charles grapples with people as they are, while Catherine and Adam cannot). Steinbeck's point is that mass production is a reality of life by this point in the story, and the smart way to think about it is not in terms of hand-wringing or boosterism, but rather with an understanding

that mass production will, like every other change, bring both good and bad. Nostalgic clinging to the past is a reductive way to view a phenomenon, and Steinbeck always insists on complexity.

Chapter 15 Quotes

❝ Then a breeze would move her bright hair, or she would raise her eyes, and Adam would swell out in his stomach with a pressure of ecstasy that was close kin to grief.

Related Characters: John Steinbeck (speaker), Adam Trask, Catherine Trask (Kate)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 159

Explanation and Analysis

This passage describes Adam's feelings of love when he sees Cathy, who is pregnant with their child. Cathy has already been shown to be an amoral and even evil character She is using Adam's feelings to manipulate him and has even tried to have an illegal abortion without his knowledge. However, Adam's natural inclination towards goodness and non-confrontation does not allow him to see people as they truly are, even his own wife with whom he supposedly shares a life.

This passage shows his delusion, and also the tragedy of this delusion; Adam is vulnerable because of his inability to recognize Cathy's evil, and he is also mistaking something manipulative for love, which denies him one of the most powerful and good human experiences. It's telling that his "love" is described as an ecstasy that borders on grief. Steinbeck suggests that real love should not be only ecstatic, since it must acknowledge flaws and be tempered by complexity. Adam's naive and ecstatic feelings are volatile, and the grief that lurks in his feelings suggests the loneliness that is at the heart of his empty relationship.

❝ Pidgin they expect, and pidgin they'll listen to. But English from me they don't listen to, and so they don't understand it…That's why I'm talking to you. You are one of the rare people who can separate your observation from your preconception. You see what is, where most people see what they expect."

Related Characters: Lee (speaker), Sam Hamilton

Related Themes:

Page Number: 163

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Sam Hamilton has asked Lee why, after all this time in America, he still speaks pidgin English. Lee is one of the smartest and most complex characters in the book, and his simplistic speech turns out to be a part of his complexity. Lee explains (in perfect standard English) that he uses pidgin speech, paradoxically, in order to be understood. Most white Americans, Lee tells Sam, would be unwilling to accept Lee if his speech didn't match their preconceptions of him, and their preconceptions, based on his race, dictate that he should speak in simplistic Chinese-inflected English. Tellingly, Lee chooses only to reveal himself to Sam, who is a virtuous, curious, and observant friend. Lee feels that only Sam is capable of looking beyond preconception and seeing Lee for who he is.

While this passage is a direct indictment of racism and a poignant exposition of the corrosive effects of racism on those who experience it (Lee is forced to hide his true self to conform to the expectations of others), this passage also ties the issue of racism to other issues of the book. Steinbeck opposes any reductive and simplistic formulation that prevents people from seeing one another as complex and whole people. Racism functions, then, like Adam's blinding goodness; it prevents us from seeing and loving one another for who we are.

Chapter 19 Quotes

❝ The church and the whorehouse arrived in the Far West simultaneously. And each would have been horrified to think it was a different facet of the same thing. But surely they were both intended to accomplish the same thing: the singing, the devotion, the poetry of the churches took a man out of his bleakness for a time, and so did the brothels.

Related Characters: John Steinbeck (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 217

Explanation and Analysis

Steinbeck opens Chapter 19 with a meditation on the ways in which people coped with the hardships of frontier life. This controversial passage suggests that the church and prostitution both fulfilled the same purposes for frontiersmen (and maybe still fulfill the same purposes for contemporary people): communion with others and

distraction from hardship. This is a telling statement in a novel that is itself a reworking of a Biblical story; it suggests that Steinbeck does not view religious truth as the singular truth, or religious morality as always being correct.

This points to Steinbeck's view of the Bible as a series of stories through which we interpret our lives, rather than a series of moral guidelines that must be strictly followed. Instead of condemning prostitution, as the church believes he should, Steinbeck frames prostitution as an activity that provides a necessary service because it has the potential to provide both escape and human connection. Throughout this book, Steinbeck argues for the rigorous examination of human assumptions and preconceptions in order to arrive at a nuanced and full appreciation for human life.

Chapter 22 Quotes

It seemed to Samuel that Adam might be pleasuring himself with sadness.

Related Characters: John Steinbeck (speaker), Sam Hamilton, Adam Trask

Related Themes:

Page Number: 253

Explanation and Analysis

By this point in the book, Cathy has left Adam with the twins and Adam is out of his mind with grief. When Sam learns that Adam has not yet bothered to even name the twins, Sam feels the need to intervene. However, this passage reveals that Sam does not simply feel compassion for Adam's grief; he feels an anger, too, born from suspicion. While Sam values hard work and overcoming obstacles, Adam (and his family in general) comes from a wealthier background and has had more idle time in his life, which Sam does not feel is morally good. Sam wonders if Adam is able to indulge his grief so fully because of his privilege, and if, furthermore, Adam is somehow luxuriating in it. If this is the case, then that grief is certainly immoral, since it is harming his children. This passage is another example of the complexity of love and the ways in which love can morph from something pure into something toxic.

One day Samuel strained his back lifting a bale of hay, and it hurt his feelings more than his back, for he could not imagine a life in which Sam Hamilton was not privileged to lift a bale of hay.

Related Characters: John Steinbeck (speaker), Sam Hamilton

Related Themes:

Page Number: 253

Explanation and Analysis

This is a chapter largely concerned with illness: Sam hurts his back, which interrupts his ability to work, and Adam grows mentally unstable after Cathy leaves him. Steinbeck draws a specific contrast between the two illnesses, though. Sam is upset about his injury, not because of the pain or even because of the financial loss of not working, but because he sees personal and moral value in labor. He calls lifting a bale of hay a "privilege," and he worries that Adam's grief is so all-consuming because Adam doesn't have that kind of work to uplift him. This passage also uses the two contrasting illnesses to talk about time. Here, time is the force that decays Sam's body, but with Adam, time is the force that could heal him. Steinbeck has always insisted that time passing brings both good and bad - it both gives and it takes away. This scene is a concrete example of this complex reality.

"We are descended from this. This is our father. Some of our guilt is absorbed in our ancestry. What chance did we have? We are the children of our father. It means we aren't the first."

Related Characters: Adam Trask (speaker), Sam Hamilton, Lee

Related Themes:

Page Number: 269

Explanation and Analysis

In this moment, Sam, Adam, and Lee are discussing the story of Cain and Abel, the very story on which the novel is based. Because of this connection, this passage is key to the book overall. Here, Adam is excited because he realizes something from the story of Cain and Abel; all humans are the descendants of Cain, the bad brother, not Abel, the good one. (Although Judeo-Christian tradition has most people descended from Seth, Adam and Eve's third son.)

Adam, who has been consumed by virtue his whole life, thinks that this, in a sense, absolves humanity of our guilt. He sees that sin is not something that we invent as

individuals, but rather something that was passed down to us by our nature. This passage shows clearly the ways in which stories are just as important as reality in terms of how our lives are structured. Believing that sin is natural (though to be avoided if possible) leads to a different lived reality (and different choices) than believing that sin is an evil that indicates personal failure. These characters are choosing the former story, which has a concrete effect on them. Ironically, this claiming of sin as part of our nature frees sin from being something that defines a person's character. Steinbeck suggests that what defines us is not our inclination to sin (which is universal), but rather our choices in the face of that reality.

"A great and lasting story is about everyone or it will not last."

Related Characters: Lee (speaker), Sam Hamilton, Adam Trask

Related Themes:

Page Number: 270

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Lee is trying to account for the power of the Cain and Abel story. He suggests that a part of human nature is the inability to truly connect with anything that isn't deeply personal. "If a story is not about the hearer, he will not listen," Lee says. Cain and Abel, Lee argues, is a lasting story because rejection, guilt, and revenge are common to all people, so Cain's story still strikes a nerve even after thousands of years.

This quote is especially relevant because of the metafictional nature of the novel's narration. Steinbeck repeatedly draws attention to the book itself as a story that is being told, not allowing it to masquerade as a reality that we, as readers, are experiencing. Because of this, Steinbeck's meditations on the purpose and power of stories are also statements about his own art. This quote comes almost 300 pages into the book--if the reader hadn't been sucked in by the story by now, he or she probably would have already put the book down. In light of this, Steinbeck is implicating readers and asking them to examine why they are captivated by the book. If they are fascinated by Steinbeck's own reworking of the Cain and Abel story, it's probably because they, too, have struggles in common with Cain.

The door was closed to men. It was a sanctuary where women could be themselves—smelly, wanton, mystic, conceited, truthful, and interested...At Dessie's they were women who went to the toilet and overate and scratched and farted. And from this freedom came laughter, roars of laughter.

Related Characters: John Steinbeck (speaker), Dessie Hamilton

Related Themes:

Page Number: 283

Explanation and Analysis

Much as Steinbeck's elaboration of Lee's character provides insight into the effects of racism, Steinbeck's description of Dessie's shop illuminates the effects of sexism on women. Steinbeck recognizes that women do not, by nature, necessarily conform to norms of "femininity." While those norms are often seen as simply reflecting feminine nature, this passage points out that, in fact, gender norms often prevent women from being their true selves. Because men are not allowed in Dessie's shop, women are able to relax and stop their relentless performances of femininity. The ability to be who they truly are in Dessie's shop gives them joy and freedom. This passage points out that sexism reduces women to something less than they truly are, and it shows the joy that women experience when they are in a place that acknowledges that women share a complexity common to all human beings. Steinbeck suggests, too, that to engage this complexity is a moral obligation for us all, since thinking in stereotypes harms others.

Chapter 24 Quotes

"But the Hebrew word, the word *timshel*—'Thou mayest'—that gives a choice. It might be the most important word in the world. That says the way is open. That throws it right back on a man...why, that makes a man great, that gives him stature with the gods, for in his weakness and his filth and his murder of his brother he has still the great choice. He can choose his course and fight it through and win."

Related Characters: Lee (speaker), Sam Hamilton, Adam Trask

Related Themes:

Page Number: 303

Explanation and Analysis

This complex passage is a meditation on human choice, a question that lies at the heart of the book. Steinbeck has already established that humanity is descended from Cain; we have sin in our blood and cannot escape that part of our nature. However, Steinbeck does not intend this to be a dark pronouncement. Here, he locates human goodness and hope not in the naive belief that people are naturally good and that sin is therefore unnatural, but rather in the notion that humans have a unique capacity to choose their own destiny and therefore we have the ability to overcome the sin that is in our own nature. Goodness would not be a virtue if it were innate (as it is in Adam); it only becomes a virtue when it is complicated by the knowledge of evil that makes true love possible. Lee suggests that our highest calling is to act out of love and choose goodness over evil.

It's important to note that this passage (which contains some of the most nuanced thoughts in the entire book) is spoken by Lee, a Chinese American character who is seen by his community as being simple based on his race. This passage challenges that stereotype.

"This is not theology. I have no bent toward gods. But I have a new love for that glittering instrument, the human soul."

Related Characters: Lee (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 304

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Lee makes his final point in his elucidation of the importance of the Cain and Abel story. He does not believe that Cain and Abel should be interpreted as strictly religious figures because he does not think the beauty or importance of the story comes from its relationship to theology. Rather, Lee locates the story's importance in its illustration of the beauty of the human soul. In other words, Lee believes in humanity instead of God, and he thinks that the Cain and Abel story reveals the central beauty and power of humans, which is our ability to make choices (in other words, our free will).

In addition, this passage gestures again towards Steinbeck's insistence that the Bible is important less as theology than as a series of stories or myths that present wisdom about human nature. Lee, as an outsider in his community (due to his race) is uniquely positioned to argue that the Cain and Abel story has more power, not less, when it is interpreted as story rather than theology. As theology, Cain and Abel is relevant only to Christians, but as a story its wisdom can be shared with everyone.

Chapter 25 Quotes

"That's what I hate, the liars, and they're all liars…I love to rub their noses in their own nastiness."

Related Characters: Catherine Trask (Kate) (speaker), Adam Trask

Related Themes:

Page Number: 322

Explanation and Analysis

In this scene, Adam has come to see Kate at the brothel, and she is incensed to realize that she no longer has a hold on him. In this passage, Kate has been drinking and, as usual, alcohol is bringing out her cruelty. She is trying to account for her hatred of the world, and she claims here that she is cruel because everyone else is a liar and a hypocrite. She frames her behavior as almost moral in that it "rubs their noses in their own nastiness."

This scene is yet another illustration, though, of the importance of acknowledging human complexity. Kate embodies evil, and, as a result, she sees that same evil everywhere. She projects herself onto the world instead of receiving and interpreting what is actually there. Were she more receptive to others, she would understand that everyone is not fundamentally a liar. While everyone is sometimes prone to telling lies, people struggle between their good and bad impulses and thus cannot be defined by one quality or another. Kate is reducing people to caricatures in much the same way that Steinbeck shows racism and sexism as functioning.

Chapter 30 Quotes

"Dear Lord...let me be like Aron. Don't make me mean. I don't want to be…I don't want to be mean. I don't want to be lonely."

Related Characters: Caleb "Cal" Trask (speaker), Aron Trask

Related Themes:

Page Number: 379

Explanation and Analysis

In this scene, Cal struggles between his impulse towards evil and his desire to be good. Cal's own personal narrative (and his treatment by others) has led him to think that he is not a good person like Aron is--he is Cain, and Aron is Abel. While Cal does seem less naturally inclined towards virtue than Aron, this scene gives a window into Cal that allows us to empathize with his complexity. Despite Cal's natural inclinations towards being bad, this scene suggests that Cal has the same potential as Aron to be good; the choice is in his hands, and it's a choice he desperately wants to get right.

Something that clearly prevents him from consistently choosing good, though, is a story--the story he has formed about himself, and the story others have told him about himself, that he is bad and Aron is good. Steinbeck shows how self-defeating these narratives can be and how they can undermine our sacred capacity for free choice by narrowing our own visions of what we ourselves are capable of.

Chapter 34 Quotes

❝ All novels, all poetry, are built on the never-ending contest in ourselves of good and evil. And it occurs to me that evil must constantly respawn, while good, while virtue, is immortal.

Related Characters: John Steinbeck (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 415

Explanation and Analysis

In this chapter, Steinbeck strays from the story to meditate on good, evil, and love. He states that he believes that the central contest of all human lives (and, therefore, all human stories) is the struggle between good and evil. He compares good and evil to the "warp and woof" (the foundation of a weaving) of consciousness, implying that good and evil literally comprise the fabric of existence. Steinbeck here suggests that this contest is not evenly weighted, though; humans gravitate towards goodness more than evil.

While Steinbeck remains committed to a picture of human nature that includes both good and bad as natural, he tips the scales here and suggests that humans have more good in them than bad. The statement about evil constantly re-spawning is ambiguous, but he seems to mean that we are always inventing new ways to exploit and manipulate one another, while kindness and virtue are much simpler. We never need to craft a new way to be kind, but since evil works best in disguise, we must always reinvent it. Steinbeck implies that this gives an inherent and lasting power to goodness, a power that evil lacks.

Chapter 38 Quotes

❝ Where Aron was received, Cal was rebuffed for doing or saying exactly the same thing.

Related Characters: John Steinbeck (speaker), Caleb "Cal" Trask, Aron Trask

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 444

Explanation and Analysis

This quote comes in a series of paragraphs that explain the evolution of Cal's character, which was formed in reaction to the ease with which Aron has always won over others. Cal has felt implicitly rejected by the world's seeming preference for Aron over him, and, as a result, he has developed a darkness--a jealousy, secrecy, vengeance, and shyness that wasn't there naturally.

This echoes the Cain and Abel story. Like Cain and Abel, Cal and Aron made offerings (their personalities) and the world (like God) seemed to accept Aron's and reject Cal's. Because of that, Cal became bitter and it cast a pall over his choices, leading him towards vice. This is a compassionate and empathetic way of seeing Cal's personality, in that it describes how, through no fault of Cal's own, other peoples' reactions to Cal steered his personality towards being based in jealousy and vengeance. It also suggests that a powerful way to combat evil is through kindness and love. To make someone like Cal feel loved and accepted would be to negate the forces that push him towards sin.

