The Grapes of Wrath

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*. Steinbeck died in New York City in 1968, at age 66.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Grapes of Wrath was published while the American Great Depression—in which the economy went into freefall, destroying lives and livelihoods—had the country fully in its grip. This historical backdrop without a doubt amplified the number of people who could directly relate to the destitution Steinbeck describes. More pertinently, the Oklahoma Dustbowl was a product of drought and dust storms in the 1930's that decimated agriculture in the American prairies, particularly Oklahoma. This natural disaster resulted in the displacement of hundreds of thousands of farming families, who, stripped of their livelihoods, often migrated westward to California to find opportunity, much like the Joads do.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Steinbeck's masterpiece is in many ways a descendant of the muckraking tradition of the turn of the 20th century. Muckraking journalists often exposed the horrendous conditions that America's lower classes had to endure in work and life. Several notable books from this period include Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* (1906), which was an exposé of the lives of low-wage immigrant workers in the meatpacking industry; and Jacob Riis's *How the Other Half Lives* (1890), which offered a photojournalistic account of life in New York City's miserable tenements. Additionally, events in *The Grapes of Wrath* are often parallels to biblical themes or occurrences, which adds gravity and universality to Steinbeck's work. Steinbeck's work also shares a similarity of focus on blue collar workers in the depression and the dustbowl with the songs and work of Woody Guthrie.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *The Grapes of Wrath*
- **When Written:** 1939
- **Where Written:** Pacific Grove, California
- **When Published:** 1939
- **Literary Period:** American Realist
- **Genre:** Novel
- **Setting:** Oklahoma, California, the American Southwest
- **Climax:** Rose of Sharon's breastfeeding of a starving man
- **Antagonist:** Industrial farms, banks
- **Point of View:** Third person omniscient narrator

EXTRA CREDIT

A Blockbuster Success: In 1940, *The Grapes of Wrath* was adapted into a movie, directed by John Ford and starring Henry Fonda as Tom Joad. The film was nominated for seven Oscars, and won two.

Steinbeck's Politics: Although Steinbeck's politics certainly leaned left, and he sympathized intensely with the working man, he never aligned with the Communist Party. Three trips to Soviet Russia only affirmed his distaste for Communism. Later on, Steinbeck developed more conservative views; he was at first supportive of Lyndon Johnson's stance on the war in Vietnam, and he held the 1960's counterculture in little esteem.

PLOT SUMMARY

In Oklahoma during the Great Depression, drought and dust storms—the Dust Bowl—have ruined farmers' crops and destroyed livelihoods already damaged by the failing economy. Tom Joad is a young man from a farming family who has just been paroled from prison, after serving four years on a homicide charge. As Tom returns home, he meets Jim Casy, an ex-preacher whom Tom knew as a child. Casy no longer preaches of virtue and sin, and instead holds the unity and equality of human spirit as his highest ideal. Together, Tom and Casy travel back to the Joad homestead, but discover that it has been abandoned. Muley Graves, a neighbor who has stayed behind, explains to the two men that the farming families have

all been evicted by the landowners and the banks, who have repossessed their land and now use tractors to cultivate it. Muley tells the men that they can find Tom's family at the home of Uncle John, the brother of Tom's father, Pa Joad.

When Tom and Casy arrive at Uncle John's, they find the Joads loading up a car in preparation to leave for California. Pa Joad reveals that the family saw fruit-picking jobs advertised on handbills, and they are heading west to take advantage of these opportunities. Once on the road, the Joads befriend a migrant couple, Ivy and Sairy Wilson, and shortly thereafter, the cantankerous Grampa Joad dies of a stroke. The Wilsons travel with the Joads until the California border, where Sairy becomes too ill to continue. Noah, Tom's older brother, abandons the family at this border, choosing instead to subsist on his own.

On their way to California, the Joads receive disheartening reports about a lack of jobs and hostility towards "Okies" in California. Once the family arrives in the state, these rumors prove to be true, and their hardships continue. Granma Joad dies during the family's passage through the Mojave desert. The family is forced to inhabit a Hooverville, a squalid tent city (named after President Herbert Hoover) where migrants live at the whim of unscrupulous contractors and corrupt deputies. At this camp, Connie Rivers—the husband of Tom's pregnant sister, Rose of Sharon—abandons the Joads. When Tom and a friend from the Hooverville try to negotiate better wages from a contractor, they get into a tussle with a deputy. Tom flees and Casy willingly takes the blame for the fight; the preacher is arrested and taken into custody.

The Joads leave the Hooverville and find refuge at a more comfortable, government-run camp. Instead of a police presence, the camp is governed by a committee elected by the migrants themselves. At this camp, the Joads find some comfort and friendship, but only Tom can find work. One day, Tom discovers that the greedy Farmers' Association, working in tandem with corrupt deputies, plans to start a riot at an upcoming dance. This will give the deputies a pretense to destroy the camp, which will weaken the laborers' bargaining power. However, Tom and some other men discreetly pre-empt this attack, and the camp is saved.

The Joads are unable to survive on the income they receive at the camp. They leave to find work elsewhere, and come across a peach-picking compound, where they are brought in to work while other migrants are on strike outside the gates. Tom discovers that Casy is the one responsible for organizing the strike. Just after Tom reunites with Casy, police find them, and one of the officers kills Casy with a pickaxe in front of Tom. In response, Tom kills the officer, and goes into hiding.

The Joads leave to pick cotton and live out of a boxcar, while Tom hides in the wilderness nearby. The family has enough money to eat fairly well, and Tom's younger brother Al has gotten engaged to the daughter of their housemates, the Wainwrights. Suddenly, torrential rains come, and the Joads are forced to stay in the boxcar (as opposed to go to a hospital or find a midwife) while Rose of Sharon gives birth. Rose of Sharon's baby is stillborn, and the family flees to a nearby barn to escape the floods. There, they find a boy and his starving father. Ma Joad realizes that Rose of Sharon is lactating, and she gets the rest of the family to leave while Rose of Sharon breastfeeds the starving man.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Tom Joad – Tom Joad is the novel's protagonist. At the beginning of the novel, he has just been paroled after serving a four-year prison sentence for killing a man in self-defense. He is strong, stoic, principled, and observant; during the trip to California, the Joad family comes to rely on Tom for precisely these qualities. Tom is very principled, and injustice enrages him. This rage can get the better of him—the most notable example of this is when Tom retaliates for the murder of Jim Casyby killing the offending policeman. Over the course of the novel, Tom comes to realize the importance and strength of the migrant worker community, and at the novel's close, he has decided to dedicate himself to organizing the workers to improve their quality of life.

Ma Joad – Ma Joad is the ferociously dedicated matron of the Joad family. Throughout the novel she makes countless sacrifices for the good of her family, and is remarkably committed to keeping the family moving forward. Her confident leadership sometimes clashes with Pa's notions, but her willpower always wins out over his patriarchal authority.

Jim Casy – Jim Casy is an ex-preacher who knew the Joads as far back as Tom's childhood. Casy has since given up his religion, because he is afflicted by guilt for having had relations with some of the young women in his congregations. Casy now places his faith in the remarkable power of a united human spirit. Throughout the book, Casy performs several acts of self-sacrifice for the common good: he saves Tom by taking the blame for a scuffle at a Hooverville, and later, he gives his life leading a strike so that peach-picking workers can earn higher wages.

Pa Joad – Pa is the easygoing head of the Joad family. He often feels responsible for taking care of the entire family, even when this task far exceeds his abilities, and he works tirelessly for the Joads' benefit. He also feels guilt for his firstborn son Noah's poor health, as he hand-delivered Noah when the child was born. Occasionally, Pa feels emasculated by Ma, who takes a more dominant role in the leadership of the family.

Rose of Sharon – Rose of Sharon, also referred to as Rosasharn, is a sister of Tom's. She is pregnant, and married to Connie Rivers. Rosasharn often falls victim to superstitious concerns about the health of her baby-to-be, and loves to

wallow in her guilt. At the book's close, Rosasharn serves as an iconic symbol of the text by breastfeeding a grown man to rescue him from starvation.

Uncle John – Uncle John is Pa Joad's brother. John is wracked with guilt over the long-past death of his young wife, whose complaints of pain he dismissed as harmless whining. He tries to atone for his sin by living as selflessly as possible; however, he occasionally gives in to temptation and gets drunk.

Muley Graves – A neighbor of the Joads in Oklahoma, Muley Graves compulsively refuses to leave his land despite having been evicted. He hides on his former land, sleeping wherever he can, hunting for food, and remembering his own and his family's personal history with the land. Muley also imparts advice to Tom about the repercussions of standing up to the authorities and then finding yourself hunted, foreboding Tom's eventual situation.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Grampa Joad – Grampa is a curmudgeonly and somewhat depraved old man. He is reluctant to leave his home in Oklahoma, and dies shortly after the Joads begin their travels.

Granma Joad – Granma is devoutly religious. During the journey west, her health declines, and she passes away as the Joads cross the desert into California.

Al Joad – Al is Tom's younger brother. He greatly looks up to Tom. Al is a skilled mechanic and a prodigious flirt, and towards the end of the novel he becomes engaged to Agnes Wainwright.

Ivy and Sairy Wilson – Ivy and Sairy Wilson are a migrant couple whom the Joads encounter on the road to California. They hospitably help the Joads cope with Grampa's death. The two families travel together until they reach the California border, where Sairy falls too ill to continue.

Connie Rivers – Connie is Rose of Sharon's immature, selfish husband. He grows frustrated during the Joads arduous journey, and abandons the family and his young wife.

Noah Joad – Noah is the oldest Joad child. He is aloof and cold; Pa suspects that his strange personality came as a result of Pa mishandling him at birth. Noah abandons the family to live on his own when they reach the Colorado River.

Ruthie Joad – Ruthie isTom's kid sister. Her immature and boastful nature gets her into trouble when, to impress her peers, she reveals that Tom is on the lam.

Winfield Joad – Winfield is the youngest Joad. He is often treated cruelly by his sister Ruthie, and he takes every opportunity to tattle on her. Towards the end of the book, he grows very ill.

Floyd Knowles – Floyd is a young man whom befriends in the first Hooverville. Floyd tries to stand up to a contractor but is arrested on a bogus charge, and hides after an altercation with police.

Mr. Thomas – Mr. Thomas hires Tom and the Wallaces to do pipe-laying work. He informs them of the Farmers' Association's plans to start a riot at the dance.

Timothy and Wilkie Wallace – Tom meets this father-and-son pair at the government camp. They help find him a job.

Agnes Wainwright – Agnes's family shares a boxcar with the Joads when they live on a cotton plantation. She becomes Al's fiancée.

The Mayor – The Mayor is a haggard man who runs the first Hooverville the Joads stay in. He has been beaten down by the systematic oppression of the cops and other cruel institutional powers, and can no longer bring himself to resist.

Jim Rawley – Jim Rawley is the manager of the government camp. He treats the Joads with kindness and caring.

Lisbeth Sandry – Mrs. Sandry is a Jehovite (Jehova's Witness) zealot from the government camp who terrorizes Rose of Sharon to make her fear sin.

Ezra Huston – Ezra Huston is the chairman of the government camp committee.

Willie Eaton – Willie Eaton is the chairman of the government camp's entertainment committee.

Mae the Waitress and Al the Cook – Mae and Al give a migrant family a special deal on food in their roadside restaurant.

The One-Eyed Junkyard Attendant – The one-eyed man does nothing but complain bitterly about his lonely, pathetic life. Tom urges him to get in control of his life.

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.

HUMANITY, INHUMANITY, AND DEHUMANIZATION

In *The Grapes of Wrath*, the most brutal adversity the Joads face doesn't come from the unforgiving natural conditions of the dustbowl. Rather, the Joads and the Okie community receive the cruelest treatment from those most capable of helping them: more fortunate individuals, typically ones who wield institutional power. Throughout the book, establishments and technological advances are shown to corrupt the humans behind them. Steinbeck's depiction of the state police shows that they've been perverted by their authority: in the first Hooverville the Joads occupy, an exploitative contractor comes to recruit Okies for dirt-cheap

labor, and the deputies that accompany him level blatantly false accusations of theft against Floyd Knowles, Tom, and anyone else who dares to protest.

Similarly, the banks are beyond the control of the men that work for them, and like the industrial farms, they expand unchecked, without regard for human life. As the banks and farms grow and grow, their owners stoop lower and lower in order to increase their profits. Some California farms even go so far as destroying perfectly good food in order to keep prices high, all while starving migrants clamor for food and jobs. Steinbeck describes the modern men of industry as mechanized, unnatural beings who live detached from the land and in so doing have become dehumanized, unlike the farming families they displace. This hostility is contagious—even small business owners fear and resent the Okies, and local Californians form militias to intimidate the desperate migrants.

At the same time, Steinbeck occasionally shows glimpses of humanity, especially in the most wretched characters. These acts often come when a character breaks the rules of an oppressive system, which further reinforces Steinbeck's point that institutions tend to be dehumanizing and morally toxic. After she is extorted at a farm company store, Ma Joad observes that "if you're in trouble or hurt or need—go to poor people. They're the only ones that'll help—the only ones." The poorest characters are often the most generous, and the richest the most selfish. Because most Okies can barely support themselves, let alone help others, every instance of altruism becomes a powerful moment in the text. Rosasharn's breastfeeding of the starving man in the book's final scene serves as the definitive example of the selfless altruism of the poor.

DIGNITY, HONOR, AND WRATH

Despite their destitution, Okies are shown to be extremely conscious of maintaining their honor. No matter how dire their circumstances, the Joads are unwilling to stoop to accepting charity or stealing. When they do accept help, they are quick to repay the debt—for example, when the Wilsons offer Grampa Joad a deathbed, Al repairs their car and Ma replaces the blanket used to shroud Grampa. With this strong sense of honor comes an equally powerful notion of righteous fury: when Okies are wronged, their anger is what gives them the strength to press onward. Toward the end of the book, when California's winter floods threaten the Okies' livelihood, Steinbeck writes that "as long as fear could turn to wrath," the Okie families would be able to continue their struggle.

