Cannery Row

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF JOHN STEINBECK

John Steinbeck was born in California only two years after the turn of the 20th century. He attended Stanford University in 1919, though he left without earning a degree six years later, at which point he worked as a journalist and manual laborer in New York City. During this time he tried his hand at a career in writing, but had trouble getting his work published and so returned to California to work a series of labor jobs. 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 focus on farm 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 *Cannery Row* in 1945 and *East of Eden* in 1952. In 1962, Steinbeck was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature. Steinbeck died in New York City in 1968, at age 66.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Although Steinbeck never indicates the exact year in which *Cannery Row* takes place, it is rather evident that the novel is set during the Great Depression, an excruciating economic downturn that lasted for most of the 1930s in the United States (and abroad). The depression itself was precipitated by a plummet in stock prices in September of 1929, which eventually led to the stock market crash the following month. Throughout the ensuing decade, the unemployment rate in the United States went as high as 25%. This is worth considering in relation to *Cannery Row*, since Mack and his crew of happy-go-lucky friends are jobless (and even homeless until Lee Chong allows them to move into his empty storehouse). However, Steinbeck's portrayal of the Depression in *Cannery Row* is remarkably lighthearted, as Mack and the gang actively enjoy the freedom of not having to work. But this lightheartedness is a very purposeful approach to a subject Steinbeck knows is deathly serious, as made evident by the devastating portrayal of the Great Depression that he delivers in *The Grapes of Wrath*. Indeed, Steinbeck makes an effort in *Cannery Row* to maintain a sense of optimism, though there's no denying that the joyful stories he tells are set against a backdrop of poverty and economic struggle.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Nearly ten years after Steinbeck published *Cannery Row*, he put out *Sweet Thursday*, a sequel that follows Doc, Mack, and many of the novel's other characters. Whereas *Cannery Row* takes place sometime before World War II, *Sweet Thursday* is set in the aftermath of the war, from which Doc has recently returned. What's more, it's worth considering Steinbeck's revered novel *The Grapes of Wrath* in relation to *Cannery Row*, since both texts deal with problems of economic hardship. However, while *The Grapes of Wrath* deals explicitly with poverty, *Cannery Row*'s treatment of such matters is oblique and fleeting, as Steinbeck focuses on small moments of joy rather than on the horrors of living without enough food or general resources.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Cannery Row
- **When Published:** 1945
- **Literary Period:** Modernism
- **Genre:** Realism
- **Setting:** Cannery Row in Monterey, California
- **Climax:** Angry because his home has been trashed by a party he didn't even attend, Doc punches Mack in the mouth.
- **Antagonist:** Failures of kindness or empathy
- **Point of View:** Third-person omniscient

EXTRA CREDIT

Namesake. In 1958, the street in Monterey, California that Steinbeck writes about in *Cannery Row* was officially named after the novel.

The Big Screen. In 1982, *Cannery Row* was adapted as a film featuring Nick Nolte and Debra Winger.

PLOT SUMMARY

Cannery Row is a street populated by canning factories in Monterey, California. Wondering how he can accurately portray what it's like to live in this place, Steinbeck decides to simply "let the stories crawl in by themselves," thus beginning a collection of loosely related vignettes. Although there are too many narrative moments to detail here, the following storylines are the most cohesive and important threads of *Cannery Row*.

Steinbeck describes the landmarks of Cannery Row, calling attention to a squalid but efficient grocery store run by Lee Chong. Lee's store is a cultural hub, as everyone does their shopping amongst his crowded shelves. In particular, Mack and

his group of drifter friends often visit and try to convince Lee to give them pints of whiskey, though they never have money. Because of this, Lee is unsurprised when Mack comes in one day after a local man named Horace Abbeville commits suicide. The day he killed himself, Horace came into Lee's store and told him he wanted to settle his outstanding debt. As such, he signed ownership of his fishmeal storehouse to Lee, left the grocery store, and committed suicide. Having heard about this, Mack asks Lee if he and his friends can move into the storehouse, pointing out that if the building is unoccupied, teenagers might break the windows or set it on fire. Lee realizes he has no choice but to allow these men to move in, since he knows that if he refuses, they will break the windows themselves to prove that he should let them live there. Lee gives Mack what he wants, but not before setting the price at five dollars. With this, Mack and his friends move into the storehouse and name it the Palace Flophouse, and Lee Chong never receives a cent.

The Palace Flophouse and Lee Chong's grocery store aren't the only notable landmarks in Cannery Row. There's also **the Bear Flag Restaurant**, a brothel run by Dora Flood, whose establishment is a "decent, clean, honest, old-fashioned sporting house where a man can take a glass of beer among friends." Indeed, Steinbeck describes the Bear Flag as "virtuous," depicting it as yet another social hotspot. Unfortunately, though the prostitutes themselves are all content, not everyone who works there is happy. Steinbeck tells a story about the brothel's former watchman, a man named William who was a "lonesome" fellow. One day, William saw Mack and the boys sitting outside, so he went to join them. When he sat down, though, all conversation ceased. When William left, Mack and the boys started chatting again, and this depressed William. Because of this, he went to Dora and said, "I feel lousy. I think I'll bump myself off," to which she said, "Well, do it on your own time and don't mess up the rugs." After having a similar interaction with one of the prostitutes, William went to the house's Greek cook, who told him that people who talk about committing suicide never actually do it. Hearing this, William grabbed the cook's ice pick and he drove it into his own heart. Now there is a new watchman, Steinbeck notes, a man named Alfred whom everyone likes much better than William.

Another important place in Cannery Row is Western Biological, a laboratory in which Doc—a marine biologist—lives and works. Doc is well-liked throughout the community, a kind and philosophical person who often takes Hazel—one of Mack's gang—to help him collect marine animals, outings that Hazel enjoys because he likes asking Doc an endless stream of questions. Hazel isn't the only young man in Cannery Row who likes spending time with Doc. There's also Frankie, a boy who showed up at Western Biological one day. Frankie is an odd boy, and Doc can tell there's something off about him, but he treats him well and allows him to sleep in the laboratory in a small box.

One day when Doc is having a small party, Frankie grabs a beer from the kitchen and gives it to a woman sitting nearby. After she thanks him, Doc chimes in and says, "Yes, Frankie is a great help to me." This causes Frankie to swell with such pride and happiness that he tries to replicate the moment the next time Doc has a party. However, this time he attempts to carry an entire tray of beers and ends up spilling them on a guest's lap, at which point he dashes out of the room and retreats to the basement.

Like Frankie, Mack and the boys also want to do "something nice" for Doc, but they can't because they don't have the money to throw him a party. However, they know Doc is always in need of frogs and that he'll pay a nickel for each one they bring him. As such, Mack visits him and says he and the boys need money for something important, adding that if Doc needs anything, perhaps they could get it for him. Unsurprisingly, Doc says he could "use three or four hundred frogs," and so Mack agrees to go on a frog-collecting expedition the next day, since Doc himself has to travel to La Jolla in southern California to obtain octopi. Once they agree to this deal, Mack asks if he can borrow Doc's car, but Doc says he will be using it himself, so Mack goes to Lee Chong and asks to use his truck. Lee says he can't help Mack or Doc, since his truck is broken, but Mack assures Lee that his friend Gay will be able to fix it, and so Lee agrees.

Mack and the boys successfully fix Lee's truck, which is a converted Ford Model T. On their way to the place where they plan to catch the frogs, though, they break down, and Gay tells them they need to find a new needle for the carburetor. He sets off to find the part, and the boys don't see him for 180 days.

Waiting by the roadside for Gay to return, Mack and his friends eventually accept that he isn't coming back, so Eddie sets off, finds another Model T, steals its carburetor, and puts the new part into Lee's truck. When they reach their destination, they wait for darkness to fall, since it's easiest to catch frogs during the night. Eventually, a former military captain and his dog approach them. Holding a shotgun, the captain tells them to vacate his property, but Mack begins talking to him about his dog, noticing that the animal has a nasty wound. Waxing poetic about how much he likes Pointers, Mack tells the captain that he knows how to make an ointment that could heal the wound, and the captain begins to like him, eventually inviting the entire clan back to his house. As Mack applies his balm to the dog's injury, the captain tells the group about how he's lonely because his wife is a politician who's always traveling, and then he gives them large quantities of rare and expensive whiskey. Before long, he becomes quite drunk and gives Mack one of his dog's puppies. He also helps them harvest hundreds of frogs from his very own pond. In the aftermath of this, the captain and the boys continue drinking, eventually setting fire to the house's curtains before the captain passes out and Mack decides they should leave before he wakes up.

Meanwhile, Doc makes his way down to La Jolla, stopping

frequently for hamburgers and beer. When he arrives, he turns off the car and sleeps until he senses the tides moving out in the morning, when he gathers his materials and makes his way over the slippery rocks. At one point, he sees a flash of whiteness beneath a small amount of water, and when he draws back the seaweed, he stares into the face of **a lifeless woman**. Stricken, he makes his way back to the beach, where he tells a man to report the body to the police station, saying he doesn't want the reward that comes along with finding her.

Doc doesn't get back to Cannery Row until quite late, leaving Mack and the boys ample time to prepare the party. Striking a deal with Lee, Mack convinces him to accept frogs as payment, insisting that Lee will be able to sell these frogs to Doc. Seeing this as an opportunity, Lee overcharges Mack and the boys as they buy decorations and whiskey. However, they become drunk and gradually lose sight of their intention to celebrate Doc. Eventually, they give all of the frogs to Lee, who allows them to put the creatures in Western Biological as long as he himself is there to watch over them. In this manner, Lee Chong, Mack, the boys, and a number of passersby begin partying in Doc's laboratory long before he arrives, playing records on his phonograph and accidentally trashing the place. By the time Doc returns, the party has dispersed, his prized possessions are broken, and the frogs have all hopped away.

After the disastrous party, Mack apologizes to Doc, but Doc punches him in the lip. However, he soon decides to forget the entire ordeal, and though Mack and the boys don't fully know it, he leaves behind his anger. Shortly thereafter, the group decides to throw him another party to make up for what they've done, so they contrive to give him a surprise birthday party. To do this, Mack tricks Doc into telling him his birthday, though little does he know that Doc—who suspects Mack is up to something—gives him a false date. This time, news of the party spreads far and wide, so that Doc eventually catches wind of the plan. Although he doesn't like the idea, he decides that he ought to prepare himself, so he orders large quantities of steak and whiskey, knowing that Mack and the boys won't think to feed the guests. Then, on the day of the party, he pretends to be surprised and settles into the festivities, eventually playing sad records on the phonograph—records that put everyone in a strange, melancholy mood, though no one finds this unpleasant. Standing up after a record finishes, Doc recites an old poem about love and nostalgia, and when he finishes, everyone—including him—feels a "sweet sadness," which is only broken when a group of sailors burst in, thinking Western Biological is Dora Flood's whorehouse. When Mack tells them they have the wrong place, they grow frustrated, pointing out that there are multiple prostitutes at the party. In response, Mack and the boys fight the sailors, and even Doc joins in, joyously "flailing about" until police cars come roaring down the road, at which point the sailors depart and everyone hides. Soon the party erupts once more, and when the police officers circle back, they join the fun, as do the sailors.

The next morning, Doc wakes up and surveys the damage. At Lee Chong's, he buys a quart of beer and tells the grocer that he had a great time. Back at home, he recites the same nostalgic poem he read the night before, at one point tearfully uttering the line, "I know that I have savored the hot taste of life."

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Doc – A marine biologist who owns, operates, and lives in Western Biological, a laboratory teeming with sea creatures, chemicals, books, and other oddities. Doc is an important figure in *Cannery Row*, as all of his neighbors respect him for his kindness, compassion, and thoughtfulness, though he is also an essentially lonely figure. Indeed, Doc is the kind of man who has no problem taking in someone like Frankie, who comes to his laboratory when things get rough at his own home. In addition to showing Frankie how to do small tasks around the lab, Doc often helps other people when they injure themselves. Mack, for one, has benefited from Doc's ability to wrap bandages, which is perhaps why he is inspired to show Doc his appreciation by throwing him a surprise party. Unfortunately, Mack's first attempt to do this ends terribly, as he and his friends drunkenly destroy Western Biological before he even comes home. In the aftermath of this, Doc experiences an uncharacteristic moment of fury and punches Mack in the face, though his anger quickly abates. Because of his levelheadedness, he soon forgets about the entire ordeal, though it isn't long before he overhears that Mack and his friends are planning to throw him yet another surprise party. Instead of thwarting this plan, though, he goes along with the charade, secretly buying food and drinks for the party so that his guests aren't unhappy when they run out of supplies. When the party finally takes place, Doc is his usual self, humoring his friends, drinking large quantities of beer (he has an unmentioned but rather evident drinking problem), and playing sad records on the phonograph. At one point, he begins reciting an old, nostalgic poem, which gives the party a "sweet sadness" that aligns with Doc's emotionally complex personality.

Mack – An easy-going, wily man concerned first and foremost with living a contented life. Mack is the ringleader of a group of likeminded men who sleep in large empty pipes when it's raining, drink heavily, and avoid steady work. When Lee Chong becomes the owner of an empty fishmeal storehouse, Mack slyly convinces the grocer to let him and his friends live in it, saying that Lee shouldn't leave the building unattended because people might vandalize it—a subtle hint that he himself will see to the storehouse's destruction if Lee doesn't let him live there. When Lee relents, Mack and his gang move in, furnishing the place with stolen and found furniture and

making it into a strange, mismatched home that they name the Palace Flophouse and Grill. Though Lee feels as if Mack didn't really give him a choice, he's happy that Mack and his friends have moved in, as they maintain the place and also make a point of patronizing Lee's grocery store whenever they can. Indeed, everyone knows that Mack isn't the most trustworthy person, but this doesn't keep them from liking him. Doc, for his part, admires Mack and his friends' easy way of moving through the world, saying, "Look at them. There are your true philosophers. I think that Mack and the boys know everything that has ever happened in the world and possibly everything that will happen." This admiration is why he can't remain angry with Mack for very long even after Mack and "the boys" trash his laboratory in an attempt to throw him a surprise party. As such, readers see that people cut Mack quite a lot of slack because of his charm, though it's also worth noting that there is an abundance of goodwill beneath his clever tricks, which is most likely the real reason people put up with his shenanigans.

Lee Chong – A Chinese man who operates a grocery store in Cannery Row. Lee Chong is a serious businessman who runs a profitable store stocked with countless goods—a store that the majority of the area's residents shop at quite frequently. Doc, for his part, buys all of his beer at Lee's store. Even Mack and the boys make use of Lee's grocery store, though they often don't have enough money to buy anything (this, of course, doesn't stop them from trying to convince Lee to give them pints of whiskey). After Horace Abbeville—who has accumulated quite a lot of debt at the grocery store—gives Lee ownership of an empty fishmeal storehouse and then commits suicide, Lee finds himself with a new piece of property that he doesn't know what to do with. This doesn't last long, though, because Mack soon convinces him to let him and his friends live in the storehouse, a proposition that Lee agrees to only because he thinks Mack and "the boys" will damage the property if he refuses to let them move in. Still, though, Lee is an entrepreneurial man who needs to maintain his image as an uncompromising business owner, so he charges Mack five dollars per week to move into the building—a fee he knows he'll never receive. Later, when Mack and "the boys" want to catch frogs to sell to Doc, they ask to borrow Lee's truck. In this way, readers see that people—and especially Mack's gang—are constantly asking Lee for favors, and though he acts like an unyielding bargainer, he never fails to provide his friends with what they need.

Dora Flood – The "madam" of the **Bear Flag Restaurant**, a local brothel. Although the Bear Flag is a prostitution business, Steinbeck portrays it as "virtuous," "clean," and "honest." In turn, he imbues Dora herself with these qualities, upholding that she is "respected by the intelligent, the learned, and the kind." Unfortunately, though, her position as a lawbreaker means that she must work twice as hard to maintain her reputation. This means that she donates large sums of money to local institutions, which have come to rely on her "dirty wages of sin" even as they publicly condemn her profession. Like almost everyone else in town, Dora is fond of Doc, and even offers to help him in any way she can when Cannery Row is stricken by the flu and he's running around trying to tend to all of the sick residents. When Doc asks her to organize her "girls" to sit with ailing community members, Dora immediately makes arrangements for this to happen, dispatching her employees to the houses of sick people.

Hazel – A man who lives in the Palace Flophouse with Mack and "the boys." Hazel comes from a poor family of eight children, and his mother named him after her great aunt, who supposedly had life insurance. By the time Hazel himself was born, his mother had already made up her mind and refused to change his name. After attending grammar school and reform school, Hazel emerged "innocent" and rather unintelligent, though he masks this by asking engaged questions. Indeed, this is what he does when he spends time collecting starfish with Doc, peppering him with questions and finding himself disappointed when Doc manages to dodge them. When Mack, Hazel, and "the boys" want to throw Doc a party for the second time, Hazel suggests that they should do it to celebrate his birthday, a suggestion that pleases Mack. Of course, Doc doesn't tell them his actual birthday, but the birthday party is a success nonetheless.

Eddie – One of the men that live with Mack and "the boys" in the Palace Flophouse. Like his friends, Eddie doesn't have a steady job, but he does bartend from time to time at La Ida, where he fills in whenever the full-time barkeep gets sick. When he does this, he brings a jug, into which he pours whatever alcohol people leave in their glasses. This makes a strong, strange concoction that consists of hard alcohol, beer, wine, and various liqueurs. Happy to share his potion, Eddie brings the jug home and splits it with Mack and "the boys." Because of this, the residents of the Palace Flophouse never ask him to do anything, since they believe he is a "very valuable" person to have around. When Mack and the boys are stranded on the side of the road on their frog-catching expedition, Eddie is the one to venture forth and steal a carburetor to put in the broken-down Model T.