❝ "Of course you may have that in you. Everybody has. But you've got the other too."

Related Characters: Lee (speaker), Caleb "Cal" Trask, Catherine Trask (Kate)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 449

Explanation and Analysis

After seeing his mother sinning at the brothel, Cal is deeply

shaken by the implications he sees for his own character. He finds Lee and confesses what he has seen, admitting that he worries that he is evil like his mother. In this quote, Lee explains to him that he does have his mother's evil in him, but he also has his father's good--everyone is a mix of both. Lee takes this argument further by scolding Cal for the laziness of assuming that he is innately evil like his mother. Lee sees the ability to blame bad ancestry for bad choices as a scapegoat and a betrayal of the sanctity of choice. "Whatever you do, it will be you who do it—not your mother," Lee says.

This passage shows the liberating potential of seeing identity as not being wrapped up in a person's blood or background, but as comprised of a series of choices made freely. In some sense, this is the least reductive way possible to see another human being.

Chapter 49 Quotes

"I send boys out...I sign my name and they go out. And some will die and some will lie helpless without arms and legs. Not one will come back untorn. Son, do you think I could take a profit on that?...I don't want the money, Cal. And the lettuce—I don't think I did that for a profit."

Related Characters: Adam Trask (speaker), Caleb "Cal" Trask

Related Themes:

Page Number: 543

Explanation and Analysis

This is a pivotal moment of the book, an analog to the moment in the Cain and Abel story when God rejects Cain's sacrifice and accepts Abel's. Here, Cal has saved up to give his father enough money to replace the fortune he lost through the refrigeration business. However, since Cal made the money profiting off of demands created by war, Adam states that he cannot accept the money. This moment is so fraught because both Cal's and Adam's perspectives make sense. Cal worked hard to do something nice for his father, hoping to earn his approval and love, and Adam is taking a moral stand against profiting off of an event that seems to him to be wholly evil.

Since both parties are acting in good faith, the fallout--Cal's heartbreak--is even more complex and wrenching. Lee's reaction to this situation is crucial, because it shows the importance of empathy. In a sense, Adam is the one who has failed here because his overly-virtuous personality has blinded him to Cal's own kindness. This lack of empathy wounds Cal deeply, but Lee insists that it is not an excuse for Cal to behave badly. In a sense, Adam did not have a choice in how he reacted because he could not see more than one side of the issue. Cal, who is a more complex person, can foresee both the virtuous and the harmful reactions he can have; Lee insists that he choose the right thing.

Chapter 53 Quotes

"He's crammed full to the top with every good thing and every bad thing."

Related Characters: Lee (speaker), Caleb "Cal" Trask, Abra Bacon

Related Themes:

Page Number: 585

Explanation and Analysis

The love between Cal and Abra is, in a sense, Steinbeck's promise of redemption. The most relentlessly virtuous characters in the book (Adam and Aron, for example) lack empathy and understanding in a way that actually closes them off to true human love. Both men experienced strong feelings for women, but those feelings weren't really love because the men could not recognize the bad parts of the women they cared for--they loved an idealized version of a woman, rather than a real human being.

Paradoxically, the fact that Cal has sinned almost unforgivably in his treatment of Aron is what makes him able to love Abra. Cal can see Abra for everything she is, rather than reducing her complexity by projecting a single characteristic onto her. The way Steinbeck presents Cal and Abra's love suggests that the way towards virtue involves acknowledging sin and evil as parts of all of us. Without seeing ourselves and each other as complex and conflicted, we are unable to grapple with the reality of the world. And without grappling with the reality of the world, we are unable to make the best choices, and we are unable to truly love ourselves and one another.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1

The chapter opens with a first person narrator's description of the Salinas valley in Northern California. The land is beautiful and expansive, but dry. **Water** comes in 30-year cycles, and the dry seasons inspire despair and the wet seasons hope and joy. Houses spring up wherever there is water, and families grow their farms. The land is turned over from the Native Americans, to the Spaniards, to finally the Americans.

The entire first chapter is an account of the passage of time—the change of seasons, the cycling of the rainfall, the slow change of the landscape, and the change in population. Before we are introduced to any characters or events we are introduced to the passage of time—and the book will continue to remind us about time and change as it progresses.

CHAPTER 2

The first-person narrator introduces us to the Hamiltons. Sam Hamilton is an Irishman, descended of Irish kings, who left Ireland (rumors allege) because of a lost love. He married a small Irish woman named Liza and moved to the Salinas Valley, but there was no good land left when he arrived. Every acre of his land is dry. Nevertheless Sam makes a good life for himself: he has worked hard, built up his ranch, studied philosophy and entertained men from all over town. He is a skilled blacksmith and has trained himself in techniques of childbirth, helping many mothers in the county deliver their children.

Several key facets of Sam Hamilton's character are established right away: he is not rich, but he is intelligent, invested, and has already overcome the loss of a great love. Already we can see that Sam is a figure for resilience: in the face of economical, familial, and personal challenges, he has become a diversely talented, engaged, generous and well-loved man.

His wife Liza has a "finely developed sense of sin" and is not a fun-loving woman. She is tough and sensible and appears to have no weaknesses. She lives with the conviction that this life is fleeting, and that she will be able to enjoy rewards in the afterlife.

Liza is from the start defined by her religious devotion. Where Sam is discussed in terms of his ability to overcome pain, Liza seems to reject pain altogether; and her faith allows her to do so.

Some people in the Salinas Valley are not like Sam Hamilton. Sam came with nothing, determined to make a life for himself and his family—the narrator wonders if this kind of venture is now "gone from the world." But others are different. They came to California with money, and they bought good land, and were able to plant wheat and build beautiful houses. Adam Trask is one of these men.

The Trask family is defined in contrast to the Hamilton family, and the issue that divides them, first and foremost, is wealth. Sam arrived in the valley with nothing, then bravely forged a life for himself against great odds. Adam arrived wealthy, and this wealth makes his experience fundamentally different from Sam's

CHAPTER 3

Adam Trask was born in a rural area in Connecticut. His mother, a godly woman who seemed to crave unhappiness, vengefully drowned herself in the shallow **water** of a pond after contracting gonorrhea from his father when he returned home from the American Civil War. His father is Cyrus Trask, a man who lost his leg in his first skirmish with the enemy. He is a bellicose, stern man who takes pride in his virility above all else. He re-marries a seventeen-year-old woman named Alice and conceives a second child, named Charles.

Adam's origins are telling: his mother kills herself when she was scared by his father—love destroys her (as it will nearly destroy Adam). Cyrus Trask is one of the first examples of Steinbeck's interest in gender roles—he is so invested in his own virility that his entire identity is shaped by a desire to be "a real man." The book will eventually challenge these conventional notions of gender.

Cyrus becomes obsessed with military affairs and the life of a soldier. He reads incessantly about the war, and begins to tell stories of battles as though he witnessed them. Eventually he begins to believe his own lies, becoming convinced that he did live through some of the War's greatest and bloodiest moments, even though he only fought in one skirmish.

Cyrus's identity is entirely self-constructed. He literally re-writes his own history, and even begins to believe his own stories and lies. This kind of willful self-deception, this blind self-love, will become a problem for several characters in the novel.

The death of Abraham Lincoln intensifies Cyrus's political and military dedication, and he begins to write articles about military affairs that are intelligent and convincing. His expertise lands him a job as a paid secretary, and he consults in matters of military organization and personnel, traveling all over the country to meet with important political figures.

Cyrus fools not only himself but, in fact, the US government. Though his memories are lies, his expertise is real; his belief in a certain kind of narrative, his interest in a certain kind of story, has led to real knowledge.

Cyrus consequently learns to run his home as if it is the army. He demands unquestioning obedience, which his wife Alice gladly gives him—she is not amenable to discussion or fighting, and finds it easy to remain quiet and submissive. She becomes sick with consumption, but hides it from her husband because she knows he will treat it so aggressively that his treatment might kill her before the disease does.

Though Alice is quiet, she is tough and resourceful—note how she weighs her options and decides to hide her illness in order to buy herself more time. Their marriage works not because they are in love or particularly devoted to one another, but because they are well-suited to accommodating one another—the book is beginning to make a complicated point about what makes a family "successful."

Cyrus raises his sons to be soldiers, because he believes the only way to truly become a man is to live the life of a soldier. The boys hate running their father's drills but it becomes a natural and inevitable part of their lives very early on. Children often see adults, especially their parents, as gods—infallible and all-powerful. But eventually, for every child, this illusion falls apart, and this happens to Adam quite early on. One day he simply realizes that his father is not a great man.

Cyrus isn't content to impose idealistic masculinity on himself; his sons must also live up to his expectations of manliness. And while children tend to start out worshipping their parents, Adam's belief in his father's greatness wanes early on—he sees through his father's act, and though he obeys Cyrus, he doesn't believe in him.

Adam is a peaceful and obedient child, but his half brother Charles is assertive like his father. He is strong, athletic, and though he has nothing in common with Adam he has a certain kind of affection for him. They are too different from one another to have true empathy or understanding between them, but they depend on each other and this makes them close.

Adam and Charles are the book's first figures for Cain and Abel. Charles from the start is, like Cain, defined by violence, where Adam is, like Abel, peaceful. Still they care for each other—it is a distant kind of love, but the variety and complexity of love is one of the main interests of the novel.

One day Adam, who is typically unsuccessful in athletic competitions, repeatedly beats Charles at a game called "peewee" which involves driving a small pointed stick as far as possible with a bat. Charles becomes increasingly angry about losing, until finally he snaps and smashes Adam over the head with the bat. Neither Charles nor Adam tell their father about the beating, but he seems to know anyway. Cyrus begins to speak to Adam in earnest about him joining the military. Adam doesn't want to go, and complains that Charles is not being forced to join. Cyrus explains that Charles doesn't have anything to learn from a soldier's life—he already lives without fear. But Adam needs to go. Cyrus takes Adam on a long walk and explains to him what it will be like; what he will learn, and why it is important to overcome fear.

Charles lashes out in jealousy—jealousy is one of the evil impulses to which Cain succumbed when he killed Abel. What's more, Cyrus treats the boys differently—just as God treated Cain and Abel differently. Cyrus believes Adam is too fearful and believes life as a soldier will help him learn courage, one of the most important virtues a man can have (in Cyrus's mind). The reader should keep in mind that Cyrus didn't, in fact, live the life of a soldier (at least not for very long.) His sense of the kind of work soldiering constitutes is not informed by real experience.

After supper that night Adam says he is going on a walk and Charles joins him. Charles demands to know what Adam and Cyrus discussed on their walk. Adam tells the truth—that Cyrus simply talked to him about the life of a soldier—but Charles does not believe him. He accuses Adam of trying to take his father away. He angrily recalls that he bought his father a nice pocketknife for his birthday, while Adam only brought him a stray puppy. Cyrus loved the puppy—the dog was lovingly trained and still sleeps with Cyrus at night. But Charles has never once seen his father use his pocketknife. Charles snaps and beats Adam fiercely. Adam passes out, and when he regains consciousness Charles is gone, but Adam feels that Charles intends to come back. He hides in a ditch—Charles does come back carrying a hatchet, but doesn't see Adam and gives up and goes away.

This is a very direct reenactment of the Cain and Abel story: Charles and Adam both gave gifts to their father on his birthday, but Cyrus preferred Adam's gift. Out of anger, rejection, loneliness, despair, jealousy—any of a number of negative emotions—Charles becomes murderous. He tries to kill his brother as Cain killed Abel but Adam hides and narrowly escapes. The reader should ask what this version of the Cain and Abel story might teach us about the original story from genesis and vice versa. So much of this novel is about the power and truth of stories—this reenactment offers us a new way of understanding Cain's motivations.

When Adam returns home, beaten, Alice and Cyrus are shocked. Cyrus demands that Adam explain why Charles did this to him. Adam explains that Charles believes Cyrus doesn't love him. Cyrus has no response, and tells Alice to put Adam to bed. As Alice is cleaning Adam up, she explains that Charles is truly a good boy; that he has been leaving small gifts for her around the house. Adam says nothing, but he has been the one leaving the gifts.

This moment represents an interesting kind of inversion of the Cain and Abel story: Charles' gift was rejected by his father, but here we see Adam's gifts being rejected (or misattributed) by a mother figure. Adam, almost peaceful and subdued to a fault, doesn't correct his step-mother, but we can assume the rejection is painful.

CHAPTER 4

That night Cyrus goes hunting for Charles with a shotgun, but Charles hides out in town for a few weeks, and when he returns his father has calmed down. Adam is enlisted in the army as a private; the narrator remarks that it is strange to him that men like Adam are so often the ones called upon to do soldiering. Adam is revolted by violence, and his time in the army, fighting Native American uprisings, only increases his distaste for bloodshed. He deliberately misses his shots to avoid killing the enemy, but he earns a reputation as a kind of hero because he goes above and beyond to rescue and save the lives of his wounded comrades.

Adam's peaceful nature, rather than being corrected or reversed by the life of a soldier, is in fact exaggerated and intensified. The reader should keep this part of Adam's character in mind when he rejects his son Cal's gift of money. Though in Genesis, God has no ostensible reason for rejecting Cain's gift but accepting Abel's, this novel gives us a backstory that allows us to understand Adam's underlying motivations for his ultimate rejection of Cal.

Charles writes Adam long, sentimental letters while he is away. It is as though Charles is able to express his feelings in writing but not in speech; he tells Adam he misses him, but he also continues to wonder about why Cyrus chose Adam as the favorite son. Charles also tells Adam he is thinking of taking a wife. He tells Adam to come home as soon as possible.

Charles' letters reveal that he is more complicated than he seemed at first. He is not an angry brute; his letters humanize him. This is crucial, for the novel uses Cain as a symbol for all humanity—so the humanity in Charles is an important extension of this understanding.

CHAPTER 5

Sam Hamilton's family continues to grow. George is born, then Will, who even as a child showed great talent for business. Tom is the third son; curious and contemplative like his father. Sam buys more land and expands his house as he has more children, but grows no richer. He does grow to be extremely well liked, though, and makes a living from helping his neighbors. He tries to become an inventor, but all of the money from his patents go to greedy lawyers, and his patents lose money. Then Joe is born, the fourth son, who is babied by everyone in the family. In addition to the boys there are five girls: Una, Lizzie, Dessie (a joker), Olive (who is the narrator's mother) and Mollie, an adorable youngster.

Note that Sam works hard, but doesn't seem to be motivated by the prospect of wealth, for he continues to work hard, to be creative, to innovate, though he grows no wealthier. The patent lawyers who essentially steal from Sam are portrayed unsympathetically—their greed is unequivocally presented as evil. Though Sam's fortune does not grow, his family does—he has nine children. This perhaps constitutes a different—and more important—kind of wealth.

Liza rears her children with expertise and deftness. She inspires a level of awe in everyone around her from the sheer impressiveness of her competence. Liza hates alcohol of all kinds, and Sam has to hide any alcohol he drinks from her or she will scold him horribly. All in all she and Sam have raised a good family—not rich, but not as poor as some. If there had been **water** they would have been relatively wealthy. But, though there was none, the family is well balanced, intelligent, and successfully settled in the Salinas Valley. Samuel is "pleased with the fruit of his loins."

The narrator again emphasizes that material wealth isn't necessary for success, virtue, or happiness. The Hamiltons are unlucky enough to live on a large property with no water—but they are not bitter about their misfortune. Wealth does not prevent them from being friendly, fulfilled, intelligent, and settled in the Salinas Valley. Sam could be angry or unhappy about his lack of material wealth but instead he is "pleased" with his life.

CHAPTER 6

Charles is so timid around women he could not stomach the thought of dating. Instead he took to visiting prostitutes. Cyrus has moved to DC for work, and so Charles is alone on the farm without Adam, who is away in the army. He longs for his brother's return, and fills up his days with the duties of the farm. One day while trying to move a rock he hits his head and gives himself a horrible scar on his face, extending from his brow line to the top of his forehead.