Dignity and wrath are a defining part of Okie culture. For instance, Steinbeck describes a migrant family that is unwilling to pay anything less than the sticker price for a meal at a restaurant, because to pay less would be no better than stealing. The organization of the government camp also highlights this culture of self-sufficiency. Annie Littlefield, one of the organizers of the women's committee, remarks that "we don't allow nobody in this camp to build theirself up that-away [by giving charity to others]. We don't allow nobody to give nothing to another person. They can give it to the camp, an' the camp can pass it out. We won't have no charity!" Finally, their justified anger at being wronged by the establishment is what motivates Casy and Tom to organize against the powers that oppress them, in the hopes of improving their community's welfare.

The Okies' honorableness is also meant to contrast with the unscrupulous conduct of wealthier people. "Shitheels," as the affluent are sometimes called, are known to steal from hotels, just as banks and industrial farms extort the masses for everything they're worth. Through his descriptions of the dignity and morality of Okie culture, Steinbeck glorifies their humble, self-sufficient lifestyle and denounces the greed of the upper classes.

FAITH AND GUILT

At different times in *The Grapes of Wrath*, nearly all of the main characters endure spiritually trying times. Casy is the first to address this theme when he speaks of his reformed faith: instead of the black-and-white teachings of Christian dogma, Casy has come to believe in a natural unity of the human race. Tom, too, comes to this realization later in the novel, after hiding from the law in the woods. Finally, Ma Joad's determination to press forward is itself a sort of faith that things will turn out all right. Notably, the faith these characters hold is often detached from established religion. Casy abandoned his preaching because of skepticism about Christianity, and Ma Joad resists the holier-than-thou attitude of the "Jehovites" (Jehova's Witnesses) in the government camp. The aspects of Christianity still present in the Joads' lives tend to resemble rituals, like saying Grace to please Granma, more than sincere beliefs.

On the flipside of the characters' faith is a sense of guilt that often cripples them. Rosasharn worries constantly that her baby will be harmed because of her own improper behavior and the behavior of those around her. Uncle John feels responsible for the death of his wife, and tries to atone for his sins by living generously, although his anguish often drives him to drink. At the emotional climax of the story—when Rosasharn delivers a stillborn child—Pa Joad agonizes about whether there was more he could have done to save the baby, just as he agonizes about hurting his firstborn, Noah, when Noah was delivered.

POWERLESSNESS, PERSEVERANCE, AND RESISTANCE

The novel often focuses on characters who resist in situations that seem hopeless. At the beginning of

the novel, the Oklahoma sharecropper families are rendered powerless by the repossessing landowners. All the same, Muley Graves remains on his land, in spite of regular run-ins with law enforcement. He knows he can't change his circumstances, but he refuses to let go of his heritage. The **land turtle** that appears in an early chapter, is a metaphor for the Okies' helplessness, endurance, and courage: it presses forward as humans treat it with both kindness and cruelty and even manages to right itself when a car flips it over. Similarly, the Joads refuse to abandon their journey westward even when the obstacles they face seem insurmountable. Tom and Casy rebel against a corrupt industrial and political system even though it costs Casy his life and forces Tom into hiding.

These individual struggles symbolize the spirit of the Okie community as a whole. At their most desperate and most powerless moments, the Okies rarely seem to lose their drive to work. Some strive to subvert the larger institutions that keep them down, like the law, the banks, and the farm owners—even when these institutions seem far too powerful to overcome.

FAMILY, FRIENDSHIP, AND COMMUNITY

Time and again in *The Grapes of Wrath*, Steinbeck demonstrates the profound ties and nuanced relationships that develop through kinship, friendship, and group identity. The arc of the Joad family shows, on one hand, a cohesive unit whose love and support of one another keeps them from abandoning hope. On the other hand, however, the novel shows that this unity comes with complications. Ma Joad's assertive leadership strips Pa of his masculine identity, and he is ashamed and embarrassed whenever his wife's determination forces him to back down in front of the entire clan. The cooperation and mutual assistance found in the Joad family extends past blood relationships to other Okies as well. This give-and-take of friendly support among the Okies is essential to all of the Okies' survival, including the Joads. Just as Wilkie Wallace helps Tom find work, the Joads are happy to assist friends they meet on their way to California, like the Wilsons.

On a larger scale, a united community confers its own kind of benefits: political strength. On several occasions, Tom marvels at how the government camp can function without police. The camp's Central Committee is a testament to the power of cooperation; its system of self-governance allows residents to regulate themselves and discipline wrongdoers without sacrificing the camp's independence. Working together not only gives Okies a way to avoid the prejudice they meet in California—it also gives them power to unionize and push for reasonable wages. Despite the vicious persecution of union leaders, many Okies remain committed to the concept of working together to improve their condition. As an endorsement of collaboration, Steinbeck writes, "here is the node, you who hate change and fear revolution. Keep…men apart; make them hate, fear, suspect each other. … The danger is here, for two men are not as lonely and perplexed as one."

SYMBOLS

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

ANIMALS

Animals often embody the same important character traits that are valued in humans, and people's treatment of animals is often used to illustrate human capacity for both kindness and arbitrary cruelty. For example, the intrepid land turtle that appears in chapter three represents the unyielding resolve that the migrants display when traveling to California. Like the Okies, the turtle is shown both kindness and malice by humans: some swerve to avoid it on the road while others swerve to hit it. Additionally, Tom's moral maturation is shown through his treatment of animals. Early in the story, he goes out of his way to kill a rattlesnake on the road, but later on, he reprimands Al for swerving to hit a gopher snake.

THE STILLBORN BABY

Rose of Sharon's stillborn baby is a literal representation of the inhumane conditions that the migrant laborers must endure. The failed pregnancy symbolizes the impossibility of cultivating life in the toxic environment of hostility, prejudice, and extortion that the Okies face day in and day out in California. Uncle John sends the baby's remains down the floodwaters, he hopes that all who see the small corpse will recognize it as a symbol of the oppression and abjection that prevent the migrant workers from living happily.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin Books edition of *The Graphs of Wrath* published in 2002.

Chapter 1 Quotes

❝ Women and children knew deep in themselves that no misfortune was too great to bear if their men were whole.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 4

Explanation and Analysis

After a devastating dust storm that ruins the hard-earned crops grown on Oklahoma farms, the women and children mentioned in this passage worry that the fathers and husbands will feel "broken" by their struggles. They look to these men to set a standard for how to respond: the patriarchal structure of the family is not really questioned throughout the book, although some of the men do struggle with how to live up to the expectation that they be strong and powerful.

The men, however, react with wrath rather than disappointment or brokenness. As a result, the women and children perceive them as still "whole": they have gained agency through their strong reaction and thus commit themselves to combating this difficulty, as well as any others that may arise. As the book begins, therefore, it at once shows anger to be a powerful, and potentially powerfully good, trait, one that can equip people like the Okies, who lack a great deal of social, economic, or political power, with a different kind of strength.

Chapter 2 Quotes

"...sometimes a guy'll be a good guy even if some rich bastard makes him carry a sticker."

Related Characters: Tom Joad (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 7

Explanation and Analysis

Tom Joad is traveling home after being released from prison, and here he is trying to cajole a truck driver into giving him a ride, even though the truck bears a sticker that reads "No Riders" on it. Tom appeals to the driver's sense of decency and community, one that for Tom exists between fellow inhabitants of the dusty Midwest. This community, he implies, has nothing to do with the centralized, powerful corporation that attempts to dictate how things are run far away.

Tom thus makes a strong distinction between the "rich bastard" that holds the money and power, and the "good guy" that may be more economically vulnerable, but makes up for it by emphasizing his goodness and humanity. Of course, these lofty sentiments have a more practical side as well, since it's in Tom's interest to have the truck driver give him a ride, but the passage is also a legitimate example of the way Tom attempts to claim greater dignity for himself and those around him in general.

Chapter 4 Quotes

"I says, 'Maybe it ain't a sin. Maybe it's just the way folks is. Maybe we been whippin' the hell out of ourselves for nothin'"...Before I knowed it, I was sayin' out loud, 'The hell with it! There ain't no sin and there ain't no virtue. There's just stuff people do. It's all part of the same thing. And some of the things folks do is nice, and some ain't nice, but that's as far as any man got a right to say.'"

Related Characters: Jim Casy (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 23

Explanation and Analysis

Tom Joad has met Jim Casy, a former preacher who believes that he baptized Tom long ago. Casy tells Tom why he left the church: he had been sleeping with girls in his congregation until he began to feel wracked with guilt. Here he explains to Tom the progress in his thoughts concerning his own actions and their relationship to his faith. He does feel that he betrayed the girls' trust, but he also cannot accept that his attraction to them was fully sinful. This realization has made him feel that there cannot be such black and white categories as "sin" and "virtue." Instead, he thinks that there is a more gray area in terms of how humans should act, a gray area that is so complicated that mere humans shouldn't claim to be able to pronounce without doubt what is right and wrong.

Still, Jim Casy's reasoning is clouded by a sense that what he did cannot be entirely excused. His exclamation, "The hell with it!", expresses his frustration with the categories that are available to him, as he searches for meaning that would be more satisfying than the empty-seeming rules and dictates of his religion.

"maybe it's all men an' all women we love; maybe that's the Holy Sperit—the human sperit—the whole shebang. Maybe all men got one big soul ever'body's a part of.' Now I sat there thinkin' it, an' all of a suddent—I knew it. I knew it so deep down that it was true, and I still know it."

Related Characters: Jim Casy (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 24

Explanation and Analysis

As Jim Casy continues talking to Tom about his struggle with his faith, he strikes a more positive note as he searches for an alternative to the strict categories of sin and virtue that he has long since decided are insufficient. He continues to make use of some of the terms and beliefs that were part of his arsenal as a preacher, but here he uses the idea of the Holy Spirit, for instance, to describe something different than the figure in the Bible. Jim Casy instead develops a notion of an all-encompassing sense of humanity, a community that all can be a part of, and a community defined by love rather than guilt.

Chapter 5 Quotes

Some of the owner men were kind because they hated what they had to do, and some of them were angry because they hated to be cruel, and some of them were cold because they had long ago found that one could not be an owner unless one were cold. And all of them were caught in something larger than themselves.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 31

Explanation and Analysis

This passage describes the tense relationship between the landowners or "owner men" and the tenant farmers. The landowners have the power to tell the tenant farmers when they must leave the land so that the banks that are really directing these affairs can profit more from the land. The narrator describes these men in a variety of ways, from angry to cold to kind. Ultimately, it's suggested, it doesn't really matter which attitude the landowners take, since they are participating in a cruel process anyway, one that seems to forget that the tenant farmers are also complex people with desires and needs of their own.

In some ways, though, the anger of the landowners can be understood as similar to the anger of the tenant farmers. For both, wrath is a way to regain a piece of control over a situation that they cannot conquer. Here, the landowners may be powerful compared to the farmers, but they too are caught up in larger processes, which are directed by far-away corporations. As a result, it comes to seem as though these processes will unfold inevitably, no matter what individuals think about them.

Chapter 6 Quotes

"If on'y they didn't tell me I got to get off, why, I'd prob'y be in California right now a-eatin' grapes an' a-pickin' an orange when I wanted. But them sons-a-bitches says I got to get off—an', Jesus Christ, a man can't, when he's tol' to!"

Related Themes:

Page Number: 47

Explanation and Analysis

Tom has met Muley Graves, who is the sole person to stay behind when all the other tenant farmers have been evicted by the landowners. Here, he attempts to explain why. Muley's reasoning may seem convoluted: essentially, he is suggesting that if no one had told him to leave, he may well have left by himself, and he'd already be in California in a much more pleasant situation than he finds himself in now. However, what Muley can't stomach is the principle of the matter - the idea that someone can tell him when he can and cannot leave his land. In response, he embraces stubbornness and commits himself to staying. Muley is not acting with the same cold, calculating, and rational judgment as those who hold power above him. Instead, he chooses another kind of reaction, one that emphasizes the inherent dignity of the individual and his ability to resist.

Chapter 8 Quotes

"I ain't sayin' I'm like Jesus...But I got tired like Him, an' I got mixed up like Him, an' I went into the wilderness like Him, without no campin' stuff...Sometimes I'd pray like I always done. On'y I couldn' figure what I was prayin' to or for. There was the hills, an' there was me, an' we wasn't separate no more. We was one thing. An' that one thing was holy."

Related Characters: Jim Casy (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 81

Explanation and Analysis

Granma has asked Casy to say grace with the family before they can begin eating. Casy's rigorous Christian belief system has long since eroded, but even as he lacks a confidence in his own faith, he still finds the structures of the religion to be a reference point that gives him a way to process how he acts and what he does. As a result, Casy's grace is rambling and sometimes confusing. He draws on

the famous Bible story of Jesus going into the wilderness to pray, and being tempted by demons, to help him explain his own struggles with temptation and his own distancing from society.

Once again, however, Casy attempts to turn to an alternative to the strict catechism of Christianity, one that emphasizes community and common humanity over personal striving. This sense of community is what Casy continues to think of as "holy," even if it has little to do with traditional Christian beliefs. It is ironic but also significant that Casy uses grace - a short ritual that for most people is just something to get through before a meal - as an opportunity for real spiritual questioning.

Chapter 9 Quotes

❝ To California or any place—every one a drum major leading a parade of hurts, marching with our bitterness. And some day—the armies of bitterness will all be going the same way. And they'll all walk together, and there'll be a dead terror from it.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 88

Explanation and Analysis

The perspective of the book has switched, in this chapter, to tenant farmers preparing to leave for California, and to one in particular who is disillusioned by the process of selling his belongings: his tools are now useless because of new technology, and he feels that he himself is now just as useless. California is treated by some in the book as a marvelous land of opportunity, a place to recover some of the agency and stability that the tenant farmers have lost in Oklahoma.