Hughie – A man who lives with Mack and the boys in the Palace Flophouse. Along with Jones, Hughie sometimes collects frogs and cats for Doc. A less prominent member of Mack's little group, Hughie is responsible for the group's decision to decorate the flophouse, since he is the first person to bring inside a cot, the house's first piece of furniture. Later, Hughie and Mack spend three days manually carrying an oven to the flophouse, where it becomes the gang's prized possession. After the disastrous first party that he and his friends throw for Doc, Hughie gets a job at a cannery, though he quits once the gang decides to plan another surprise party.

Jones – One of the men living with Mack and his friends in the

Palace Flophouse. Like Hughie, Jones often collects frogs and cats for Doc. When the first party that Jones and his friends throw for Doc fails miserably—disgracing them in the eyes of their fellow community members—he goes with Hughie and gets a job at a cannery, but this only lasts for a short time, since he quits as soon as Mack and the others begin planning a second party for Doc.

Gay – A man who moves into the Palace Flophouse with Mack and "the boys" because he wants to get away from his wife. Normally, Gay's wife simply calls the police and gets him arrested, but she soon realizes he has come to enjoy spending time in jail. As a result, she no longer calls the police when she's angry at him. Instead, she starts beating him when he's asleep. Because of this, Gay moves to the flophouse, where he lounges with Mack and the rest of the crew. When the gang borrows Lee Chong's truck to go on the frog-collecting expedition, it is Gay who fixes the vehicle, since he's a talented mechanic. Unfortunately, though, the truck eventually breaks down on the side of the road, and when Gay goes for help, he ends up getting sidetracked by a number of shenanigans that eventually lead him to the Salinas jail, where he gets along with the sheriff. Later, when Gay hears about the second party Mack and "the boys" are throwing for Doc, he convinces the sheriff to let him attend.

Frankie – A boy who starts coming to Western Biological because his mother and uncles are abusive and his father is dead. Before long, Frankie develops a fondness of Doc, who cares for him by buying him clothes, curing him of lice, and cutting his hair. In fact, Doc even lets Frankie help out around the laboratory, though there are certain tasks the boy struggles to complete because he is mentally disabled in some way (the nature of Frankie's cognitive challenges are never fully articulated in *Cannery Row*, though Steinbeck makes it clear that the boy is at a disadvantage because his surrounding community fails to accommodate his intellectual differences). When Frankie hears about the surprise birthday party Mack and "the boys" are throwing for Doc, he tries to steal a beautiful onyx clock, which he wants to give to Doc as a token of his appreciation. Unfortunately, though, he is arrested and detained, and when Doc visits the jail, the police officers inform him that now that they have a "mental report" on the boy, they are going to put him "away." Hearing this, Doc asks Frankie why he stole the clock, and Frankie says, "I love you"—a response that prompts Doc to run out of the jail because he understands that there's nothing more he can do to help Frankie.

The Captain – A former military captain who finds Mack and "the boys" on his property when they're on their frog-collecting expedition. At first, the Captain appears with a shotgun and tells the gang to get off his land. However, Mack soon takes an interest in the Captain's dog, a Pointer with a wound on her leg. Flattering the Captain with compliments about his military service, Mack establishes a connection with him by paying attention to his dog. In response, the Captain invites the entire group of men back to his house, telling them they can raid his personal pond for frogs. Once inside his house, Mack treats the Pointer, and the Captain gives everyone whiskey. The group becomes drunk, and the Captain helps them capture roughly one thousand frogs. Because the Captain's wife is a politician who is often out of town, he has become a rather lonely man. This is why he ends up welcoming Mack and "the boys" with open arms, glad for a chance to socialize. Eventually, though, he passes out after accidentally burning his wife's curtains, and Mack and the gang decide they ought to leave before he wakes up.

Henri – An eccentric painter living in the margins of society. Henri's real name isn't actually Henri, but he's obsessed with the idea of embodying the image of an avant-garde Parisian painter, so he presents himself as a cultured artist who is always changing his "medium," using strange materials (like nutshells) to create paintings. What's most notable about Henri is that he lives in a boat he has been building for the past ten years. The boat is on land, as he hasn't yet finished it yet, meaning that it can't float. However, he doesn't *want* to finish it, for he's afraid of the water. As such, he simply focuses on building the vessel, buying materials whenever he can and often redoing entire sections. Because the living quarters of his boat are so small, Henri finds it hard to maintain long-term relationships. Indeed, he has been married twice and has had many different lovers, but anyone who ever lives with him eventually leaves because they grow tired of existing in such cramped conditions and having to go to the bathroom in the woods. Whenever a lover leaves Henri, he buys wine and spends the night weeping in the boat, but Steinbeck says this is "luxurious stuff" that gives him an overall feeling of "well-being."

Horace Abbeville – A man with two wives and six children, Horace has accumulated an unfathomable amount of debt at Lee Chong's grocery store. Worried that his children will suffer as a result of his financial woes, he visits Lee one day and asks if his debt will be forgiven if he gives the grocer ownership of his fishmeal storehouse. After considering this prospect for a moment, Lee agrees that this will indeed make up for everything Horace owes, and so the two men make the deal. Walking out of the grocery store, Horace then makes his way to the storehouse, where he kills himself. In the aftermath of his death, Lee Chong gives Horace's wives free groceries and pays for the funeral. Eventually, Mack and "the boys" move into the fishmeal storehouse, which becomes the Palace Flophouse.

The Old "Chinaman" – An old man who emerges at dusk each evening and walks through Cannery Row, eventually disappearing beneath a pier on the beach. Then, at dawn, the old man reappears and walks back through Cannery Row and moves through a hole in a fence. No one knows what this man does or who he is, but they leave him alone, as some people think he is God and other people think he is "Death." One day,

though, a young boy named Andy shouts a racist rhyme at the old man, prompting him to turn around. As Andy faces him, he sees the old man's eyes merge into one another, whereupon a lonely and mountainous vista appears where the man's face should be. This terrifies Andy and makes him feel like the only person on earth, so he shuts his eyes. When he opens them again, the old man is simply walking away, and no one ever bothers him again. Although this story condemns Andy for his racist lack of empathy, it's worth noting that Steinbeck's portrayal of the old man—and his dated use of the word "chinaman"—is itself problematic, since it draws upon stereotypes of Asiatic mysteriousness, an idea that ultimately others people like this old man and frames them as supernaturally strange just because they hail from faraway places and don't conform to American notions of normality. Given that this is the one of the only instances of magical realism in the entire novel (and certainly the most pronounced instance, at that), it's unfortunately obvious that Steinbeck himself has conflated his own character's uniqueness with racially charged notions of otherness.

Andy – A boy from Salinas. One morning when Andy is visiting Cannery Row, he sees the old "chinaman" walking through the streets. Although no one ever bothers this old man, Andy feels he must taunt him in order to preserve his own "self-respect," so he shouts a racist rhyme at him. In response, the old man turns around and looks at Andy, his two eyes merging and giving the boy a glimpse of a lonely, empty world. This experience makes Andy feel as if he's the only person on earth, and so he closes his eyes. When he opens them, the old man is gone, and no one ever taunts him again.

William – The bouncer at **the Bear Flag Restaurant** before Alfy. Lonely and depressed, William tries desperately to reach out to the people around him, but no one bothers to pay attention to him. After a failed attempt to socialize with Mack and "the boys," he visits Dora Flood and tells her he's going to commit suicide. Unfortunately, though, she doesn't take him seriously, so he eventually goes to the Greek, who *also* fails to give him the attention he needs. As a result, he takes the Greek's ice pick and stabs himself in the heart.

The Greek – The cook at Dora Flood's brothel, **the Bear Flag Restaurant**. When William—the bouncer who precedes Alfy—comes to the Greek and tells him that he's thinking of committing suicide, the Greek doesn't take him seriously. Instead, he says that people who talk about killing themselves never actually do it, a statement that prompts William to grab an ice pick and thrust it into his own heart.

Sam Malloy – A man who finds a large and empty boiler in the "vacant lot" near Lee Chong's grocery store. Because he and his wife have nowhere else to live, they decide to move into the boiler, eventually furnishing it as if it's a house. Before long, Sam starts renting out the empty pipes that sit nearby, leasing them to other people when Cannery Row experiences a housing shortage.

Mrs. Malloy – Sam Malloy's wife, who—along with Sam—moves into an empty boiler in the "vacant lot" near Lee Chong's grocery store. Although Mrs. Malloy is happy with this situation at first, she soon becomes tired of living in the boiler. As such, she tries to improve her situation by decorating the place, becoming especially upset when Sam doesn't want to give her money to buy window curtains, despite the fact that the boiler doesn't have any windows. Eventually, Sam relents, and the Malloys buy a set of lace curtains.

Tom Talbot – Mary Talbot's husband. A cartoonist who frequently experiences financial hardship, Tom becomes depressed when he and his wife are short on money. When Mary tries to cheer him up, though, he insists that he simply wants to acknowledge his misery rather than ignore the fact that everything is going badly.

Darling – The puppy that the Captain gives Mack. As Darling grows older, everyone at the Palace Flophouse falls in love with her, doting on her and letting her do whatever she wants. When Eddie tries to bake a cake for Doc's surprise birthday party, Darling finds it, eats it, and subsequently throws up in its center. Later, Darling becomes dangerously ill, and it isn't until Doc visits the Palace Flophouse and gives Mack and "the boys" instructions about how to care for her that she gets better. Perhaps most importantly, this is the first meaningful interaction that the gang has with Doc after the disastrous first party, thereby reestablishing their connection to the kindhearted marine biologist.

Joey – A timid young boy whose father committed suicide by taking rat poison. When Joey's friend Willard tries to provoke him—wanting, for some reason, to get in a fight—Joey kindly dodges each insult, swallowing his pride and listening to Willard speak badly about his father. In this way, Joey avoids getting into a fight with his friend, though a dispute over a penny eventually threatens to turn into a physical altercation. However, the vignette about Joey and Willard ends before it's clear whether or not they will actually come to blows.

Willard – A mean and aggressive young boy who wants to get into a fight with his friend, Joey. Eager to provoke Joey, Willard taunts him by making fun of his father, who committed suicide by taking rat poison. However, Joey refuses to grow angry, instead simply letting Willard say what he will. When Joey finds a penny on the ground, though, Willard pounces on it and claims it as his own, finally getting a rise out of his friend. Nevertheless, Steinbeck cuts this story off before it becomes clear whether or not the two boys will actually come to blows.

Mr. Carriaga – An old man who comes upon a boy and his dog, both of whom are carrying internal organs. Concerned that these organs don't look like they belong to an animal, Mr. Carriaga asks around and soon discovers that the body parts belong to a well-known humorist who died in a nearby hotel.

The doctor who embalmed him, Carriaga learns, threw the unnecessary internal organs into the "gulch" behind his house.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Mary Talbot – A woman who loves throwing parties. However, Mary and her husband, Tom, are rather poor, so Mary rarely has the money to host the kind of gatherings she'd like to host. As a result, she focuses on holding tea parties for the neighborhood cats.

Alfy – The bouncer of Dora Flood's brothel, **the Bear Flag**. Alfy is hired for this position after William commits suicide, and unlike William, everyone takes an immediate liking to him.

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.

VICE AND VIRTUE

In *Cannery Row*, a novel documenting the lives of outcasts and eccentrics, Steinbeck challenges conventional notions of virtue, ultimately arguing that society often champions qualities that don't necessarily lead to happiness or widespread goodwill. In fact, he suggests that vice and virtue sometimes have an inverse relationship, one in which supposedly negative or sinful attributes can actually lead to virtuousness. To illustrate this point, he presents a gang of happy-go-lucky men who refuse to concern themselves with pursuing the kind of lives society pressures most people to lead. As a result, they are immune to the greed and materialism of their contemporaries, and though they frequently fail to successfully do the right thing, their motivations are always pure. In turn, Steinbeck sets forth an interpretation of virtuousness that has to do with a prevailing, fundamental sense of goodness—one that doesn't necessarily align with what society values.

Steinbeck quickly solidifies the idea that Mack and his friends are different than their contemporaries, who work difficult jobs and obsess about money. Whereas these people spend their entire lives thinking about wealth and stability—two things society insists are intrinsically good or worthwhile—Mack "and the boys" lounge in the sun, drink heavily, work intermittently, and simply enjoy life. "Mack and the boys are the Beauties, the Virtues, the Graces," Steinbeck writes, referring to three groups of Greek goddesses who represent splendor and brilliance, mirth and joy, and abundance. With this in mind, it's easy to see that Steinbeck wants to imbue Mack and his friends with a natural kind of virtue that is beautiful and life-giving.

What's more, he contrasts this free-flowing goodness with an image of the surrounding society as full of repressed, ferocious people bent on adhering to societally-prescribed notions of financial productivity as virtue. Indeed, Steinbeck sees the people around Mack as "tigers with ulcers," likening them to "strictured bulls," or bulls that have been neutered or are otherwise unable to mate. Whereas Steinbeck likens Mack and the boys to goddesses of fertility, then, he portrays their fellow citizens as incapable of enjoying life.

The main reason Mack's repressed contemporaries are so unhappy, Steinbeck suggests, is because they fixate on trivial matters like money. "What can it profit a man to gain the whole world and to come to his property with a gastric ulcer, a blown prostate, and bifocals?" he writes (riffing on the Bible verse "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"). "Mack and the boys avoid the trap, walk around the poison, step over the noose while a generation of trapped, poisoned, and trussed-up men scream at them and call them no-goods, come-to-bad-ends, blots-on-the-town, thieves, rascals, bums." Although Mack and his friends are happy—or perhaps *because* they are happy—their society thinks of them as "no-goods" and "blots-on-the-town." In turn, Steinbeck demonstrates how unwilling people are to accept the intrinsic goodness of simply living life without succumbing to greed.

Not only does Steinbeck uphold that society's conventional notions of vice are mixed up, he also suggests that many supposedly more virtuous people in Cannery Row are hypocrites. Indeed, many of Monterey's citizens condemn certain practices while simultaneously depending upon the people they're criticizing. For instance, Dora Flood's brothel often comes under fire for being a place of sin. Steinbeck, for his part, goes out of his way to clarify his belief that Dora and her establishment are not examples of vice, stating, "This is no fly-by-night cheap clip-joint but a sturdy, virtuous club, built, maintained, and disciplined by Dora who, madam and girl for fifty years, has through the exercise of special gifts of tact and honesty, charity and a certain realism, made herself respected by the intelligent, the learned, and the kind." It's worth taking special note of the words Steinbeck associates with Dora and her brothel: "virtuous," "tact," "honesty," and "charity." By doing this, he frames prostitution not as something that is categorically evil, but something that can still embody elements of goodness.

Unfortunately, many people are unwilling to acknowledge Dora's virtuousness, which is why she is "hated by [a] twisted and lascivious sisterhood of married spinsters." Because of this, Dora is forced to redouble her efforts to be "honest" and "charit[able]." "Being against the law, [...] she must be twice as law abiding as anyone else," Steinbeck notes, explaining that she's forced to be "especially philanthropic" by donating large amounts of money to public institutions. As such, the entire community ends up thriving on Dora's supposedly "shameless

dirty wages of sin."

This kind of hypocrisy regarding vice and virtue lies at the heart of modern society. Doc, for one, recognizes this while observing Mack and the boys one afternoon. "It has always seemed strange to me," he says. "The things we admire in men, kindness and generosity, openness, honesty, understanding and feeling are the concomitants of failure in our system. And those traits we detest, sharpness, greed, acquisitiveness, meanness, egotism and self-interest are the traits of success. And while men admire the quality of the first they love the produce of the second." In this passage, Doc articulates the fact that his society claims to "admire" traits that it ultimately fails to encourage; "kindness and generosity, openness, honesty, [and] understanding" all lead to "failure" in the money-minded "system" in which Doc and his contemporaries exist. This is why Mack and the boys are disenfranchised (though they don't mind their poverty).

Indeed, Steinbeck posits that Mack and his friends are virtuous because of the fact that they refuse to exhibit the "sharpness, greed, acquisitiveness, meanness, egotism and self-interest" that would enable them to lead "success[ful]" lives. In turn, he sets forth a theory of virtue that eschews and destabilizes conventional notions of what it means to be good—notions that only lead people into vice and avarice.

LONELINESS, MELANCHOLY, AND HAPPINESS

Melancholy and happiness are directly linked throughout *Cannery Row*. In fact, there is often a certain degree of joy embedded in moments of sadness and gloom, and many of the novel's characters experience a poignant kind of loneliness that—as harrowing as it can be to feel alone—sometimes gives them an odd sense of "well-being." Perhaps most strikingly, the reclusive painter Henri undergoes bouts of crushing loneliness and sadness, but he manages to simply experience these feelings as part of his life. By accepting these emotional hardships, he opens himself up to the full breadth of human experience. What's more, it's worth noting that his loneliness is alleviated to a certain degree by the fact that he belongs to an entire community of people living on the margins of society—people who, like him, don't necessarily fit in. In turn, Steinbeck intimates that as long as a person has at least some kind of community, they can and should approach loneliness not as a debilitating sorrow, but as something that might unexpectedly reinvigorate their capacity to enjoy life.