Charles becomes plagued by loneliness—a kind of misery the Steinbeck focuses on throughout the novel. Charles seeks out the comfort of brothels because they provide him, sadly, with some of his only human contact. He finds refuge in work: though it's hard and unforgiving, it provides him a certain kind of relief from sadness.

When Adam is discharged, he doesn't know how to cope with his new freedom. He has become accustomed to order and obedience, and is uncomfortable being free in the world. He decides he cannot go home and re-enlists.

Adam has also become absorbed by work—in fact he doesn't know how to live a life outside of the army. He cannot make decisions for himself, an ominous foreshadowing of his inability to make sound moral judgments later in the novel.

Adam receives an order to appear in DC. Cyrus is responsible for this, and meets Adam when he arrives in DC. He is clearly a wealthy man now, well-dressed and with a new high-tech false leg. He wants to know why Adam has reenlisted and suggests that Adam try to move his career ahead and get a job in politics. Cyrus is an influential man and can help Adam succeed. Adam rejects this offer, and Cyrus laments that his son has learned the "dumb resistance" of a soldier.

Cyrus has changed his tune when it comes to the "life of a soldier"—instead of learning courage, Adam has learned the opposite: thoughtless, dumb resistance. Cyrus is angry that Adam is not interested in advancement. Cyrus has become a materialist, and cannot understand the desire to do work that doesn't lend itself to wealth and status.

Charles has looked forward to Adam's return for five years. He readies the farm in every way possible. He hires a woman to come clean the house until it is immaculate. He sleeps in the barn so as not to undo any of her work. He waits for Adam, but of course Adam does not come. Adam was perhaps too ashamed to write him. After a year passes, Adam writes him many apologetic and anxious letters. Charles eventually responds and tells Adam that he has expanded the farm and has been having modest success.

Remember that Charles is a symbol for Cain—the heartbreaking account of his tender but ultimately unnecessary preparation for Adam's homecoming once again humanizes him. We know he is in some ways evil and violent, but in moments like this Charles is also undeniably, pathetically, and deeply human. In this version of Cain and Abel, we can see that Abel is also capable of hurting Cain.

CHAPTER 7

Adam's next five years fly by, for they are uneventful and unmemorable. He writes to tell Charles that this time he is really coming home, but instead hitchhikes around the country and lives as a vagabond. He is arrested and jailed for vagrancy and put on a chain gang. He escapes, however, and starts to make his way back to Charles.

Adam, rather than going home, eschews material comfort of all kinds and roams the country as a vagabond. Later in the novel Adam will come into a great deal of wealth; the reader should ask whether Adam is happier as a vagabond or as a rich man.

One day Charles receives word in the mail that Cyrus is dead. His father has willed all his possessions to be split between his two sons—and Charles discovers his father had assets worth well over a hundred thousand dollars. He is disturbed by this—where did his father get this money? Soon after this he gets a telegram from Adam, asking for 100 dollars, and saying he is on his way home.

Charles, who, unlike Adam conceived of his father as a hero and a great man, is disturbed to find out that his father has secrets. His idealistic picture of Cyrus begins to break down. This unsettling realization is accompanied by correspondence from Adam—family tensions and Drama are coming to a head.

Adam finally arrives home, and his reunion with his brother is somewhat awkward. Charles is clearly hiding something. After some questioning, Adam gets Charles to reveal the fact of their father's fortune. What's more, Cyrus's discharge papers from the war were sent along with other documents, and they reveal that he only fought in one skirmish before losing his leg and leaving the army. The boys, who had believed their father's stories of his time in the war, don't know what to say so they change the subject.

Finally Adam and Charles must contend with the reality about their father: that he lied about his time in the war, and that he likely came into a great deal of money by dishonest means. The brothers avoid the truth—it is too hard to discuss the possibility of their father's deceit and dishonesty; they must continue behaving as if their father is a good man.

Charles asks Adam if there are any women in his life. Adam says he stayed with a Native American woman for a while on the road, and Charles can see Adam had feelings for this woman. Charles says that he has been going to the whorehouse every once in a while, and asks Adam if he'd like to go. Adam says maybe later.

The novel continues to make a point about the universality of loneliness—neither of the brothers have had a fulfilling sexual relationship in their lives. Both have different ways of coping—Adam by developing hopeless attachments and Charles by indulging in indecent behavior.

They dance around the issue of their father throughout dinner, until finally they return to it. Charles is deeply worried about the possibility that the money they have inherited from their father was stolen or otherwise ill-gotten. He demands to know why Adam does not look upset, and asks if Adam even loved Cyrus. Adam says he did not love Cyrus, but that he has faith Cyrus was not a thief. He says "papers are no match for his faith" and refuses to believe that his father is a liar. Charles does not understand, but hesitatingly agrees to keep the money. Adam suggests moving to California, but Charles says he could never leave the farm.

Adam's comments about faith are deeply revealing: Adam recognizes that the stories we tell ourselves can either deceive us or expose us to difficult but necessary truths. Adam decides to tell himself and his brother a story about their father's infallibility—he chooses to believe this story even in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary. Adam suffers from being unable to see the bad in people—this part of his history gives us insight into this particular character flaw.

CHAPTER 8

The narrator tells us that, just as there are children born with monstrous physical deformities, there are children born with monstrous psychological deformities; children in possession of a "malformed soul." The narrator believes Cathy Ames is one of these monsters. Cathy was born with an innocent face and small, delicate hands and feet. She learns early that her sexuality can be used to manipulate people—though Cathy has no human sexual desire to speak of, she understand exactly how the desire of others can be used to her advantage. As a ten year old she frames two young boys for her sexual assault. When she attends high school, she drives her Latin teacher to kill himself. No one ever suspects her, though some people think there is a terrifying kind of emptiness in her eyes.

Cathy is a character study on the nature of evil. From the start we see that narrator John Steinbeck doesn't conceive of her as possessed by inhuman evil impulses. Rather, she is evil and inhuman because she is incomplete—she is born with only the bad in her and none of the good. This description of her character reveals an important feature of Steinbeck's worldview: evil is part of human nature. All people are born with bad in them. It is only when this innate evil is unchecked by goodness that it becomes inhuman. The idea that people are always both good and bad is one to which the novel will return repeatedly and at length.

Eventually Cathy grows tired of obeying her parents, and carries out a sadistic plot: she burns her house down with her sleeping parents trapped inside, and makes it seem as though she has been kidnapped. Everyone can see why a man would carry Cathy away—she was pretty and delicate.

Cathy benefits from her girly, innocent appearance. She uses gender roles and sexuality to her advantage—people invested in clichés and stereotypes, who are governed by their expectations, are more easily manipulated.

CHAPTER 9

Catherine goes to a local whorehouse run by a man named Mr. Edwards. She sells him a sad story about a troubled past, and he falls in love with her almost instantly. He buys her a house, lavishes her with gifts, and she keeps him miserable by withholding affection and deliberately making him jealous. One night, however, he demands that she have a drink with him. Alcohol breaks down her defenses, and her cruelty shines through. She insults him horribly, tells him she's never cared for him, and laughs that he is in fact utterly repulsive to her. Mr. Edwards comes back the next day and demands that she go on a drive with him. He takes her to a secret place in the country, pulls over, and beats her viciously with the intention of killing her. He doesn't know, when he leaves her bloodied on the ground, that Catherine is still alive.

We learn Catherine's biggest weakness-when she drinks alcohol, her caution disappears, and she reveals her true nature to those around her. We also learn that her tactics have consequences—manipulating Mr. Edwards into loving her proves beneficial in various ways. But this book repeatedly affirms that love is often turbulent and dangerous; Mr. Edward's love for Catherine is no exception. He, like Cal, like Cain, is willing to kill for love. Love can bring out generosity and kindness, but also possessiveness and jealousy.

CHAPTER 10

Charles and Adam bicker constantly, and Adam periodically leaves only to come crawling back after a few months. Adam wants to move with Charles to California, but Charles doesn't understand why Adam would want to leave. One night in anger Charles mentions that Adam has never paid him back for the 100 dollars he sent him. Adam, upset with himself, can't believe his oversight. He tells Charles that he needed the money because he was escaping from prison. Charles is delighted by this information, and feels closer to Adam than he has in a long time.

Charles is comforted by the fact that Adam has spent time in jail. The reader should note that this moment of closeness between the brothers is brought about by moral and social transgressions on Adam's part: he fails to pay back a debt and is incarcerated for vagrancy. Perhaps Charles is comforted because he sees Adam is also imperfect, "bad" as well as "good."

CHAPTER 11

One night the brothers hear a scratching on the door. When they go to look outside they see a dirty, bloodied woman lying helpless on their porch. Charles worries how it will look if two brothers are discovered with a bloodied woman in their house, but Adam insists that Charles call the doctor and carries the woman (who the reader can assume is Catherine) to bed. Adam cares for her passionately, and protects her from the invasive questioning of Charles and the doctor. Catherine knows she can handle Adam and the doctor, but she sees something in Charles' face that she recognizes, and this makes her uneasy.

Adam, whom we have already seen struggling with seeing the bad in people, cannot see the bad in Catherine. Charles, on the other hand, is more uneasy around her. Notably we are told that Catherine sees something she "recognizes" in Charles's face. Whatever Catherine has inside of her is something that Charles (our current figure for Cain) also has inside of him.

As Cathy starts to get better, Charles begins to mistrust her more and more. In a private conversation when Adam is out of the room, he tells her there is something off about her; Charles believes she is the devil. Charles insinuates that he knows she has a secret, and that he will tell the authorities if she doesn't leave. This frightens her—Charles is manipulative just like she is.

Charles recognizes something in Catherine, too—and whatever he sees, he doesn't like (he calls her a "devil"). What does it mean to be a devil, and if Catherine is the devil, is the devil something that exists within all of us? Questions like these will inform much of the rest of the novel.

She tells Adam she is afraid of Charles, and knows that Charles wants her to leave. Adam insists that Charles cannot make her leave; then, in a moment of shining passion, he proposes. She says she'll think about it. Five days later, Adam tells Charles that he and Cathy are married. Charles is appalled and says he won't live in the same house with that woman. Adam responds that they are moving to California anyway.

Adam is so blinded by his goodness, optimism, and love that he marries Cathy. Their marriage is an almost perfect fusion of too much goodness and too much badness. From its inception the Trask marriage is presented as a struggle between good and evil, with faults and failings on both sides.

When Adam tells Cathy they are leaving, she says she doesn't want to go, but he doesn't listen to her. He assumes she is as enthusiastic as he is. That night, Cathy drugs him with her pain medications and he falls into a heavy sleep. While he is unconscious, she goes into Charles room. When Charles understands her intentions he remarks that his brother is a "poor bastard" but lets Cathy into his bed.

Adam doesn't even hear Cathy: his understanding of her is completely clouded and fabricated. Catherine drugs him into a deep sleep, but in a sense Adam was already sleepwalking through life—he lives and loves as if in a dream.

CHAPTER 12

The narrator tells us that "this book has reached a great boundary that was called 1900." He remarks on the anxiety of old men, who worry that virtue is gone from the world. On the other hand, these men also acknowledge that the 1800s were full of evil, corruption and greed, not to mention a terrible civil war.

Human history, just like humanity itself, is a delicate balance of good and evil. Old men remember the 18th century fondly—they were young, their bodies were healthy, they lived and loved as only young people can. But these memories are accompanied by harsh ones: of civil war, slavery, and corruption.

CHAPTER 13

Cathy brings "glory" into the life of Adam Trask. He imagines her as a perfect woman; he doesn't see her hatred and pain, he sees only a woman who believes in all the same things he believes in. He moves to California and searches patiently for just the right piece of land. One day he finds Cathy collapsed on the floor in a puddle of blood. He calls the doctor, who can tell immediately that Catherine has attempted an abortion. She lies to him about her motives, and makes him feel sorry for her. He agrees not to tell Adam that she has tried to abort the baby, but tells her the baby has survived, and warns her that if she tries anything again he will call the sheriff.

Adam continues to be blind to Catherine's anger and hatred for him. Catherine's failed abortion is in many ways a figure for the failure of evil—Catherine, in spite of herself, will participate in an act of creation, and creation triumphs over destruction. Her children, especially Cal, will overcome a great deal over the course of their lives, and perhaps it is appropriate to think of this as their first triumph.

Adam, delighted to hear that Catherine is pregnant, becomes interested in a large piece of property for sale along the river. He is told to see Sam Hamilton, who will knows if a well can be brought up on the property. Adam agrees, and goes to Sam's house. Sam has a savant-like knowledge of soil and how it works, and tells Adam the property is a fine one, and likely sitting on top of **water**. Just before Adam leaves, he remarks that Sam has made the Salinas valley sound like a wonderful place to settle. Samuel's face grows dark, and he warns that "there is a blackness in this valley." Sam can't put his finger on it, but he feels a violence haunts this land. Adam excuses himself; Sam apologized for his rambling. The next day Adam buys the property.

Ironically, though Sam has no water of his own, he knows more about water than anyone in the Salinas Valley. Though Adam is wealthy, he depends on Sam for his acute abilities of perception and his knowledge. Water isn't the only thing Sam is knowledgeable about: he feels a "darkness" in the Salinas Valley that Adam is blind to—where Adam believes that Sam has made the Salinas valley sound like a "wonderful place to settle" Sam seems to know that evil has found its way into this community.

CHAPTER 14

In those days it is a prestigious accomplishment to become a schoolteacher, and this is what Olive Hamilton becomes. She becomes engaged to a man from King City and marries him, moving to the city of Salinas. The narrator says that Olive was an exceptional mother to him and his three sisters. She is fiercely loyal and courageous—when a neighbor boy is killed in WWI, she devotes all her time to raising money for the war effort. She is rewarded with a medal of recognition and a ride in an airplane.

We get some brief insight into the life of our as-yet-unnamed narrator. This information is all quite autobiographical, mirroring the life of the book's author, John Steinbeck. Steinbeck's "presence" in the novel reminds the reader that he or she is, in fact, reading a story—the novel is so much about the importance and influence of certain stories in human life that it counts itself among these stories.

Olive's stubborn mind does not allow for the existence of such things as airplanes, but she knows she cannot turn down the honor. She prepares to die, for she is certain the plane will crash. When the time comes for the flight, she bravely sits next to the pilot. From the ground, the narrator remembers seeing the plane do loops and rolls—an unusual thing for the pilot to do, given his passenger is an old woman. When he had asked Olive if she wanted to do a stunt, she assumed he was telling her the plane was crashing, and she'd smiled and nodded at him to reassure him in their final moments. The pilot is so impressed with her when they land that he opines she would have made a great pilot herself.

Olive is an example of a woman who believes so thoroughly in her own stories that her mind will not be changed even by evidence to the contrary. The pilot also tells himself a story about Olive—that she is brave and unflappable and would have made a great pilot. This scene is in many ways about the variety and incongruity of opposing perspective, or opposing "stories."

CHAPTER 15

Adam begins turning his grand plans into a reality. He starts building up a grand house. Like everyone else in California at that time, he can think only of the future. He has a great appetite for life, and is ecstatically in love with Cathy. Meanwhile, Cathy's greatest virtue as a criminal is her patience; she endures her pregnancy and waits diligently for her opportunity to escape. Adam's Chinese servant Lee is suspicious of her, but Adam notices nothing.

Adam goes about his day oblivious to Cathy's hatred. Note how expertly she uses time to her advantage—patience is her greatest criminal virtue. She is "waiting out" her pregnancy and looking for the optimal time to escape.

One day Adam sends Lee to the Hamilton house to fetch Sam. Lee obliges and as he and Sam are traveling back to Adam's property, Sam asks Lee when he moved to America. Lee tells him—in very broken English—that he was born here. Sam wonders why Lee never perfected his English. Lee then begins to speak in a flawless American accent, and explains he speaks pidgin English because meeting people's expectations is easier than defying them. Sam says he sometimes does the same thing, playing the part of the boisterous Irishman even when he is feeling solemn.

Lee is one of the novel's deepest and most complex characters. Because he is an outsider, he has a keen eye for how people cling to preconceptions and stereotypes. Not surprisingly, Sam is the only character whom Lee trusts enough to reveal his true self to—Sam's powers of perception are unmatched by anyone (except for Lee himself) in the book.