This farmer, however, begins to feel as though California is not just a random choice but a useless one. Wherever he and his fellow farmers go, he believes, they will be pursued by the sense of hopelessness that has defined their work up until now. If there's any sliver of hope left, it's in the fact that there are so many people like this that they make up "armies of bitterness," a group of people bound by shared experiences even if those experiences are desperate.

Chapter 10 Quotes

❝ And now they [the Joads] were weary and frightened because they had gone against a system they did not understand and it had beaten them.

Related Characters: Ma Joad, Tom Joad, Pa Joad, Rose of Sharon, Grampa Joad, Granma Joad, Al Joad

Related Themes:

Page Number: 97

Explanation and Analysis

Some of the members of the family had gone into town to sell everything in the house that they can. They have returned, however, with only eighteen dollars for all of it. They felt that their belongings were worth much more, but the buyer wouldn't pay more than that for them, and they could not find a way to "beat" this system. This is the first hint for the Joads that their plan of salvation, their migration to California, will be beset with difficulties just as great as those they have faced in Oklahoma. Their battles with the "system" will not end just because they are leaving this one physical place. Indeed, it is their lack of understanding how exactly this system works, and what its power might have in store for them, that increases their suspicion and even despair before the long road ahead of them.

❝ "It ain't kin we? It's will we?" ...As far as 'kin,' we can't do nothin', not go to California or nothin'; but as far as 'will,' why, we'll do what we will. An' as far as 'will'—it's a long time our folks been here and east before, an' I never heerd tell of no Joads or no Hazletts, neither, ever refusin' food an' shelter or a lift on the road to anybody that asked. They's been mean Joads, but never that mean."

Related Characters: Ma Joad (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 102

Explanation and Analysis

The family has begun to debate whether or not Casy will be allowed to come with the Joads to California. At first Pa Joad isn't sure, but soon his wife begins to overrule him. By making a distinction between "can" and "will," she reminds her family that so many of their struggles have been based on a seeming impossibility of "can": that is, a sense that they

don't have the material means to gain power over their own situation.

However, precisely because their capabilities are so uncertain, Ma Joad believes that it is crucial to express their will in whatever they can - to commit to certain actions regardless of whether they might seem impossible or hopeless. For her, these actions must align with certain values that are defining traits of the family, including kindness and generosity. By referring to her and her husband's ancestors, Ma Joad reminds her family of their long heritage in Oklahoma, and how these families have countered the economic and social fragility of their lives with the dignity and responsibility that comes from emphasizing community.

Chapter 11 Quotes

That man who is more than his chemistry, walking on the earth, turning his plow point for a stone, dropping his handles to slide over an outcropping, kneeling in the earth to eat his lunch; that man who is more than his elements knows the land that is more than its analysis. But the machine man, driving a dead tractor on land he does not know and love, understands only chemistry; and he is contemptuous of the land and of himself.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 115-116

Explanation and Analysis

Here the narrator describes certain changes taking place as a result of technological progress coming to replace humans with tractors and other machines on the farms of Oklahoma. By creating distance between the land and the person using it, between labor and its means, the narrator suggests that such changes are alienating people from the very source of their stability and livelihood. Farmers who are close to the land, who physically have to kneel down and rummage through the dirt, understand that the land is not just there to gain profits for him or for far-away corporations: instead, it is powerful and important in itself, as well as closely bound with farmers' own self-definitions.

As technology continues to distance people from their sources of wealth and resources, the narrator suggests, people come to look scornfully on this land, failing to understand the mutual interdependence between humans and environment. This does not only mean that vast landscapes will be transformed into ugly, barren outdoor factories, useless except for the money that can be extracted from them; in addition, it means that people themselves will feel less strongly a sense of humanity in its connection to the place they live.

Chapter 12 Quotes

The people in flight from the terror behind—strange things happen to them, some bitterly cruel and some so beautiful that the faith is refired forever.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 122

Explanation and Analysis

For this chapter, the narrator has zoomed in on the experience of one migrant family in particular. A crooked salesman, knowing that they are desperate, tries to sell them a tire for an exorbitant price. After refusing and continuing to limp along with a broken trailer, the family finally enlists the help of another driver and manages to arrive to California. As a result, this family's experience is a typical reminder of the various ways that humans can treat each other, some of which include acting as though other people are simply instruments of one's own power and wealth. Other attitudes, though, value strangers as fellow travelers and fellow humans.

The narrator thus stresses that it is impossible to extract any one conclusion from the struggles of these migrant farmers, apart, perhaps, from the inherent complexity and inconsistency of humanity. Still, we also see in this passage that the families are desperate enough to leave behind the "terror" of their past life that they will cling to "beautiful" things more than "cruel" ones. The small examples of kindness and community will have to be enough to enable them to persevere on their journey.

Chapter 13 Quotes

"We're proud to help. I ain't felt so—safe in a long time. People needs—to help."

Related Characters: Ivy and Sairy Wilson (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 141

Explanation and Analysis

Granpa has just died, and the family is making preparations to bury him on the own. Earlier, the Joads had met a couple, the Wilsons, whose car had broken down, and after initially exchanging tense remarks, Tom's appeal to their common humanity had helped to ease the situation. Although Granpa's death has happened only shortly after their meeting, the Wilsons now feel close enough to the Joads to want to help in whatever way they can, in order to maintain Granpa's dignity even in a fragile situation. Friendship and community, this passage suggests, may be just as fragile, but they can also be powerful signals of common humanity. Indeed, as Sairy implies here, the act of helping another can be a positive force even for the person who offers assistance.

Chapter 14 Quotes

❝ Fear the time when Manself will not suffer and die for a concept, for this one quality is the foundation of Manself, and this one quality is man, distinctive in the universe.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 151

Explanation and Analysis

The narrator is describing the changes taking place in the West as a result of the influx of migrant farmers, some of whom are fighting for better wages and work quality. The narrator suggests that what they are really fighting for, however, is a sense of dignity and respect that the landowners involved refuse to give them. What is called the "concept" is this broader motivation behind the fight for change: while specific, material desires stir people onward, it is the belief in certain broader values that really defines humans and convinces them that a better life is possible.

This process of change and perseverance is only possible, it's suggested, when a group of people bands together, so that life becomes not just a question of the individual I, but of humanity or "Manself" all together. Indeed, it is this community of strivers that defines what humans are and can be.

❝ Here is the node, you who hate change and fear revolution. Keep these two squatting men apart; make them hate, fear, suspect each other…the danger is here, for two men are not as lonely and perplexed as one.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 151

Explanation and Analysis

After detailing the desires of humans fighting for greater dignity and banding together in communities in order to do so, the narrator turns to the enemies of these communities: the landowners and corporations who care little about the lives of these people who are so less powerful than themselves. The narrator frames the differences between these two groups in the form of rhetorical "advice" that he gives to those in power. While it is important for workers and the poor to express their common humanity through community, for those in power the opposite is necessary: they must continually break down the bonds of common humanity in order to prevent real change from happening.

To do so, the narrator suggests, those in power must turn individuals against each other, encouraging them to suspect and harbor ill will towards each other. As a result, they will be able to maintain their own power over others just as they break down the dignity of those over whom they rule.

Chapter 16 Quotes

❝ "It don't make no sense. This fella wants eight hundred men. So he prints up five thousand of them things an' maybe twenty thousan' people sees 'em. An' maybe two-three thousan' folks gets movin' account a this here han'bill. Folks that's crazy with worry."

Related Themes:

Page Number: 189

Explanation and Analysis

Pa has met an exhausted, downtrodden-looking man at camp who is coming back from California. He is one of the first pieces of proof that California may not be the paradise that the Joad family had hoped it would be. The Joads, like many other families, have learned about the opportunities for workers in the West through advertisements that have promised work and a decent living. However, according to this man, the landowners advertised so much in order to have a large influx of labor, so that they could then haggle down the cost and exploit the workers.

The man's estimations perhaps "make no sense" from a strictly factual point of view, but he knows well that the strategy does make sense from a business point of view. The

landowners have an advantage in terms of money, time, and resources, and they use that advantage to the best of their ability to keep the workers (whom they nonetheless need) as powerless as possible. The man only briefly alludes to the consequences of this strategy, which makes already desperate people even more desperate, particularly after having overcome obstacles in order to arrive at a place they thought would be stable and welcoming.

Chapter 17 Quotes

❝ At first the families were timid in the building and tumbling worlds, but gradually the technique of building worlds became their technique. Then leaders emerged, then laws were made, then codes came into being. And as the worlds moved westward they were more complete and better furnished, for their builders were more experienced in building them.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 194

Explanation and Analysis

The Joads have joined one of the many camps that have sprung up where migrant workers making the same journey as they stop for the night to rest. These moments are initially fraught with tension. The travelers don't know each other, for the most part, and recognize that they are all going in pursuit of the same jobs, so they could consider each other as natural competitors. However, this is not what happens. Instead, they begin to band together in makeshift communities.

The narrator describes the building of such communities almost as if he were describing the historical development of society out of individuals and smaller units: indeed, in many ways the journey west recalls the more monumental historical journey of humans through time. Initially, these groups are rudimentary, but over time they grow more complex. While the novel is certainly critical of some complex social organizations, landowning corporations among them, this passage shows that not all communities have to be ruthless or small-minded. Instead, those in charge of creating bonds between people can learn from their mistakes through time, and work in support of human connection rather than against it.

Chapter 18 Quotes

❝ "They's a time of change, an' when that comes, dyin' is a piece of all dyin', and bearin' is a piece of all bearin', an bearin' an' dyin' is two pieces of the same thing. An' then things ain't lonely any more. An' then a hurt don't hurt so bad, cause it ain't a lonely hurt no more, Rosasharn. I wisht I could tell you so you'd know, but I can't."

Related Characters: Ma Joad (speaker), Rose of Sharon

Related Themes:

Page Number: 210

Explanation and Analysis

Granma seems to be losing her mind, as she starts speaking incoherently and imagining that her husband is there with her. Rose of Sharon is worried about her, and here Ma Joad attempts to reassure her. She does so by making an appeal to the larger forces that structure human life. Giving birth, bearing children, and dying are all part of the same process, she says, and it is impossible to have one without the other. Ma Joad takes solace in this vision of death, because it suggests that we are not alone - that what seems frightening, unknown, and lonely to us in fact fits into a broader meaning.

Ma Joad does seem to have developed her own beliefs about life and death beyond what her Christian heritage has taught her. Instead, she draws on all that she's learned regarding the ability for humans to come together in a community. This community might be fragile, but she continues to believe in it enough for it to structure her beliefs.

Chapter 19 Quotes

❝ And the great owners, who must lose their land in an upheaval, the great owners with access to history, with eyes to read history and to know the great fact: when property accumulates in too few hands it is taken away. And that companion fact: when a majority of the people are hungry and cold they will take by force what they need. And the little screaming fact that sounds through all history: repression works only to strengthen and knit the repressed.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 238

Explanation and Analysis

Throughout this chapter, the narrative zooms in and out, focusing first on the larger history behind those who owned and took over the land in the West, and then on the specific experiences of the Okies who are forced to move west because of the selfishness and greed of the landowners. Here, the narrator suggests that these landowners are blind to this cycle of history. They think themselves exceptional because of their powerful grip on others weaker than they are, because of their ability to erase the dignity of their workers. But the narrator points out that the desire to rebel against unjust power never goes away: it is a defining fact of human history.

Through these powerful lines, Steinbeck suggests that the story he is writing is only one part of a bigger history. His characters may seem desperate and constantly dehumanized, and their experiences may be in some ways unique, but in other ways their lives fit into a narrative about progress, resistance, and struggle for human rights and recognition. The book itself might not include any revolutions or even political battles, but these remain in the background, relevant to everything else that happens.

Chapter 20 Quotes

❝ "Well, when the cops come in, an' they come in all a time, that's how you wanta be. Dumb—don't know nothin'. Don't understan' nothin'. That's how cops like us...be bull-simple."

Related Characters: Floyd Knowles (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 248

Explanation and Analysis

Tom has met another worker, Floyd Knowles, who gives him some tips about how to navigate in the world of the farms. These farms are tense and fraught with danger because of the constant prowling and hostility of the police. The police are always looking for migrant workers who might be doing something wrong. While they believe that all the workers are below them in the social hierarchy, they also can readily believe that these migrant workers aren't small enough to cause too much trouble.

Floyd recommends that Tom take advantage of this bias and prejudice by acting just as dumb as the police probably think he is. In a twisted way, this performance becomes a way for the migrant workers to regain some measure of power over their own situations. By managing, even if only partially, a biased system, they can continue to feel some small degree of dignity.

Chapter 21 Quotes

❝ The great companies did not know that the line between hunger and anger is a thin line.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 284

Explanation and Analysis

As the situation of the migrant farmers becomes more desperate, the book states, these people no longer seem like real people, nor even like farmers, but rather begin to be defined solely as migrants torn from their homes and unable to settle into a new home. The "great companies" described here are eager to squeeze out as much work as they possibly can from the migrants, who are unable to support themselves or their families with their meager earnings. Instead, they grow hungrier and hungrier. The companies believe this hunger to be something manageable: indeed, they may even believe that hunger makes these people more docile and less willing to rise up against the unjust forces affecting their lives. What the narrator suggests, however, is that hunger is not something meek and quiet but rather another kind of wrath. And in this book, of course, wrath can be powerful and good, a force that can provoke change and remind characters that they are alive enough to fight.

Chapter 22 Quotes

❝ "We ain't never had no trouble with the law. I guess the big farmers is scairt of that. Can't throw us in jail—why, it scares 'em. Figger maybe if we can gove'n ourselves, maybe we'll do other things."