Henri the painter is well-acquainted with loneliness and melancholy because he lives in a half-built, land-ridden boat that none of his lovers want to stay in for more than a short period of time. Because of this, the women he becomes romantically involved with always leave him before too long. Of course, he is quite sad each time this happens, but that sadness quickly turns into an appreciation of his independence. "Each time he was left alone, he mourned formally for a while but actually he felt a sense of relief," Steinbeck writes. "He could stretch out in his cabin. He could eat what he wanted." Because he's so used to this kind of heartbreak, he develops a routine, one that he begins to relish despite his melancholy circumstances. "It had become his custom, each time he was deserted, to buy a gallon of wine, to stretch out on the comfortably hard bunk and get drunk," Steinbeck writes. "Sometimes he cried a little all by himself but it was luxurious stuff and he usually had a wonderful feeling of well-being from it." By calling Henri's crying "luxurious stuff," Steinbeck shows that loneliness and melancholy are not as divorced from happiness as people tend to think. In this regard, Henri relishes his solitude and heartbreak because such sadness gives him a feeling of catharsis, ultimately offering him a chance to get in touch with his emotions and thus granting him a "wonderful feeling of well-being."

Regrettably, not everyone in Cannery Row is capable of turning melancholy and loneliness into a cathartic form of happiness. For example, when William—the bouncer at Dora Flood's whorehouse, **the Bear Flag**—tries to befriend Mack and his friends, he finds himself unable to assimilate into their group. "He walked out one day and sat on the pipe," Steinbeck writes. "Conversation stopped and an uneasy and hostile silence fell on the group. After a while William went disconsolately back to the Bear Flag and through the window he saw the conversation spring up again and it saddened him." In this moment, William is rejected by a group of men who are normally kind and accommodating. Unfortunately, this rejection pairs with William's tendency to be "introspective and self-accusing," ultimately creating an insurmountable feeling of loneliness and despair that eventually leads him to commit suicide. Whereas Henri sees his loneliness as an opportunity to cathartically experience the full reach of human emotion, then, William's loneliness only exacerbates his "self-accusing" nature. The difference, of course, is that Henri isn't truly isolated from other people. Indeed, it is his own choice to live alone on a boat, and he knows he could have healthy romantic relationships if only he decided to live elsewhere. William, on the other hand, can't even join the community in which he exists, and this makes his depressing isolation unbearable. In this manner, Steinbeck suggests that camaraderie and human connection (or even just the availability of these two things) are integral to a person's ability to subvert their own unhappiness.

Having established the idea that complete social isolation makes it impossible to gain a sense of "well-being" from loneliness, Steinbeck showcases a certain kind of communal melancholy. During his surprise birthday party, Doc starts playing records that give the entire atmosphere a mournful feeling into which everyone relaxes, finding pleasure in the half-drunk gloominess of sitting in a room with friends and listening

to sad songs. "Doc was feeling a golden pleasant sadness," Steinbeck writes. This is an important phrase, as it draws attention to the fact that Doc enjoys the combination of "golden pleasant[ness] and "sadness," two things that aren't often correlated with one another. Then, when the music ends, Doc stands up and reads a sad, wistful poem that causes everyone to think nostalgically about lost lovers. "The party was slipping away in sweet sadness," Steinbeck notes, underlining the notion that, although the characters have plunged into "sadness," there is a "sweet[ness]" to this feeling. Indeed, they are all sitting together, "luxuri[ating]" in a shared yet distinct experience. As such, Steinbeck demonstrates not only that it's possible for loneliness and melancholy to create happiness, but that this emotional inversion most often takes place when a person is connected to others. By using the party as an example of how melancholy can be cathartic, he essentially spotlights the importance of community and camaraderie, allowing the closeness of his characters to stand for a certain emotional resilience and optimism in the face of unhappiness and loneliness.

KINDNESS, EMPATHY, AND FRIENDSHIP

In *Cannery Row*, Steinbeck examines the nature of kindness, eventually suggesting that Doc's selflessness and empathy are rare. Indeed, everyone around him wants to demonstrate how much his goodwill means to them, but they often find themselves incapable of doing so. This is because they themselves are unable to embody the selflessness that they appreciate so much about Doc. Most notably, Mack and "the boys'" efforts to celebrate Doc are disastrous, since the parties they throw for him end up centering around their own desire to drink the night away. As such, Steinbeck shows readers how difficult it can be to carry out selfless acts of kindness, even when one truly wants to do something nice for a close friend. At the same time, Doc manages to recognize that Mack and "the boys" only want to show him their appreciation, so he goes along with their shenanigans, ultimately having a fantastic time despite the fact that doing so means allowing his home and possessions to be ruined. In turn, Steinbeck highlights the value of welcoming kindness from one's friends, even when that kindness is flawed and misguided.

The kindness that Mack and "the boys" exhibit is complicated, since it is simultaneously empathetic and self-interested. For example, when they decide to give him a surprise party, they demonstrate their desire to do something nice for their friend. At the same time, though, there's no denying that they're also looking for any excuse to have a party, rendering this act of kindness rather self-motivated. Doc, on the other hand, is an empathetic person who spends a great deal of energy trying to help others without expecting to personally benefit from his actions. For instance, when the entire town comes down with the flu, he drops everything in order to visit and treat sick people even though he isn't a medical doctor. What's more, he asks Dora Flood to send her prostitutes to sit with the fevered, thereby proving that he's not only invested in treating his community members physically, but also wants them to not be scared or lonely. In this way, Steinbeck presents Doc as a model of empathy and kindness—a model that has nothing to do with personal motivations and everything to do with selfless goodwill.

Mack and "the boys," on the other hand, have trouble separating themselves from their supposed acts of kindness. Even before Mack finishes executing his plan to pay for Doc's party (which requires taking a trip to collect frogs), he senses that he isn't being as selfless as he'd like to think. "We worked it out that we wanted to give Doc a party," he says to his friend. "So we come out here and have a hell of a lot of fun. […] And I ain't sure we're doin' it for Doc. I ain't sure we ain't doin' it for ourselves." In this moment, Mack realizes that his desire to throw a party for Doc isn't purely altruistic. Rather, he understands that he likes the idea of having an excuse to go on a trip—a trip during which he and his friends drink, lounge, and "have a hell of a lot of fun." "I'd just like to give him something when I didn't get most of it back," he says, finally understanding that his plan to show Doc his appreciation benefits him almost as much as it benefits Doc. As such, he realizes that the best way to carry out his plan would be to somehow give Doc something that he (Mack) doesn't also want.

Despite Mack's newfound conviction to behave unselfishly, he quickly resumes his plan to throw Doc a surprise party, which, unsurprisingly, goes terribly. Trashing Doc's laboratory and breaking his belongings before he's even in attendance, Mack and "the boys" leave his home in shambles, thereby failing miserably to express their appreciation of him. By virtue of this, Steinbeck underscores how hard it is to be truly selfless, even when trying to do something nice—a notion that emphasizes the value of genuine, unselfish kindness, which is rare. At the same time, however, Steinbeck doesn't present Mack and "the boys" as antagonistic characters, thereby hinting that their *intentions* to be kind ultimately outweigh the fact that they fail so miserably to be thoughtful.

Although Mack and his friends are ashamed of their failed attempt to celebrate Doc, they can't think of any other way to show him kindness, so they plan yet another surprise party. Interestingly enough, though, when Doc catches wind of this, he doesn't tell them to stop, but begins to prepare for the potentially disastrous event. And even though the party once again descends into chaos and destruction, Doc simply gives himself over to this, deciding to enjoy what his friends have done for him. "Even Doc was happy," Steinbeck notes when a fight breaks out, adding that Doc starts "flailing about" and relishing the mayhem. In this way, readers understand that, although it's quite noble to perform selfless acts of kindness,

even selfish expressions of appreciation can be worthwhile, for they can sometimes still manage to communicate a sense of goodwill. Indeed, Doc—wielding his own powers of empathy—understands that what's most important is not *how* Mack and the boys celebrate his friendship, but the mere fact that they want to celebrate it at all. As a result, Steinbeck suggests that true friendships can withstand failures of thoughtfulness and empathy as long as there is genuine goodwill at the heart of a person's intentions.

REALITY, RANDOMNESS, AND DISORDER

In *Cannery Row*, Steinbeck is concerned first and foremost with capturing what it feels like to be alive in Monterey, California sometime before World War II. Rather than writing a completely cohesive narrative or adding complex literary embellishments, he simply presents readers with a series of linked vignettes that, when assembled, create an interconnected but abstract representation of life itself. In this way, he accentuates reality's inherently disordered and random qualities, thereby encouraging readers to simply experience the book—and existence in general—for what it is. As such, he advocates for a certain kind of surrender to chaos, one that a number of characters in *Cannery Row* also learn to embrace. Because of this abstract commitment to disorder, the novel is sometimes difficult to analyze, since it's challenging to draw broader meaning from a text that is primarily interested in exploring meaninglessness and the plain facts of everyday life. However, that *Cannery Row* often evades interpretation is itself a meditation on the nature of reality—a meditation that encourages readers to simply let the randomness and disorder of life wash over them.

In order to recreate the random disorder that is so much a part of being alive, Steinbeck often showcases his characters' eccentricities. More specifically, he looks at the ways in which people contradict their own beliefs, thus demonstrating that even things people think they control—such as their own convictions—are just as chaotic and unpredictable as everything else in life. "Doc was a pure scientist and incapable of superstition and yet when he came in late one night and found a line of white flowers across the doorsill he had a bad time of it," Steinbeck writes. "But most people in Cannery Row simply do not believe in such things and then live by them." When Steinbeck says that "most people in Cannery Row" don't "believe in such things," he means that they think of themselves as too practical and levelheaded to believe in "superstition." And yet, they still end up allowing these superstitions to dictate the way they live, proving that even their own internal lives, which seem so rational and controllable, are subject to contradiction and unpredictability. What's more, Steinbeck offers no reason as to *why*, exactly, people can't depend upon their own convictions. He presents readers with a strange discrepancy that sits at the heart of human existence, ultimately offering up an example of life's inherent disorderliness without explaining it away. In this way, he encourages readers to embrace reality's inscrutability, which frequently brings itself to bear on a person's internal world.

Steinbeck's representation of internal disorder mirrors the randomness of the outside world. Indeed, he explicitly calls attention to life's messy disorganization as early as the first chapter of *Cannery Row*, in which he establishes his desire to present an unadorned portrait of reality. Because he is interested in capturing what it feels like to be alive, he decides to create a portrait of Cannery Row that has no agenda other than to reveal the nuances and complexities of reality. Having described Cannery Row as "a poem, a stink, a grating noise, a quality of light, a tone, a habit, a nostalgia, a dream," he wonders how he might accurately portray all this on the page. "How can the poem and the stink and the grating noise—the quality of light, the tone, the habit and the dream—be set down alive?" By asking this question, he makes it clear that he wants to communicate what it's like to live in Cannery Row without losing a sense of immediacy. In other words, he wants to make sure his writing is just as "alive" as the experience itself.

"When you collect marine animals there are certain flat worms so delicate that they are almost impossible to capture whole," Steinbeck writes, "for they break and tatter under the touch. You must let them ooze and crawl of their own will onto a knife blade and then lift them gently into your bottle of sea water. And perhaps that might be the way to write this book—to open the page and to let the stories crawl in by themselves." In this moment, Steinbeck states that he is going to "let the stories crawl in by themselves," thereby implying that he doesn't want to finesse anything that makes its way into *Cannery Row*. This, he believes, will enable him to preserve the authenticity of these stories, thereby allowing him to properly "set down" the experience of being "alive." If these stories are going to simply "crawl in by themselves," then it's obvious they won't necessarily adhere to structural or narrative formalities, instead creating an amalgamation of lived experience that—above all—honors the uncompromised and often incomprehensible feeling of reality itself.

SYMBOLS

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

THE BEAR FLAG RESTAURANT

In *Cannery Row*, Dora Flood's brothel—called the Bear Flag Restaurant—represents the fact that vice and virtue are often not so easy to separate. Although the Bear Flag is a house of prostitution, Steinbeck introduces it as a

"virtuous club." What's more, he asserts that Dora has the "special gifts" of "honesty" and "charity," adding that she is "respected by the intelligent, the learned, and the kind." By presenting both Dora and the brothel itself in this flattering light, then, Steinbeck challenges readers to look beyond conventional notions of right and wrong, ultimately suggesting that someone whom society might generally consider to be morally corrupt can still be an honest, upstanding citizen. In turn, the Bear Flag comes to stand for the ways in which vice and virtue aren't necessarily mutually exclusive, but rather inextricably bound.

THE DEAD WOMAN

Because the dead woman that Doc finds in the tidal "flats" of La Jolla elicits such a complicated reaction from him, she becomes a symbol of life's fundamental complexity. When Doc finds this unknown woman's corpse stuck in a "crevice" just beneath the waterline, he starts hearing "a high thin piercingly sweet flute" in his head, but the melody reaches "beyond the hearing range." This strange experience gives Doc "goose pimples," as he struggles to understand why, exactly, he is reacting this way to seeing a dead stranger. "He shivered and his eyes were wet the way they get in the focus of great beauty," Steinbeck writes, suggesting that what Doc feels in this moment isn't abject horror, but an appreciation of "beauty." At the same time, though, there's no denying that Doc is deeply troubled by this experience, since he knows right away that the haunting image of this woman's face is now "burned into his picture memory" forever. In this way, Steinbeck uses the dead woman to embody the complicated emotional response that the idea of mortality elicits from humans—a response that Steinbeck intimates is in and of itself a thing of "great beauty."

QUOTES

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

Prologue Quotes

❝ Cannery Row in Monterey in California is a poem, a stink, a grating noise, a quality of light, a tone, a habit, a nostalgia, a dream. Cannery Row is the gathered and scattered, tin and iron and rust and splintered wood, chipped pavement and weedy lots and junk heaps, sardine canneries of corrugated iron, honky tonks, restaurants and whore houses, and little crowded groceries, and laboratories and flophouses. Its inhabitants are, as the man once said, "whores, pimps, gamblers, and sons of bitches," by which he meant Everybody. Had the man looked through another peephole he might have said, "Saints and angels and martyrs and holy men," and he would have meant the same thing.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 1

Explanation and Analysis

These are the opening words of *Cannery Row*. Right away, Steinbeck establishes the fact that Cannery Row is rough around the edges and teeming with life. Indeed, it is home to a number of public establishments, including "honky tonks, restaurants and whore houses, and little crowded groceries, and laboratories and flophouses." Given that each of these establishments is wildly unique, readers see the vast multitudes that exist within this otherwise small location, enabling Steinbeck to spotlight life's deceptive complexity. What's more, when Steinbeck describes the "inhabitants" of Cannery Row as "whores, pimps, gamblers, and sons of bitches," he momentarily prepares readers to encounter malicious and vice-riddled characters. However, he quickly subverts this expectation by suggesting that "everybody" fits into this category. In fact, he even takes this idea one step further by upholding that there is no difference between "whores, pimps, gamblers, and sons of bitches" and "Saints and angels and martyrs and holy men." In this way, he frames vice and virtue as inextricably intertwined, ultimately intimating that people are too complicated to be completely good or completely bad.

❝ How can the poem and the stink and the grating noise—the quality of light, the tone, the habit and the dream—be set down alive? When you collect marine animals there are certain flat worms so delicate that they are almost impossible to capture whole, for they break and tatter under the touch. You must let them ooze and crawl of their own will onto a knife blade and then lift them gently into your bottle of sea water. And perhaps that might be the way to write this book—to open the page and to let the stories crawl in by themselves.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 2

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Steinbeck considers the difficulty of writing about real life. Wanting to "set down" the nature of life in Cannery Row without sacrificing its realistic qualities, he wonders how such seemingly indefinable notions—the "poem and the stink and the grating noise" of everyday life—can be preserved *and* recreated for readers. To answer his own question, he offers a metaphor about "flat worms" that are "so delicate" it is nearly "impossible to capture" them without ripping their soft bodies. The only way to preserve these creatures, he explains, is by simply letting them "crawl" of their own volition onto a "knife blade." Applying this to the challenge of using writing to capture real life, Steinbeck suggests that the best way to communicate what it feels like to live in Cannery Row will be to "open the page" and let "the stories crawl in by themselves." In turn, he prepares readers for a collection of vignettes in which representation and recreation are more important than plot or narrative.

Chapter 1 Quotes

❝ Lee Chong stood in back of the cigar counter and his nice brown eyes were turned inward on a calm and eternal Chinese sorrow. He knew he could not have helped it, but he wished he might have known and perhaps tried to help. It was deeply a part of Lee's kindness and understanding that man's right to kill himself is inviolable, but sometimes a friend can make it unnecessary. Lee had already underwritten the funeral and sent a wash basket of groceries to the stricken families.

Related Characters: Horace Abbeville, Lee Chong

Related Themes:

Page Number: 8

Explanation and Analysis

This passage appears shortly after Horace Abbeville gives Lee Chong ownership of his fishmeal storehouse and then kills himself. In the aftermath of this tragic event, Lee considers the nature of the deal and feels sad about the fact that he failed to help his friend. On the one hand, he understands that Horace's depression surely had nothing to do with Lee himself, since Lee didn't do anything to truly exacerbate the man's sadness. However, he can't help but think about the fact that sometimes "a friend can make" suicide "unnecessary" for a person. This line of thinking, Steinbeck notes, is simply "part of Lee's kindness." This is an important detail, since *Cannery Row* is a novel that examines the ways in which kindness manifests itself between friends. By showcasing Lee's sorrow in this moment, then, Steinbeck demonstrates the man's empathy and compassion.