Sam asks Lee why is he content to be a servant. Lee says a man not only learns a great deal from being a servant—about life, about human nature—but also that servants wield a great deal of power. Masters are so dependent on servants that a servant—even if he is not very good—enjoys utter security. He then confides in Sam that though he enjoys life as a servant, he has always dreamed of opening a bookstore in San Francisco.

Lee explains that a servant's life is like an education in human nature, and indeed Lee will become a kind of authority on what it means to be human. He is in many ways the mouthpiece for the book's most important points about good, evil, love, loneliness, and meaning.

Sam and Adam wander around the property looking for **water**. Sam carries a stick with him that, like a magic wand, seems drawn to the ground when there is water to be found beneath it. Sam finds a great deal of water on Adam's property and says he has no doubt he could drill a well. Adam asks for three wells—he tells Sam he means to build a garden, a kind of paradise, and make Catherine into his Eve. Sam pokes fun at Adam's naiveté, but promises he will find him water.

The biblical allegory becomes overt—Adam imagines himself as the original man, building a paradise to live in with his wife Eve. Adam seems to miss the irony that in the Bible, Eve was responsible for the fall of man into sin and despair. At the same time, Eve was responsible for self-knowledge: the apple she took in the Garden of Eden was from the tree of knowledge. In the novel, Catherine teaches Adam about the nature of human evil.

Adam invites Sam to dinner. Sam agrees, but finds dinner to be excruciatingly awkward. He sees something terrifying in Cathy, but cannot put his finger on what it is. Her cold distance gives him the shivers. He quickly finishes his dinner and excuses himself. On his way out he asks Lee if he's noticed anything "creepy" going on around this house. Lee doesn't answer him directly, but asks him if he happens to need a cook.

Sam and Lee, the story's most perceptive characters, are fearful of Cathy, but unwilling to voice their concerns outright. Their cryptic conversation conjures a feeling of impending doom—Cathy's evil has been lurking under the surface, and the moment that this tension will come to a head seems to be nearing.

Adam and Cathy sit under a tree as the sun sets. Adam describes to her all of his plans to plant wheat and alfalfa and to have a great garden. Cathy quietly tells him that she plans to leave as soon as she can. Adam laughs this off, and tells her she will feel differently after the baby.

What's remarkable about the tension between Adam and Cathy is that Cathy is not really being deceptive—she flat out tells Adam she will abandon him. The problem lies with Adam—he refuses to see anything bad in his life.

CHAPTER 16

As Sam rides back from the Trask property he tries to understand why he is feeling so uneasy. Cathy's eyes had reminded him of something—it comes suddenly to him in a flash: as a young boy, he had witnessed an execution. The man in the noose's eyes were "not like the eyes of a man." Cathy has eyes like that. He feels guilty thinking such evil things about her, and vows to help Adam as much as he can with the land.

Sam remembers seeing the same look in Cathy's eyes when he was a child—she has the same eyes as a condemned criminal whose execution Sam witnessed. Sam recognizes there is something inhuman in her eyes. But he feels guilty for thinking such a thing, and resolves to help Adam as a kind of penance.

The next day at breakfast Sam tells Liza about Adam Trask hiring him to dig three wells, as well as build some windmills. She is skeptical, and doesn't like the idea that Sam is associating with a rich man, for richness begets idleness. She relents eventually, and Sam brings Tom and Joe with him when he returns to Adam's property two days later.

Liza is wary of wealth because she thinks it encourages a man to be idle. This plays into a larger discussion in this book about the relationship between wealth and happiness. In addition to Liza, many other characters will encounter this issue throughout the novel.

CHAPTER 17

The narrator muses about the nature of Cathy's monstrosity. He notes it is easy to say that Cathy was bad, but difficult to say why, for Cathy never had a common language with anyone.

The narrator is making an important point here about the nature of human understanding: understanding requires a common language. In other words, we can only understand that which we can apply to ourselves, to our own story.

Cathy's pregnancy advances quickly—he grows unusually large in the stomach for a woman her size. She sits quietly watching the flurry of activity around her. One day while Sam is drilling, Lee comes running outside and insists that Sam come inside to help—Cathy has gone into labor and Adam is losing his mind with excitement, fear, and worry. Sam tells Lee to calm down, and as they head to the house, they talk about Cathy. Lee explains that he's witnessed births before, but that Cathy's labor is strange, and if he were more old fashioned, he might call her a demon. Just before Sam goes into the house, Lee tells him he's been translating old Chinese poetry into English, and offers these translations to Sam to read. Sam says he would love to look at them.

This scene nicely illustrates the narrator's point about language above. Lee cannot find a word to describe Cathy—if he were more "old fashioned" he would call her a demon, but we get the sense that he finds this word inadequate. Cathy is simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar, for she is part—but only part—human. Lee's dexterity with language, his ability to translate ideas across cultures (like translating Chinese poetry), is a key part of his complex identity and of his understanding that storytelling is universal.

Sam goes into the bedroom and Cathy looks furious. He manages to get her to tell him how far apart her contractions are, though it is clear she hates Sam and resents his help. When the next contraction strikes she bites down on Sam's hand so hard he knows he will not be able to use it for weeks. Sam pours whiskey on the wound, and the baby is ready to be delivered. It is a boy—Sam swaddles the baby and tells Adam, who looks queasy. Sam asks for Lee, who comes in to help him clean up. Suddenly Sam sees that a second baby is coming. Sam delivers the second child as quickly as the first, and announces to Cathy that she has two sons. Cathy refuses to see them. Sam hears the hatred in her tone and tells Cathy he doesn't like her. Cathy ignores him and asks for Adam.

Here we see Cathy's monstrous behavior clearly on display. Her biting of Sam is animalistic and barbaric. What's more, her unwillingness to hold or even acknowledge her sons is detestable to Sam, who can no longer disguise his feelings for her. The birth of two healthy sons despite the conflicts and negativity that surrounds them is once again an affirmation of humanity's resilience in the face of hatred, anger, violence, and evil.

Lee tries to clean up Sam's wound, and they talk about Cathy. Sam says he "feels a dreadfulness coming" and Lee agrees, but both men worry they are being stupid and superstitious. Sam decides he will send for Liza to help with the twins, and if she notices anything about Cathy then they have real cause to worry.

Lee and Sam feel foolish for being as afraid as they are—their fear is irrational. But he novel is in many ways an affirmation of the value and importance of the irrational; not all understanding comes from rational thought.

Liza arrives a few hours later and stays for a week, cleaning the house, washing the children and helping Adam adjust. When she returns, Sam asks her how it went. Liza remarks that, though she can find no fault with Cathy, she dislikes her. Sam notes that Cathy has put a spell on Adam—that he can't leave her side, and has barely given a thought to the twins.

Liza also possesses the same irrational distrust of Catherine. Adam's inability to leave her side shows again that he is not seeing the real Cathy. His unflinching belief in her goodness threatens to destroy his entire family.

Cathy rests for a week, until one day Adam enters her room to find her holding a suitcase and wearing traveling clothes. She announces that she is leaving. Adam doesn't understand. She repeats herself, and when Adam tries to stop her, she pulls out a gun and shoots him in the shoulder. As he lies on the floor, injured, he hears her footsteps on the porch, and hears the crying of his sons; he's forgotten to feed them.

Finally Cathy makes her escape. Adam is caught entirely off guard, though she made her intentions quite clear. As Adam lies bleeding on the floor, the cries of his sons reveal his neglect: by believing blindly in the goodness of his wife he has failed to be a good father.

CHAPTER 18

The Salinas county sheriff investigates the shooting. At first he is suspicious of Adam, who won't tell him anything and who seems mentally disturbed. But eventually the sheriff hears that Catherine Trask has holed up in a whorehouse in Salinas. The sheriff decides not to tell Adam, and also to warn Catherine to keep her identity and whereabouts a secret, or he'll run her out of town.

The sheriff protects Adam from the truth; for now, the reality of his wife's character is hidden from him. But we have the sense as readers that eventually Adam will have to contend with these unpleasant realities—will the "true" story destroy him?

Sam comes to visit Adam, who sits alone on his porch with his arm and shoulder in a bandage. Adam tells him he will pay Sam for the wells, but that he doesn't want them anymore. Sam tells him he must "go through the motions"—he explains that though Adam feels dead inside, he must act like he is still alive, and eventually it will be true. Sam leaves, but not before promising Adam that he'll come back to see him.

Sam speaks to Adam as though Sam has been there himself. Remember that Sam has a lost love in Ireland. Sam was able to demonstrate resilience and courage in moving on with his life. The reader must ask if Adam is capable of the same resilience.

CHAPTER 19

There are three whorehouses in Salinas—one of which is run by a motherly-type woman named Faye. Her house becomes a refuge for adolescent boys who are eager to lose some of their young virtue. Faye is puzzled by a new girl—who calls herself Kate—who is not like any woman Faye had come across before. Kate is too pretty to need to prostitute herself, and yet she has clearly worked in a whorehouse before and is excellent at her work, attracting many new customers. What's more she helps selflessly around the house, hanging new curtains and comforting the other girls when they're feeling dejected. Faye begins to think of Kate as a daughter, and soon begins to wish that her "daughter" were not a whore.

"Kate," as Catherine is now calling herself, once again preys on the loneliness of those around her. In many ways a brothel is the perfect workplace for her. It is a place where lonely men betray themselves, their morals, their wives; it is a refuge for the darker and more despicable human vices. Kate manipulates Faye into thinking of her as a daughter—she wields the compassion and love of others as a weapon.

After Kate has been at the house for about a year, Faye asks her what the sheriff came to see her about shortly after she first arrived. Kate brushes the question off, but thinks back to that conversation in her head: she almost remembers it fondly. The Sheriff had told her to lay low; to dye her hair black; to tell no one of her identity. He warned her he would press charges as soon as she let her story get out. He had seen her immediately for what she was, and he dealt with her smartly and efficiently.

The sheriff recognizes Kate immediately for what she really is. We can imagine some of his perceptive power comes from his training: as the sheriff, he deals with criminals more than the average man. He is keenly aware of the kind of evil people are capable of, and has no trouble recognizing this evil in Kate.

CHAPTER 20

One afternoon Faye begs Kate to give up her work—she offers to give Kate a home and a life free from whoring. Kate gently turns her down, calling her "mother" as she does so, which makes Faye cry. Faye tells Kate she loves her, and Kate responds that she loves Faye too. Faye tells Kate to come back later—Faye has a surprise for her.

Kate finally calls Faye "mother"—a gesture she knows will have a huge impression on Faye, who has no children of her own and whose vulnerability Kate can easily exploit. Faye's loneliness makes her especially vulnerable to Kate's cruelty and evil manipulation.

That night Kate tells the girls not to come in to see Faye at all—for Faye is quite ill, but wants to keep it a secret. The Girls are worried but agree not to bother Faye. Then Kate puts on a pretty dress, takes a gold watch out of her dresser drawer, and goes to Faye's door. The room is decorated as if for a party. Faye is delighted to see Kate, and even more delighted when Kate gives her the watch. It is engraved "To C. With all my heart, from A," and Kate tells Faye it used to be her mother's watch.

Kate gives Faye the watch that Adam gave her. She weaves a web of lies and manipulation by exploiting the love and loneliness of those around her. The watch underscores that Adam's weakness—his blind desire for love and romance—is the same as Faye's weakness. She desires a daughter just as Adam desired a wife, and Kate is perfectly suited to exploit this desire.

Faye then tells Kate she is going to give her a present now. Faye takes out a sheet of paper and hands it to Kate: it is a will, in which Faye simply leaves all of her worldly possessions to Kate. Kate grows silent, and Faye asks her what's wrong. Kate says she doesn't like to think about Faye's death, and she doesn't know if she can accept such a present. Faye insists, and pours Kate a drink. Kate tries to refuse, saying she has always been made sick by alcohol of any kind. But Faye insists, and Kate takes a glass, then two, and she feels a change come over her.

Faye tells Kate that she has willed all of her belongings to her. It seems like this must have been Kate's master plan all along. The novel presents inheritance as dubious, a way of quantifying relationships that can be apart from the emotional bonds that typically unite family members. Anyone can be named in a will and receive an inheritance, but to truly consider someone family requires a much deeper bond.

Kate's filters and defenses break down. She begins to spit cruel insults at Faye, calling her fat and ugly and stupid, and forcing Faye to drink more and more liquor. Kate begins to detail to Faye what she does in the bedroom with her customers—she describes a depraved scene; Kate whips and humiliates men, who beg her for more pain, more degradation. Faye begins to howl loudly, and Kate shuts her up. Faye tells her to leave the house, to never come back. Kate pours more drink down Faye's throat, and Faye finally passes out.

Kate reveals the kind of work she's been doing at the brothel—it is even more depraved than Faye anticipated. Kate is not only offering men sex, she is offering them depravity, humiliation, and violence. Once again we see that Kate has exploited human loneliness in order to impose her evil influence.

Kate begins to sober up and a feeling of dread comes over her. Kate puts Faye in her bed and undresses her Then she takes a cloth soaked in ammonia and places it over Faye's mouth. The fumes wake Faye up, and Kate soothingly comforts her, telling her it's only a nightmare and to go back to sleep. Faye falls back into a stupor, and Kate waits a little while, then repeats this process. She draws Faye in and out of sleep, and every time Faye wakes up, Kate comforts her, saying that she's had a nightmare, and should go back to sleep. Faye comes to believe that it really was only a nightmare.

Kate ingeniously corrects her own mistake by drugging Faye and inducing strange dreams. This scene recalls the earlier scene where she drugged Adam in order to have sex with his brother Charles. As with Adam we get the sense that Faye is in fact asleep; that she has indulged in a dreamlike vision of Kate as her daughter.

CHAPTER 21

Kate begins to execute her plans, with characteristic slowness and patience. She spreads around the news of Faye's will to everyone in the house, then blames the cook for letting this secret out. Eventually he believes that he is to blame, and no one traces the rumor back to Kate. Then Kate goes to see the doctor because of kidney trouble. She goes early in the morning after the doctor has been up all night. He carelessly leaves the door to his medicine room open, and Kate steals a few bottles from it. She then suggests to Faye that, to save money, the house should preserve and can their own vegetables. Faye agrees. One afternoon Kate puts a small drop from one of the medicine bottles she stole into Faye's nightly tonic. Faye feels an uncomfortable fluttering in her heart, but it passes. Kate makes a great show of worry, and insists Faye get some rest.

Kate begins to unfold her plan in earnest. Her plan is masterful, detailed, and elaborate. Her virtuosic control of everyone and everything around her is a testament to her frightening power—maneuvers like this make Kate appear invincible. Is evil too great a force to be resisted? This passage has the effect of drawing out and rendering our own paranoia with respect to the sheer force and seductive allure of acting "bad" and being evil. Though this is ultimately a novel about the triumph of good over evil, Steinbeck goes to great lengths to show that evil is a worthy and dangerous adversary.

That night at supper Kate fixes Faye a meal of canned string bean salad. She mixes two drops from one of her bottles into Faye's string beans. Then she takes a swig of a different bottle and swallows it down before going to Faye's room. Soon after eating they both feel sick. Kate begins to wretch and vomit and Faye has similar spasms. They call the doctor, who sees the green beans on their plates and demands to know f they have been home-canned. The girls confirm that they have been, and the doctor becomes irate and tells them to throw all the cans away. A couple of days later he is sitting with Kate, and explains to her that the green beans were tainted with botulism. He tells Kate she will make it—her youth and health have protected her against the worst parts of the disease. But Faye is dying; she will not recover.

Note how hard Kate tries to appear innocent: she eve drugs herself so that she may appear to have some of the same symptoms as Faye. Though her medicine is not lethal, she nevertheless demonstrates a notable disregard for her own health and safety in order to take down Faye. We recognize that Kate does not care about herself so much as she cares about destroying others, and it's her hell-bent desire for destruction that makes her so powerful.

Kate goes in to see Faye, calling her mother, and stroking her check. She then puts some liquid from a small eyedropper into Faye's mouth. Faye's breathing slows until it stops. Kate goes out into the back and digs a small hole. She puts the glass bottles into the hole, stamps them into pieces with her feet, and covers them with dirt. In the days following Faye's death, Kate has to be "tied down to keep from hurting herself" She forgets completely about the will, and doesn't remember until one of the girls reminds her.