Related Characters: Timothy and Wilkie Wallace (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 297

Explanation and Analysis

Tom has befriended more people who are savvier regarding how to navigate the difficult and sometimes dangerous terrain of farm work. Together, though, Timothy, Wilkie, and Tom have learned from Mr. Thomas about the Farmer's

Association's plans to stir up trouble at the camp so as to be able to bring in the police. Here Timothy expresses frustration that even the smallest signs of community creation and of self-sufficiency among the migrant workers, such as appointing their own leaders and managing some of their own affairs, are looked upon as threatening by those in power above them.

For Timothy, those in power are frustrated that they cannot use the one biased tool at their disposal - the law - to oppress the workers, since they are not breaking the law. Any degree of independence among these workers is looked on as a possibility of further resistance or rebellion, one that must be immediately quashed.

"Well, sir, Hines says, 'A red is any son-of-a-bitch that wants thirty cents an hour when we're payin' twenty-five!' Well, this young fella he thinks about her, an' he scratches his head, an' he says, 'Well, Jesus, Mr. Hines. I ain't a son-of-a-bitch, but if that's what a red is—why, I want thirty cents an hour. Ever'body does. Hell, Mr. Hines, we're all reds.'"

Related Characters: Timothy and Wilkie Wallace (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 298

Explanation and Analysis

Timothy continues to express his frustration about the lack of justice he's experienced as a farmworker from those in power. Here he tells the others about a conversation he had with a certain Mr. Hines. "Reds" are Communists, but the term was also used for anyone suspected of having left-leaning politics. When Timothy attempted to ask Mr. Hines what the exact definition of a "red" was, it soon became clear that for Mr. Hines, the word was only an excuse: by calling someone a "red" he could threaten greater repercussions from the police and thus ensure that no one would dare to ask for thirty cents an hour rather than twenty-five.

Mr. Hines seems to have no shame about his calculating attempts to keep his workers poor and powerless. Meanwhile, Timothy embraces the politically dangerous term "reds" to underline just how unjust he sees the system to be, turning Mr. Hines's logic on its head to claim that reds must define all the workers, no matter their political beliefs.

Chapter 24 Quotes

"They're gettin' purty mean out here. Burned that camp an' beat up folks. I been thinkin'. All our folks got guns. I been thinkin' maybe we ought to get up a turkey shootin' club an' have meetin's ever' Sunday."

Related Themes:

Page Number: 345

Explanation and Analysis

A man at the dance tells Pa about a story he heard concerning another group of workers, this time outside Ohio. These people also wanted to fight for better wages and living situations, he says, but they were barred at every turn. Finally, in a symbolic show of force, thousands of them took their rifles and marched through the center of town on their way to the turkey shoot, before marching back - and since then they haven't had any trouble. The man suggests that even if force will not get them anywhere that peaceful protest hasn't, it might still be an effective political move for the workers to show that they do have strength in numbers, even if the gesture is largely symbolic. He suggests that by mounting their own "turkey shoot," the workers might be able to assert their own dignity as well as their closely-knit community in a way that might send a powerful message to their bosses.

Chapter 25 Quotes

The people come with nets to fish for potatoes in the river, and the guards hold them back; they come in rattling cars to get the dumped oranges, but the kerosene is sprayed. And they stand still and watch the potatoes float by, listen to the screaming pigs being killed in a ditch and covered with quick-lime, watch the mountains of oranges slop down to a putrefying ooze; and in the eyes of the people there is the failure; and in the eyes of the hungry there is a growing wrath. In the souls of the people the grapes of wrath are filling and growing heavy, growing heavy for the vintage.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 349

Explanation and Analysis

This passage describes what happens when there is a good harvest and too much food is left over after the expected supply is picked and dispatched. The business owners don't want there to be too great a supply, or else prices will go

down and they'll risk losing money. For them, it is even too much a business risk to allow the farmers to collect the food that remains for their own use.

This refusal seems to change the businessmen's actions from a merely shrewd business strategy to an attitude meant precisely to dehumanize the workers, to emphasize their powerlessness at the hands of those who hire them. The workers are indeed forced to watch the potatoes, oranges, and pigs be destroyed, without being able to do anything about it. It is this sense of despair, and not only the shocking gap between the overabundance of food and the hungry, weak farmers that are responsible for picking it, that makes the "souls of the people" so heavy. The final line of this passage gives the book its title. The sentence uses a metaphor of wine vineyards, appropriate given the cultivation work of these migrant workers, to describe a growing feeling of despair and anger among them. Like the grapes that grow heavy as harvest approaches, these workers too are building up their wrath to an unknown but inevitable point in the future at which they will no longer be able to stand what they are forced to experience.

Chapter 26 Quotes

"Learnin' it all a time, ever' day. If you're in trouble or hurt or need—go to poor people. They're the only ones that'll help—the only ones."

Related Characters: Ma Joad (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 376

Explanation and Analysis

Because of the unjust business strategy of the owners, which means that the Joad family is making even less money than before, Ma is forced to ask the shopkeeper to lend her money for the food she needs. The shopkeeper agrees, but this apparent show of generosity is a deceitful façade: the shopkeeper has inflated the prices at the store to take advantage of the workers' desperation, and it is in his best interests to keep people like Ma Joad dependent on him.

Ma Joad seethes with anger, as she is forced yet again to reckon with the fact that even people who occupy the same general community as she does can too often be cruel and calculating. She realizes that the family must carefully weigh whom to trust and whom to remain suspicious of. One possible way of judging such a test, she decides, is poverty: even though poor people have less to give, Ma Joad has learned that they tend to be more compassionate and understanding, more willing to forge bonds of community than those who, paradoxically, have more.

Chapter 28 Quotes

"But now I been thinkin' what he said, an' I can remember—all of it. Says one time he went out in the wilderness to find his own soul, an' he foun' he didn' have no soul that was his'n. Says he foun' he jus' got a little piece of a great big soul. Says a wilderness ain't no good, 'cause his little piece of a soul wasn't no good 'less it was with the rest, an' was whole. Funny how I remember. Didn' think I was even listenin'. But I know now a fella ain't no good alone."

Related Characters: Tom Joad (speaker), Jim Casy

Related Themes:

Page Number: 418

Explanation and Analysis

Tom's secret is out, and he will now have to flee the camp in order not to be caught and punished for his crime. As Ma Joad generously gives him much of her savings, they talk about what Tom will do next. The book has come a long way from its beginnings, with Jim Casy's rambling remarks on what he learned since deciding to leave his position as preacher, but it turns out that Casy's words have actually had an enormous impact on Tom - even though even Tom didn't realize that he was affected by them at the time.

Tom too is in search of a bigger, more meaningful community, and he is struck by the recollection that for Jim Casy, isolating oneself in the wilderness is actually no guarantee of goodness. Instead, Tom is convinced that he must try to work with others to enact change. Like Casy, Tom is developing an alternative to the official catechism of the Christian faith he was born with, attempting to understand how humans relate to one another and how they might better connect.

Chapter 29 Quotes

And the women sighed with relief, for they knew it was all right—the break had not come; and the break would never come as long as fear could turn to wrath.
Tiny points of grass came through the earth, and in a few days the hills were pale green with the beginning year.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 435

Explanation and Analysis

The beginning of *The Grapes of Wrath* had described a severe drought in Oklahoma that was devastating for the farms and those who worked on them. Now it is the opposite, a flood and not a drought, that strikes fear once again into the hearts of the women. And here, once again, their fears are assuaged by realizing that their husbands and fathers have chosen anger over fear: for them, this sentiment ensures that they will continue to act, rather than being broken and rendered passive by what has happened to them.

The end of this passage suggests that even the darkest times eventually give way to something better. The imagery has to do with the cyclical process of nature, but it also recalls the Biblical story of the great flood, which washed away human sin and allowed humanity to begin again. Perseverance, for these workers, does not mean that they will suddenly become successful or that their problems will be magically resolved, but there is some solace to be had in the knowledge that they will live to see even slightly better days.

Chapter 30 Quotes

"Go down an' tell 'em. Go down in the street an' rot an' tell 'em that way. That's the way you can talk. Don' even know if you was a boy or a girl. Ain't gonna find out. Go on down now, an' lay in the street. Maybe they'll know then."

Related Characters: Uncle John (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 448

Explanation and Analysis

Rosasharn's baby has been born stillborn, the ultimate sign of how the conditions in which the Joads find themselves afford so little possibility for life. Here, Uncle John puts the dead infant into a box and sends it down the current. He knows that, as things stand, the baby's death will remain unknown and unacknowledged by the world outside the desperate migrant camps. By sending it down into town, he hopes that the body will bear witness to the desperation of these workers, and their despair in the face of apathy and inhumanity on the part of other people. If others finally "know," perhaps, Uncle John will have done his part in sharing these people's experiences with the world, and in helping to change their reality, even if only slightly and slowly.

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

Beginning in the month of May, a drought damages the cornfields of Oklahoma. As the land's fertility wanes, the earth and the sky grow steadily more pale. In June, wind blows away all clouds that offered any chance of rain. This wind increases. Soon, Oklahoma is engulfed in a furious dust storm that ruins the crops beyond saving.

The book opens with a bleak depiction of the dustbowl. Every hope for rain that appears is promptly crushed by nature. The author's repetition of the word "pale" highlights the gradual destruction of the landscape.

Farming families look in dazed disbelief at the harm the weather has done to their fields. Women worry that their husbands will "break," and children worry that their mothers and fathers will "break." Yet the farming men's initial dismay turns to anger, and this reassures their wives and children: "women and children knew deep in themselves that no misfortune was too great to bear if their men were whole." The men then begin to think of what to do next.

The impoverished Oklahoma farmers will persevere in circumstances that seem hopeless. It's important to note that the men's wrath—"anger" instead of passive "dismay"—is what assures their families that they won't give up. And it isn't catastrophe that destroys a person—it's giving up.

CHAPTER 2

Tom Joad, a protagonist of the novel, is introduced. He is young, tall, and weather-beaten. He has just been released from serving a four-year prison sentence for homicide, and he wears the new, ill-fitting suit that was given to him upon his release. Tom has walked to a roadside restaurant to hitch a ride home. He takes a seat on the running board of a truck, even though he notices that the truck bears a "No Riders" sticker.

Tom's new clothes are an inconvenience, and they contrast sharply with his weather-worn body. By taking a seat on the running-board of the truck in spite of the "No Riders" sticker, Tom shows that he's self-assured and comfortable breaking rules.

When the truck driver returns and seems wary of giving Tom a ride, Tom appeals to the trucker: "sometimes a guy'll be a good guy even if some rich bastard makes him carry a sticker." The trucker, sensing that he's being "trapped" by Tom's words, agrees to let Tom ride.

Tom's comment about the rich emphasizes the way those in power impose arbitrary rules to prevent people from helping each other. The driver helps in order not to seem inhospitable or supportive of the wealthy.

Tom explains that he's on his way back to his father's forty acre farm. The driver is surprised to hear that a forty-acre "cropper" managed to escape the destruction of the dust storms or repossession by landowners. Tom responds that he hasn't heard any news lately, since he and his father, while literate, don't write letters to one another.

The driver's surprised comment foreshadows the discovery Tom will make a few chapters later, when he comes across his family's abandoned farmhouse, and also makes it clear that nature isn't the only thing the small farmers have to contend with.

Throughout the ride, the truck driver pressures Tom for more information about himself—his questions "spread nets" and "set traps." Tom senses this "secret investigating casualness," and answers the trucker's questions standoffishly, choosing to remain mostly silent as the driver rambles. The trucker notices Tom's reticence and explains that the loneliness of life on the road is what makes him so talkative.

Tom's quiet confidence contrasts with the driver's insecure babbling. The driver's reference to the loneliness of life on the road prefigures the long journey to California that the Joads will soon undertake, and it highlights the value of companionship during hard times.

Finally, once the truck nears Tom's destination, Tom acknowledges the driver's nosiness: "You give me a goin'-over when I first got in. I seen you." He then explains that he received a seven-year sentence in McAlester prison for homicide; he's out early on parole. After exchanging goodbyes, Tom gets out at a dirt road and the truck pulls away.

With this candid outburst, Tom shows that he doesn't much like deception. Tom's willingness to tell the driver about his time in jail shows that he isn't ashamed of his past.

CHAPTER 3

A **turtle** moves slowly across a run-down highway, struggling to climb a steep embankment. As it works its way across the road, a woman in a sedan swerves to avoid running it over, and the turtle continues plodding on. Soon after, a man in a truck comes down the road, and goes out of his way to run the turtle over. The turtle is thrown across the highway and lands on its back. It slowly manages to turn itself over, and continues on its way, down the embankment on the other side of the highway.

Throughout the book, animals often represent the concept of powerlessness. The turtle's persistence in the face of adversity symbolizes the perseverance of the Oklahoma farmers, who, like the turtle, receive both kind and malicious treatment from the humans they encounter.

CHAPTER 4

After watching the truck depart, Tom walks down the road barefoot, with his shoes wrapped in his coat. He comes across a turtle and turns it on its back. After watching the turtle flail and wet itself in fear, Tom picks it up and carries it off wrapped in his coat.

Tom's treatment of the defenseless turtle gives a glimpse into his character at this point. He is neither kind nor cruel, just observant; he doesn't use his power to hurt or to help.

Tom finds a man sitting in the shade of a tree, singing a hymn. The man recognizes Tom, and gives his name as Jim Casy. Casy is a former preacher, and claims to remember baptizing Tom, back when Tom was a young boy fixated on pulling girls' pigtails. The two share a drink of whisky from Tom's flask.

This encounter shows how close-knit Tom's community is. Even after years apart, Tom and Casy remember one another, and are immediately comfortable together.

Casy goes on to explain why he has given up being a preacher. He tells Tom that he was plagued by guilt for having sex with girls from his congregations, but found himself unable to stop. After agonizing about seducing the young women he felt responsible for, Casy concluded that he doesn't really believe in the Christian concept of sin. Rather, he "loves people" and doesn't feel comfortable judging their actions. For Casy, the Holy Spirit is the "one big soul ever'body's a part of." Casy is relieved to hear that Tom remembers his baptism experience with indifference, because Casy's guilt makes him worry about having done one of his congregants harm during his time preaching.