❝ Mack was the elder, leader, mentor, and to a small extent the exploiter of a little group of men who had in common no families, no money, and no ambitions beyond food, drink, and contentment. But whereas most men in their search for contentment destroy themselves and fall wearily short of their targets, Mack and his friends approached contentment casually, quietly, and absorbed it gently.

Related Characters: Mack

Related Themes:

Page Number: 9

Explanation and Analysis

This is the first explanation in *Cannery Row* of Mack's temperament, which is one of the novel's focal points, since his blend of kindness, empathy, and mischief is quite unique. Indeed, Mack is someone who prioritizes "contentment," not caring that he has "no money" and "no ambitions beyond food" or "drink." What's more, Steinbeck makes clear that Mack does indeed "exploit" people to a "small extent," though this is seemingly balanced out by the fact that he also serves as a "mentor" in a number of his personal relationships. In turn, readers see that Mack is neither wholly good nor wholly bad—instead, he is a mess of contradictions, a notion that recalls Steinbeck's earlier assertion that the people living in Cannery Row are both "sons of bitches" *and* "Saints and angels." What's more, it's worth noting that Steinbeck asserts that most people on a

quest to find happiness end up "destroy[ing] themselves." This, it seems, is because they don't have Mack's lackadaisical attitude, which allows him to pursue "contentment casually" and "quietly."

❝ In Mack's eyes there was good will and good fellowship and a desire to make everyone happy. Why then did Lee Chong feel slightly surrounded? Why did his mind pick its way as delicately as a cat through cactus? It had been sweetly done, almost in a spirit of philanthropy. Lee's mind leaped ahead at the possibilities—no, they were probabilities, and his finger tapping slowed still further. He saw himself refusing Mack's request and he saw the broken glass from the windows. Then Mack would offer a second time to watch over and preserve Lee's property— and at the second refusal, Lee could smell the smoke, could see the little flames creeping up the walls. Mack and his friends would try to help to put it out. Lee's finger came to a gentle rest on the change mat. He was beaten. He knew that. There was left to him only the possibility of saving face and Mack was likely to be very generous about that. Lee said, "You like pay lent my place? You like live there same hotel?"

Related Characters: Lee Chong (speaker), Mack

Related Themes:

Page Number: 10

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Mack has just asked Lee Chong if he will let him and his friends move into the grocer's new fishmeal storehouse. Reminding Lee that the storehouse is currently wasting away, Mack says Lee probably shouldn't leave it empty, since people will break its windows or burn it down. At first, Lee sees "good will and good fellowship and a desire to make everyone happy" lurking in Mack's eyes, but then he realizes that Mack's proposition has a slightly menacing quality to it. After all, he understands that Mack and his crew will break the windows of the storehouse themselves if Lee refuses to let them move in. They'll do this, he knows, because then they'll be able to tell him that they were right about how he needs them to watch over the property. In this way, Steinbeck creates a perfect portrait of Mack's strange combination of "good will" and mischievousness. What's more, he demonstrates Lee's desire to "save face" by presenting himself as a businessman despite the fact that Mack has "beaten" him in this particular transaction. Indeed, Lee decides to charge Mack and his friends a monthly rent even though it's obvious they'll never pay him. In turn, he manages to give Mack what he wants without having to sacrifice his reputation as the kind of businessman who can't be taken advantage of.

Chapter 2 Quotes

❝ The Word is a symbol and a delight which sucks up men and scenes, trees, plants, factories, and Pekinese. Then the Thing becomes the Word and back to Thing again, but warped and woven into a fantastic pattern. The Word sucks up Cannery Row, digests it and spews it out, and the Row has taken the shimmer of the green world and the sky-reflecting seas.

Related Characters: Lee Chong

Related Themes:

Page Number: 13

Explanation and Analysis

With these words, which serve as the opening to Chapter 2, Steinbeck continues his examination of language and its various representational qualities, while also referencing the opening of the Biblical Gospel of John ("In the beginning was the Word"). When he says that "the Word is a symbol and a delight which sucks up men and scenes," he considers the nature of language and its ability to "digest" real life and recreate it as a "symbol" on a page. This, it seems, is what he is doing as an author when he's writing about the "trees, plants, [and] factories" in Cannery Row (the word "Pekinese," for what it's worth, is an adjective denoting that someone or something is from Beijing). Once a writer sets something down on the page, Steinbeck explains, it "becomes the Word," and since "the Word" represents the original "Thing," then it also becomes that "Thing" again. This is rather convoluted, but it is simply Steinbeck's way of both celebrating and criticizing the efficacy of language when it comes to representing things that exist in real life. In this strange process—which both succeeds and fails to recreate life itself—things take on "the shimmer of the green world and the sky-reflecting seas." In turn, Steinbeck puts his faith in the power of "the Word" to breathe energy into a story despite the fact that nothing can truly embody life except life itself.

Mack and the boys, too, spinning in their orbits. They are the Virtues, the Graces, the Beauties of the hurried mangled craziness of Monterey and the cosmic Monterey where men in fear and hunger destroy their stomachs in the fight to secure certain food, where men hungering for love destroy everything lovable about them. Mack and the boys are the Beauties, the Virtues, the Graces. In the world ruled by tigers with ulcers, rutted by strictured bulls, scavenged by blind jackals, Mack and the boys dine delicately with the tigers, fondle the frantic heifers, and wrap up the crumbs to feed the sea gulls of Cannery Row. What can it profit a man to gain the whole world and to come to his property with a gastric ulcer, a blown prostate, and bifocals? Mack and the boys avoid the trap, walk around the poison, step over the noose while a generation of trapped, poisoned, and trussed-up men scream at them and call them no-goods, come-to-bad-ends, blots-on-the-town, thieves, rascals, bums.

Related Characters: Mack

Related Themes:

Page Number: 13

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Steinbeck once again considers Mack and his friends, this time focusing on the ways in which their easygoing, unworried lifestyle ultimately makes them happier than everyone else. Whereas the people around them live "in fear" and "destroy everything lovable about them[selves," Mack and his crew are like "the Graces"—Greek goddesses associated with fertility and beauty. By making this comparison, Steinbeck suggests that Mack and "the boys" know how to live natural, organic lives that don't "destroy" or harm them. However, society sees them as "no-goods" because they don't care about money or the things other people care about. But this is exactly why Mack and his friends are happy, whereas their contemporaries are obsessed with "gain[ing] the whole world," an endeavor that only leads to "gastric ulcer[s]" and "blown prostate[s]." In this way, Steinbeck outlines a critique of greed, showing readers that the people who are supposedly the most prosperous in modern society are actually "poisoned" and "trussed-up men" who are inhibited by their overwhelming avarice. Yet again, Steinbeck destabilizes conventional notions of vice and virtue, arguing that people often value qualities that get in the way of happiness.

Our Father who art in nature, who has given the gift of survival to the coyote, the common brown rat, the English sparrow, the house fly and the moth, must have a great and overwhelming love for no-goods and blots-on-the-town and bums, and Mack and the boys. Virtues and graces and laziness and zest. Our Father who art in nature.

Related Characters: Mack

Related Themes:

Page Number: 14

Explanation and Analysis

With these words, Steinbeck concludes Chapter 2, which is essentially an examination of vice, virtue, and happiness. When he writes, "Our Father who art in nature," he alters a prayer commonly known as The Lord's Prayer, which comes from The New Testament's Gospel of Matthew. The original prayer begins: "Our Father who art in heaven [...]." By substituting the word "heaven" for the word "nature," Steinbeck invests himself in a certain kind of corporeal and organic spirituality, one that prizes the natural world above all else. Given that Steinbeck has already made it clear that Mack and "the boys" are pure souls who thrive in nature's difficult environment—an environment that turns many of their contemporaries into "poison[ed]," "trussed-up" men—it's significant that he emphasizes the notion that God exists in the tangible world. Indeed, this ultimately suggests that Mack and the boys are quite close to God, despite the fact that everyone thinks they are sinners. In turn, Steinbeck once again intimates that society's ideas about vice and virtue are misinformed, since Mack and the boys are closer to God than people who claim to lead moral and spiritual lives but actually spend their time behaving greedily. Rather than praising people for working hard and earning money, Steinbeck exalts people like Mack because they have a certain "laziness and zest" that he believes God appreciates. In turn, readers see that stereotypical notions of good and bad—of vice and virtue—do not apply to the worldview Steinbeck has crafted in *Cannery Row*.

Chapter 3 Quotes

But on the left-hand boundary of the lot is the stern and stately whore house of Dora Flood; a decent, clean, honest, old-fashioned sporting house where a man can take a glass of beer among friends. This is no fly-by-night cheap clip-joint but a sturdy, virtuous club, built, maintained, and disciplined by Dora who, madam and girl for fifty years, has through the exercise of special gifts of tact and honesty, charity and a certain realism, made herself respected by the intelligent, the learned, and the kind. And by the same token she is hated by the twisted and lascivious sisterhood of married spinsters whose husbands respect the home but don't like it very much.

Related Characters: Dora Flood

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 15

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Steinbeck describes Dora Flood's brothel for the first time, making sure to present the Bear Flag Restaurant as a noble establishment and not some "fly-by-night cheap clip-joint." Although people might assume that a "whore house" is riddled with vice and maliciousness, Steinbeck upholds that the Bear Flag is a "sturdy, virtuous club." This, of course, aligns with his overall belief that the human qualities and lifestyles that society generally condemns are not always bad or sinful. In fact, he believes that Dora—a person society would normally categorize as a sinner—is someone who practices "honesty" and "charity." This, in turn, has earned her the "respect" of "the intelligent, the learned, and the kind." This last quality is important to note, for it appears that only "kind" people are capable of seeing past Dora's profession to fully take her virtuousness into account. Anyone who can't do this ends up "hat[ing]" Dora because of an unfair judgment based solely on an inability to empathize with her. As such, Steinbeck once again outlines the ways in which social stigmas regarding vice and virtue can blind someone to another person's positive qualities.

William thought dark and broody thoughts. No one loved him. No one cared about him. They might call him a watchman but he was a pimp—a dirty pimp, the lowest thing in the world. And then he thought how he had a right to live and be happy just like anyone else, by God he had. He walked back angrily but his anger went away when he came to the Bear Flag and climbed the steps. It was evening and the juke box was playing *Harvest Moon* and William remembered that the first hooker who ever gaffed for him used to like that song before she ran away and got married and disappeared. The song made him awfully sad. Dora was in the back parlor having a cup of tea when William came in. She said, "What's the matter, you sick?"

"No," said William. "But what's the percentage? I feel lousy. I think I'll bump myself off."

Dora had handled plenty of neurotics in her time. Kid 'em out of it was her motto. "Well, do it on your own time and don't mess up the rugs," she said.

Related Characters: Dora Flood, William (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 15

Explanation and Analysis

After William tries to join Mack and "the boys" in conversation one day, he finds that they don't want to socialize with him. Afterward, he thinks "dark and broody thoughts," feeling as if "no one love[s]" or "care[s] about him." When he goes back to the Bear Flag, his anger turns into something else—sadness. The song on the jukebox there makes him think about a prostitute who once left him behind because she "got married," a thought that ultimately emphasizes the fact that loneliness has presided over his entire life. No matter what, it seems, he can't escape the fact that he is alone in this world. This is most likely why he decides to speak so candidly to Dora, since all he wants is a companion who might empathize with him. Unfortunately, though, Dora doesn't recognize how desperately he needs her sympathy and instead tries to "kid 'em out of it" by making a joke about the rugs. This is an important moment to remember as *Cannery Row* progresses, since William is one of only a few examples of characters who are incapable of living with loneliness. Whereas the majority of the other characters have a community to turn to when they experience these melancholic feelings, William is utterly alone, and this is why he ends up killing himself.

And William saw the change, saw first how the Greek knew he could do it and then the Greek knew he would do it. As soon as he saw that in the Greek's eyes William knew he had to do it. He was sad because now it seemed silly. His hand rose and the ice pick snapped into his heart. It was amazing how easily it went in. William was the watchman before Alfred came. Everyone liked Alfred. He could sit on the pipes with Mack and the boys any time. He could even visit up at the Palace Flophouse.

Related Characters: Alfy, The Greek , William

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 15

Explanation and Analysis

This is a description of the moment in which William commits suicide. Having tried to ease his sense of loneliness by visiting Mack and "the boys," William retreats when they refuse to include him in conversation. He then goes to Dora, who makes fun of his desire to kill himself. At this point, William visits one of the prostitutes in the Bear Flag Restaurant, but she offers no relief, either. Finally, William goes to the Greek and tells him that he's thinking of committing suicide. Unfortunately, though, the Greek doesn't know he's serious, so he remarks that people who talk about killing themselves never do it. In response, William grabs an ice pick out of the Greek's hand, and as the two men stare at one another, William notices the Greek's face "change." First, he sees that the Greek finally understands that William "could" indeed kill himself. Then an even more profound realization breaks over the Greek's face as he realizes that William *will* kill himself. Watching this play out, William understands that he can't back out now, or else he'll only confirm what the Greek said in the first place about how people who talk about suicide never actually kill themselves. Because of this, he ends up committing suicide out of a certain sense of obligation, as if he now has to end his own life in order to save face. To make things worse, everyone likes Alfred when he arrives after William's death. The fact that Steinbeck narrates this last development in such a curt manner suggests that the truth of the matter is ugly but can't be denied: some people are simply more likable than others.

Chapter 4 Quotes

The old man stopped and turned. Andy stopped. The deep-brown eyes looked at Andy and the thin corded lips moved. What happened then Andy was never able either to explain or to forget. For the eyes spread out until there was no Chinaman. And then it was one eye—one huge brown eye as big as a church door. Andy looked through the shiny transparent brown door and through it he saw a lonely countryside, flat for miles but ending against a row of fantastic mountains shaped like cows' and dogs' heads and tents and mushrooms. There was low coarse grass on the plain and here and there a little mound. And a small animal like a woodchuck sat on each mound. And the loneliness—the desolate cold aloneness of the landscape made Andy whimper because there wasn't anybody at all in the world and he was left. Andy shut his eyes so he wouldn't have to see it any more and when he opened them, he was in Cannery Row and the old Chinaman was just flap-flapping between Western Biological and the Hediondo Cannery. Andy was the only boy who ever did that and he never did it again.

Related Characters: Andy, The Old "Chinaman"

Related Themes:

Page Number: 21

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, a boy named Andy yells a racist rhyme at an old Chinese man. When he does this, he suddenly finds himself staring into the man's eyes, which become one large portal to somewhere lonely and foreign. Looking through this "transparent" door, Andy sees a "lonely countryside" and suddenly feels a "desolate cold aloneness" that he's never before experienced in his entire life. The fact that he feels this kind of extreme isolation and solitude after treating the old man with such little empathy is worth considering, since Steinbeck clearly intends to demonstrate the negative effects of racism and malice. Indeed, Andy's mean-spirited attempt to make the old man feel unwelcome in America only leads to his own estrangement from his surroundings, as he literally loses hold of his present reality and feels isolated from everything and everyone around him.

Although Steinbeck's desire in this scene is to seemingly demonstrate that racism and bigotry negatively influence those who make a habit of such practices, his treatment of the entire situation is dated, especially considering that he refers to the old man as a "chinaman," which has—because of a number of pejorative connotations—become an offensive term. Furthermore, his portrayal of the old man as some kind of inscrutable, mystical figure fails to present the

character as a genuine human, instead framing him as an exotic other and thus falling prey to the kind of unexamined bigotry that Andy exhibits (though at least Steinbeck isn't, like Andy, actively trying to insult the old man).

Chapter 6 Quotes

❝ Doc swung his heavy sack of starfish to the ground and stood panting a little. "Nuts?" he asked. "Oh, yes, I guess so. Nuts about the same amount we are, only in a different way."

Such a thing had never occurred to Hazel. He looked upon himself as a crystal pool of clarity and on his life as a troubled glass of misunderstood virtue. Doc's last statement had outraged him a little.

Related Characters: Doc (speaker), Henri, Hazel

Related Themes:

Page Number: 33

Explanation and Analysis

During this conversation, Doc and Hazel discuss Henri's attempt to build a boat. After pointing out that Henri keeps tearing apart his boat just before it's finished in order to start anew, Hazel asks Doc if he thinks the painter is "nuts." In response, Doc says that Henri probably *is* a bit nuts, but no more so than anyone else. In this manner, he suggests that both he and Hazel are also crazy in their own ways. Since Hazel isn't someone who normally considers such matters, this is a rather troubling statement. After all, he sees himself as a "crystal pool of clarity," meaning that he normally doesn't have any trouble understanding himself. Of course, this might be because he simply doesn't challenge himself by interrogating his own identity or personal convictions. After all, he's too busy trying to navigate the "troubled glass of misunderstood virtue" that he sees as his own life. As such, there's no time for him to question his various eccentricities (or, at the very least, he doesn't have the willpower to do this). Because of this, Doc's suggestion that everyone is somewhat "nuts" destabilizes his sense of self, inviting him to grapple with his own oddities.

❝ "The remarkable thing," said Doc, "isn't that they put their tails up in the air—the really incredibly remarkable thing is that we find it remarkable. We can only use ourselves as yardsticks. If we did something as inexplicable and strange we'd probably be praying—so maybe they're praying."