Kate is thorough in her deception until the end. She doesn't even mention Faye's will—she waits to be "reminded" by one of the girls. She has managed to pull off this entire endeavor while only leaving behind a few small crushed bottles. Once again, it seems as though Catherine might be invincible.

CHAPTER 22

Adam Trask has drawn into himself; Cathy's departure has caused a great sickness in his mind. For a while Lee and Sam did their best to help him, but eventually gave up, for Adam could not be reached. One day Sam sprains his back while working, which deeply disturbs him, for he has always been able to lift heavy bales of hay without any trouble. He goes to see the doctor, then afterwards visits his son Will, who now runs a successful store. At the store, Sam runs into Lee, and they go to have a drink together. Lee tells Sam that Adam has still not named his twins—he just calls them "they." Sam becomes quite angry, and promises Lee he will come to the Trask home and beat some sense into Adam. Lee says he will prepare a chicken to eat.

Adam Trask is one of the many characters in this novel to fall ill, only his is a disease of the mind brought on by despair at having lost Catherine. By failing to name his sons he has failed to acknowledge their existence, their humanity. Sam, a figure for human resilience, is predictably outraged by this failure, and vows to correct it. Though this is an impressive show of life and determination, this scene also shows the slow deterioration of Sam's body—his back has given out for the first time in his life. Evil can be overcome, but the effects of time cannot be.

Sam has to first convince Liza to let him visit Adam—she believes Adam is a bad influence and doesn't want her husband to associate with such a man. But when Liza hears that Adam has not given his sons any names, she tells Sam that he must not fail to get through to Adam. She lends him a bible so that he and Adam may go through it to find suitable names. Sam is surprised by his wife, and is filled with wonder and love for her.

Liza surprises her husband by not only allowing him to go see Adam but encouraging him. Liza has the same appreciation for human life and human triumph and redemption that Sam does—and Sam feels an overwhelming sense of love for her. Though she is not his great love, she is still deeply important to him. Their relationship is a testament to human strength.

Sam arrives at Adam's door, but Adam tells Sam he is unwelcome. Sam begins to shout at Adam, building up his anger, condemning him for failing to treat his boys like people. Sam even goes so far as to grab Adam by the throat, throwing him to the ground. Adam seems to come to his senses, and actually thanks Sam for abusing him. Sam cheerfully asks Adam if his performance was convincing—for Sam is not truly a violent man.

Sam must put on a great performance when he sees Adam. He is not a violent man but he is willing to make a show of violence for the greater good. It is possible that this is a commentary on violence and war more generally—how might we make sense of war if we believe human nature is ultimately good? Perhaps violence for a good cause is possible.

Sam and Adam go to look at the boys—Adam has never really looked into their faces before. Adam says he feels like he is waking up from a deep sleep. Sam says Adam has built Cathy up in his mind, but he's never really seen her for what she is. Sam then tells Adam he is getting well—some men refuse to get well because they believe their sickness has a kind of glory in it. But, he says, time will heal Adam if Adam will let it.

Sam, once again seeming to speak from experience, tells Adam that if he will let time heal him then it will—though time is destroying Sam's body, it will ultimately repair Adam's mind (assuming he allows it to). Sam also astutely points out that Adam loved an idealized version of Cathy and never knew the real Cathy.

Adam, Lee and Sam sit down with dinner and begin to consult the Bible for names. Sam suggests that Adam name his sons after the original sons of Adam: Cain and Abel. They turn to the story of Cain and Abel and discuss it at length. Cain feels rejected by God when God accepts Abel's sacrifice but not his, and in anger and jealousy he kills his brother, and is banished by God and sent east of Eden. Lee, Sam, and Adam all agree that the story contains truths about the nature of the human spirit. For Cain lived and bore children—Abel did not. Men are, in the end, descended from Cain. Lee says that any great and lasting story will feel deeply personal and familiar: Cain and Abel is one of these stories.

This is one if the most important passages in the novel. The three men delve into the Biblical story on which the entire novel is based. The story of Cain and Abel is important because it teaches us something universal about human nature—otherwise, as Lee says, we would not continue to tell this story. A story will only last if it is personal and familiar—which prompts the reader to evaluate the story he or she is currently reading: how does Steinbeck meet his own standards? What is deeply personal and familiar about East of Eden *itself?*

Eventually, though, Sam and Adam agree that the names Cain and Abel carry too much darkness in them, and. settle instead settle on Caleb and Aron. As Sam prepares to leave, Adam tell him his dream to build a garden has gone out of him. Sam says that this dream won't die until Adam dies—he commands Adam not to let it die. He mounts his horse, named Doxology, and rides away.

Though Adam's sons are not named after Cain and Abel they nevertheless bear their initials—just as Adam and Charles, and Adam and Cathy do. "Doxology" is a word that means a short hymn or verse in praise of God. This scene makes it clear that to praise God is to work tirelessly to understand the stories in the bible.

CHAPTER 23

Una Hamilton, one of Sam's daughters, marries a man who becomes obsessed with developing color photography. He succeeds, but along the way Una is poisoned (it is believed accidentally) by his chemicals, and she dies. Her death has an immense impact on Sam, who cannot think of death taking any part of his flesh. The other children are thriving, except for Tom, who keeps returning to the ranch. He and his father have deep and philosophical discussions about how to find meaning in the world.

Time rolls on: Una dies, a harsh and unpleasant reminder of mortality. What's more, she is killed by chemicals being used to develop new technology, which also draws our attention to the fast-paced change taking place in the American Technological landscape over time. Sam and Tom's minds are heavily weighed upon by these realities.

The narrator recalls that his sister Mary wanted desperately to be a boy. She was always athletic, and once when Uncle Tom came to visit, they begged him to tell them how to make Mary into a boy. When he did not have an answer for them, they grew disappointed—Tom was obviously disappointed in himself, too. He hated to let them down.

Mary is another example of Steinbeck's desire to break down gender stereotypes, to examine what we traditionally conceive of as feminine or masculine. Mary believes she is too strong and competitive to be a girl, and wishes desperately that things were different.

The difference between Sam and Tom is that Sam is able to find his way out of complex trains of thought unscathed. He does not get trapped by ideas. But Tom "tunneled like a mole among the thoughts" and cannot read a book without making something of a mess in his mind. Of all his family, Tom loves Dessie best, for she is so lighthearted that she balances out his seriousness. The dress shop she owns in town is a sanctuary for women, who, like men, need spaces where they can be not women, but human. At Dessie's shop the women they burp, fart, laugh, and shout.

Dessie's dress shop is also a pointed commentary about the role proscribed to women in 20th-century American society. A woman is feminine before she is human. Where men are allowed to be both men and be simply human, women are often denied this fundamental kind of expression. This is why Dessie's dress shop is so popular—it provides a vital outlet for women who are constrained by societal standards.

One day, however, Dessie falls in love. The narrator only knows that the affair is gray and terrible, and it leaved a hole in Dessie—the laughter never fully returns.

Once again we see that love can be a highly destructive force—it can even bring down someone as full of life as Dessie Hamilton.

On Thanksgiving in 1911, all of the Hamilton family gathers at the ranch. We learn the name of the narrator's father: Earnest Steinbeck. All the Hamilton children notice one thing immediately: that their father has grown old. They can hardly stand to think of a world without Sam in it, and Tom is the most upset of all. They agree that Sam's life on the ranch is too hard, and they devise a plan to allow Sam to live his life out in peace. They will each invite him to stay with them in succession, and this way they will keep him away from the ranch for his final months. Tom agrees to take over for his father and run the ranch.

This passage finally reveals that the narrator's last name is "Steinbeck." As the line between fictional narrator and historical author suddenly becomes less clear, we are forced to remember that we are reading a story. This scene also includes the unhappy realization that Sam Hamilton does not have much time left—even a man as full of life as Sam is still capable of growing old and dying—this is a fact especially hard for his children to accept.

When Sam receives an invitation from Olive a week later he knows immediately what is going on. He calls Tom in, and Tom admits the plan to him. Sam is soberly good humored about it—he tells Tom he knows where he is going, and he is content.

Sam has accepted his fate, however—he knows he cannot defeat time. His graceful acceptance of death is yet another heroic attribute of his character.

CHAPTER 24

Sam has some difficulty getting Liza to agree to go on vacation with him to visit their kids, but eventually she agrees. She is not bothered by death, because she believes she will simply receive her reward and live on in heaven, though she hopes there is not too much singing in heaven, for she would find that distasteful.

Liza believes she has worked diligently in this life to secure reward in the next one, and her strong sense of belief in eternity protects her from a fear of aging, illness, and death. Time doesn't scare her.

As Sam prepares himself to leave the ranch, likely for the last time, he memorizes all the rolling hills and mountains and every detail of the landscape. He saves his visit to the Trask place for last. Lee and Adam ask Sam to stay for dinner and he agrees. Sam looks at Adam's unplanted land and asks Adam if he feels shame for letting his land go to waste. Sam realizes Adam has never let Cathy go. Sam says that the only way to live your life when bad memories creep into your mind is to resolve to make up some good new memories, to love your current circumstances with dedication and fierceness, and to move forward always.

Sam offers some final advice to Adam—his words are the key to overcoming hardship. Sam has succeeded in life because in the face of bad memories he has resolved to make new, good ones. Sam's heroism is also humanity's heroism; in Sam Hamilton, the reader can find an affirmation of human bravery, strength, and resilience. The question becomes one about Adam—can he overcome despair and evil the way Sam has?

Sam goes in to see the boys—it has been ten years since he helped to name them. Aron has dropped the second A from his name and Caleb prefers to go by Cal. Aron raises rabbits, and Cal has taken to gardening—this makes Sam smile knowingly.

Cal and Aron have become neatly aligned with Cain and Abel—Cal, like Cain, is a gardener, while Aron, like Abel, raises livestock. Sam is amused by the coincidence.

Over dinner Lee says he dedicated many years to thinking about the story of Cain and Abel. He noticed that two American translations of the bible are in an interesting kind of disagreement. When God says he likes Abel's sacrifice better than Cain's, he tells Cain not to be angry. One translation says that God tells Cain "Do thou [overcome sin]," the other translation says that god's words are "Thou shalt [overcome sin]." One is an order, the other is a prediction. Lee brought the problem to some other old members of the Lee family. They were fascinated, and together they worked to learn Hebrew. The Hebrew word used in the story is "timshel," which is best translated as "thou mayest."

This is another crucial passage, containing one of the book's most important arguments. Wrapped up in Lee's words are Steinbeck's thoughts on human nature, personal agency, the nature of moral choice, and the relationship between good and evil. Humanity is defined by its ability to choose between good and evil—we are all capable of both, and our greatness lies in this choice.

Lee triumphantly explains that "thou mayest" captures what makes men great—they have the choice to overcome sin. "He can choose his course and fight it through and win." Lee settles back in his chair triumphantly. He says "I have no bent towards gods. But I have a new love for that glittering instrument, the human soul...it is always attacked and never destroyed, because 'Thou mayest."

This moment deftly illustrates the role that religion plays in the novel's philosophy: Lee is perhaps the most capable interpreter of the Bible in this entire book, but his strongest faith is in humanity, not God. His faith in the "human soul" translates to a faith in the power of stories.

As Sam is leaving, he tells Adam he has a medicine that might cure him and might kill him. Adam says he wants that medicine, and Sam tells Adam that Cathy is the owner of the most violent and depraved whorehouse in Salinas. Adam is left reeling and Sam leaves. Lee goes with him; he wants to spend a few more minutes riding with Sam. Lee says he can see that Sam has made up his mind that he will die soon. Sam says too many men think of life ending in defeat, and Lee says that it is because we are too rich—rich men die of despair. Sam reflects on Lee's discovery of the word "timshel"—and tells Lee that he, Sam, has forced Adam to "live or get off the pot" and in doing so he has made his great choice. Lee says goodbye and gets off the cart, shouting farewell to Sam as he drives away.

Sam's departure is saturated with a variety of thematic meanings: his decision to tell Adam about Cathy is in fact a gift to Adam, for now Adam is being "forced to live." He must contend with the reality of human depravity and evil, and in doing so he will have the chance to overcome it as Sam has. Lee's speculation that wealth has hurt Adam more than helped him is a classic stance against materialism. And finally, Sam's acceptance of death, his belief that death is not a "defeat," is a solution to the anxiety that comes along with time's passage and with our awareness of our mortality.

CHAPTER 25

The following March, Tom receives a telegram at the ranch and knows what it will say before he opens it: Sam has died. The funeral is in Salinas and it is somber. Though he hadn't wanted to come, Adam feels compelled to attend, for he cannot believe Sam is dead. He leaves the burial at the cemetery early and walks to a bar. He asks the bartender about a place called "Kate's." The bartender tells him to not mess with a place like Kate's, and tells him to go to a different one next door to Kate's place. Adam asks him for directions.

Sam's death forces Adam into action—it is as though the death of a man like Sam convinces him that he does not have an infinite amount of time to learn how to be truly alive. He goes straight from Sam's funeral to search of Kate, an act symbolic of Sam's influence on him.

Adam arrives at Kate's in the evening. The woman at the door tells Adam that Kate is not available, and Adam tells the girl to tell Kate that Adam Trask is here to see her. When Kate hears this she agrees to see Adam, though she is wary. When Adam sees her he smiles—this surprises Kate and she demands to know why he is smiling. He says that now that he has seen her, he can forget her. Kate notices that Adam looks at her fattened ankles and her wrinkled neck—this makes her furious. She can tell Adam is drunk, and she gets out a bottle of rum and two glasses. Adam refuses to drink from his glass until Kate has finished hers. The alcohol once again makes her cruel. She tells Adam she is glad Sam Hamilton is dead, for she hated that man with all her being.

Adam's reunion with Kate does not go as we might have expected it to. How do we explain Adam's relief and happiness upon seeing his wife as the owner of the city's most depraved whorehouse? Adam has finally let go of his idealized version of Catherine. In seeing her, and accepting her, for what she really is, Adam is able to overcome her. The underlying lesson here is that we must recognize and really know evil in order to overcome it. Looking the other way is not a solution.

Adam cannot stop smiling. He asks Kate why she has so much hate in her. Kate tells him ever since she was a little kid she has seen the hypocrisy in people, people who profess to be good but inevitably give in to their most base impulses. She loves to rub men's noses in their own nastiness. She shows Adam a stack of photos she has in her desk—they are photos of some of the most respected men in the county doing depraved things with women in her house. Adam tells her he is beginning to think she is "no human at all." She hates the good in people because she cannot understand it.

Kate believes that people only pretend to be good, and she hates the hypocrisy and the lying more than anything else. But Adam recognizes that Kate doesn't believe people are good because she herself cannot be good. She cannot understand what she has not experienced. She does not understand human nature, that someone can contain both good and evil, and because of that she hates it.

Kate changes gears and tries to seduce Adam. Adam is not susceptible to her charm anymore. He notes that Kate has not asked about her sons. Kate tells Adam he might not even be the boys' father—she maliciously reveals to him that she slept with Charles after drugging Adam with her medications. Adam closes his eyes for a moment, but then laughs suddenly. Even if this is true, he says, it doesn't matter at all. When Adam leaves, still smiling, Kate's eyes are desolate.

Even more significantly, Adam is unfazed by the notion that Charles is actually the father of his sons. Note that if this is the case, then Adam, like Abel, has failed to conceive, where Charles has lived to bear sons. Adam's recognition that "it doesn't matter at all" is an acknowledgement that he is related to his sons no matter what—that he shares his very humanity with them, and that that is enough.

CHAPTER 26

Adam should have been sad and bitter after Sam's death and his conversation with Kate, but instead he feels euphoric. He goes to see Will Hamilton, who has been selling cars in town for a while. Adam wants to buy a Ford. Will agrees to sell him the next one he gets his hands on. Adam asks how Liza is doing and Will speaks of his mother with more admiration than he ever spoke of his father: she is doing fine, cleaning and feeding people with so much efficiency and capability that one can't help but be impressed by her.