Casy occupies somewhat of a moral gray area. He abused the trust of women in his congregation, but he seems to be genuinely remorseful for his actions. Casy's guilt stems from the black-and-white teachings of sin and virtue that he believed while he was preaching. His re-evaluation of his faith shows less of a focus on absolute judgments like good and evil, and instead emphasizes common humanity.

Casy asks Tom about his father, Ol' Tom Joad, and Tom confesses that he hasn't heard anything from him in four years. Tom explains that he served time for killing a man with a shovel in self-defense, after he was assaulted with a knife at a dance. Tom remarks that his jail time wasn't all that unpleasant, since he was kept clean and fed.

Tom's explanation of his crime to Casy includes a new detail: the murder was in self-defense. This makes Tom's moral situation less clear—he isn't a stone-cold murderer, as he led the trucker to believe, but he isn't perfectly innocent, either. His comment about jail reveals how bad things are for the poor during the Depression; jail's pretty good compared to that poverty.

The two men head off in the direction of Tom's homestead. Tom reveals that he and his family are squatters, saying that he expects his house to be in the same place as he left it, "'less somebody stole it, like Pa [Joad] stole it." Tom explains that the Joads first got their land when Tom's father, along with his father, Grampa Joad, and son, Noah Joad, used a team of horses to drag another family's abandoned house onto the land. As Tom and Casy crest the hill above the house, they see that it's been deserted.

Tom's glib description of house-stealing illustrates a different conception of property. For the Joads, it's perfectly normal to make use of something that others have left behind. To Tom, "stealing" the abandoned house isn't a dishonorable act, and since the house was abandoned it calling it "stealing" isn't exactly accurate either.

CHAPTER 5

This chapter returns to a broader description of the worsening farming situation in Oklahoma. The landowners confront the farmers who rent farmland from them—known as tenant farmers—and tell them they have to vacate the land. The farm owners are described as either self-loathing, angry, or cold, and all of them are forced to be cruel by a system "larger than themselves" that runs on mathematical calculations of profits. In turn, the banks that some landowners work for are "monsters" that enslave humans. Technology fuels the wealthier people's greed: one man on a tractor can now cultivate as much cotton as a dozen families could. These tractor men raze and "rape" the land, knocking over any tenant families' houses that stand in their way.

This scene strongly emphasizes the dehumanizing effects of large institutions. The banks are "monsters" that have grown well past the control of the humans running them. In search of higher profits, landowners disregard the basic human needs of their tenant farmers, even if it pains the landowners to do so. This inhumanity is heightened by the use of machines, like tractors, which do the work of dozens of people, without the same connection to the land. And note the contrast: the Joad's "stole" an unoccupied house. The landowners re-possess occupied *houses.*

A tractor man, the son of a local farmer, is accosted by another farmer for working "against [his] own people." The tractor man explains that he gets three dollars a day to do his work, and can only afford to worry about the welfare of his own family. The tenant farmer threatens to shoot the tractor man if he demolishes the home he built by hand, but the tractor man reminds the farmer that the bank is too big to fight, and that there are plenty of men in line to operate the tractors.

Like the landowners, the tractor man is part of a system that is far beyond his control. Just as the tenant farmers are powerless to resist the tractor men, the tractor man is powerless to oppose the harms he's doing: if he sides with his people, he'll lose his livelihood and be quickly replaced by someone else willing to do the dirty work to keep his *family alive.*

CHAPTER 6

Tom and Casy observe that the Joad homestead was quickly and recently abandoned. One side of the house is seriously damaged, a window has been broken, and the furnishings are gone. Furthermore, Tom concludes that the entire neighborhood must be deserted, because nobody has stripped the house's useful plank siding—had there been neighbors around, they would have been quick to borrow anything left behind.

Tom's observation that neighbors would have taken the Joads' plank siding recalls the quasi-theft through which the Joads acquired their own home. Oklahoma tenant farmers will clearly use any materials available to them—and the fact that the plank siding is still around is ominous.

An old neighbor, Muley Graves, is spotted as he walks through the cotton fields by Casy and Tom. They speak with him, and Muley talks at length about how he has chosen to stay alone, and is unwilling to leave his land. Muley explains that Tom's folks were forced out of their home and are now staying with Tom's Uncle, John. The Joads plan to pick cotton in order to earn enough money to drive to California in search of work.

Here, we learn for certain that the Joads have been evicted, like the families described in Chapter 5. Muley symbolizes the near impossibility of resisting the advance of the banks' tractors, and his decision to resist has made him alone.

Muley keeps talking, only semi-coherently, about his compulsion to stay on the land, even though he, too, has been evicted by the bank. He sleeps where he can and eats whatever animals he can catch on the prairies. He shows his kills of the day, and Tom gets excited to see fresh meat for the first time in four years. Muley somewhat reluctantly agrees to share his food with Tom and Casy. Over dinner, Muley continues to reflect on his connection to the land, remembering the dust in which his father died and the grass where he first slept with a woman.

Muley's fanatical refusal to leave his land is an amazing exercise in determination, and it illustrates the profound connection to the land that Oklahoma tenant farmers experience. His loneliness and waning sanity also illustrates the importance of the farming community to each of its individual members. As that community disappears, Muley loses himself..

After the men finish eating, they are forced to hide from a police car's searchlights to avoid being arrested for trespassing. Tom wants to put up a fight, but Muley tells him that he doesn't understand how bad it is to be hunted and forces Tom and Casy to hide in the field with him. Once the police have left, Muley beds down in a hidden cave and Tom sleeps outside, while Casy stays awake to think.

While Tom, unaccustomed to the feeling of being hunted, is still eager to resist the powers that be. Muley's experience shows that the institutions that evicted the tenant farmers are too strong to resist on one's own. The men must hide in order to avoid being arrested on trespassing on land where they have lived for generations.

CHAPTER 7

This chapter is narrated from the point of view of a used car salesman. He advises his employees to exploit customers in order to make bigger sales by looking for their psychological weaknesses. It becomes clear that Oklahomans' westward search for work has driven up demand for automobiles, and the ignorant farmers are easily coerced into paying the salesman's exorbitant, unfair prices for broken-down cars. One migrant even tries to trade his mules for a jalopy, but is told that his animals have no place in this mechanized age. Throughout the chapter, the car dealer repeatedly fantasizes about having still more cars to sell.

The car salesman's perspective shows that he has been dehumanized by his greed. He only cares about selling cars, and is happy to undermine the psychological well-being of desperate Oklahomans, not to mention sell them crappy cars for exorbitant prices when they are already desperately poor, just to increase his bottom line. Additionally, the dismissal of the farmer's mules articulates the role that advancing technology plays in these changing times.


CHAPTER 8

Tom and Casy continue towards Uncle John's house. Tom has been awoken early by Muley, who fearfully warns them to get off the land by daybreak. As he and Casy walk onward, Tom tells the ex-preacher that Uncle John has been a lonesome character ever since his young wife died suddenly. The night before his wife died, John had ignored her complaints about stomach pain and refused to call a doctor, thinking she had given herself a stomachache from overeating. These days, Uncle John tries to escape his guilt through alcohol, and by living selflessly and giving away most of what he has. For example, John gives treats to children and drops off meals with his neighbors.

Uncle John's remorse about his role in the death of his wife expands upon the theme of guilt that characters like Tom and Casy have already begun to develop. Unlike Casy, whose guilt drove him towards a more accepting view of humankind, Uncle John's guilt has pushed him in the opposite direction. John leads a life of extreme opposites. On one hand, he often exercises impressive discipline; on the other, he occasionally plunges into drinking.

The two men arrive at Uncle John's house. Set up in Uncle John's yard is a modified jalopy with a truck bed attached, and Tom notices right away that this means his family is getting ready to hit the road soon. Tom comes across his father, Pa, working on the car. Ol' Tom Joad takes a while to recognize his own son. He is embarrassed not to have written to tell Tom of the family's plans to go to California, but is excited to hear that his son is home on parole and isn't a fugitive. Inside the house, Tom's mother, Ma, mistakes Tom for a stranger and offers him some food. Once she realizes she's speaking with her son, she, like Pa, immediately worries that Tom is on the lam after breaking out of jail. She also worries that Tom has been harmed by his jail time, but Tom assures her that he isn't bitter.

Tom's interactions with his mother and father show that the Joads are accustomed to moving on in the aftermath of misfortune. While Ma and Pa are evidently happy to see their son, their inability to recognize him, and Pa's failure to contact him, make it clear that the family was entirely prepared to leave Tom behind. That they all think he may have escaped from prison is a testament to their relationship to law enforcement but also a subtle indication of their assessment of Tom's strength and capabilities.


Grampa Joad, disheveled and mischievous, appears to greet Tom; Grampa is followed by his wife, Granma Joad. Tom's older brother, Noah, also comes to say hello. Noah, Pa Joad's first-born, is strange-looking, emotionally distant, and apathetic. Noah was delivered by Pa himself when a midwife couldn't arrive in time, and Pa blames his mishandling of the baby for Noah's strange looks and demeanor.

Tom seems to be much more of a natural leader than Noah, despite being younger. Pa's guilt about Noah's deformations adds still further to the overarching theme of shame and guilt, and shows that while the Joads are good at moving on, they can never leave their past deeds behind completely.


The Joad family and Casy sit down for breakfast, and Granma insists that Casy say grace. Casy is uncomfortable speaking about Jesus, and gives a long-winded account of his secular spiritual awakening, which ends with: "I'm glad there's love here." The family remains sitting as if in prayer until Casy remembers to say "Amen," which ends the grace like clockwork.

The Joads' faith seems to be much more of a ritualistic practice than a sincere belief. Granma in particular seems to care only that grace was said, not the actual substance of Casy's prayer.

Finally, Tom inquires about the other members of his family. Uncle John has gone into town with Ruthie and Winfield, Tom's youngest siblings. Rosasharn (short for "Rose of Sharon"), Tom's sister, is now pregnant and living with her husband, Connie Rivers. Pa shows Tom the car they bought and fixed up with the help of Al, Tom's sixteen-year-old brother. Soon after, Al struts into the yard. However, his swagger quickly fades when he sees Tom is home. Al's behavior makes it clear that he deeply respects and admires Tom.

Tom is clearly a role model for Al. Even though Tom's homecoming places Al lower in the family pecking order, the younger brother is happy to see Tom's return.

CHAPTER 9

Chapter 9 shifts focus away from the Joads and instead describes the preparations that tenant farmers in general are making for the exodus to California. It is mostly told from the general perspective of a farmer, who is trying to sell all his extra possessions before his family sets out westward. The farmer's hand tools have been rendered valueless by the new, tractor-based farming techniques, and the farmer begins to see the buyers not as buyers of "junk," but of "junked lives."

This scene further emphasizes the harm that the landowners the tractor men, and technological progress in general have done to the lives of the tenant farmers. To these farmers, having to part with their few possessions and leave town is tantamount to losing their lives.


The farmer is extremely frustrated by opportunistic buyers, who offer unfairly low prices for his belongings. These buyers show no remorse for buying the possessions that the farming families have grown attached to through years of hard work. The tenant farmers return home disappointed in how little money they've rounded up. Families are forced to burn most of their heirlooms, as they have no room to bring along items with only sentimental value. As their belongings burn, the families grow restless, and drive away hurriedly.

Yet again, humans are shown to be willing to take advantage of one another in pursuit of profit. The hard times leave no room for sentimentality, and the farmers must leave behind not merely their land but items that they had come to see as their heritage.


CHAPTER 10

Ma Joad tells Tom about her hopes for California. She remembers seeing handbills advertising high wages and bountiful harvests. Tom warns her not to be too optimistic about the future.

Tom's time in jail has likely made him somewhat cynical, and he is skeptical of the bounty California will offer. Ma, on the other hand, is driven by her faith that things will get better.

Casy asks Tom, Ma, and Grampa Joad if he can come along to California with them. Ma quickly answers that the family would be happy to have him, and they'll decide if there's room when Al, Pa, Uncle John, Ruthie, and Winfield get back from selling their possessions in town.

Even though she holds a great deal of power in the family, Ma Joad allows the men to be the nominal leaders of the clan. This is why she doesn't answer Casy definitively off the bat, and instead defers to her husband.

The rest of the family comes back from town with Rosasharn and Connie in tow; the men are disappointed that they only managed to get eighteen dollars for every movable thing in their house. The family holds a conference to decide whether Casy can come with them. Ma Joad overrules her husband's uncertainty and plays a crucial role in this decision, saying that the choice to include Casy isn't a matter of "can we" but a matter of "will we."

Ma Joad's decisiveness shows that she really holds the power in the family. Her choice to take Casy is a testament to her determination, resilience, and generosity.

The family prepares for the journey. Casy offers to help Ma Joad salt down the meat. She is surprised, since the task is "women's work," but Casy convinces her that these trying circumstances make her concerns impractical. Ma Joad then gathers her most important jewelry and burns the rest of her possessions.

The meat salting exchange shows that times are desperate enough—Casy's good intentions are strong enough— to overturn biases about male and female roles.

Muley comes by to pay his respects to the family before they leave. Pa offers Muley a chance to travel with them to California, but Muley refuses. Ma Joad asks him if he'll ever leave Oklahoma, and Muley answers that he can't bring himself to leave.

Muley represents the tenant farmers' profound connection to the farmland. His desire to stay—his need to stay—overpowers every other self-interest.

Muley's stubbornness makes Grampa determined to stay as well, and he resists his family's efforts to talk him into going. The Joads ultimately resort to spiking Grampa coffee with Winfield's sleeping medicine so that they can bring the old man with them.

Grandpa, like Muley, is overcome with his connection to the land. For the rest of the Joads, the bond of family is clearly stronger than that of land, since they are willing to take Grampa against his will.