Related Characters: Doc (speaker), Hazel

Related Themes:

Page Number: 34

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Doc responds to Hazel's question about why stinkbugs put their rear-ends in the air. Having looked down to see hundreds of the tiny creatures raising their butts, Hazel asks Doc what he thinks they're doing, and Doc says he thinks they're "praying." This baffles Hazel, but Doc simply goes on, saying that the most "remarkable thing" isn't that the stinkbugs raise their rear-ends, but that humans find this "remarkable" in the first place. "We can only use ourselves as yardsticks," he says, emphasizing the idea that a person can never step outside of their experience. The best one can do when it comes to understanding others, then, is to imagine oneself in someone else's position. This is what Doc does in this moment when he posits that the stinkbugs are praying, since he thinks that if humans were to do something "as inexplicable and strange" as sticking their butts into the air, he would assume this would mean they were praying. By explaining this to Hazel, Doc reveals his ability to project himself into someone else's experience, thereby highlighting why he's so good at empathizing with others.

Chapter 11 Quotes

❝ Someone should write an erudite essay on the moral, physical, and esthetic effect of the Model T Ford on the American nation. Two generations of Americans knew more about the Ford coil than the clitoris, about the planetary system of gears than the solar system of stars.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 61

Explanation and Analysis

This humorous passage has little to do with the plot of *Cannery Row*, but it does align with Steinbeck's interest in examining the ways in which life is chaotic and disorderly. Indeed, the Model T comes to stand—at least in Steinbeck's view—for the ways in which order *can* be forced upon life, at least in certain circumstances. However, he makes it clear that this kind of order is only something that can be applied to machines, not humans. After all, he upholds that "two generations of Americans knew more about the Ford coil

than the clitoris," and this is because machines can be calculated and controlled, whereas humans cannot (or at least not in the same way). Of course, Steinbeck's comment about the clitoris is also a joke about how lousy many heterosexual male lovers are about finding ways to pleasure their partners, but his juxtaposition of the "Ford coil" and the clitoris—one of the most misunderstood anatomical organs—highlights the vast amount of information that humans don't know about their own kind, thereby feeding into the author's broader consideration of the ways in which people try and fail to understand their own chaotic lives.

Chapter 13 Quotes

We worked it out that we wanted to give Doc a party. So we come out here and have a hell of a lot of fun. Then we'll go back and get the dough from Doc. There's five of us, so we'll drink five times as much liquor as he will. And I ain't sure we're doin' it for Doc. I ain't sure we ain't doin' it for ourselves. And Doc's too nice a fella to do that to. Doc is the nicest fella I ever knew. I don't want to be the kind of a guy that would take advantage of him.

Related Characters: Mack (speaker), Doc

Related Themes:

Page Number: 73

Explanation and Analysis

Mack speaks these words while he and his friends are on their frog-collecting expedition. Once they finally reach their destination, they decide to wait until nightfall to capture the frogs—since it's easiest to catch frogs in the dark—and so they lounge around drinking, cooking dinner, and napping. After a while, though, Mack realizes that he and "the boys" have been lying to themselves. Outlining what he means to his friends, he points out that they have traveled all this way just to "have a hell of a lot of fun," despite the fact that they're supposedly doing this for Doc's sake. Of course, it's true that they need to catch the frogs in order to eventually make enough money to throw Doc's party, but Mack suddenly understands that their motivations for wanting to throw Doc a party in the first place are somewhat suspect. He expresses this by saying, "I ain't sure we ain't doin' it for ourselves," finally admitting that his desire to express his appreciation for Doc isn't necessarily separated from his desire to have a raucous party. In this way, he sees that his attempt to perform a selfless act of kindness is not, in truth, all that selfless after all.

Chapter 17 Quotes

In spite of his friendliness and his friends Doc was a lonely and a set-apart man. Mack probably noticed it more than anybody. In a group, Doc seemed always alone. When the lights were on and the curtains drawn, and the Gregorian music played on the great phonograph, Mack used to look down on the laboratory from the Palace Flophouse. He knew Doc had a girl in there, but Mack used to get a dreadful feeling of loneliness out of it. Even in the dear close contact with a girl Mack felt that Doc would be lonely.

Related Characters: Mack, Doc

Related Themes:

Page Number: 92

Explanation and Analysis

This passage addresses the fact that Doc, who is perhaps the most well-liked person in all of Cannery Row, experiences loneliness just like anyone else. However, Steinbeck intimates that many people fail to notice this because of Doc's "friendliness." Plus, Doc has so many friends that no one would ever assume he's lonely—no one, of course, except for Mack, who notices that Doc seems "always alone" even when he's in a group. In other words, Mack realizes that spending time with other people doesn't necessarily alleviate Doc's melancholic feeling of solitude. In turn, Steinbeck hints that loneliness isn't something that simply goes away in the presence of other people, for it is actually a broad and somewhat inescapable existential feeling. Luckily, though, Doc has people like Mack, who care enough about him to take note of his emotions. This, it seems, is what sets someone like Doc apart from someone like William, who's unable to lead a happy life because of his loneliness. Whereas William has no one to turn to, Doc has a number of people who would be more than happy to help him if he were ever to want their attention. As such, he's able to move through life and simply experience loneliness as an inherent part of being alive.

Because he loved true things he tried to explain. He said he was nervous and besides he wanted to see the country, smell the ground and look at grass and birds and trees, to savor the country, and there was no other way to do it save on foot. And people didn't like him for telling the truth. They scowled, or shook and tapped their heads, they laughed as though they knew it was a lie and they appreciated a liar. And some, afraid for their daughters or their pigs, told him to move on, to get going, just not to stop near their place if he knew what was good for him.

Related Characters: Doc

Related Themes:

Page Number: 95

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Steinbeck describes Doc's experience walking through the United States as a young man. Sad and overworked, Doc decides to set out on foot, walking a great distance simply because he wants to "see the country, smell the ground and look at grass and birds and trees." When people ask him why he's doing this, though, he discovers that the truth unnerves other people. He tries to tell people that he is "nervous," which is partially why he wants to walk across the country, but they don't enjoy hearing about his emotional struggles. In fact, they become suspicious of him, clearly thinking that anyone who is emotionally troubled enough to want to walk such long distances is unstable and thus dangerous. Of course, this isn't the case, but it illustrates an important point about the way people often approach unhappiness, framing it not as a natural occurrence, but as something sinister and disturbing.

Chapter 18 Quotes

He sat down on the beach in the coarse dry sand and pulled off his boots. In the jar the little octopi were huddled up each keeping as far as possible from the others. Music sounded in Doc's ears, a high thin piercingly sweet flute carrying a melody he could never remember, and against this, a pounding surf-like wood-wind section. The flute went up into regions beyond the hearing range and even there it carried its unbelievable melody. Goose pimples came out on Doc's arms. He shivered and his eyes were wet the way they get in the focus of great beauty.

Related Characters: Doc

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 101

Explanation and Analysis

This passage appears after Doc finds a dead woman in one of La Jolla's tidal flats. Having waded out rather far in search of octopi, he sees a flash of whiteness just beneath the water, and when he goes to it, he's shocked to find himself staring into the face of an unknown corpse. After putting the seaweed back over her face, he slowly makes his way back to the beach and sits down on the "coarse dry sand." Interestingly enough, music begins to play in his head, but it is a song that reaches the "regions beyond the hearing range." In this way, Steinbeck communicates the strange experience Doc has just had, which is difficult for him to make sense of. What's more, this inarticulable experience has given him both a feeling of terror and an appreciation of life's inherent beauty. Death is often ghastly, but it can also be beautiful—it is, after all, a very natural thing, which is most likely why Doc finds himself so moved by the dead woman's face. In keeping with this, he discovers that his eyes are "wet the way they get in the focus of great beauty."

Chapter 21 Quotes

"We'll pay for it, Doc."

"No you won't, Mack," said Doc. "You'll think about it and it'll worry you for quite a long time, but you won't pay for it. There's maybe three hundred dollars in broken museum glass. Don't say you'll pay for it. That will just keep you uneasy. It might be two or three years before you forgot about it and felt entirely easy again. And you wouldn't pay it anyway."

Related Characters: Doc, Mack (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 121

Explanation and Analysis

This conversation takes place between Mack and Doc after Mack and "the boys" destroy the contents of Western Biological during their frivolous party. Shortly before this exchange, Doc punches Mack in the face, which is why the two men are able to speak so frankly in this moment. Having gotten over his initial anger, Doc now finds himself capable of forgiving Mack, insisting that he shouldn't promise to pay for the damage he and his friends have done to the laboratory. "You'll think about it and it'll worry you for quite a long time, but you won't pay for it," Doc says, revealing the extent to which he understands Mack and his unreliable ways. However, Doc doesn't say this maliciously. Rather, it is out of compassion that he tells Mack not to even try to pay for what he's done. Doc understands that, although Mack will never *actually* come up with the money, he will fret about the matter for years on end. Readers see that Doc recognizes Mack's kindheartedness, since he understands that his friend is a compassionate fellow even if he doesn't always do the right thing. Because he doesn't want to see Mack tear himself apart over this, then, he lets him off the

hook.

Chapter 22 Quotes

Each time he was left alone, he mourned formally for a while but actually he felt a sense of relief. He could stretch out in his little cabin. He could eat what he wanted. He was glad to be free of the endless female biologic functions for a while.

It had become his custom, each time he was deserted, to buy a gallon of wine, to stretch out on the comfortably hard bunk and get drunk. Sometimes he cried a little all by himself but it was luxurious stuff and he usually had a wonderful feeling of well-being from it.

Related Characters: Henri

Related Themes:

Page Number: 124

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Steinbeck outlines the way that Henri approaches loneliness. Henri, he explains, can't seem to make his relationships last because none of his lovers ever want to live in the cramped space of his boat for longer than a few months. As a result, Henri is rather well-acquainted with the kind of sadness that comes at the end of a romantic partnership. "Each time he was left alone," Steinbeck writes, "he mourned formally for a while [...]." This is an interesting sentence, especially since Steinbeck upholds that Henri's grieving is "formal," as if he's simply going through a standard routine, one he's used to experiencing. This would suggest that his loneliness and sadness are voluntary, like a tradition he performs "each time" he breaks up with a woman. What's more, Steinbeck asserts that this tradition brings him a "sense of relief." Once more, then, readers see that certain kinds of melancholy actually feed into contentment, as Steinbeck blurs the boundaries between happiness and sadness. Henri's crying is "luxurious stuff" that gives him a "wonderful feeling of well-being"—yet another indication that there can be pleasure in experiencing emotional pain, a process that can sometimes remind a person what it feels like to be fully alive.

Chapter 23 Quotes

Look at them. There are your true philosophers. I think [...] that Mack and the boys know every thing that has ever happened in the world and possibly every thing that will happen. I think they survive in this particular world better than other people. In a time when people tear themselves to pieces with ambition and nervousness and covetousness, they are relaxed. All of our so-called successful men are sick men, with bad stomachs, and bad souls, but Mack and the boys are healthy and curiously clean. They can do what they want. They can satisfy their appetites without calling them something else.

Related Characters: Doc (speaker), Mack

Related Themes:

Page Number: 129

Explanation and Analysis

Doc says this to a friend while observing Mack and "the boys" from afar one afternoon. When he says that they are "true philosophers," he presents them as wise men who are too levelheaded to get caught up in the superficial worries that distract—and destroy—most people in modern society. "In a time when people tear themselves to pieces with ambition and nervousness and covetousness, they are relaxed," he says, asserting that the cause of Mack and his friends' happiness has to do with their utter disinterest in being conventionally "successful." Indeed, Mack and the gang aren't "ambitio[us]," and they don't "covet" anything other than, perhaps, whiskey. Whereas their contemporaries have ruined their "souls" in pursuit of a meaningless kind of "success," Mack and the boys "do what they want," simply heeding their "appetites" without striving to be something they're not. By outlining this temperament, Doc—and, in turn, Steinbeck—once again suggests that true contentment doesn't necessarily come from pursuing the kind of life that people normally consider virtuous.

"It has always seemed strange to me," said Doc. "The things we admire in men, kindness and generosity, openness, honesty, understanding and feeling are the concomitants of failure in our system. And those traits we detest, sharpness, greed, acquisitiveness, meanness, egotism and self-interest are the traits of success. And while men admire the quality of the first they love the produce of the second."

Related Characters: Doc (speaker), Mack

Related Themes:

Page Number: 131

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Doc talks to his friend about why Mack and "the boys" are admirable and virtuous. Rejecting the idea that Mack and his friends are nothing but a group of lazy men who embody only sloth, he contemplates the strange nature of modern society, pointing out that most people don't actually exemplify the kind of qualities they claim to "admire" so fervently. Although most people claim to appreciate "kindness and generosity, openness, honesty, understanding and feeling," these traits only lead a person to "failure" in society's current "system." Indeed, this is why Mack and "the boys" are so disenfranchised—they actually *do* embody kindness and all of these other positive attributes. Unfortunately, though, the people who succeed in modern society are characterized by "greed, acquisitiveness, [and] meanness," among other unflattering qualities. Once again, then, Steinbeck destabilizes common conceptions of vice and virtue, ultimately portraying the majority of people as hypocrites.

Chapter 25 Quotes

It's all right not to believe in luck and omens. Nobody believes in them. But it doesn't do any good to take chances with them and no one takes chances. Cannery Row, like every place else, is not superstitious but will not walk under a ladder or open an umbrella in the house. Doc was a pure scientist and incapable of superstition and yet when he came in late one night and found a line of white flowers across the doorsill he had a bad time of it. But most people in Cannery Row simply do not believe in such things and then live by them.

Related Characters: Doc

Related Themes:

Page Number: 143

Explanation and Analysis

In *Cannery Row*, Steinbeck often emphasizes life's inherent disorderliness, writing scenes that are rife with chaos and randomness. This is why he takes a moment at the beginning of Chapter 25 to consider superstition, for superstition is sometimes the only way people can gain a feeling of control over their lives. Of course, most people in Cannery Row claim not to believe in "omen[s]," but they still live their lives according to certain superstitious beliefs. For instance, even a person who says they aren't superstitious will still "not walk under a ladder or open an umbrella in the house." In fact, Doc—a man of reason and science—finds himself unsettled by certain things, like when he finds "a line of white flowers across the doorsill." This, Steinbeck notes, is not an uncommon reaction, for "most people in Cannery Row simply do not believe in such things and then live by them." With this, readers see that humans often seek to gain a modicum of control over life, which is otherwise messy and random and chaotic. And yet, Steinbeck proves that a person need not "believe in such things" in order to "live by them," a fact that only emphasizes the inscrutability of human existence once more.

Chapter 30 Quotes

Hazel was so taken by the sound of the words that he had not listened to their meaning. But a little world sadness had slipped over all of them. Every one was remembering a lost love, everyone a call.

Mack said, "Jesus, that's pretty. Reminds me of a dame—" and he let it pass. They filled the wine glasses and became quiet. The party was slipping away in sweet sadness.

Related Characters: Mack (speaker), Hazel, Doc

Related Themes:

Page Number: 173

Explanation and Analysis

This passage appears after Doc reads a sad, nostalgic poem to the people at his surprise birthday party. The poem itself is an eleventh-century Sanskrit poem called "Black Marigolds," which is largely about a man's memory of a loved one on the eve of his potential death. When Doc finishes reading this aloud, everyone is stunned by how emotional they feel. Hazel, for his part, is deeply moved just by "the sound of the words." Indeed, the cadence of "Black Marigolds" ushers in a "little world sadness" that settles over the party, but Steinbeck makes no indication that this is a bad or unwanted development. Rather, he presents the guests' melancholy as pleasurable, a "sweet sadness" that once again proves the fact that happiness and contentment can and often do come from a wistful kind of sorrow.

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.

PROLOGUE

Steinbeck begins by stating that Cannery Row is "a poem, a stink, a grating noise, a quality of light, a tone, a habit, a nostalgia, a dream." Describing the landscape, he mentions the "weedy lots and junk heaps" that sit alongside "sardine canneries," bars, restaurants, brothels, "laboratories," and "flophouses." Steinbeck notes that a man once said that the people who live here are "whores, pimps, gamblers, and sons of bitches"—or, as Steinbeck himself puts it, "Everybody." Going on, he adds, "Had the man looked through another peephole he might have said, 'Saints and angels and martyrs and holy men,' and he would have meant the same thing."

By opening the novel with a lyrical examination of life in Cannery Row, Steinbeck signals to readers that this text will—above all—be a love letter to this squalid and beautiful place. Rather than setting a plot in motion, Steinbeck uses the opening pages to establish his interest in simply looking at what it's like to live in Cannery Row (a coastal strip in Monterey, California that is full of canning factories). What's more, he calls attention to the ways in which virtue and vice are intertwined, suggesting that people that society usually believes are wicked ("whores, pimps, gamblers, and sons of bitches") can actually be as good as "saints and angels and martyrs and holy men."

Steinbeck describes what Cannery Row is like in the morning, when the coast comes alive as people rush to work, men toil on boats, and "the canneries rumble and rattle and squeak." Then, at day's end, "the Row" becomes "quiet and magical" once more. "How can the poem and the stink and the grating noise—the quality of light, the tone, the habit and the dream—be set down alive?" Steinbeck wonders. "When you collect marine animals there are certain flat worms so delicate that they are almost impossible to capture whole, for they break and tatter under the touch. You must let them ooze and crawl of their own will onto a knife blade and then lift them gently into your bottle of sea water. And perhaps that might be the way to write this book—to open the page and let the stories crawl in by themselves."