Adam moved on with his life by purchasing an automobile—the machine of the future. Liza continues to be, as is typical of her character, exceedingly competent and capable. Her strength, though different from Sam's, is undeniable, and she is a source of inspiration to those around her.

When Adam returns home Lee notices a change in him. Adam tells Lee he wants to get to know his sons better—Lee says Adam will really like them. He then asks Adam to let him go—Lee would like to quit, now that Adam is recovered. He wants to start the bookstore in San Francisco that he's been dreaming of starting. Adam is saddened by this, but tells Lee that he is of course free to go. Lee agrees to stay around for a while to help Adam tie up some loose ends around the house, but will depart as soon as things are more settled.

Lee, now that he sees his servant duties are done, asks to leave the family. Though Lee has served this family for many years, he clearly does not consider himself a part of it. Lee is capable of understanding people from a distance, but he doesn't yet understand himself as part of a community.

CHAPTER 27

The two boys creep through the Trask's yard with bows and arrows, hunting wild rabbits. They kill one—Cal offers to let Aron tell everyone he shot the rabbit, though Cal's arrow is clearly the one that hit it. There is something taunting in Cal's voice—Aron can never understand why Cal acts this way.

Now we see that Cal possesses some of the manipulative, hypercompetitive tendencies that both Catherine and Charles have demonstrated over the course of the novel. Cal and Aron become the new figures for Cain and Abel.

Cal tells Aron he heard some men saying that their mother didn't die—that she is still alive, and that she'd run away from them. Aron says these men must be liars—father has told them their mother is in heaven. Cal says he believes their mother is alive, and vows to one day bring her home. Aron is deeply upset by the thought of his father and Lee lying to him, but Cal shows no emotion.

Aron, like Adam, has trouble imagining that his loved ones are capable of evil. His mother could not have left him, his father and Lee could not have lied to him. Cal, on the other hand, already seems comfortable with the reality of human shortcomings—perhaps because he has already recognized these same shortcomings in himself.

A storm comes on suddenly, and the rain pours down on the boys. They run back to the house and notice a strange carriage in their drive—they have visitors. When they go in Adam explains to the boys that their visitors got lost in the storm and have taken cover with them. The family consists of a husband and wife and a young girl. Aron is struck by the girl and is almost too shy to introduce himself. Cal snickers at Aron's awkwardness. The young girl's name is Abra. The two boys and girl go out to play. As they leave they hear the visiting couple asking Adam if he is interested in moving closer to the city to get his sons a better education.

We see Aron begin to fall in love—he is rendered speechless by Abra. Cal's laughter at his brother's expense is deeply familiar—he seems to scorn this weakness in his brother just as Catherine scorned the same kind of weakness in his father. Aron is already portrayed as sweet and innocent, Cal as cruel and vindictive. But, as we will see, the picture is far more complicated than this.

The three children test their power over one another once they get outside. Abra clearly wants control, and gains it quickly, bossing the twins around. Cal can tell immediately that Abra likes Aron—he can see the beginnings of love forming in her eyes, for Aron is a strikingly beautiful boy. He decides to punish her for liking Aron better.

Cal, like Cain, wants to punish his brother for being better liked. Cain killed his brother because he didn't feel loved by God—loneliness and rejection beget evil and violence in Cain, and the same is true of Cal.

Aron offers to give Abra the rabbit they shot as a gift—when he goes inside to wrap it up, Cal tells Abra that there will be something vicious in the box—that Aron is putting in something alive along with the dead rabbit. Aron finally brings the box out and hands it to Abra—she looks scared, and Cal accuses her of wetting her pants. She climbs in the carriage with her parents, and Aron sees her throw the box out by the side of the road without opening it. He had put something in there besides the rabbit—a note, asking her to marry him.

Cal plays a cruel joke on his brother and Abra. He exploits both of their weaknesses to scare and humiliate them. His cruelty is remarkable, but the readers should note how natural it is, too—there is nothing unusual or unfamiliar about jealousy between brothers, or about a young boy teasing a young girl. Steinbeck is making sense of Cal's evil by pointing out that it is deeply human, and very natural.

CHAPTER 28

At dinner the boys tell their father about Abra, and ask where their mother's grave is. Adam tells them it is in the east, and that some people like to be buried where they were born. Adam asks the boys if they might like moving to the city to go to better schools. Aron likes the idea, because he knows Abra lives in Salinas. Cal wonders what would happen to their ranch. Adam tells them to think about it and sends them to bed.

Aron is already ready to move to the city in order to be closer to Abra. The reader should keep in mind that Catherine's brothel is in Salinas—so there is an ominous note in Adam's suggestion. Why would he consider moving his sons closer to their mother? The reader is asked to speculate about his possible motives.

Lee and Adam discuss the risks of moving to Salinas—the boys would be closer to their mother, and they might find out about her. Lee says that Adam shouldn't hide the truth from his children: Lee's father never hid anything from him. Lee then tells the story of his mother, who posed as a man in order to remain with his father and to sneak onto a ship bearing railroad workers from China across the Pacific to the United States. His father was worried for her, but also delighted not to be separated. She worked hard and grew strong just like the rest of the men. One day she told Lee's father that she was pregnant, and they began to make plans for their escape. But Lee's mother went into labor while she was pounding in a stake and the other working men—who had not seen or been with a woman in so long, who were crazy like animals—attacked her, ravaged her, and killed her. Almost as penance for their crime, they agreed to help raise Lee, and made him one of the best cared for babies that ever lived.

Lee believes that the boys ought to be told the truth about their mother—perhaps Adam agrees on some level, and that is why he is considering the move. The story of Lee's parents is tremendously important. His mother defied convention and not only passed as a man but proved to be just as strong and as capable as one. Lee's birth revealed his mother as a woman and the other men, giving into their base impulses, destroyed her. But their evil was followed by penance. They cared for Lee as if he was their own son. Depravity is followed by redemption, sin is followed by virtue.

That night Adam writes a letter to Charles—the first one in roughly ten years. He asks Charles to come see him—Charles is a good farmer, and he could make the garden that Adam failed to make. Adam sends the letter off and is already anxious for a reply.

Adam tries finally to get in touch with his brother after years of non-communication. He believes his brother can build the garden that he failed to build—he finds hope in family.

CHAPTER 29

A few days later, the Ford that Adam wanted to buy arrives. A mechanic comes along to try and teach Adam how to use the vehicle. He is disdainful of Adam's ignorance of internal combustion engines and has little patience for his questions. As he leaves he tells Adam to study the manual under the seat.

Adam realizes that transitioning headlong into the future isn't as easy as buying a Ford. Adam has to adjust to using the car, and, like many transitions, it is fraught with misunderstanding and difficulty.

CHAPTER 30

A week after the driving lesson, Adam, Lee and the boys are driving the car around, and stop by the post office. There is a letter from Adam from an east coast law firm. Adam reads the letter slowly: it says his brother is dead, and has left all of his fortune to Adam and his wife, assuming she is still living. Adam can barely remember how to start the car—Lee gently reminds him, and they head home.

Suddenly Adam's dream of reuniting with his brother is shattered—he must move on with his life without Charles. Lee and the boys are now his only remaining family. Adam must find truth, love, and comfort with the three of them—that is his only option moving forward.

The boys pretend to drive the parked car as Lee prepares dinner. Aron asks Cal why Cal insists on doing sneaky, tricky things. He knows Cal said something to Abra to make her throw the rabbit away—he doesn't care what Cal said, he only wants to know why Cal felt the need to say anything. Cal is suddenly overcome by a painful feeling in his heart. He longs for Aron to love him, and he feels ashamed at being found out.

Cal's character becomes vastly more complicated—we see that he does have a good side, a fierce desire to be loved; he is capable of guilt shame and regret. Cal is more than his cruel and jealous impulses—he is complicated, sensitive, and human.

After the boys go to bed Adam and Lee talk about Charles's letter. They realize that because Adam and Cathy have never divorced, the way the will is written stipulates that Cathy has a right to half of the inheritance. Lee asks Adam what he plans to do. Adam says he doesn't know, and that he'll have to think about it. Lee says that Adam has already made up his mind; Adam denies this, but Lee smiles and says "Bull shit!" as he leaves the room.

Lee knows that Adam will give Cathy her share of the inheritance because Adam seems almost incapable of deceit or theft. Though he has been wronged by Catherine in many more ways than one, his sense of fairness will not allow him to keep the money if it belongs to her.

Cal sneaks away from the door of the room where Adam and Lee have been talking—he's heard the whole thing. He quietly sneaks back to the room he shares with his brother, and says a prayer. He begs the lord to make him like Aron, to not make him mean and lonely. Aron wakes up, and asks Cal what he hears while he was listening at the door. Cal says that he only heard father and Lee planning to send fresh flowers to their mother's grave on the east coast. They will pack them in ice to preserve them, and they will look lovely and new when they arrive. As he tells this lie, Cal's mind is crying all along: "don't let me be mean."

In this very touching scene, Cal discovers that his father and Lee have, in fact, been lying to him, and that his mother is still alive. He begs God not to make him mean—he is fearful of the darkness inside of him and wishes to be good like Aron. When Aron hears him praying, Cal, in an incredibly kind gesture, keeps the news of their mother secret and tells Aron a happy story about Adam and Lee sending flowers to their mother's grave. Cal protects his brother instead of punishing him.

CHAPTER 31

The next day, Adam goes to see Kate about the inheritance. He tells her she is entitled to half of the money, and insists that he has no objective other than to inform her. She is suspicious of him, and pokes and prods him in various ways to try to discover his objective. But he has none—he is simply doing what he believes is fair. Even Adam is surprised and impressed with his total lack of emotion. Adam tells Kate she doesn't believe he could be fair to her because she doesn't understand fairness. And she doesn't believe he loved her because she can't understand love. He tells her she is only part of a human, and she cannot understand in other what she does not recognize in herself.

As Lee Predicted, Adam's sense of fairness does not allow him to keep Kate's share of Charles inheritance. Kate is completely incapable of understanding this impulse, for she was literally born without a sense of fairness, debt, or duty. She cannot even understand love—she perceives it as a weakness and a nuisance and nothing more. Once again we are told Catherine is only part human—she cannot understand human benevolence because she has none of it within her.

On his way back from the house, Adam stops at the Steinbeck's house. Little Mary and John peek out through the door at him—the reader now knows that the occasional first person narrator in this novel is that little boy John, whose full name is John Steinbeck. Adam introduces himself to Olive, explaining that Sam and Liza helped him deliver his sons. He simply wants to offer his condolences to Liza, who is staying with Olive at the moment. When Liza hears that Adam is thinking of moving to Salinas, she tells him to go see Dessie, who is thinking of selling her house and moving to the ranch to be with Tom. Adam agrees.

This passage is most notable because it includes the narrator's full name: John Steinbeck. Note that this passage is not told in first person—little John is referred to in a third-person omniscient voice. Once again, the author's decision to draw attention to the name of the narrator "John Steinbeck" has the effect of reminding the reader that he or she is holding a book written by John Steinbeck—we are reminded of the fact that we are reading a story.

Adam goes straight from the Steinbeck's house to Dessie's house. He goes to a little place across the street from Dessie's to eat dinner, and runs into Will. Adam explains to Will that Dessie may be selling her house to him and moving in with Tom—At this news Will becomes angry and says he doesn't trust Tom. He believes Tom has been acting crazy ever since Sam's death. His defiance only lasts a moment though, and he doesn't speak of it any more.

Tom needs Dessie's company because he has been so lonely after the death of his father. Will doesn't like this, not seeming capable of understanding sadness and loneliness the same way that Tom, Sam, and Dessie do. Will's character is much like Liza's—ruthlessly practical, and often judgmental.

CHAPTER 32

Dessie, like all of the Hamiltons, is capable of great versatility except when it comes to love. Though Dessie tries to remain unchanged after her sordid love affair, everyone can see that the light has gone out of her eyes, and her company begins to make people sad. Will comes to see Dessie after his conversation with Adam, and asks her not to move to the ranch—he thinks it is too lonely there, and he can't stand the thought of her being alone with the strange and brooding Tom. Dessie laughs and comforts him. "Let me decide" she tells him softly. "I've lost something. I want to try to find it again."

Will even goes so far as to beg Dessie not to go live with Tom. But Will cannot understand what Dessie is going through because he has never experienced loss like she and Tom have. He had no lost love, and the death of his father did not upset him very deeply. He is a businessman—his passion is for business, not for people. And though he clearly cares about his sister, they cannot understand each other.

When Dessie moves back to the ranch, Tom meets her at the train station; he is clearly elated to see her and anxious that everything be perfect for her return to the ranch. As they drive up the road, Dessie notices a small card stuck in a bush. Tom pulls over to it and lets her pluck it out: it says welcome home. Tom coyly denies putting it there and Dessie laughs. There are similar cards all up the pathway. When they round the crest of the hill Dessie looks out over the landscape with delight: whitewashed stones are arranged on the opposing hill to spell out, in huge letters, "Welcome home, Dessie." She laughs and cries and the same time, and holds Tom close.

Dessie's homecoming, with Tom's thoughtful decorations, is one of the most moving moments in the novel. Dessie and Tom, who have struggled against the weight and pain of loneliness and loss, take refuge in each other's humor, affection, and generosity. Their relationship is a testament to the strength and power of family and companionship.

Dessie has been bothered by stomach pains for quite some time, but hides them from Tom. He has cleaned the house immaculately for her, and the two of them begin to recover emotionally in each others' company. They make plans to see Europe; they will save money for one year, and then they will set out on a great adventure together.

Time has taken its toll on Dessie and she has become ill, but hides her pain from Tom so that the two of them can feel comfortable making plans for the future. Believing she has more time left gives her energy, and hiding her illness protects Tom from more pain.

CHAPTER 33

Tom grows happier and happier, and Dessie is glad to see him improving, but becomes even more convinced that she cannot confide in him about her illness. One night they have an uncharacteristically frank conversation about love. Tom says he has never been in love, and the whorehouses provide little comfort to him. Dessie feels saddened by this, and wishes Sam were still alive, for he could have pulled the greatness out in Tom. They change the subject and devise a plan to raise money for their trip to Europe.

Tom and Dessie are lonely but in different ways—Dessie because she has lost love, and Tom because he has not learned how to find it. Dessie believes Tom has a greatness in him—a potential—that remains unrealized. She believes her father could force Tom into living, rather like he forced Adam Trask into living. They continue to believe in the future—it helps them keep going.

The next day Tom goes to see Will about his plan to raise money for a great trip, and Will shoots him down. Tom leaves feeling dejected. When he arrives home he sees Dessie curled up in pain. He fixes her some salts and makes her drink them. She cannot eat dinner, and the pain in her stomach grows worse and worse. She calls Tom into her room in the middle of the night. He sits with her and dozes off a little. When he wakes up, Dessie is barely conscious and her stomach is knotted and hard. He runs to the neighbors house, breaking down their door so that he can use their phone. The doctor asks him what he has done; when Tom says he's given her salts, the doctor calls him a "goddam fool."

In a particularly tragic turn of events, Tom kills Dessie accidentally by treating her stomach pains with the incorrect medicine. Steinbeck has made the point over and over again that life can be cruel, and that it demands overcoming seemingly insurmountable setbacks. Dessie's death is a perfect example of the kind of challenge that might either make a man or break him. Steinbeck's audience had just lived trough a second world war—so the idea that death and destruction are an inevitable part of life would have rung especially true to them.

A week after Dessie's funeral, Tom returns to the ranch. His sins announce themselves in his head over and over: Vanity Lust, Laziness, Gluttony—and lastly and most terribly, Murder. He writes a note to Will, asking him to tell Liza he was kicked by a horse. He mails the letter, and when he returns to the house he shoots himself in the head.

Tom, in the end, cannot clear this hurdle. His final act, however, is a kind one—he protects his mother from the knowledge of his suicide. Though Tom never pursued love, he is one of the novel's most loving characters.

CHAPTER 34

Narrator John Steinbeck muses about the nature of all stories. He concludes that "All novels, all poetry, are built on the never ending contest in ourselves of good an evil. And it occurs to me that evil must constantly respawn, while good, while virtue, is immortal."