CHAPTER 11

The farmers have abandoned their homes, and the land has become uninhabited. The only things left with life in them are the modern farming implements, made of metal and fueled by gasoline. Unlike traditional farmers and beasts of burden, however, the tractors lose all vitality once they are powered down.

The mechanized, profit-hungry nature of the new farming techniques dehumanizes everyone involved. The farming process has lost the organic intimacy that it had for families like the Joads.

The cold, mechanized efficiency of these technical tools removes the land's wonderful properties, and the tractor men cannot understand the land as deeply as the farmers did. Similarly, this machinery prevents the men who use it from truly understanding themselves, and life in general, in anything but detached, scientific terms. Meanwhile, the vacant houses become increasingly decrepit. Prairie animals take over the homes.

Once again, technology is shown to alienate men from the natural sense of wonder and intimate connection to the land that makes them human. By failing to love and understand the land, the tractor men miss out on the fundamental humanity that Casy praises above all else.

CHAPTER 12

Migrants flee hardship along Highway 66, which winds across the country's diverse territory, from Arkansas, through the mountains of Arizona, to the fertile valleys of California.

Highway 66 unifies the diverse landscape of the U.S., just as it gives the fleeing migrants some solidarity in their hardship.

The narrator speaks from the perspective of traveling farmers, who worry about their malfunctioning cars and improvise solutions in order to continue their journey to California. A greedy car-parts salesman has little sympathy for a poor family in need of a new tire, and tells the family that California isn't big enough to accommodate all the country's needy citizens. The salesman threatens that the border patrol will deny the migrants entry into California and rip up their driver's licenses.

Along the highway, uncaring opportunists are eager to take advantage of the desperate migrants. Worse still, these greedy individuals are fearful of—and openly hostile to—the migrants. The salesman, for one, seems to perceive the farmers' differences as a threat to him and his part of the country.

The salesman tries to sell the migrant family a faulty tire for an unfair price. The farmer, indignant at being taken for a fool, insults the car salesman and drives away in anger, still relying on the broken tire.

The salesman's lies incite righteous fury in the farmer. The farmer is so enraged that he risks a breakdown to keep the salesman from profiting.

Some migrant families rely on the charity of others after being kicked off their land. They build a makeshift trailer and wait with it along the 66. A sedan picks them up and feeds them, and they manage to reach California. The narrator marvels at the way the family manages to survive simply through their faith in humankind. On the road, "bitterly cruel" events like the tire salesman's extortion and "beautiful" things like the carless family's faith happen side by side.

The unscrupulous behavior of many individuals towards the Oklahomans does not represent a complete condemnation of the human race. The sedan-driver's generosity indicates that some people do possess the sense of brotherhood that forms the base of Casy's newfound faith.

CHAPTER 13

Al deftly and vigilantly guides the Joads' old, laden-down car westward. He is in tune with the car's every noise and vibration, and listens attentively for any signs of malfunction. As he drives, he asks Ma whether she is scared of traveling to a new place. She is quick to reply that she isn't anxious about the future because she can't do anything more than cope with the present.

Ma Joad has learned to carry herself with confidence and composure, even in the face of uncertainty that unsettles the rest of her family. Her bearing exemplifies the type of stoic optimism that the Oklahomans need in order to overcome their difficult circumstances.

The Joads grow thirsty, and their radiator requires water. The family pulls up at a run-down gas station with a water faucet. As Al pulls up to the faucet, the station's portly proprietor comes out, and doubts that the Joads have any money to pay for gas. Al assures him that the family isn't begging, and Tom is indignant at the attendant's assumption. The attendant explains that most of the people who stop at his station are migrants who can't afford to buy anything—the rich people in new cars stop at the corporate gas stations in the nearby town. Once he notices Ma Joad, the fat man cuts short his complaints about poor migrants, and instead commiserates about the sorry state of the country.

The gas station attendant's assumption that the Joads have come to beg deeply offends Tom's honor. As this chapter and previous ones show, Oklahoman migrants are very determined to remain self-sufficient and resent when charity is directed their way.

Tom snaps at the fat man for speaking unsympathetically of the migrants. Then Tom notices the attendant's pathetic attempts to paint his pumps yellow, like the higher-class stations, and realizes that the entire gas station is in a poorly-disguised state of disrepair. Tom apologizes and sympathizes with the fat man's position.

This scene clarifies the cycle of mistreatment that the migrants experience. The larger gas stations hurt this gas station attendant, and in turn, he makes the migrants suffer. Tom's insight into this cycle makes him treat the fat man like a human being.

As the Joads refuel, their dog is struck and killed by a passing car. The big, new vehicle only slows down briefly to survey the damage it has done before speeding off. Rosasharn worries that watching the dog's gory death might hurt her unborn child. The gas station attendant promises to bury the dog, and the Joads continue on.

The dog's death is an ominous indication of the difficulties of the Joads' coming journey. A still worse omen is the fact that the culpable driver doesn't even stop to apologize, despite being aware of the harm that's been done.

The Joads drive through the town of Bethany and decide to stop for the night near a couple, Ivy and Sairy Wilson, who are stopped because their car broke down. The Joads and the Wilsons interact tersely at first, but become fast friends once Tom appeals to the Wilsons' hospitality.

The hospitable interactions between the Joads and the Wilsons restore hope in human kindness and brotherhood, after a disheartening series of events.

Soon after the Joads stop to camp, Grampa begins to feel ill, and the Wilsons let him relax in their tent. Grampa's condition worsens quickly, and he dies of a stroke. Casy, at Granma Joad's behest, offers a Christian prayer for Grampa, and the Joads throw together a slapdash funeral with the Wilsons' help. Pa and Uncle John debate reporting Grampa's death legally, which requires a forty dollar fee, but ultimately decide to bury him illegally.

Casy's prayer for Grampa recalls the grace he gave earlier: it's a token gesture meant to appease Granma. Pa and Uncle John's reluctance to dump Grampa's body illegally show their strong sense of honor, and their choice to do so illustrates just how financially desperate they are

Because the Wilsons lent Grampa their tent and allowed their blanket to be used as a shroud, the Joads reimburse their debts by giving them money for a new blanket, and Al repairs the Wilsons' car. The two families then decide that it might be helpful to set out for California together, and the Wilsons agree to take some of the Joads in their car.

The Joads' strong sense of honor is evident in their purposeful attempts to repay the Wilsons for their kindness. This consideration solidifies the bond between the families, and they're now unified enough to travel together.

CHAPTER 14

The Western States are experiencing change as the influx of migrant farmers increases. Those in power try to push back against the symptoms of unrest rather than the causes: unified labor, new taxes, etc. Try as they might, the powerful will be unable to stop millions of people's determined attempts to improve their own lives.

Those in power are fearful of the change that the destitute farmers may bring about. However, these farmers' desperate need will drive them to effect the changes they seek, while the powerful won't be able to stop their gradual progress.

Men are still willing to lay their lives on the line for a concept, and the unified action of mankind is what fosters revolutionary change. As soon as "I" becomes "we," the seeds of change have been planted. The powerful landowners are unable to understand this process, because their greed prevents them from knowing anything but "I."

Steinbeck outlines his philosophy clearly: mankind's greatest and most distinctive asset is its ability to unite and strive for a common good. The landowners' greed and fear blinds them to this beautiful aspect of humanity.

CHAPTER 15

Mae is a waitress in a diner along Highway 66 that caters to truck drivers and other travelers. Al is a silent line cook who works with her. Rich clientele will often stop their fancy automobiles at the restaurant, act haughty and dissatisfied with the food and the service, and tip poorly. Mae and Al call these people "shitheels."

Despite having the greatest potential to help, the rich characters of the novel are also the most ungrateful and miserly. This reinforces Steinbeck's view that power leads to selfish discontent.

A pair of truck drivers arrives at the restaurant. The truckers discuss the influx of migrant farmers with Mae. They go on to describe an accident they saw on the highway: a luxury car, a Cadillac, recklessly collided with a migrant family's jalopy, leaving the driver of the Cadillac impaled on his steering wheel and killing a migrant child. Mae says she's heard rumors that the migrants are thieves, but hasn't seen any evidence of their dishonesty.

The car accident the truckers recount is a symbol for the way that the rich's greed is destructive both to themselves and to less fortunate—and more innocent—people. Mae is someone who thinks for herself, who judges the migrants not by rumors but by the evidence she's seen.

A migrant farmer and his two shabbily-dressed sons enter the restaurant and ask for water. Mae seems irritated by their presence, but lets them drink. The man then asks to buy a loaf of bread. Mae is reluctant to sell one of the fifteen-cent loaves they use to make sandwiches, but the farmer only has a dime and can't afford other food. Al tells Mae to sell the farmer the bread, and she obliges. The farmer insists on taking only ten cents worth of the loaf, but Mae gives him the entire thing. The farmer also asks to buy some candy for his boys, and Mae sells him two peppermint sticks for a penny.

The farmer's persistent humility and refusal to steal from the store represents the dignity that the migrant farmers manage to retain through their struggles. Mae's choice to give the farmer a bargain price on the candy shows that she's overcome her initial ungenerousness, and once again affirms the presence of human kindness in this story.

The truck drivers at the counter watch the entire encounter, and call Mae out for selling candy to the farmer at a drastically reduced price. The two truck drivers exit, leaving a generous tip, and are soon replaced by more truckers.

The truckers seem to approve of Mae and Al's generosity, and show this with their large tip. The prompt arrival of more truckers underscores the cyclical nature of life on the road.

CHAPTER 16

The Wilsons and the Joads travel together, through Oklahoma and into the Texas Panhandle. For two days, the new pace of travel exhausts the family, but on the third day, the travelers acclimate to their new way of living.

The two families' adaptation shows their perseverance, resilience, and commitment to their journey.

Rosasharn tells Ma that once the group arrives in California, she and Connie plan to live in town while the rest of the Joad family toils in the fields. Rosasharn is excited by the opportunities urban life offers: motion pictures, hospitals, and so on. Connie, she says, will study at night and work towards owning a business. Ma Joad opposes this idea because she doesn't want to see the family separated, but doesn't push her objection because she sees that Rosasharn is only dreaming.

The Joads' solidarity—both within the family and beyond it, as with the Wilsons—is what has let them come as far as they have. Ma Joad recognizes this. However, she's an astute enough person to realize that Rosasharn's ambitions are simply pipedreams.

The Wilson's car, which Al is driving, breaks down because of a broken bearing. Al is ashamed; he takes the car's failure as an indication of his incompetence, and he lashes out at Tom when Tom insinuates that Al may have been responsible for the breakdown.

When the car breaks, Al feels a guilt similar to what many men in the novel experience when bad things happen that are mostly out of their control.

Tom, Al, and Casy volunteer to stay with the car while the group continues on. Pa supports this plan, but Ma challenges his authority by refusing to go along. Pa, humiliated by his wife, backs down, and the Joads stay in place.

Again, Ma Joad stresses the importance of the family staying together, and is even willing to challenge Pa Joad's leadership in order to ensure the family sticks together.

Tom and Al work on fixing the car. Al tries to bring up personal topics, but Tom tells his brother that he'd prefer to focus on moving forward.

Tom, like Ma, has gained perspective that keeps him from overthinking his hardship.

To find the replacement part they need, Tom and Al go to a junkyard in town. They find the part, and hang around to talk to a one-eyed man who works at the lot. The one-eyed man cries to the brothers about his pitiful life. Tom harshly tells the man to stop complaining and get his life together, but denies the attendant a ride to California after he asks for one. When the brothers leave, the one-eyed man cries alone.

This scene showcases Tom's moral ambiguity. Tom's criticisms of the one-eyed man seem well-intentioned but unnecessarily harsh. Furthermore, he refuses to help the man, even when asked to do so. The one-eyed man's suffering illustrates the damage that loneliness can do.

With the Wilsons' car fixed, the brothers meet the rest of the group at a campsite. The camp proprietor, a local, attempts to charge Tom for sleeping on his property. Tom refuses defiantly, and goes to sleep down the road.

The proprietor's exploitative behavior provokes Tom's righteous ire, and Tom is willing to inconvenience himself to prove his point.

At the camp, a haggard man tells Pa that he's on his way back from California, and that the Joads' search for work will likely be fruitless. The handbills that promise work are designed to yield far too many workers so that the employers can exploit the workers who show up. The naysayer then becomes self-conscious, and gives Pa advice on how to negotiate better working conditions.

This scene presents one of the first direct signs that the Joads' experience in California will involve still more hardship. However, even the bitter man feels some remorse, and tries to redeem himself by offering helpful advice.

CHAPTER 17

The lonely migrant travelers camp down for the night in large groups. These groups are inclusive and supportive; in them, "twenty families became one family."

This general description of migrant community parallels the inclusive values Ma Joad emphasized in the last chapter.

As these small "worlds" develop, the migrants come to understand what rights they must respect in others, and devise a set of rules that must be obeyed. These rules center on respect and hospitality, and breaking them is punished by violence or, worse yet, ostracism. The encamped families exchange advice for survival and entertain one another. When they leave, their cars move along the highway like bugs.

The migrant camps' collaborative systems preserve individual honor and dignity, while working for the group benefit. Ostracism is even worse than violence because it involves kicking someone out of the group, forcing them to lose the protection and support and connection of the group.

CHAPTER 18

The Joads travel across New Mexico and Arizona until the reach the Colorado River. Past the river lies the formidable Mojave Desert, and past that, California. The travelers set up camp by the river. Granma Joad rests, but babbles incoherently—she seems to be getting ill.

Not every Joad can handle the changes that come with their difficult journey, and Grandma's health threatens to worsen even further.

At the river, Pa and Tom encounter a boy and his father, who are returning from California after being unable to find work there. The returning migrants warn that the fertile country of California is completely bought up. Arable land often lies fallow, and migrants will be punished for cultivating it. Migrants also face abuse from resentful locals, who call them "Okies."