When Steinbeck considers the best way to portray life in Cannery Row, he suggests that reality is best represented by the randomness and disorder that makes it so difficult to describe in the first place. Rather than using complex narrative tricks, then, he has decided to simply "open the page and let the stories crawl in by themselves," thereby suggesting that the inscrutable nature of life must be embraced for what it is. In turn, he encourages readers to accept the fact that this novel won't always form a cohesive narrative.

CHAPTER 1

Steinbeck introduces Lee Chong, a grocer who runs a well-stocked store, which opens early in the morning and doesn't "close until the last wandering vagrant dime ha[s] been spent or retired for the night." A fastidious man, Lee is not necessarily greedy, but won't turn away from potential profits, either. However, almost everyone in Cannery Row has at one point in time owed him money, though he doesn't make a habit of chasing them down. That said, he will stop giving them credit if their debts become too large. Lee is a good businessman, adding that when he makes mistakes in his calculations or dealings, he still manages to "turn" these "errors" to his "advantage," though sometimes his profit comes in the form of "good will" instead of money.

In Cannery Row, *Steinbeck is often interested in how greed manifests itself in his characters' lives. By beginning the novel with a portrait of Lee Chong—a money-minded businessman—he alerts readers to this thematic preoccupation. However, he also makes it clear that Lee's desire to make money isn't necessarily an indication of his greed. After all, Lee understands that the value of "good will" frequently outweighs the value of money. As such, Steinbeck presents readers with a man who is capable of thriving in a capitalist, money-hungry system without sacrificing his moral values.*

One night, Lee Chong stands in the grocery store in front of the pints of whiskey (called Old Tennis Shoes). This is his customary place in the shop because he doesn't want people like Mack and his friends to steal the liquor. On this particular evening, he contemplates a business deal he made earlier in the day, when Horace Abbeville—who has "two wives and six children" and an enormous outstanding debt at Lee's store—walked in and said, "I guess I owe you plenty dough." He then added, "I hate to have my kids with that hanging over them. Why, I bet you wouldn't let them have a pack of spearmint now." As such, he gives Lee ownership of his fishmeal storehouse, which is across the street. Lee accepts this deal and agrees to clear all of Horace's debt.

Again, Steinbeck indicates that Lee is a moral and just man even when he's dealing with financial matters. Although Lee is a businessman who wants to earn as much money as possible, he's also willing to compromise with his fellow community members when they're unable to pay him. In turn, it becomes clear that he's an empathetic man who would rather help the people around him than greedily prosper off of their misfortune.

After Lee and Horace strike this deal, Lee gives him a flask of Old Tennis Shoes, at which point Horace walks to the storehouse and shoots himself "on a heap of fish meal." "And although it has nothing to do with this story," Steinbeck writes, "no Abbeville child, no matter who its mother was, knew the lack of a stick of spearmint ever afterward." Lee, for his part, feels as if a man has a "right to kill himself," but he can't help but think that "sometimes a friend can make it unnecessary." Feeling guilty in this way, he pays for Horace's funeral and gives both his wives free groceries.

Unfortunately, Lee's compassionate willingness to accept Horace's compromise doesn't stop Horace from killing himself. This ultimately suggests that, although Horace's financial woes must have troubled him, they were not at the root of his unhappiness, considering that he no longer has to worry about repaying his debt to Lee. In this way, Steinbeck infers that money and financial stability are not capable of giving people true happiness.

Having heard that Lee now owns the fishmeal storehouse, Mack comes into the grocery store to make a proposition regarding the building. He is "the elder, leader, mentor, and to a small extent the exploiter of a little group of men who [have] in common no families, no money, and no ambitions beyond food, drink, and contentment." Despite these qualities, though, Mack and his friends don't "destroy themselves" in their "search for contentment," but rather pursue happiness "casually" and "quietly," and when they attain it, they "absorb it gently." As soon as Mack enters the grocery store, Lee scans the place to see if any of his cronies have entered with him to steal produce, but Mack comes straight up to him and asks if he and his crew can move into the storehouse since it's empty anyway.

Mack is a complex character, as made clear by the nuanced introduction that Steinbeck gives him. On the one hand, Lee sees Mack as something of a thief, someone he must watch. On the other hand, though, Steinbeck makes a point of underlining the fact that Mack is a "gentle" person who only wants to chase "contentment." In fact, he even says that Mack and his friends' search for "contentment" isn't destructive, thus rejecting the stereotype that vagrants are dangerous, unhealthy people. As such, Steinbeck manages once again to imply that virtuousness doesn't necessarily have anything to do with the qualities society normally associates with goodness.

"We'll keep up the property," Mack says to Lee, insisting that he and his friends won't let anyone "break in or hurt anything" in the storehouse. "Kids might knock out the windows, you know—Place might burn down if somebody don't keep an eye out," he adds. For a moment, Lee considers this request, realizing that he has no choice but to allow Mack and his gang to move in. After all, if he says no, he knows they'll covertly break the windows themselves so that they can emphasize how important it is that Lee find someone to "watch over and preserve" the place. As such, Lee decides to grant Mack his wish, but since he must maintain his image as a businessman, he sets the rent at five dollars per week—a sum he knows Mack and his friends will never pay.

Once more, it's evident that Lee Chong is a virtuous man who—despite his desire to make money—is driven not by greed, but by kindness. Though it's true that he doesn't want Mack and his friends to break the storehouse's windows, he also seems to want to help these men—after all, he clearly feels bad about the fact that his acquisition of the property came along with Horace Abbeville's death. By letting Mack and his gang move in, then, Lee can feel like he's doing something good to counterbalance the unfortunate circumstances surrounding the deal he made with Horace.

"And that was the way it was," Steinbeck writes about Mack and Lee's deal, adding that, although Lee never receives any money, he doesn't feel as if he has "suffered a total loss," for this is not the way his mind "work[s]." After all, the place doesn't catch fire, none of the windows break, and Mack and his friends make a point of spending all their money—when they have it—at Lee's grocery store.

Steinbeck suggests that one good deed leads to another. Indeed, Lee makes a financial sacrifice by letting Mack and his friends move into the storehouse, but he ends up financially benefiting from this decision in the long run. In turn, Steinbeck implies that greediness isn't the only kind of attitude that can make money, for kindness and empathy can, too.

Slowly, Mack and his friends begin to turn the storehouse into a functional—albeit unconventional—home. Dubbing it "the Palace Flophouse and Grill," they decorate it with furniture that they find or steal, always making a point of painting the pieces a new color so that no one will recognize them as stolen items. "The Palace Flophouse and Grill began to function," as Mack and "the boys" take to sitting in front of the house and looking across the lot into the windows of Western Biological, where Doc works and lives. And when Doc leaves the laboratory to buy beer at Lee Chong's, Mack says, "That Doc is a fine fellow. We ought to do something for him."

Although Steinbeck hasn't yet revealed what, exactly, Mack means by the fact that he wants to "do something for" Doc—a character who hasn't yet been introduced in any substantial way—it's worth considering the fact that these men are thinking about how they can be kind to their neighbors even as they're preoccupied with setting up the Palace Flophouse. Steinbeck intimates once again that they are virtuous despite their rough appearances.

CHAPTER 2

"The Word is a symbol and a delight which sucks up men and scenes, trees, plants, factories," Steinbeck writes. "Then the Thing becomes the Word and back to Thing again, but warped and woven into a fantastic pattern." In this manner, "the Word" "digests" Cannery Row and "spews it out" with a "shimmer of the green world and the sky-reflecting seas." With this in mind, the author turns his attention to Lee Chong, who he asserts must be "more than a Chinese grocer," suggesting that perhaps he is "evil balanced and held suspended by good."

Steinbeck's consideration of "the Word" is nothing less than an examination of the power of language and writing to capture reality—while also a riff on the beginning of the Gospel of John in the Bible. "The Word," Steinbeck upholds, absorbs real life, but it also "warp[s]" the very things it's trying to represent. By saying this, Steinbeck comments on his attempt to represent what it's like to live in Cannery Row. What's more, when he says that Lee must be "more than a Chinese grocer," he calls attention to the fact that writing novels often forces an author to reduce people into one-dimensional characters. In reality, people are complex, containing an entire range of emotional qualities. In keeping with this, Steinbeck says that Lee is "evil balanced and held suspended by good," thus articulating the idea that a person is never just one thing, but rather a fluctuating continuum of vice and virtue.

Still contemplating the nature of his characters, Steinbeck considers "Mack and the boys," saying that they are "the Virtues, the Graces, the Beauties." He upholds that they prosper in this world, which is "ruled by tigers with ulcers, rutted by strictured bulls, [and] scavenged by blind jackals." Indeed, in this rough world, Mack and his friends do well, "din[ing] delicately with the tigers." "What can it profit a man to gain the whole world and to come to his property with a gastric ulcer, a blown prostate, and bifocals?" Steinbeck asks. "Mack and the boys avoid the trap, walk around the poison, step over the noose while a generation of trapped, poisoned, and trussed-up men scream at them and call them no-goods, come-to-bad-ends, blots-on-the-town, thieves, rascals, bums." Going on, the author posits that "our Father who art in nature" must have an "overwhelming love for no-goods and blots-on-the-town and bums."

In this section, Steinbeck again expresses his belief that sometimes the most virtuous people are actually those who society believes are evil and wicked. When he suggests that most men sacrifice their overall well-being in order to "gain the world," he implies that the desire to succeed in life often harms people more than it helps them. Whereas their contemporaries are "trussed-up" and "poisoned" by their toxic lives, Mack and his friends are thriving. Indeed, Steinbeck even likens them to "the Graces," who are Greek goddesses associated with love and fertility. In this way, he frames Mack and "the boys" as pure and healthy, and this is why he believes that God—who he says is "in nature"—has such "love" for them, for they aren't wasting their lives chasing money or trying to do anything but find "contentment," which is the most natural way to live. Unfortunately, though, many of their contemporaries are unable to recognize this.

CHAPTER 3

Along with Lee Chong's grocery store and the Palace Flophouse, Dora Flood's brothel is an important place in Cannery Row. This brothel is "a sturdy, virtuous club, built, maintained, and disciplined by Dora," who is "respected by the intelligent, the learned, and the kind." Unfortunately, her positive qualities of "honesty" and "charity" have also made her "hated" by a number of people in town. Nevertheless, Dora "keeps an honest" establishment, which she has named **the Bear Flag Restaurant**. And though the inhabitants of the Bear Flag are prostitutes, many of them are also devoted Christian Scientists.

Again, Steinbeck asserts that a person who society would normally see as sinful is, in truth, quite virtuous. Although Dora runs a brothel—a kind of establishment that doesn't normally gain much respect—she remains "honest" and true, and the majority of her employees are religious. By drawing readers' attention to this fact, Steinbeck destabilizes the beliefs people stereotypically hold about those who participate in illegal activity, ultimately suggesting that these beliefs are reductive and lazy.

Dora "must be twice as law abiding as anyone else" because she lives "against the law." This means that "if the police give a dance for their pension fund and everyone else gives a dollar, Dora has to give fifty dollars." This is the case for many of the local institutions, which have come to rely on Dora's "philanthropic" deeds, though they continue to lament her "dirty wages of sin."

Not only is Dora an "honest" person despite what people might think, she also uses her profession for good. Unfortunately, though, many people fail to see that she is supporting the entire community, instead condemning her supposed "dirty wages of sin" even as they profit from these "wages" themselves. Steinbeck thus spotlights the hypocrisy of modern society and its superficial obsession with virtue.

Before Alfy worked as the bouncer at **the Bear Flag**, the bouncer was a man named William who was "lonesome" and depressed. He often used to watch Mack and "the boys" lounging and chatting outside, so one day he tried to join them, but they stopped talking as soon as he arrived. When he returned, he saw that their conversation resumed, and this "saddened him." As such, he brought whiskey the following day, but this did little to ingratiate him to the group—they drank the whiskey but hardly said a word. "Now William's heart broke," Steinbeck writes. "The bums would not receive him socially. […] William had always been introspective and self-accusing." As such, he "thought dark and broody thoughts" about how no one "loved" or "cared about him."

In this moment, Steinbeck demonstrates the dangers of living in complete social isolation. Although many of the characters in Cannery Row *live on the margins of society and experience a certain kind of existential loneliness, most of them belong to—or could belong to, if they so desired—a community. William, however, is cut off from the people around him. As a result, he's unable to avoid the "dark and broody thoughts" that assail him, causing him to feel helplessly alone.*

Walking into **the Bear Flag**, William finds Dora and says, "I feel lousy. I think I'll bump myself off," to which she replies, "Well, do it on your own time and don't mess up the rugs." Even more saddened than before, William seeks out a very "spiritual" prostitute who often goes to confession but who is an "unpredictable drunk." Again, William says he's going to kill himself, but the prostitute only yells at him about how suicide is a sin, and then she tells him he's a "no-good bastard."

All William wants is someone to listen to him. Indeed, he simply needs someone with whom he can commiserate, someone willing to treat him with kindness. Unfortunately, though, no one cares enough about him to take him seriously when he talks about committing suicide—yet another indication that he is completely isolated from the people around him.

William seeks out the Greek—the house's cook—and tells him he wants to kill himself. "I hear like the fella talks about it don't never do it," the Greek says, so William grabs the ice pick out of his hand. Looking at the Greek, William notices that the cook slowly realizes he's serious, and this makes him feel like he has no choice but to go through with the act. "He was sad because now it seemed silly," Steinbeck writes. "His hand rose and the ice pick snapped into his heart." These days, Steinbeck notes, Alfy is the bouncer, and everyone likes him.

Once again, William fails to find camaraderie when he needs it most. This time, though, he becomes so desperate for attention that he grabs the Greek's ice pick. The fact that he thinks the entire idea of suicide is "silly" once he knows he must do it ultimately indicates that he never actually planned to go through with this in the first place. Rather, he only talked about committing suicide as a way of encouraging his peers to take an interest in his emotions. Unfortunately, though, no one cares, and so he feels he must kill himself. In this way, Steinbeck shows the detrimental effects of loneliness on people who have no one to rely upon.

CHAPTER 4

Each evening, a man Steinbeck calls "the old Chinaman" walks through the streets with a basket, disappearing down on the beach beneath the piers. Then, right before daylight, he reemerges and walks back up the hill. Many of the people living in Cannery Row hear him coming and going, but they never "taunt him." One day, however, a boy named Andy who's visiting Monterey decides he must yell at the man in order to maintain his "self-respect," though he is afraid to do so. Still, he follows him and shouts, "Ching-Chong Chinaman sitting on a rail—'Long came a white man an' chopped off his tail."

Andy's decision to yell at the old man in this scene is strange, as it seemingly comes from a place of obligation. Indeed, Andy feels as if he must yell this racist line at the old man in order to keep his "self-respect," a notion indicating that he proudly sees himself as someone who doesn't care about kindness or social decorum. In a novel populated by virtuous and kind people like Lee Chong and Mack, then, Andy exemplifies a complete failure of empathy.

The old man turns, and Andy watches his two eyes "spread out until" they merge and engulf the man's entire body. "And then it was one eye," Steinbeck notes, "one huge brown eye as big as a church door." Looking into this eye, Andy sees "a lonely countryside, flat for miles but ending against a row of fantastic mountains." Peering into this "countryside," Andy experiences intense "loneliness," feeling as if there isn't "anybody at all in the world" except himself. As such, he closes his eyes, and when he reopens them, the old man is walking away. "Andy was the only boy who ever did that and he never did it again," Steinbeck writes.

After failing to show the old man kindness, Andy experiences a vast and inconceivable loneliness, effectively feeling as if he's the only person on earth. As such, Steinbeck intimates that failures of empathy can estrange a person from the people around them, eventually leaving them all alone in the world. Practicing kindness, then, is the only way to avoid a bleak and lonely life.

CHAPTER 5

Steinbeck describes Western Biological, the laboratory Doc owns, which also happens to be where he lives. The lab sells marine animals as well as bugs, snakes, and rats. "You can order anything living from Western Biological," Steinbeck notes. In addition to the laboratory, the building also has an office, a library (which contains Doc's prized phonograph), and a kitchen. Doc himself is small, and his "face tells the truth." Rumor has it that he has "helped many a girl out of trouble," and it's well-known that he will never hurt anything if he can avoid it.

Although the beginning of chapter 5 is primarily expository, it's important to note that Doc is someone who's willing to put himself at risk in order to help others. This is made evident by the fact that he has "helped many a girl out of trouble," considering that abortion wasn't legalized until 1973, meaning that Doc performed these procedures at the risk of being arrested. As such, readers see how little he considers his own wellbeing when it comes to helping others. Note also that Doc is a collector of marine animals, which reflects Steinbeck's story at the book's beginning about collecting delicate flatworms.

Doc is "the fountain of philosophy and science and art" in Cannery Row. Many of the locals pass the time in his laboratory, including "the girls from Dora's," who hang around and listen to the Gregorian records he often plays on the phonograph. Lee Chong also comes around to Western Biological, where he first heard a record of English translations of Li Po. Henri the painter also often comes by and is frequently inspired to change the "medium" in which he's working, once even deciding to start making art solely using "nutshells." "Doc would listen to any kind of nonsense and change it for you to a kind of wisdom. His mind had no horizon—and his sympathy had no warp." What's more, everyone who knows him often says, "I really must do something nice for Doc."