After one of the most tragic chapters has finished, The novel unequivocally affirms a belief in the ultimate triumph of virtue. The placement of this chapter is just as important as its content: we can overcome events as sad, as unfair, and as tragic as the death of Dessie Hamilton because human virtue will always triumph over evil.

CHAPTER 35

Lee helps Adam make the move to Salinas, and afterwards says his goodbyes. As per his previous agreement with Adam, Lee is off to start his bookstore now that Adam has moved and no longer needs Lee's help. Adam barely has time to remind Lee to write before Lee is out the door. Aron and Cal make a bet about Lee's departure; Cal believes Lee is gone forever, and Aron is sure Lee will come back to them within a month. Lee in fact returns in only six days. When asked why he returned by Adam, Lee replies "Nothing happened to me. I got lonesome. That's all. Isn't that enough?" He then tells Adam that he is "incomparably, incredible, overwhelmingly glad to be home. I've never been so goddam lonesome in my life."

Lee leaves, but leaving makes him realize that he hasn't simply been a servant in the Trask household—the Trasks are like family to him, and when he goes away from them he realizes how terrible loneliness truly is. He calls the Trask house "home"—Lee has spent so much time analyzing humanity in the abstract that it has taken him this long to experience *his own humanity, to see himself as a part of the whole.*

CHAPTER 36

In Salinas, Cal and Aron begin their 7th grade education at their new school Cal is respected by everyone—teachers and classmates can see he is smart—but he is not well liked. Aron on the other hand is loved by everyone. And Aron sets to work immediately courting his beloved Abra Bacon. She avoids him for a while, but then finally allows him to walk with her one day after school. They go to sit in the shade and secrecy under a willow tree, and make their plans to be married. bra suggests they play house under the willow tree to practice. Aron asks Abra if she will pretend to be his mother. She agrees, and holds his head against her and strokes his hair, calling him her "little baby." Aron unexpectedly breaks down sobbing. Abra continues to quietly comfort him.

We can already see that Abra and Aron's romance is fraught with dysfunction. Aron is using Abra to fill a void left by his missing mother. They are both too young to realize what is happening, but their young love showcases how vulnerable loneliness can make us. Though Aron is loved by everyone in school, he still feels a longing for connection.

Abra tells Aron that she has heard rumors that his mother is still alive, and that she has just run away. She tells him it is a secret, and that he must not tell anyone that she knows this information. Aron agrees, and she kisses him and tells him she loves him, then runs home.

Abra represents a kind of coming of age for Aron—she has the capacity to teach him about various vaguely dangerous realities: about sex, love and passion, but also about his mother and her whereabouts.

Aron is disturbed: either his mother is dead, or his father and Lee or liars, which makes them dead in a different kind of way. He cannot stomach the thought of that, and concludes that Abra simply heard some incorrect information. He pushes the thoughts from his mind. That night, as Adam reads in his chair, Aron puts his hand on his father's shoulder gently, and sweetly tells him goodnight before he goes to bed.

Aron, like Adam, demonstrates a remarkable talent for refusing to see negativity, deceit, or evil in the world around him. As Adam once did, he uses stories to protect himself from the truth—rather than using stories to understand the truth. Like Adam, he is all good without the bad.

CHAPTER 37

As time passes, Adam becomes enamored of various new technologies. He buys a Victor Victrola (a new music player) and subscribes to various scientific journals. Eventually he becomes obsessed with the idea od refrigeration. He studies it and begins to daydream about the possibilities. One day he invites Will Hamilton over—he wants to discuss something with him. He reveals to Will his plan: he will buy the Salinas ice plant, and use refrigeration techniques to ship fresh lettuce clear across the country on a train for the first time ever. Will becomes angry—he chastises Adam for not thinking things through, for not giving any consideration to sound business practice. Will says that war is brewing in Europe, and that beans and other imperishables are going to be far more in demand than fresh lettuce in the winter. He calms himself down and is proud when he leaves that he gave Adam such sound advice.

The disagreement between Will and Adam is another example of the novel's stance against materialism. Adam wants to create because he is interested, he is enthusiastic, and he is excited by the prospect of solving problems. Will cannot understand such enterprise—he is a businessman, and the only justification he understands is profit. He suggests Adam look for ways to profit off the impending war instead of filling his head with wild ideas about invention and innovation. He genuinely believes he is doing Adam a favor; but in reality he is discouraging curiosity and engagement in favor of the pursuit of profit.

Later that year Adam executes his great plan. Many major businessmen are excited about the venture, but no one wants to invest until they see that it works. Adam packs his lettuce in ice and the train sets off—and an almost impossibly unlucky series of events come to pass. The train is delayed over and over again, and the trip is several days longer than it should be. The result is six full carloads of rotted, soggy lettuce. Now, in hindsight, Everyone dismisses Adam's idea as stupid and foolish. Even so, and despite the fact that he has squandered most of his fortune on his failed plan, Adam remains in good spirits, deciding to keep the ice factory.

Adam's experiment is a failure, but not because of any fault on his own part. His ideas were sound, and that's all that matters to Adam. Though he has lost his fortune, he is not concerned with such things. Like Sam Hamilton, Adam can live a fulfilled, meaningful, happy life without becoming particularly wealthy. He is happy to do work so long as it is interesting and meaningful, even if it doesn't make him rich.

Aron takes the failure much harder than his father. He is ridiculed in school and feels ashamed that he is no longer wealthy. Aron feels as though he cannot hold his head up in school, and tells Abra that he hates his father. Abra chides him for saying such things, and Aron says he wants to escape Salinas. He buries himself in his studies and begins to perform well in school. As for Cal, knowledge has always come so easily to him that he finds it hard to be engaged by his coursework. He grows tall and restless, and a darkness can be seen in his face.

Aron does not take kindly to the idea that his father is fallible. He dreams of escaping Salinas—Aron is, like Adam once was, an escapist. He would rather look away from the harsh realities of life than experience them, endure them, and overcome them. Cal, on the other hand, seems to inhabit this kind of darkness perpetually. Their reenactment of the Cain and Abel story continues.

CHAPTER 38

Cal craves affection, but it seems Aron is always better loved than he is. He does not have friends and lives his life alone. He takes to wandering about town late at night—people find it odd, but he doesn't seem to be making trouble, and so it is tolerated. One night Cal meets up with the town drunk, who becomes confused about who Cal is and invites him to go to Kate's place with him. Cal goes. What Cal sees the women doing at Kate's doesn't make him sick, but the faces of the men who watch them does.

Cal suffers from loneliness just like everyone else. Eventually his wandering lands him in his mother's whorehouse. Notice how Cal is not disgusted by the acts of the women, but rather by the expressions on the faces of the men watching. Depravity doesn't revolt him; the men who succumb to depravity do. Cal is afraid he is like these men, that he will not be able to resist his darker impulses.

Following this incident Cal approaches Lee and boldly tells him he knows where his mother is. Lee answers all of Cal's questions truthfully, and Cal learns the story of his mother's violent departure. Cal asks Lee what his mother is like, and Lee tells him she is missing something: kindness or conscience perhaps. But, Lee continues, Adam has almost too much kindness and conscience in him, and when Cathy left, something died inside Adam. Cal begins to shake, and Lee asks him what is the matter. Cal tells Lee he loves his father. Lee says he loves Adam too. Then Cal reveals his worry: that he has his mother's evil in him. Lee takes Cal by the shoulders and shakes him, telling him everyone has evil in them, but everyone has good in them too, and Cal must always remember this. Cal agrees. Cal knows he can never tell Aron about his mother—Aron is not strong enough to handle it.

Cal receives important advice from Lee: everyone has evil in them. Everyone is like Cathy Trask in some respect. But Cal undoubtedly has good in him too—his desire to be good is a testament to his goodness, for we are defined by our choices. Though he and his father are not alike, Cal loves his father deeply—he loves him so much it makes him shake and cry. The reader can see that there is something ominous in this love—for God's rejection of Cain drove him to commit murder, and it is obvious that, should Cal be rejected by his father, it would upset him terribly as well.

CHAPTER 39

One night Cal is caught gambling and put in jail overnight. His father comes to pick him up in the morning. Instead of getting angry, Adam seems apologetic. He tells Cal they should get to know each other better; Adam resolves to be a better father. Cal hesitatingly opens up to Adam. He talks about Aron's relationship with Abra; he tells his father that he loves his brother; but that he feels Aron needs to be protected from the evils of the world. Cal tells him Aron is thinking of going to college, and Cal says he wants to help pay for it. Adam is pleased—he tells Cal he thought he hated Aron. Cal says he used to have hatred for many people, but now he cannot hate. He lets it slip that he does not even hate his mother, revealing to Adam that he knows of Catherine's whereabouts. Adam responds calmly, and asks if Aron knows. Cal swears he will do everything in his power to keep this information from Aron. Adam tells Cal he trusts him.

Cal and his father finally get to know each other—Adam makes a concerted effort to learn about Cal. Adam is, notably, most pleased by Cal's love for and commitment to protecting his brother Aron. Adam and Aron are kindred spirits; Cal is different, and not so well understood by Adam. But by serving Aron, Cal feels he is serving Adam, and he wants his father's acceptance more than anything else. By swearing to his father that Cal will protect Aron from the truth about Catherine, Cal agrees to become "his brother's keeper"—once again the parallel to the biblical story strengthens, and as it does, the tension in the story grows.

This affection and acceptance from his father puts Cal in such a bright mood that Lee thinks Cal has a girlfriend. Cal takes to following Catherine around town when she runs her errands once a week—he feels the more he knows about his enemy the safer he is. One day Kate turns around and demands to know why Cal has been following her. Cal can think of nothing to tell her but the truth. She is shocked for a moment, but then asks him to come back to her house.

Cal uses fatherly love to replace romantic love to an extent. This underscores how deeply important Cal's father's acceptance is to Cal. Cal devotes himself to the protection of his brother, which means he must "know his enemy." This is a metaphorical way of saying that Cal must know evil in order to fight it.

When they are settled in Kate's office, Kate asks Cal what he wants. He says he doesn't want anything. He tells her that Aron, his brother, looks like her. He asks her why she shot his father—she simply explains that she needed to leave and he was in her way. Cal cautiously asks her if as a child she remembers feeling different. The question causes her to close off to him, and this prompts a great relief in Cal. He tells her he'd been afraid that her evil was in him. But now he knows he is his own person. She yells at him to get out. Cal can see she is afraid and tells her he is glad she is afraid.

Finally reunited with his mother, Cal comes to several important realizations about the nature of good and evil and himself. Cal sees that there is something familiar in his mother, but he also sees that he is "his own person"—he realizes his identity and his choices are not defined by his heritage or his past. Catherine is scared because she sees good in Cal, and she is frightened by what she can't understand.

CHAPTER 40

After her meeting with Cal, Kate calms herself by touching a small vial she keeps hanging on a chain around her neck. Inside the vial is a lethal dose of morphine; it brings her comfort. She thinks back to the time shortly after she had collected Charles' inheritance. An old employee of Faye's, named Ethyl, had come to see her. She told Kate she'd found bottles buried in the yard after Faye passed away. Kate gave her 100 dollars and sent her away.

Kate's crimes threaten to catch up with her. Recall that her plot against Faye was so strong and elaborate she seemed to be an unstoppable force. Well now, as the novel draws to a close, we begin to see evil being defeated—her defenses are not impenetrable after all.

Later that day Ethyl is arrested—a man has complained that she stole about 100 dollars from him. She is found guilty, but she insists to the judge that she has been framed. She asks to speak to him alone, but the judge sends her away, and sentences her to be driven out of town.

Kate, though, is nothing less than a formidable opponent—she sends away the witness to her crime without much difficulty; but the point still stands: she is not capable of fooling everyone.

For a long time Kate doesn't think of Ethyl, but slowly the idea that she is out there begins to make Kate nervous. She sends her henchman Joe out to find Ethyl at all costs. He agrees, and secretly wonders why an old whore is so important to Kate. When Cal begins to follow Kate she is wracked with fear, but now that she knows who he is, she sleeps easily.

Kate feels her own weaknesses and is terrified by them. Her paranoia and her desperation become clear: the metaphorical decline of evil is at hand. She is shaken, which suggests that she will soon be defeated.

CHAPTER 41

WWI begins, but at first it has no effect on the people in the Salinas Valley—they live as they always have. Aron, meanwhile, has become deeply interested in religion, and in the process become solitary and introverted. Aron's detachment from the world angers Cal, who has to fight the urge to reveal his mother's identity to Aron simply to shake him out of his introverted meditations. Abra thinks Aron enjoys feeling sad and ashamed—Cal doesn't understand this.

Cal is already resisting strong temptations to tell the truth to his brother—and in so doing knowingly destroy him. Aron turns to religion not to understand humanity and his place in it—as Lee and Sam Hamilton did—but to escape from reality.

Cal is determined to help Aron go to college and to earn back his father's fortune lost on the lettuce experiment. He joins forces with Will Hamilton, who lets him in on a plan to subsidize bean farming, offering farmers slightly over the current market price for their beans. Will is sure the war will skyrocket the price of imperishables such as beans, and is confident they will make huge profits by then re-selling the beans they have bought at slightly over-market price at a much higher value. Will likes Cal's honesty and his uncomplicated way of thinking, and gladly makes him a partner in this business venture.

Though it has been established that Will Hamilton is a greedy, in many ways amoral character, Cal's decision to team up with Will is one made out of love, compassion, and generosity. By teaming up with Will, Cal acknowledges that great deeds are combinations of good and evil. He acknowledges that shades of grey exist; he is willing to sacrifice some small virtue in order to help someone he loves.

CHAPTER 42

Eventually Salinas can no longer ignore the war. At first, after the United States joins the war they are confident that victory will son be had, but it becomes clear that the Germans are more worthy adversaries than Americans assumed them to be. And as the war goes on, the price of beans skyrockets—they are a valuable commodity and difficult to find. Farmers in Salinas wished they hadn't sold their beans to Will Hamilton six months ago.

The war, as Will Hamilton predicts, drives up the price of beans. He has, in some sense, tricked farmers out of a great deal of money. This is less than admirable—but Will's bad intentions do not negate Cal's good intentions. Good and evil can coexist.

CHAPTER 43

Aron has worked hard to get ahead in school, and he is set to graduate a year early. Adam could not be prouder of him. He glowingly boasts to Lee about Aron's accomplishments. Meanwhile, the minister at the church points out to Aron, who is considering going into the clergy, that a new woman has been coming by—she looks tired and haggard. The minister asks Aron to pray for her redemption.

It seems everything in Aron's life is going just fine, but this passage contains a certain hint of danger. Adam's pride in Aron is dangerous because it could potentially hurt Cal. This is underscored by the sudden appearance of Catherine Trask in Aron's church—he is just inches away from the edge; the fate of Abel looms heavily over his character.

Adam assumes Aron will tell him as soon as his exams are finished, and Adam buys his son a gold watch to give him as a reward. But Adam hears about Aron passing the exams from Cal, who is shocked to hear that Aron kept this information from his father. Lee hears about this and threatens to fight Aron if he does not start treating his father better. Aron becomes sad, and expresses his desperate desire to get away from Salinas. Lee comforts him, and tells him to go through the motions, to pretend life is better than it is. Eventually, Lee promises, this will be true.

Aron does not love his father the way Cal does. Though his father is glowing with pride, Aron scorns him by neglecting to even tell him when he passes his exams. Lee, a kind of student of Sam Hamilton, gives Aron advice about how to keep going in the face of sorrow and dissatisfaction. Adam was able to overcome, but there's no guarantee the same will be true of Aron.

CHAPTER 44

Aron goes off to Stanford for college, and is disappointed by the experience. He writes Abra elaborate and adoring love letters—writing her is the only thing in his life that has any meaning for him anymore. Abra confides in Lee, with whom she has grown increasingly close, that she feels the letters are written to someone "wearing her skin," that Aron has concocted an imaginary Abra and fallen in love with this imaginary woman, leaving the real Abra behind. She worries that if he sees any imperfection in her, if she happens to smell bad one day, he will leave her. Lee feels sorry for her, and tells her it must be hard to live this way. "Humans just do smell bad sometimes."