This is the first real indication that the land of plenty that the Joads seek in California may not, in fact, be the paradise they expected. The same arbitrary cruelty and selfishness that harmed the Joads in Oklahoma may still exist in California, after all.

Noah tells Tom that he can no longer go on. He is entranced by the water of the Colorado river, and plans to live off fish he catches. Tom tries to talk Noah out of his plan, but can only watch as Noah walks down the riverbank, growing further and further away.

Noah doesn't value family as strongly as the rest of the Joads, and his strange demeanor is shown as the result of an asocial existence.

Granma raves in the stifling heat, yelling out at Grampa Joad. Rosasharn looks after her, and is distressed, but Ma Joad explains that birth and death are part of a larger process, and aren't as lonely and painful as they seem. A Jehovite (Jehovah's Witness) woman enters the tent and wants to give Granma her final prayers, but Ma Joad declines.

Ma Joad, like Casy, appears to have found an alternative form of spirituality that focuses on the unity of life and natural processes. Notably, Ma's spirituality doesn't mesh with the framework of established religions, as she denies the Jehovite.

A sheriff pokes his head into the tent that houses Ma Joad, Rosasharn, and Granma. He calls the family "Okies" and tells them that they aren't welcome to stay. Ma Joad grabs a skillet and reprimands the man for his disrespect, and he moves on to the next tent.

Here, the Joads experience the bald-faced prejudice of the police for the first time.

The Joads prepare to leave quickly, fearing the cops. Tom tells Pa that Noah has left on his own, and Pa blames himself for the boy's eccentricities.

Pa once again feels guilty for Noah's behavior, though he isn't in control of it.

Ivy and Sairy Wilson cannot continue with the Joads. Sairy's health is deteriorating. She asks Casy to pray for her before the family leaves and he does so silently, without invoking God.

The moment of mutual understanding between Casy and Sairy underscores precisely the sort of unity that Casy believes in.

The Joads try to cross the desert in a night. A gas attendant that fuels them up warns them crossing the desert in their shaky jalopy is a risky proposition. The family continues along, and reaches an agricultural checkpoint. The checkpoint guards hassle the family, but back down when they see how bad Granma looks, and they let the car through. Ma Joad insists that the family cross the desert before stopping.

Ma Joad represents unyielding determination to cross the desert. Even the men at the checkpoint sense the Joads' compulsion to make it across.

The family reaches California. Ma Joad reveals that Granma's been dead since before they passed the checkpoint. Casy admires and fears Ma's willpower; she stayed on the truck all night with Granma's corpse out of love. Uncle John worries whether Ma has sinned, and Casy assures him that she has done nothing wrong.

Ma's fearsome devotion for her family compels her to endure a harrowing journey. Here, the difference between John's and Casy's moral codes becomes apparent: John worries about the sin of lying, while Casy appreciates Ma's altruism as the greatest good.

CHAPTER 19

This chapter recounts the saga of the growth of farming as an industry. What allowed the Americans to seize California from the Mexicans was their hunger for the land, which overpowered any desire that the comfortable Mexicans felt. Over time, the descendants of these American squatters grow into landowners. Gradually, farms expand, and laborers are imported from overseas to aid the harvest. By this point, the owners are abusive and alienated from the harmonious, natural act of farming.

Once people become alienated from their work and the land, they become weak and complacent. This allows their land to be taken. Conversely, it is the hunger of deprivation that allows people to improve their lot. But the cycle continues, and those who were once hungry themselves become wealthier, crueler, and complacent.

The dispossessed Okies are forced to travel west for work. They are despised by the landowners because the owners fear their resilience, and the other Californians hate Okies because their wretchedness brings down wages.

The Okies are met with hostility because their desperate hunger threatens the comfort of the people they encounter.

The Okies live together in makeshift villages called Hoovervilles. They dream of having a small amount of land to cultivate, and some try to farm fallow land on the sly. These men are arrested for trespassing, even though they do no harm.

The trespassing incident is a clear demonstration of the way the laws of the rich serve no real purpose, except to harm those most in need. The migrants were farming unused land.

The government raids and burns Hoovervilles on the grounds that they threaten public health. More families are displaced westward.

The government is biased against the migrants, and actively harms them without reason.

In one of the camps, a child dies of pellagra, a disease caused by malnutrition. The child's family receives donations from the other residents of the Hooverville.

While the rich do nothing, those with the least still pitch in to assist the less fortunate.

CHAPTER 20

The family takes Granma's body to the coroner's office. Pa and Uncle John are ashamed to be unable to afford a proper funeral ceremony.

Pa and John feel guilty that their circumstances prevent them from honoring their dead.

Tom meets another young man, Floyd Knowles. Floyd tells Tom that the large farms operate by widely distributing handbills, which creates a huge supply of workers. Since they are so desperate to work, these laborers accept rates like 15¢ per hour. Tom suggests that men try to strike, and Floyd tells him that anyone who tries to coordinate such action will be labeled a "red" and be placed on a "blacklist," which guarantees they won't be hired. Floyd then explains that the police are corrupt and unsympathetic. He encourages Tom to act "bull-simple" around cops; that is, play dumb to avoid confrontation.

Tom gains a better idea of the prejudices that the migrant workers face within a biased system. Floyd's advice to act "bull-simple" is designed to give the authorities the impression that the migrant workers are subhuman and content in their wretchedness, and therefore pose no threat. It means that those in power won't actively try to destroy the poor, but they may still treat these "animals" with casual cruelty.

Rosasharn and Connie argue about their future. Connie remarks that if he had known things would be as bad as they are, he would have become a tractor man and gotten paid three dollars a day.

Connie lacks the perseverance of the Joads. He is far more ready to sacrifice his morals for his own comfort.

Hungry children walk around the camp and watch Ma Joad prepare dinner. One of them tells Ma about a government camp that offers comfortable amenities to migrants; it is hard to find vacancies in these camps. Ma saves a small amount to give to the children, even though the Joads don't have enough for themselves.

Ma shows that she is generous, perhaps even to a fault. The mention of the government camp introduces a goal that will figure into the Joads' later plans.

Floyd tells Tom and Al that he's heard of work up north in Santa Clara Valley. As the men debate the benefits of driving two hundred miles to the worksite, a contractor drives into the town in a new Chevrolet. The contractor offers the men work, but refuses to give a firm price when Floyd pressures him. The contractor, sensing the threat Floyd poses, gets the deputies that arrived with him to arrest Floyd. As a deputy leads Floyd to a car, Floyd attacks him. The deputy tries to pursue Floyd, but is tripped by Tom. The deputy tries to shoot Floyd, but hits a woman instead, crippling her hand. Casy then knocks the deputy unconscious. Casy urges Tom to run away, which Tom does. When reinforcements arrive, Casy takes the blame for the crime, and is taken off by the police.

This is the first scene of outright corruption that Tom witnesses. Tom's righteousness compels him to defend Floyd, even though it puts himself in danger. Casy, in turn, makes a very Christian self-sacrifice in order to protect Tom—he martyrs himself to save his friend.

Seeing Casy give himself up to protect Tom causes Uncle John anguish, and John needs to get drunk to cope with it. Ma and Pa give him permission to go.

Ma and Pa understand John's suffering, and they know that he lacks the strength to remain disciplined at all times.

Tom returns to his family. He tells Pa that they need to leave, because the camp will likely be burned tonight. Rosasharn cannot find Connie, and Al reveals that he saw him walking south along the river—he has abandoned the family. Pa denounces Connie as arrogant, but Ma urges the family not to speak ill of Connie, since he is still the father of Rosasharn's child.

Connie is the fourth member of the Joads' original party to be lost. While Pa is preoccupied with petty anger, Ma realizes that the most judicious thing to do is to avoid speaking ill of Connie, since doing so will only hurt his future son. She's always looking out for the family.

Tom goes to look for Uncle John. Tom discovers his uncle singing hymns off the side of a road. John doesn't want to leave with the family, so Tom knocks him out as gently as possible and brings him back to the camp.

Uncle John's singing of hymns reaffirms that his black-and-white spiritual dogma is rooted in Christian principles of guilt and salvation.

On their way out of the camp, the family warns the "mayor" of the camp to leave. The mayor shamefully says he won't be able to get his things together in time. After the family leaves him behind, Tom says that the mayor has become subservient after being oppressed by the police; he is "cop-happy" and "bull simple."

The mayor represents the result of institutional oppression. He has lost the willpower to stand up for himself against the corrupt system, and will continue to be oppressed because of this.

As the Joads drive to a nearby town, they reach a blockade of men carrying pick handles and shotguns and wearing old military helmets. One of the men comes up to the window of the family's car and tells them to turn around, saying that they don't want to see Okies in their town. Tom smells alcohol on his breath. Tom turns the car around and tries to stop himself from crying. Tom drives around the town and continues south, deciding to look for the government camp.

Tom's powerlessness before the hostile mob reduces the usually strong and silent man to tears. This is one of the most profound displays of emotion in the entire book, and it illustrates the debilitating frustration that baseless oppression causes.

CHAPTER 21

The masses of displaced farmers are no longer farmers: they are migrants. These migrants have been changed by the industrialization that pushed them from their territory, and are united by the hostility they experience in the places to which they migrate.

A new identity for Okies has been forged from the hardships they have endured together.

The migrants terrify comfortable men, because these migrants hunger more strongly than the comfortable men can feel anything.

Human greed is no match for human desperation.

Industrialists gain monopolies on the cultivation and canning of fruit, which drives smaller farmers out of business, and creates more migrants, desperate for work.

The cycle of greed and extortion produces more desperate people, suggesting that the cruel rich create the conditions that will lead to their own eventual downfall.

The banks work against themselves. The money they spend trying to suppress rebellion in the laborers could have instead been directed towards enhancing the laborers' quality of life.

Enterprise becomes preoccupied with preserving its selfish ways, and overlooks the value—to itself included—of basic altruism.

CHAPTER 22

The Joads arrive at the Weedpatch government camp. A night watchman tells Tom that the government camp has no police presence, as the migrants elect their own police. They also elect representatives to a Central Committee, which governs the camp.

The camp's effective self-sufficiency illustrates that the migrants are more powerful and more efficient when they band together.

Tom has breakfast with Timothy and Wilkie Wallace, who offer to try to get him a job at the farm that employs them. When the three arrive at the farm, the owner, Mr. Thomas, tells them that the Farmer's Association—which is run by the bank—has demanded that he pay his workers no more than 25¢ an hour, down from their usual 30¢. The three men reluctantly agree to the pay cut.

Mr. Thomas's hands are tied by the greedy system of which he is a reluctant part. Like the farmers, he must follow the unfair directions of his higher-ups in order to stay afloat.

Thomas then nervously tips the men off about the Association's plans to incite a fight in the government camp at the upcoming Saturday night dance. The Association doesn't like the camp's independence, and plan to use this riot as an excuse to bring in police to destroy the camp.

Mr. Thomas empathizes with the workers, and takes a risk to help them. The Association's plans indicate that it will stop at nothing to keep the laborers oppressed and available for cheap work.

At the camp, Pa, Al, and Uncle John prepare to search for work. As Ma cooks breakfast, the camp manager, Jim Rawley, comes by to introduce himself. Ma is initially suspicious of his clean clothes, but she is quickly won over by the courteous and sympathetic welcome he extends.

Jim Rawley is a glimmer of humanity amidst the inhumanity of the migrant laborer lifestyle, and he represents the good that can come from collaboration in the Okie community.

Rosasharn is approached by a religious zealot named Mrs. Sandry, who warns Rosasharn about the dangers of immoral behavior—especially the intimate dancing that takes place at the camp's Saturday dances. Mrs. Sandry implies that if Rosasharn participates in these activities, she risks suffering a miscarriage. After Mrs. Sandry leaves, Rosasharn confesses to Mr. Rawley that she and Connie danced intimately back home. Mr. Rawley comforts her and tells her not to worry about Mrs. Sandry's superstitions.

Mrs. Sandry's religion revolves around judging others; these are the set of ideas Casy abandoned. This black-and-white depiction of righteousness and sin is designed to divide people, not promote unity: Mrs. Sandry elevates herself at the expense of credulous people like Rosasharn. Rosasharn's insecurity and guilt grow.

The three women in charge of the camp's Ladies' Committee visit Ma and Rosasharn and explain how their committee regulates some aspects of camp life, particularly sanitation. The three women are stern but caring, and during their conversation with the Joad women, they offer emergency assistance to a woman whose family has run out of food. They emphasize that this aid is not charity.

The women's serious treatment of mundane issues of camp life demonstrates their dignity and composure. Their willingness to offer help—and the needy woman's reluctance to accept it—also reflects this dignity. The people of the camp are determined to exist as self-sufficiently possible.

Mrs. Sandry finds Ma and tries to preach to her, but Ma chases her off with a stick. Mr. Rawley appears again to defuse this situation and apologizes for Mrs. Sandry's behavior.

Ma is wiser and less superstitious than Rosasharn, and has no patience for Mrs. Sandry's sanctimoniousness.

Pa, Al, and Uncle John come home empty-handed: they couldn't find work. Ma is hopeful, trusting that Tom has found work.

Despite having little reason to be hopeful, Ma remains optimistic about the family's new situation, and about Tom.

CHAPTER 23

The migrant people try to find pleasure in the midst of their suffering. One migrant tells a story of his time as a soldier, when his regiment was ordered to fire on an unresisting Native American warrior. The migrant reflects on the sorrow he felt after destroying "somepin better'n you."

The migrant's remorse at his arbitrary cruelty shows that human unkindness makes even its perpetrators unhappy.

When the migrants have the money to do so, they drink alcohol. Other times, they play music and dance. Preachers give passionate sermons and baptize reverent crowds, who "grovel and whine" on the ground. These activities let the migrants distract themselves from their abject circumstances.