Considering that so many people visit Doc's and are influenced by the time they spend in his laboratory, it's clear that Western Biological is one of Cannery Row's most important cultural hubs. This, it seems, is because Doc himself is so kind and friendly. In turn, Steinbeck implies that this kind of goodwill is inherently attractive, as people simply want to be around anyone who behaves in this way.

CHAPTER 6

One day, Doc collects starfish with Hazel, one of the residents of the Palace Flophouse. Hazel loves hearing people speak, relishing "the tone of conversation." This is why he always asks questions—simply to keep a conversation going. "I wonder what they do with them," he says, asking Doc how the people who've hired him to collect starfish are going use the creatures. When Doc answers, Hazel asks another question, and then another, until finally Doc manages to put a stop to the interrogation. In the ensuing silence, Doc asks Hazel how things are going at the Flophouse, and Hazel says that Gay has just moved in because his wife hits him. Doc points out that Gay's wife "used to swear out a warrant and put him in jail," but Hazel points out that Gay started liking jail too much, so now she beats him while he's sleeping.

Although Hazel is perhaps not as intelligent as Doc, his desire to listen to "the tone of conversation" denotes a friendliness that is not altogether that different from Doc's easygoing, amicable personality. This is most likely why these two men are able to connect, despite the fact that Hazel only asks questions for the sake of asking questions—a practice one would assume Doc would find annoying, since he is a careful and methodical thinker. The fact that these two men get along, then, is a testament to the idea that kindness brings people together despite their differences.

Hazel and Doc talk about Henri, who is building himself a boat. "He's got it all changed around. New kind of boat. I guess he'll take it apart and change it. Doc—is he nuts?" Hazel says. "Oh, yes, I guess so," Doc replies. "Nuts about the same amount we are, only in a different way." This statement astounds Hazel, since he looks "upon himself as a crystal pool of clarity and on his life as a troubled glass of misunderstood virtue." Wanting to make a distinction between Henri and himself, he reminds Doc that Henri has been building his boat for seven years. "Every time he gets it nearly finished he changes it and starts over again," he says, but Doc says that Henri "loves boats" but is "afraid of the ocean," which is why he never wants to finish building the vessel.

Hazel is troubled by Doc's assertion that everyone is crazy. This is because Hazel thinks of himself as a "crystal pool of clarity," essentially believing that he is an uncomplicated, straightforward man. His life, on the other hand, he sees as a "troubled glass of misunderstood virtue," indicating that he doesn't feel fully in control of the choices he makes (or has made). It seems that he feels that he himself is virtuous, but his good intentions are often muddied by the "troubled" situations of life. When Doc implies that everyone is a little bit crazy, then, Hazel is forced to reckon with the fact that life is illogical and disordered.

On the way back to the laboratory, Hazel notices stink bugs on the ground. "What they got their asses up in the air for?" he asks, but Doc says he doesn't know. "Well, why do *you* think they do it?" Hazel asks. "I think they're praying," Doc replies. Hazel, for his part, can't fathom this idea, but Doc pushes on, saying, "The remarkable thing isn't that they put their tails up in the air—the really incredibly remarkable thing is that we find it remarkable. We can only use ourselves as yardsticks. If we did something as inexplicable and strange we'd probably be praying—so maybe they're praying."

Part of being empathetic means understanding that one's own experience isn't necessarily universal. Doc illustrates this point here by encouraging Hazel to shift his perspective. "The really incredibly remarkable thing is that we find it remarkable," he says, referencing the stink bugs' behavior. By saying this, he points out the ways in which humans often take things for granted, accepting certain things as normal and others as extraordinary. If people like Hazel learn to shift their perspectives—leaving behind conventional notions of normality—then they will be in a better position to understand how others experience the world. This, in turn, will enable them to empathize with the people around them more easily.

CHAPTER 7

When Mack, Hazel, Eddie, Hughie, and Jones first move into the Palace Flophouse, they see it as "little more than shelter from the wind and the rain, as a place to go when everything else ha[s] closed or when their welcome [is] thin and sere with overuse." Before long, though, a bout of heavy rain keeps them indoors for a long time, and they grow tired of the empty house. Shortly thereafter, Hughie drags in a cot, and the rest of the men grow jealous. From that point on, everyone starts finding and stealing furniture to decorate the place, and Mack and Hughie even buy a stove on credit and spend three days carrying it back to the Flophouse.

Even people like Mack and his friends, who live on the margins of society, want to create a sense of belonging for themselves. This is why they turn the Palace Flophouse into a true home, for they know that it's important to feel comfortable in one's own environment. Indeed, William's suicide is a testament to this fact, since he killed himself because he didn't feel a connection with his surroundings. Feeling at home in a community can stave off loneliness.

One day, Mack and "the boys" are lounging and drinking a strong alcoholic mixture that Eddie concocts whenever he fills in for the bartender at La Ida. On these nights, Eddie brings a jug and a funnel and pours whatever leftover booze people leave in their glasses into the jug, creating a strange "punch" that he shares with his friends. Now, as Mack and the gang sip the mixture, they talk about Doc. "That Doc is a hell of a nice fella," Mack says. "He'll give you a quarter any time. When I cut myself he put on a new bandage every day." Going on, he says he'd like to do "something nice" for Doc, and the group eventually decides to throw him a party. Unfortunately, though, they don't have the money to do this.

Again, readers see that kindness generally invites and creates more kindness. Because Doc is so empathetic and friendly, everyone who knows him wants to show him their appreciation. However, the true pity is that Mack and "the boys" live in a money-oriented society in which it's difficult to express gratitude without buying gifts. Because of this, they must work extra hard to do "something nice" for Doc.

Hughie tells "the boys" that he used to go to Carmel Valley to collect frogs for Doc, who paid him a nickel for each one. Hearing this, Mack realizes that they could fund the party this way, assuming that Doc needs frogs. "We could go up the Carmel River and have a little outing and we wouldn't tell Doc what it was for and then we'd give him one hell of a party," he says.

Mack is quite clever, as he finds ways to work around his and his friends' poverty. However, it's worth noting that this is a rather convoluted plan, as Doc will effectively be paying for his own party without knowing it. At the same time, though, he will ostensibly profit by gaining frogs (as long as he actually needs them). Regardless of the quality of Mack's plan, though, there's no denying that his intentions are pure, since he simply wants to throw Doc a party.

CHAPTER 8

Steinbeck presents the Malloys, a married couple who find a boiler in a vacant lot. This boiler used to belong to a cannery, but the owners decided to purchase a new one, so it was moved to the area near Lee Chong's grocery store and **the Bear Flag**. When the Malloys come upon it, they decide to turn it into a home. After moving a mattress inside, they take up residence within, and Sam Malloy starts renting empty nearby pipes to other homeless people. Soon, though, Mrs. Malloy tires of the boiler. When Holman's Department Store has a sale, she asks Sam for money to buy lace curtains. Confused, he asks why she wants curtains, since they don't even have any windows. "I like nice things," she insists, lamenting the fact that he won't spend $1.98 to please her. "Men just don't understand how a woman feels," she cries.

Like Mack and "the boys," the Malloys understand how important it is to feel a sense of belonging. This is why they decide to turn the boiler into a home. Although they don't have a traditional house, they see this as an opportunity to settle down. Indeed, Mrs. Malloy's desire to decorate the boiler with curtains (even though they don't have windows) is nothing but a desire to feel established and rooted in her environment. This, Steinbeck implies, is how people manage to find happiness even when they live in unconventional—and even undesirable—conditions.

CHAPTER 9

When Doc returns from collecting starfish, Mack goes to Western Biological, passing Sam Malloy on his way. "You know any kind of glue that you can stick cloth to iron?" Sam asks, but Mack doesn't stop to help, though he'd normally "throw himself headlong into this problem." "Hiya, Doc?" he says when he enters the laboratory. Doc, for his part, likes Mack but is somewhat nervous when he appears. "It was not that trouble always came in with Mack but something always entered with him," Steinbeck notes. "Doc, you got any need for any kind of animals now?" Mack asks, saying that he and "the boys" need money for a "worthy cause." Hesitantly, Doc says, "I could use three or four hundred frogs. I'd get them myself but I've got to go down to La Jolla tonight. There's a good tide tomorrow and I have to get some octopi."

It's worth noting that Mack would normally "throw himself headlong" into helping Sam with his strange curtain problem. This is a testament to Mack's willingness to devote himself and his time to his fellow community members—a mark of kindness and general goodwill. However, Doc understands that Mack is a complicated man, for although he often means well, he also frequently invites "trouble," or at least "something" like it. As such, readers see that Mack's good intentions don't necessarily save him from his tendency to make mistakes, though Steinbeck hasn't yet clarified how, exactly, these mistakes manifest themselves.

After establishing that Doc still pays a nickel for every frog, Mack says he and "the boys" will do the job for him. He then asks if they can use Doc's car, but Doc reminds him that he needs it to drive to La Jolla. As such, Mack decides to ask Lee Chong to borrow his truck, but first he asks Doc to lend him money for gas. "No," Doc says, because he has "fallen into this before." "Once he had financed Gay to go for turtles," Steinbeck writes. "He financed him for two weeks and at the end of that time Gay was in jail on his wife's charge and he never did go for turtles." Instead of giving Mack money, then, Doc gives him a note to give to the gas attendant, telling him how much gas to put on his tab.

Doc's suspiciousness in this moment calls attention to the idea that Mack is perhaps not the most trustworthy person. However, Doc obviously wouldn't do business with Mack if he thought he was malicious. It becomes evident once again that Mack is a good person who is sometimes misguided when he tries to do something for someone else. His intentions, though, are pure.

Mack goes to Lee Chong's and asks to borrow his truck, but Lee informs him that the truck is broken. "Doc needs them frogs," Mack says. "He give me this order for gas to get them. I can't let Doc down. Now Gay is a good mechanic. If he fixes your truck and puts it in good shape, will you let us take it?" After considering this for a moment, Lee decides to let Mack and "the boys" have the truck, though he knows it's a risk. Still, though, he doesn't want to let Doc down. "By the way," Mack says before leaving. "Doc's paying us five cents apiece for those frogs. We're going to get seven or eight hundred. How about taking a pint of Old Tennis Shoes just 'til we can get back with the frogs?" "No!" Lee yells in response.

In this scene, readers see how persuasive and charming Mack can be when he's trying to get his way. To convince Lee to lend him his truck, for example, he calls upon the grocer's kindheartedness, saying that he shouldn't "let Doc down." It's also worth noting that he has already made a slew of promises. Not only has he told Doc that he will capture frogs for him, he has now also promised Lee that Gay will fix his truck. As these claims pile up, readers begin to understand why Mack isn't always able to deliver what he says he will, thus receiving a reputation as untrustworthy. If it's not already clear that he's undependable when it comes to his business dealings, he pushes his luck just one step further by asking Lee to give him a bottle of whiskey on credit, thereby demonstrating that he has no qualms with spending money he hasn't even made yet.

CHAPTER 10

Steinbeck introduces Frankie, a young boy who first appears in the doorway of Western Biological as an eleven-year-old. "For a week or so he just stood outside the basement door and looked in," Steinbeck writes. "Then one day he stood inside the door. Ten days later he was in the basement." Although he is incredibly dirty, Doc allows him to help out in small ways. One day, he asks Frankie about his home life, and Frankie reveals that he comes to the laboratory because Doc never hits him. At home, he says, his uncles beat him or give him a nickel to leave. His father, he says, is dead. Taking pity on the boy, Doc cuts his hair, treats him for lice, and buys him new clothes at Lee's. "I love you," Frankie says. "Oh, I love you."

Doc's willingness to clean Frankie up, cut his hair, and buy him new clothes is yet another sign of his unfailing kindness. An empathetic soul, he doesn't hesitate to welcome people like Frankie into his home. This, of course, is why people feel so fondly for him.

Despite Frankie's yearning to be useful, Doc can't deny that the boy is rather clumsy. In fact, there's something off about Frankie, who has trouble conceptualizing and executing simple tasks. Whenever Frankie fails to do something, he sheepishly crawls into a box in the lab and refuses to come out. "But Frankie was a nice, good, kind boy," Steinbeck writes. "He learned to light Doc's cigars and he wanted Doc to smoke all the time so he could light the cigars." Above all, Frankie loves when Doc has parties. One day when Doc has several people over, Frankie grabs a glass of beer from the kitchen and gives it to a girl sitting nearby. "Why, thank you," she says, and Doc says, "Yes, Frankie is a great help to me." Overjoyed, Frankie repeats this line in his head for days.

In keeping with the theory that kindness breeds more kindness, Frankie desperately wants to do something to help Doc and thus show the man his appreciation. This is why he's so overjoyed when Doc calls him a "great help," for he—like Mack and "the boys"—wants to treat Doc with the same kind of compassion that Doc shows him.

Wanting to replicate the splendid moment in which Doc praised him, Frankie seizes his opportunity at the next party that takes place at Western Biological. Going into the kitchen, he pours multiple glasses of beer and balances them on a tray. Walking carefully through the party, he goes to the same woman who thanked him the first time. When he reaches her, though, his "co-ordination fail[s]" and the entire tray falls into her lap. In the silence that follows, he runs downstairs in shame. Following him into the basement, Doc finds him curled up and "whimpering" in his box. "Doc waited for a moment and then he went quietly back upstairs. There wasn't a thing in the world he could do."

Doc is an extremely empathetic man, but he recognizes when nothing can be done to cheer a person up. In fact, this is actually a facet of his empathic abilities; he can put himself so thoroughly in Frankie's shoes that he understands that nothing he could ever do would make the boy feel better about what has just happened. On another note, it's worth remembering Frankie's disastrous failure to show his appreciation for Doc, since the novel's primary plot concerns itself with Mack's attempt to the same thing. As such, this moment foreshadows what's to come.

CHAPTER 11

Lee Chong's truck is a converted Model T that has seen a lot of use. Although "any one of the boys" could fix it, Gay is indisputably the best mechanic, so he does the majority of the work, at one point instructing Eddie to sneak back to his house to steal a car part without being seen by his (Gay's) wife. Before long, he gets the Model T running, and the gang heads for the gas station, where Mack tells the attendant, "Doc was a little short of change. So if you'll put five gallons in and just give us a buck instead of the other five gallons, why that's what Doc wants." However, Doc has called ahead and instructed the attendant to fill the car with ten gallons and not to give Mack anything else. When this is done, "the boys" set off.

Unsurprisingly, Doc has predicted that Mack will try to keep some of the gas money. As such, readers see that, although Mack is capable of flat-out dishonesty, Doc is still willing to treat him as a friend and, for that matter, also still willing to hire him. This, it seems, must be because he believes that Mack is a good person despite his wily tricks.


The Model T runs rather well, considering that it can only go up steep hills in reverse. "Someone should write an erudite essay on the moral, physical, and esthetic effect of the Model T Ford on the American nation," Steinbeck notes. "Two generations of Americans knew more about the Ford coil than the clitoris, about the planetary system of gears than the solar system of stars." It is with this extensive knowledge of the Model T that Gay is easily able to diagnose the problem when the carburetor gives out and the car breaks down on the side of the road. Knowing that they need a new needle to put into a malfunctioning needle valve in the carburetor, he tells "the boys" to stay put while he goes looking for a replacement. "The boys" watch him leave, and they don't see him for another 180 days.

Although Steinbeck's humorous comments about the cultural role of the Model T in American society don't necessarily fit into the novel's thematic or narrative threads, it makes sense that he stops to consider the mechanics of this iconic vehicle. After all, Cannery Row *is a text interested in exploring the disorder and chaos of reality. The Model T, then, comes to stand for the notion that certain things in life actually* do *make logical sense. Whereas language and emotions and relationships are constantly in flux, machines like the Model T either work or do not work, and a person can fix them as long as they understand their "planetary system of gears." As such, Gay can repair the Model T if he finds the necessary part. However, humans themselves are not as predictable as cars, which is why Gay suddenly disappears for half a year. In this way, Steinbeck offers up a juxtaposition between the chaos that is human life and the order that defines the world of machines.*

"Oh, the infinity of possibility!" Steinbeck writes, explaining how circumstances lead Gay to jail. First, the car that picks him up while he's hitchhiking breaks down, but he's able to fix it, so the driver buys him a drink at a nearby bar, where the bartender is celebrating his birthday. "Fate just didn't intend Gay to go on that frog hunt and Fate took a hell of a lot of trouble and people and accidents to keep him from it." Gay ends up breaking into Holman's "bootery" with his new friends, and when the police come, he's the only one still trying on shoes, so they take him to jail in Salinas. Meanwhile, Mack and "the boys" wait for Gay, eventually realizing that he's not coming back, at which point Eddie leaves to find the necessary car part.

By explaining the long, winding path that leads Gay to jail, Steinbeck underlines just how temperamental and unpredictable humans are. In fact, he implies that this kind of randomness is the essence of life itself, suggesting that "fate" waylays Gay from doing what he intends to do.

CHAPTER 12

Steinbeck takes a moment to tell an odd tale about the death of the well-known humor writer. There is a French doctor who lives above a "gulch" and embalms dead people before they're put into the ground. One morning, a man named Mr. Carriaga comes upon a boy and a dog. The boy is carrying "a liver" and the dog has "yards of intestine" in his mouth. Disconcerted by the fact that the liver doesn't look like it belongs to an animal, Mr. Carriaga goes around asking if anyone died the night before, eventually learning that the humorist died in a nearby hotel. Going to the French doctor, Mr. Carriaga discovers that the doctor threw the writer's "tripas" in the gulch. Upon hearing this, he makes the doctor gather "the parts," wash them, and put them in a box that is buried with the humorist.