Aron, like Adam before him, is so incapable of seeing human fallibility that he makes Abra into an idealized version of herself. In some ways Aron, by making Abra into what he wants her to be instead of loving her for who she is, has fallen in love with himself, and not with Abra. Lee wisely acknowledges that the unrealistic standards to which Abra is being held—as a woman and as Adam's betrothed—are harmful.

Abra, in a moment of courage, asks Lee if Mrs. Trask is still alive. Lee says yes. Just then Cal enters the kitchen. He is elated, and says he has a great present for his father that he plans to give him during Thanksgiving dinner.

Abra now knows the secret that would destroy Aron, which raises the stakes and increases the sense of danger. We then hear that Cal plans to give his father a gift—since this story is a reenactment of Cain and Abel, the reader should know that a reckoning is coming.

The next day, Abra asks Cal to walk with her after school, and confides in him that Aron's letter have been worrying her. She explains that Aron seems to be writing to himself, not to her. She asks Cal if it's true that he has visited whorehouses. He tells her he has, and she asks him if he believes he is "bad." Cal asks her why she is interested in this and Abra responds "I'm not good either."

We see the beginnings of a connection beginning to form between Abra and Cal. Abra, weary of being idealized, seems to find relief in the reality that Cal is imperfect—for she is imperfect too—she, like all humans, is "not all good."

CHAPTER 45

Joe Valery, Kate's henchman, grows more curious about Kate's obsession with Ethyl. He wonders what information Ethyl has that's making Kate so nervous. He begins to put the pieces together. When he discovers that Ethyl has been found drowned in the **ocean** a few towns over, he decides not to tell Kate—he thinks he can use Ethyl to wield some power for the first time in his life. He lies to Kate, and tells her Ethyl has been spotted in Salinas.

Joe has spotted Kate's weakness. Once again we see Kate's strength being challenged; and once again, we become increasingly convinced that she is not invincible. Though she is a force to be reckoned with, she will not prevail.

CHAPTER 46

John Steinbeck, the narrator, tells a story about how he and sister Mary, when hatred of Germans had reached a fever pitch, harassed and insulted one of Salinas's German citizens. The narrator says he has always felt bad about this act.

Another interlude from the narrator reveals a crucial reality about the nature of evil: John succumbed to nationalistic fervor and harassed an innocent man. But just as significant as his transgression is his repentance: he knows he has done wrong. Good once again exists alongside evil, and redemption is always an option.

CHAPTER 47

Adam is appointed to a spot on the army draft board. The responsibility weighs heavy on him, as he feels he is personally sending boys off to war to be killed. Meanwhile, Adam looks forward to Thanksgiving when Aron will come home. For his part, Aron has grown increasingly disillusioned with his schooling and has become immensely homesick. He dreams of a world where he and Abra can run off together, and live far away from ugliness.

Aron's dream to run away is ominous foreshadowing. He believes he can run away from ugliness because he does not realize that ugliness is integral to being human—there is no escaping it, and attempting to escape it will result in disaster.

CHAPTER 48

Joe Valery continues to collect gossip about Kate, and realizes she is likely a very dangerous woman. In the meantime the girls of the brothel notice a change come over Kate. She seems nervous and ill. When she feels panic start to overcome her, she fingers the vial around her neck.

As Kate's secret becomes known to Joe, her weakness manifests physically. Illness is taking her; she cannot endure. As John said in an earlier chapter, "evil must always respawn."


CHAPTER 49

At Thanksgiving time, Adam, Lee, Cal, and Abra go to the train station to greet Aron. Adam is anxious to see his son and hopes that everything is set up perfectly for him at home. Aron gives Abra an enormous hug when he sees her, and then shakes the rest of his family's hands vigorously. That night Aron finds Cal wrapping a gift in tissue paper. Cal keeps the contents of the gift a secret. Aron tells Cal he is thinking of dropping out of college. Cal is appalled—he tells Aron not to be rash, and to at least sleep on it.

Already the holiday is not going as Cal has planned it. Aron tells him he is thinking of dropping out of college, which would lessen the value of Cal's gift. Given that the rejection of Cal's gift would spell disaster, Aron's admitting that he no longer wants to attend college has ominous implications indeed.


Cal plans out every detail regarding the present, which is 15 thousand dollars in gold certificates, from his business venture with Will Hamilton. But on the day of Thanksgiving, Aron asks for Lee to delay the meal which messes up Cal's carefully calibrated timeline. Cal succumbs to angry thoughts—he hates his father for loving Aron better, and knows Aron is only the favorite because he looks like Catherine, whom Adam will never get over. He bitterly chides himself for trying to buy his father's love. But he controls himself, warns himself against enjoying anger and sadness, and decides to give the day to Aron. After making this peace, Cal sets about procuring champagne and wine for the dinner celebration.

Cal begins to crack—like Cain, he becomes enraged at the idea that he is less loved than his brother for no good reason. He grows full of hatred, self-loathing, anger, and jealousy. But, unlike the original Cain, Cal is able to overcome this wave of anger, and accept that the day will revolve around Aron. We see him exercising the great choice between good and evil that, according to Lee, makes humanity great.

Finally, it is time for Thanksgiving dinner, and Cal proudly gives the box to his father, who opens it and does not react as planned. He is silent. Cal quickly explains how he made the money, and Adam grows disgusted. He states that he does not want this money stolen from poor farmers, this profit from a horrible and deadly war. He tells Cal he doesn't want the money—and returns the certificates. He tells Cal not to be angry.

Adam, like God rejecting Cain's sacrifice, rejects Cal's money. Because he is incapable of seeing that evil and good can exist together, he cannot understand that his son could make the money with good intentions and still have teamed up with Will Hamilton.

When Lee sees Cal later he begs him to stop it—Cal looks innocently confused, as if he doesn't understand Lee, and Lee tells him to remember he has a choice. His father couldn't help but reject the money, but Cal has a choice in how he reacts. Cal tells Lee he shouldn't get so worked up.

Lee knows that Cal is contemplating something horrible. He reminds Cal that Adam cannot see that there is good and bad in everything—but Cal knows better, and can make a choice between good and evil.

Cal goes out for a walk that night. After a while Aron catches up with him. He tells Cal he is sorry his gift was not well received. Cal tells Aron he has a surprise for him. Aron cheerfully asks what kind of surprise—and Cal leads his unknowing, innocent brother towards the edge of town, where the whorehouses are.

Cal has known all along that Aron would not be able to handle the truth about Catherine—this act is tantamount to killing his brother, and he knows it. Cal has killed his brother as Cain has killed Abel.

The local army recruiting office has a visitor the next morning: a young and beautiful boy, who is clearly not 18 yet. The boy lies about his age, however, and the recruiter cannot turn him away, for able bodied men are so sorely needed in the war.

Aron runs away, as he has always done, to try to avoid ugliness and pain. But he is running away to a terrible and bloody war—the implication is that Aron, like Abel, is doomed.

CHAPTER 50

Kate's arthritis is getting worse—her hands are gnarled and there are pains through all of her joints. Joe Valery, seeing her weakness, decides to lay his cards on the table. He says he's heard a rumor that Ethyl is around telling stories about some woman named Faye. But Kate sees through him. She sends him away, and after he leaves she writes and mails a note to the sheriff telling him to check on Joe's fingerprints (she has known about Joe's criminal history all along).

Time has taken its toll on Kate—her arthritis serves to catalogue the effects on time on her fragile body. Joe thinks that he's bested Kate, but Kate has enough sense and strength left in her to punish Joe for trying to fool her. Nevertheless, Kate's weaknesses have been spotted, and we get the sense that there is not much more she can do to save herself.

Catherine thinks back to her childhood, and to her childhood love for *Alice in Wonderland*. She thinks of Alice as she writes out her will, in which she leaves everything to her son, Aron Trask. She thinks of Alice as she swallows the contents of her little vial. She imagines she is Alice as slowly she is swallowed up into death.

Catherine takes refuge in a story as she commits suicide. Her final act is ultimately a cruel one—she leaves her fortune to Aron so that he must find out about her death. Aron has already been destroyed by Cal, however, and so (though she doesn't know it) her actions will have no effect.

CHAPTER 51

When Joe Valery comes back to Kate's office and finds her dead, he searches her desk for valuables. He finds the envelope full of incriminating pictures of the important men of Salinas and pockets them, believing he has struck gold. Just then the sheriff arrives and asks for Joe to come down to the station. Joe agrees, but when they get outside he makes a run for it, and is shot dead. The sheriff finds the photos in his pocket and resolves to destroy them. The next day the sheriff goes to see Adam Trask and informs him that his wife has killed herself, and left her fortune to Aron. It becomes clear to Adam that he must tell his son about Catherine.

Catherine does succeed in destroying Joe ultimately. Her death also finally prompts Adam to realize that he cannot protect his son from the truth any longer, but the bitter irony here is that Adam has had this realization too late—his son Cal has already told Aron the truth. Cal has essentially done Catherine's job for her—this highlights the extent to which his revealing her identity to his brother was an evil thing to do.

Adam and Lee wait for Aron to come home. When they don't see him for a while they ask Cal if he knows where he brother is. Cal says "am I supposed to look after him?" But when Cal leaves he drinks himself into a stupor from guilt—he is worried something horrible has happened to Aron. He goes home and finds the gold certificates in his desk, and burns them up one by one.

This is a near perfect reenactment of Cain's famous line in the Bible's book of Genesis: "Am I my brother's keeper?" The reality is that Cal was, in fact, his brother's keeper—and he failed to protect him from the truth. Cal burns up the gift that caused him to destroy his brother, symbolically rejecting the evil side of himself.

Lee finds Cal, and tells him that his mother committed suicide. Lee explains softly that people, especially Americans, who are spectacularly excessive, who throw their weight around with so much passion, are violent. He explains everyone is descended of barbarism. Lee leaves when he sees Cal understand, and finds Adam in the hall, slumped against the wall clutching a note in his hands. It is from Aron, and it reads "Dear Father, I'm in the army…don't worry about me. Aron."

Lee explains to Cal that everyone is violent, everyone is destructive—it is in our blood, so to speak. This helps Cal contextualize his own actions—he is an extension of a long history of humanity, and humanity is both evil and virtuous. Aron's fate is finally made clear, however, and now Cal, like Cain, must contend with his wrongdoing.

CHAPTER 52

Adam Trask is deeply confused by his son's sudden departure. His eyes begin to fail him, and he has tingling in one of his hands. Cal worries for his father's health, and asks Lee after a couple of months if they ought to call a doctor. Lee changes the subject and asks about Abra. Lee misses her, and tells Cal to send her to come see him again.

Time is taking its toll on Adam as well. A mysterious illness begins to become noticeable in him. Lee's deflection suggests that he is protecting Cal from something. Lee's inquiry about Abra demonstrates his almost familial concern and love for her—he misses her.

Cal catches up with Abra the next day. They have not talked in a while, and Abra tells Cal she has stopped loving Aron. In fact she has not loved him for quite some time. Abra agrees to go visit Lee the next day.

Abra and Aron never had a fully formed loving relationship, for he never saw her as her own person. Her final acceptance of this opens her up to Cal's love.

CHAPTER 53

After school the next day, Abra asks Cal to carry her books home. She looks into his eyes with a strange kind of intensity, until he wants to drop his gaze away from her.

It becomes more explicitly clear that Abra and Cal are meant to be together—Abra knows that Cal—being fully human himself—can see and accept her as fully human.

Adam takes to sleeping in short bursts throughout the day and night. Lee sees that Adam's time is drawing short, and it makes Lee feel, paradoxically, more alive. When Abra comes to the Trask house, he is thrilled to see her, and in an exuberant moment of abandon blurts out that he wishes Abra were his daughter. She tells him she feels the same way. Lee has to leave the room to collect himself. When he returns he says there is something different about Abra—she seems more grown up to him. Lee then asks Abra if she likes Cal. She tells him she does, and Lee responds by observing that Cal is "crammed full with every good thing and every bad thing." Abra tells Lee that Cal has invited her to go picnicking with him when the azaleas bloom. Lee wonders if she will go, and Abra resists the urge to smile and says that she is going.

Adam and Lee respond to the passage of time differently—Adam is slowly weakened by it, but Lee is invigorated it—it seems to remind him that he is alive. He tells Abra how he feels about her; he has never had children of his own and his emotional adoption of Abra shows that he is able to make a family for himself. He actively fills his life with good memories, as Sam once advised Adam to do. He responds to loneliness with creativity. He then sums up why Abra and Cal can be together: because Cal is full of good and bad and therefore full of humanity, full of life.

Cal walks Abra home and they agree to see the azaleas rain or shine as soon as spring arrives. Cal thinks romantic thoughts on the way home, and even considers putting flowers on his mother's grave. He tells himself he is beginning to think like Aron.

This moment where Cal sees himself "beginning to think like Aron" is Cal recognizing and nurturing the good in himself. Though he has evil in him that Aron never had, he can still be "like" Aron in his goodness.

CHAPTER 54

Adam's health is beginning to improve slowly. Finally at the end of May, the azaleas bloom, and Cal and Abra jubilantly skip school to go have their picnic. During their picnic, Abra confides in Cal that her father is a thief of sorts, and that he hides out all day pretending to be sick so he won't be held responsible for his crimes. Abra holds Cal's hand, and Cal puts his arm around her.

Abra's story is much like Cal's; one of her parents has engaged in despicable behavior, has made immoral decisions, has elected not to live a good life. Abra, like Cal, worries about this badness being replicated in her. Their love is borne out of mutual recognition that neither one of them is perfect.

That afternoon an envelope is delivered to the door. Lee resists the urge to open it, telling himself it is some kind of advertisement. When he finally does tear it open, he tells himself not to be a coward, and to have courage. He hears Adam opening the door.

Lee knows immediately that the letter will contain news of Aron's death. He tells himself to have courage—the choice to do good, to be strong instead of weak, is a choice that requires a great deal of courage.

CHAPTER 55

When Cal and Abra return home, Lee is there to give them some terrible news. Aron is dead, and Adam has had a stroke. He cannot move or speak, and he may live for as long as a year or as short as a day. That night Cal goes to Abra's house and demands loudly to see her. Abra's mother refuses, but Abra has heard Cal's voice and sneaks out the back. Cal passionately, desperately confides in her. He tells her his mother is a whore and her blood is in his veins. She tells him her father is a thief and he is in her blood too. He tells her he killed his brother, and Abra insists that they return to Cal's house.

Cal finally has to reckon with what he did to his brother—and by extension, to his father, whose stroke, we are led to believe, was hastened by the news of Aron's death. He wisely confides in his friends and family—he does not isolate himself. He finds comfort not only in the company of others like Abra, but in the reality that he is not the only person who has succumbed to evil impulses—he is not alone in his wrongdoing, and he can recover from it.

Abra, Lee and Cal sit in the kitchen. Abra begs Lee to help Cal understand. Lee takes Cal upstairs to his father's room. Lee loudly explains to Adam that his brain is injured, but he must strive to listen. He commands Adam to look at Caleb. Lee shouts that Caleb acted out of anger, and that his anger killed Aron. He tells Adam he must not crush Caleb with rejection. He begs Adam to give Caleb his blessing, over and over, shouting, "give him your blessing!" Adam tightens up in concentration tries to speak, and fails. Lee coaxes him gently, softly asks him to try again. Adam tries and fails, then tries a third time, and utters the word "timshel" before closing his eyes and going to sleep.

Here, finally, is where the story of Cain and Abel ends—not with the banishment of Cain, but with forgiveness of him. Adam blesses his son by telling him that he still has a choice; he still has greatness in him; redemption is still an option, and will remain an option to Cal for as long as he is alive. But it is important to note that this blessing is obtained with the indispensible help of Lee and Abra—if this ending is a triumph, it is a triumph of a community, a family. Nobody can succeed alone.

HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Winner, Kathryn. "*East of Eden.*" *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 3 Aug 2015. Web. 21 Apr 2020.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Winner, Kathryn. "*East of Eden.*" LitCharts LLC, August 3, 2015. Retrieved April 21, 2020. https://www.litcharts.com/lit/east-of-eden.

To cite any of the quotes from *East of Eden* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

Steinbeck, John. East of Eden. Penguin Classics. 1952.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Steinbeck, John. East of Eden. New York: Penguin Classics. 1952.