The migrants take whatever route they can to escape from their destitution, in the hopes of escaping the difficulty of their lives and find hope where they can, such as in the promise of religious salvation.

CHAPTER 24

It is the morning of the Saturday dance. Ezra Huston, chairman of the camp's Central Committee, briefs his committee on the Farmers' Association's plans to incite violence. Willie Eaton, his entertainment chairman, has hired twenty men to keep watch for troublemakers. Huston emphasizes that the men should not hurt the instigators, and only prevent them from doing harm.

Huston appears to be a caring individual who is genuinely concerned with everyone's health and safety. His generous character is supported by the fact that he ensures that the impending threat will be dealt with humanely.

On his way to the dance, Al flirts with a girl, but is chased away by the girl's mother. Meanwhile, Rosasharn agrees to come to the dance with Ma, but on the condition that she can abstain from dancing.

Al's roguishness contrasts with and highlights Rosasharn's romantic humiliation and guilty concern about morals incited by Mrs. Sandry.

The dance begins. Tom and other young men keep watch for the riot-starters, and they notice three suspicious characters. As the three intruders force their way into the center of the dance floor, Tom and his friends quickly surround them and keep them from starting any fights. The police, expecting a riot to be started by this time, try to enter the camp without a warrant, but are turned away.

The corrupt police's concerted attempt to invade the camp shows that they are clearly in cahoots with these instigators and the wealthy men who back them from the shadows.

As the troublemakers are thrown out of the camp, they reveal that they were just trying to earn money to eat. Ezra Huston tells them that their actions are only hurting their own people. An entertainment committee guard wants to assault the interlopers, but Willie Eaton insists that they leave unharmed.

Even though the troublemakers showed no regard for the well-being of their people, the men in charge of the camp are concerned for all Okies. This is why they do not retaliate against the scoundrels.

A man tells Pa a story about a group of mountain people who formed a union while working for a rubber company in Akron. Akron's townspeople labeled them "reds" and prepared to drive them out. However, the mountain men organized a turkey shoot outside the town, and five thousand of them marched through Akron carrying rifles. This display of force halted efforts to expel the mountain people. The man knowingly suggests that the Okies establish their own turkey shooting club.

This anecdote reinforces the notion that groups of people are far stronger than any individual could be. The rising discontent amongst the Okies has prompted them to realize that a display of power might be able to win them better living conditions.

CHAPTER 25

During the California spring, the weather is beautiful and the produce is bountiful. However, there is too much produce to pick and distribute without lowering the prices. So the big farms decide to leave mountains of fruit out to spoil. Smaller farmers cannot afford to keep up with the industrial farms' techniques, and their debt increases.

The industrial farms' amazing capability to create bounty goes completely to waste. This is the ultimate symbol of their selfish perversion of nature.

Migrants drive to pick up discarded fruit, but men are dispatched to spray the fruit with kerosene and burn it. Children die of malnutrition while good food rots, all in order to inflate prices. "In the eyes of the hungry there is a growing wrath. In the souls of the people the grapes of wrath are filling and growing heavy, growing heavy for the vintage."

The quest for profits has driven the farms and their employees to absolute inhumanity. They waste food that could be used to save children's lives, only in order to increase their profits.

CHAPTER 26

The Joads are in poor shape after a month in the government camp. Winfield is very ill, and Tom has been the only man able to find work. Ma Joad insists that they leave the next morning. Pa is indignant that a woman is telling him what to do. Ma dares him to beat her impudence out of her, and Pa backs down, embarrassed.

Once again, Ma asserts her dominance over her husband. Although tradition dictates that men have familial authority, the de facto situation for the Joads shows Ma's clear control.

Rosasharn complains that she is undernourished and worries for her child. Ma gives Rosasharn her gold earrings, and pierces her daughter's ears for her.

Ma's gift is a huge sacrifice. it shows that the Joad women are still aware of beauty, even in their wretchedness.

Before the Joads leave, Tom sits with his friends from the Weedpatch camp. Tom concludes that the secret to the camp's success and independence is that the migrants work together; the police are powerless against a collaborative effort.

Tom is coming to realize the profound power of the unity that Casy preaches. His belief in the value of organized labor is growing stronger.

The family leaves camp early in the morning. After some time on the road, they pause to fix a tire, and are approached by a gaudily-dressed man who offers them work picking peaches nearby. On the way to the worksite, Al **deliberately runs over a gopher snake**, and Tom reprimands him.

The peach-picking contractor's fancy clothing is an ominous sign of greed. Tom's condemnation of hurting harmless animal shows that Tom has matured since his own snake-killing episode a few chapters previous.

Arriving at the peach-picking compound, the Joads drive past a police blockade and protesting groups of migrants. They discover that they'll receive only five cents per box of peaches. After a day's work, the family has taken in little more than a dollar.

The Joads are strike-breakers, working against the efforts of their own people. Worse yet, they themselves are hardly compensated for their toil.

The family's dollar must be spent at the company store, which charges inflated prices for food. The day's wage isn't enough to feed the Joads. Ma asks the shopkeeper to give her ten extra cents worth of sugar. He agrees to loan her the money, and she leaves furious at being extorted, saying "If you're in trouble or hurt or need—go to poor people. They're the only ones that'll help—the only ones."

The peach-picking operation is designed to take advantage of the captive workers. The shopkeeper's insensitivity to the needs of a fellow human being further diminishes Ma's faith in the kindness of those more fortunate.

After nightfall, Tom sneaks out to learn more about the strike outside the compound. He comes across a tent, and finds Casy inside. Casy informs Tom that he's become an advocate for the workers, and that the strike is taking place because the peach-picking rate was set at two and a half cents. He predicts that the Joads' rate will soon drop to that number.

Casy has translated his religious awakening into a political one. Human unity offers not only spiritual value, but can also be used to improve living conditions for the migrant laborers.

Men with flashlights approach Casy and Tom. One of them swings a pick handle at Casy, striking him in the head and killing him. Tom seizes the pick and strikes the murderer in the head. Tom runs away, but takes a blow to the head as he escapes.

Tom's righteous fury compels him to kill Casy's murderer. The injury he receives will make him recognizable to the police, and he will have to hide until he heals.

Tom returns to the tent. The next morning, he explains to the entire family what happened with Casy. That day, the men go to work while Tom hides in the tent. When the workers come home, they reveal that their pay has dropped to two-and-a-half cents per box, as Casy predicted. The family decides to leave the camp, and Ma is adamant that Tom come with them. Pa resents her dominance but agrees.

Ma's love for Tom is strong enough that she is willing to risk the entire family's safety. Moreover, Ma is again shown as the dominant voice in Joad family life, much to Pa's humiliation.

The family moves into a boxcar near a plantation. Tom sets up camp in a culvert nearby, and Ma plans to secretly bring him food.

Like Casy earlier, Tom must now spend time in the wilderness alone.

CHAPTER 27

It is cotton season, and handbills advertising cotton-picking jobs are visible everywhere. If they cannot provide bags of their own to carry the cotton they pick, migrants who take the jobs are forced to pay for the bags on credit.

Forcing the workers to buy the bags they use to do work for the farmers is yet another creative way that farm owners take advantage of poor laborers.

The workers are desperate to save some money for the impending winter, but it is often difficult to earn money picking cotton because there are so many workers competing with one another. Moreover, unscrupulous plantation owners are known to use crooked scales to weigh the cotton. Workers counterbalance this by putting clods of earth in their bags.

Cotton picking often forces the Okies to compete against one another for pay, harming the community of workers and, as a result, reducing their pay. The laborers' own deceptive tactics comes only in response to larger-scale dishonesty from the farm owners.

CHAPTER 28

The Joads become fairly comfortable in their boxcar on the plantation, which they share with another family, the Wainwrights. These families are fortunate; later arrivals have been forced to camp in tents nearby, which gives the boxcar occupants a higher social status.

The Joads' ability to adapt to their circumstances is impressive. The social status conferred to boxcar occupants reveals that even between the Okies, arbitrary social differences can develop.

With the entire family working, the Joads are making decent money, and can afford good food. Ruthie and Winfield are even treated to a box of Cracker Jack.

Living conditions for the Joads seem to be improving, as they can even afford special treats.

Winfield tells Ma that Ruthie has told on Tom. Another girl bullied Ruthie and took her Cracker Jack. In response, Ruthie boasted that her brother is on the lam after killing someone, and threatened to have Tom retaliate for her. Ma doesn't discipline Ruthie, but sneaks away to bring Tom food and warn him of what has happened.

Ruthie's childish insecurity is so strong that it endangers her brother's well-being.

Ma advises Tom to travel far away, and offers him seven dollars to take with him. Tom reveals that in his time alone in the wilderness, he has been thinking about Casy and the preacher's philosophy. Tom tells Ma that he feels a calling to unite his soul with everyone else's soul, and wants to help his people by continuing the organizing work that Casy did.

Ma's seven saved dollars are a dramatic sacrifice and a testament to her love for Tom. Tom has gone through a religious epiphany like Casy's, and now sees that the highest calling is to help and unite his people.

On her way back from visiting Tom, a farm owner approaches Ma and offers her work on his cotton plantation. Ma agrees to pick for 90¢, and the farm owner laments that his wages are set by the Association.

Like Mr. Thomas, the small-time farm owners are depicted as neutral characters whose hands are forced by the self-interested people in power.

Back at the boxcar, Al declares to the family that he and the Wainwrights' sixteen-year-old daughter, Agnes, are going to get married. The families rejoice together. Rosasharn is discomforted by the news, and is determined to try and pick cotton the next day.

Rosasharn is reminded of her failed marriage by Al's news. Feeling upstaged and seeking validation, she is compelled to show her independence and prove her worth.

At the cotton-picking job the next day, the fields are swarmed with workers, and are picked clean by eleven in the morning. As the family drives back to their boxcar, a heavy rain begins. Rosasharn shivers violently and complains of feeling ill, and the family rushes to make her comfortable.

The rains ominously reaffirm that things have taken a turn for the worse. Rosasharn's well-intentioned exercise of independence has, ironically, harmed her more severely than any of the activities she avoids superstitiously.

CHAPTER 29

The constant downpour of rain begins to flood the earth. Migrants build dikes around their tents to protect themselves from flooding. Some try to get monetary assistance from the relief offices, but have not lived in the state long enough to receive aid.

The flood is a hardship of biblical scale. Unlike human cruelty, which the migrants can overcome, the power of nature is impossible for humans to resist.

Migrants begin to succumb to illness, and the rains force them to beg, lie, and steal. Police strengthen their forces, and townspeople's loathing for the Okies grows.

It takes a natural disaster, and not mere human cruelty, to compromise the migrants' morals. The townspeople just see their own prejudices confirmed in the Okie's misery.

The Okies' deeper desperation also makes them angrier. The migrant women watch their men to see if their wills have been broken. The women are comforted to notice that when the men are gathered together, they no longer seem fearful, but are instead filled with wrath.

This scene recalls the beginning of the book. Like the Oklahoma drought, the flood fails to break the men's wills. It is the men's wrath that allows them to persevere.

After the rains abate, small shoots of greenery begin to emerge from the earth.

The budding plants illustrate that hope springs eternal, and that growth and triumph can come from despair and terrible circumstances.

CHAPTER 30

The rains do not let up for days. The Wainwrights are afraid that the boxcars will flood, and want to leave. Al says that he'll go with the Wainwrights if the families split up. On the third day of rain, Rosasharn goes into labor. The Joads have no option other than to stay.

Things appear to be at their worst. Rosasharn's pregnancy traps the Joads in dire circumstances, and, worse yet, Al's choice to stay with the Wainwrights will divide the family.

Pa gets the rest of the men from the boxcars to help build a dam to protect the boxcars. They seem reluctant to stay, but they understand the Joads' predicament and work tirelessly to build a barrier. The embankment they construct is torn apart by an uprooted tree. The current reaches the cars, and the Joads' engine is flooded.

The men from nearby families risk their families' safety in order to help the Joads. However, while their collaboration lets them overcome human cruelty, their joint effort still cannot overcome the elements.

When Pa returns from the failed effort to build the dam, Mrs. Wainwright tells him that Rosasharn's baby was stillborn. Pa agonizes to Ma about his responsibility for the failed dam, but Ma tells him not to blame himself.

Once again, the Joads are powerless before nature—this time, disaster comes as a stillbirth. Although he has no control over his failure, Pa is wracked with guilt.

The baby is placed in an apple box, and Uncle John sends it down the current, hoping that it will "go down an' tell 'em. Go down in the street an' rot an' tell 'em that way." The baby is only able to tell its story by becoming a spectacle, and Uncle John hopes that it will arrive in town and convey the story of the migrants' suffering.

The stillbirth signifies that the conditions the Joads are subjected to cannot support human life. Uncle John hopes that the baby will illustrate this point to all who see it, so that others comprehend the Okies' hardship.

Pa uses the family's last bit of money to buy potatoes for dinner. After days of intermittent rain, Ma decides to move the family somewhere safer. Al elects to stay with the Wainwrights, and Ma promises to return to him.

Even at their most destitute, the Joads persevere. Ma's instinct is to keep moving, always hopeful that things will be better elsewhere.

After the family marches down the highway, they come across a barn on a hill. Inside the barn, the family finds a father and a son. The father is starving to death and cannot keep solid food down. The boy begs for milk or soup to give his father. Ma and Rosasharn exchange a wordless glance, and Rosasharn says "Yes." The family leaves the barn, and Rosasharn breastfeeds the starving man.

Rosasharn's breastfeeding of the old man is the book's ultimate act of altruism. On the most basic level, the act illustrates the profundity of the Okies' desperation and need. The breastfeeding also shows that life and generosity can still come out of the tragedy that has befallen Rosasharn. And in the way that the act references the pieta—Mary's giving comfort to Christ—it suggests, like the grass growing after the storm—that the desperate circumstances that the Joads and the Okies must face will in the end produce a triumphant revolution of human spirit.

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