Of all the vignettes in Cannery Row, *this one is perhaps the most difficult to place in the broader context of the text. Suffice it to say, the fact that the French doctor is forced to clean the humorist's internal organs and put them in a box to be buried with him aligns with Steinbeck's interest in examining the ways in which humans try—and sometimes fail—to treat each other with kindness and respect.*

CHAPTER 13

Eddie returns to "the boys" the next morning carrying a carburetor he stole from another Model T. After putting in the new part, Mack and the gang zoom off once again and reach their destination that afternoon. Because "the best time for frogs is at night," they decide to "just lay around 'til it gets dark." Meanwhile, they cook a chicken they ran over with the car, all the while drinking from Eddie's jug. While they're lounging that evening, Mack says, "God damn it. I hate a liar," and when his friends asks who's a liar, he says, "Me. And maybe you guys. […] We worked it out that we wanted to give Doc a party. So we come out here and have a hell of a lot of fun."

In this moment, Mack begins to express misgivings about the plan he and his friends have devised. Indeed, it seems that he is finally realizing that his attempt to commit an act of kindness is somewhat self-motivated, as he articulates that he and "the boys" are having "a hell of a lot of fun." As such, he worries that they've been lying to themselves by insisting that this is all for Doc.

"There's five of us," Mack continues, "so we'll drink five times as much liquor as [Doc] will. And I ain't sure we're doin' it for Doc. I ain't sure we ain't doin' it for ourselves. And Doc's too nice a fella to do that to." Going on, he says that he doesn't want to "take advantage" of Doc, adding that Doc one time gave him a dollar even though it was clear he had lied about why he needed it. "I paid him that buck back the next day," he says. "Just kept it overnight and then give it back to him." Interjecting, Hazel points out that Doc loves parties, but Mack says, "I don't know, I'd just like to give him something when I didn't get most of it back."

Again, Mack reveals that he has grown uncomfortable with the plan he and his friends have come up with to celebrate Doc. This is because he has finally admitted to himself that he is interested in throwing Doc a party because he himself is looking forward to drinking lots of "liquor." When he says, "I'd just like to give him something when I didn't get most of it back," then, he puts his finger on why his plan to celebrate Doc is flawed, for he knows he will personally benefit from the party.

As Mack and "the boys" discuss the best way to honor Doc, a man appears holding a shotgun, a Pointer dog standing by his side. "What the hell are you doing here?" he says, adding that they can't hunt on this land. In response, Mack says, "Look, Captain, we made a mistake and we're sorry. You're a military man, aren't you, sir? I can always tell. Military man don't carry his shoulders the same as ordinary. I was in the army so long, I can always tell." At this, the man stands up straighter, and Mack goes on, saying that he and his friends are collecting frogs to give to scientists, who will "experiment" on the creatures in an attempt to find a cure for cancer.

Despite Mack's newfound revelation about kindness, he has clearly slipped back into his old ways as a smooth-talking charmer. Indeed, readers see in this moment why he's always so capable of duping people, for it's clear that he's quite gifted when it comes to flattering others and encouraging them to ignore his true intentions. First, he praises the Captain as a way of endearing himself to the man, and then he delivers a phony tale about why he and his friends are looking for frogs, ultimately framing their efforts as undeniably altruistic. It's obvious that the Captain will have a hard time staying angry at him.

"By God, that's a fine-lookin' bitch," Mack says, sensing that the Captain has relaxed. "She's lame. Tick got her right shoulder," the Captain replies, and Mack asks if he can examine her. "She just had pups, didn't she?" Mack says, and the Captain confirms that she did. Mack then tells the Captain about a "poultice of epsom salts" he knows how to make that would cure the dog's wound. "Tell you what I'll do, Captain," he says. "I'll look after her myself. Epsom salt'll do the trick. That's the best thing." In response, the Captain says, "You know, I've got a pond up by the house that's so full of frogs I can't sleep nights. Why don't you look up there? They bellow all night. I'd be glad to get rid of them."

When the Captain says that Mack and "the boys" can use his pond to collect frogs, readers see how effective Mack's charm really is. Now that he has endeared himself to the Captain, he finds himself capable of getting exactly what he wants, thus demonstrating the ways in which he uses kindness to his own personal benefit.

CHAPTER 14

Steinbeck delivers a fleeting but poetic snapshot of dawn in Cannery Row, depicting a scene in which two soldiers and two young women stumble drunkenly out into the pre-light of day and make their way to the beach, where they lie down and "smile at each other," feeling as if they possess a "tired and peaceful and wonderful secret." At one point, a "watchman" shouts at them saying that they can't be on the beach, which is private, but the group pays no heed, and he eventually retreats, though they're too contented to even notice.

Above all, this is a portrait of the kind of happiness that comes along with complete relaxation. These four partiers, Steinbeck intimates, only want to have a good time, and they refuse to let anyone (like the "watchman") interfere with their ability to do so. In turn, Steinbeck shows readers once again that behavior that is often looked down on (like excessive drunkenness) isn't always a sign of vice, especially when it leads to such unabashed and unharmful happiness.

CHAPTER 15

In the Captain's house, Mack applies the "poultice" to the pointer and tells the Captain that the puppies should be "weaned." The Captain, for his part, admits that he probably should have "drowned" them because he doesn't have enough time to care for so many animals. "I've been so busy trying to keep the place going," he says. "People don't take the interest in bird dogs they used to. It's all poodles and boxers and boxers and Dobermans." Agreeing, Mack asserts that Pointers are the best breed, but he expresses astonishment that the Captain would even think about drowning the puppies. "Well, since my wife went into politics, I'm just running crazy," the Captain says. "She got elected to the Assembly for this district and when the Legislature isn't in session, she's off making speeches." In response, Mack says that "must be pretty lonely."

Once again, loneliness surfaces in Cannery Row. *At first, Steinbeck presents the Captain as somewhat of an antagonist, considering that he appears with a shotgun and tells Mack and the boys to leave his land. However, he soon reveals that the Captain is a nice man who is simply lonely, and once he opens up, he has no problem showing Mack and the boys an admirable amount of kindness.*

"Now if I had a pup like this," Mack says, picking up a puppy, "why I bet I'd have a real bird dog in three years." Hearing this, the Captain tells Mack to take a puppy, saying that he might as well because "nobody seems to understand bird dogs any more." As this conversation continues, the rest of "the boys" stand in the kitchen and look around, noticing the influence of the Captain's wife and feeling thankful that she's not home, since "such women" know that they are "the worst threats to a home." This, Steinbeck says, is because Mack and "the boys" provide "ease and thought and companionship as opposed to neatness, order, and properness." At this point, the Captain offers the group some whiskey that he has been saving since Prohibition, and they all become drunk.

As the Captain warms up to Mack and "the boys," he becomes increasingly accommodating, even going out of his way to offer them whiskey. Considering that he first appeared as an antagonistic character, it's easy to see how much Mack's charm can affect a person. Indeed, this is because Mack and his friends put people at "ease" and lend them a feeling of "companionship"—something the Captain sorely lacks because he is so lonely without his wife. In turn, readers see once again that Mack and the boys use kindness and generosity in order to get what they want, though it's also worth noting that their efforts aren't purely exploitative, since Mack's goodwill seems altogether genuine despite the fact that he benefits from endearing himself to the Captain.

Although Mack acts as if he doesn't want too much to drink, he subtly encourages the Captain to keep pouring glasses of whiskey, eventually suggesting that it would be easier if he simply poured some of the cask into a "pitcher." Later, they all raid the pond, successfully rounding up a very large number of frogs and having a great time as they do so. "It is doubtful whether the captain had ever had so much fun," Steinbeck writes. "He was indebted to Mack and the boys. Later when the curtains caught fire and were put out with the little towels, the captain told the boys not to mind it. He felt it was an honor to have them burn his house clear down, if they wanted to."

That the Captain's curtains catch fire is an indication of the kind of mayhem that comes along with Mack and the boys' kindness. Although they don't mean any harm, it's clear that their shenanigans often lead to calamity—a fact that doesn't bode well for Doc's party.

Shortly thereafter, the Captain passes out, and Mack asks Eddie to confirm that the man did indeed offer him a jug of whiskey and a puppy. "I never did roll a drunk and I ain't gonna start now," Mack says, adding that they should leave before the Captain wakes up. "He's gonna wake up feelin' lousy and it's goin' to be all our fault," he says. As they leave—whiskey and puppy in hand—Mack says, "We shouldn't go forgettin' we're doin' all this for Doc."

Although Mack's tactics often lead to disaster, it's worth noting that he has a strong moral compass. Indeed, he goes out of his way to make sure he's not stealing from a drunk man, thereby demonstrating his virtuousness even as he brings chaos into the Captain's life.

CHAPTER 16

Steinbeck narrates the tale of **the Bear Flag**'s busiest period, a time when the brothel is overrun by "a new regiment" of soldiers and, simultaneously, the entire town comes down with the flu. Although this strain of the flu isn't as deadly "as it was in 1917," many children are still particularly vulnerable to the illness. As a result, the local doctors are overextended, so Doc begins treating people when they need help, running around Cannery Row and doing his best to give people extra blankets and food. When Dora Flood sees him looking worn out in Lee Chong's, she asks if there's anything she can do to help, and he tells her that she could ask her "girls" to go sit with the sick families, who are "scared and helpless." As such, Dora's prostitutes apply themselves to helping the sickly while also accommodating the new influx of clients.

Once again, Doc is a model of kindness. By interacting with so many sick people, he runs the risk of coming down with the flu himself, and yet he selflessly ignores this possibility in order to serve his fellow citizens. What's more, this act of empathy encourages Dora to consider what she can do for the town's sick people, thus proving once more that kindness only leads to more kindness. It's also worth noting that Dora and her employees' willingness to do this good deed once again proves Steinbeck's belief that people who aren't generally considered virtuous (like prostitutes) are perfectly capable of goodness.

CHAPTER 17

"In spite of his friendliness and his friends Doc was a lonely and a set-apart man," Steinbeck writes, suggesting that Mack is the only person who truly notices that Doc seems "always alone" even in a group. Now, Doc makes the drive to La Jolla by himself because he couldn't find anyone to accompany him. Mack and "the boys" are in Carmel, and even Henri is busy, since Holman's Department Store has hired a "flag-pole skater"—a man trying to stay on a raised platform for as long as possible while wearing roller skates. The skater has been doing this now for three consecutive days without stopping, and Henri feels he can't "leave town while the skater [is] up there," for he wants to make a painting called "Substratum Dream of a Flagpole Skater," thinking that there are "philosophical implications in flag-pole skating."

Mack's observation that Doc is "always alone" even when he's in a group is worth noting, for it suggests that well-liked people who are respected and surrounded by friends still experience loneliness. In this way, Steinbeck intimates that loneliness is simply a symptom of life, something that no one can avoid altogether. Fortunately, though, Doc does *have people around him, which puts him in a better position than someone like William, who was completely alone and isolated. On another note, the flag-pole skater is an interesting figure in Cannery Row, as he represents not only Steinbeck's interest in exploring the ridiculous things people will do for money, but also the ways in which something can mean different things to different people. This is evident by Henri's artistic and philosophical interest in the skater—surely a different kind of reaction than what the owners of Holman's Department Store must have originally had in mind when putting on this promotional spectacle.*

Compared to most people, Doc travels slowly. This is because he frequently stops for hamburgers and beer. In fact, someone once told him, "You love beer so much. I'll bet some day you'll go in and order a beer milk shake." This statement has stayed with Doc, troubling him because he can't help but wonder what it would be like to have a beer milkshake. He finds the idea disgusting, and yet, he can't banish it from his mind. Having stopped for a snack, Doc now avoids looking at the milkshake machines, thinking that if he were ever to order a beer milkshake, he would have to do it in a town where people don't recognize him. However, he worries that people would be suspicious of a bearded man like him ordering a beer milkshake. "A man with a beard was always a little suspect anyway."

In this section, Steinbeck makes a point of making Doc into a more three-dimensional character. Until this point, he has simply presented Doc as a kind fellow with a few eccentricities. Now, though, readers see that Doc is a quirky man who, despite his self-assuredness, still considers—and, to a certain extent, worries about—what people think of him. Indeed, he knows that his beard sets him apart from most men, an idea that emphasizes his loneliness, as it calls attention to the ways in which he feels like an outsider in the world in which he lives.

Steinbeck tells a story about Doc's youth, when he was a university student who—feeling depressed about "love" and having "worked too hard—decided to walk from Chicago to Florida. Whenever someone asked why he was walking, he tried to tell the truth, since he "love[s] true things." However, speaking honestly about his discontent unnerved people, who often told him to get away from them "if he knew what was good for him." "And so he stopped trying to tell the truth. He said he was doing it on a bet—that he stood to win a hundred dollars. Everyone liked him then and believed him." Ever since then, Doc has understood that the truth can be "a very dangerous mistress" in this world.

Doc is an unfailingly good man, so it's no surprise that he wants to tell the truth whenever possible. However, he discovers that not everyone is ready to speak honestly about unhappiness or discontent. Interestingly enough, his decision to lie while walking such a long distance as a young man is nothing more than an attempt to be kind, for he doesn't want to upset other people by shocking them with the truth about his own melancholy. Readers see once again that he is devoted to doing what's best for others, even when this means lying at his own expense.

At a certain point during his trip to La Jolla—after stopping in multiple towns for burgers and beer—Doc visits a gas station, where he takes on a hitchhiker. After a while, he pulls over again and asks the hitchhiker if he wants any beer. "No," the man replies. "And I don't mind saying I think it's not a very good idea to drive under the influence of alcohol. It's none of my business what you do with your own life but in this case you've got an automobile and that can be a murderous weapon in the hands of a drunken driver." Hearing this, Doc says, "Get out of the car," and when the hitchhiker hesitates, he adds, "I'm going to punch you in the nose."

Despite Doc's all-around goodness, he is still human. As such, he has certain vices, and though it doesn't seem to interfere with his life all that often, he clearly has a drinking problem. After all, the hitchhiker is right to point out that Doc shouldn't be driving under the influence, but Doc is unwilling to hear this. This is the first time in the entire novel that Doc has acted selfishly, and his threat to punch the hitchhiker in the nose is quite obviously inappropriate. However, this is just a testament to the fact that even the most virtuous people have various shortcomings and vices.

The hitchhiker scrambles out of the car. "I'm going to find an officer," he says through the window, but Doc grabs a wrench and gestures threateningly, and the man quickly walks away. Getting out of the car himself, Doc goes into the restaurant and orders a beer milkshake. "Are you kidding?" the waitress asks. "I've got a bladder complaint. Bipalychaetorsonectomy the doctors call it. I'm supposed to drink a *beer milk shake*. Doctor's orders," Doc lies. "Oh!" replies the waitress. "I thought you was kidding. You tell me how to make it. I didn't know you was sick." After instructing the waitress how to make it, Doc takes a sip of the milkshake. "It sounds awful," the waitress says. "It's not so bad when you get used to it," Doc replies. "I've been drinking it for seventeen years."

Again, Doc demonstrates that he is not immune to anger, for although he's quite virtuous, he is still human and, thus, prone to certain flaws. On another note, his decision to lie about why he's ordering a beer milkshake aligns with his understanding that sometimes the truth can be disconcerting to other people. When the waitress expresses her disgust, he tells her that he has been drinking beer milkshakes for 17 years because of a medical condition, thereby allowing her to feel at ease rather than making her uncomfortable.

CHAPTER 18

Doc reaches La Jolla at two in the morning, at which point he parks near the "tidal flat" and sleeps until morning. Waking up as the tide goes out, he drinks coffee, eats breakfast, and has "a quart of beer." Wading out over the "flat," Doc upturns rocks and collects octopi, chasing the tide as it recedes. "He came at last to the outer barrier where the long leathery brown algae hung down into the water," and Doc then sees "a flash of white under water and then the floating weed covered it." Making his way to this "flash of white," Doc "part[s] the brown algae" and looks down. "Then he grew rigid," Steinbeck notes. "**A girl**'s face looked up at him, a pretty, pale girl with dark hair."

Doc is in his element as he wades out into the tidal flat. As a marine biologist who often feels lonely in groups, this moment of solitary research is quite natural for him. However, he soon comes face to face with death itself, as he stares into this unknown young woman's lifeless eyes. This girl, Steinbeck notes, is "pretty." By calling attention to this fact, he suggests that even death can be beautiful, though this doesn't necessarily make it any easier for Doc to process what he has just seen.

Looking down at this **dead girl**, whose body is stuck in a "crevice," Doc feels as if the image has become "burned into his picture memory." In his mind, "a high thin piercingly sweet flute" plays "beyond the hearing range." Putting the seaweed back over the girl's face, he makes his way back to the shore, where he comes upon a man who asks if he's feeling all right. "Is there a police station near?" Doc asks, explaining that there's "a body out on the reef." "You get a bounty for finding a body," the man says, but Doc walks away, saying, "You take the bounty. I don't want it." As he retreats, "only the tiniest piping of the flute sound[s] in his head."

Doc is an emotional man who cares very little about money. As such, he focuses on what the experience of finding a dead woman makes him feel, not the reward he could receive for reporting her body. Indeed, he experiences a kind of existential shock, one that acknowledges his surprise but also opens him up to a world of beauty, one in which there is a "piercingly sweet flute" playing just beyond the "hearing range," an image that brings to mind the notion that there are certain things in life that a person can feel and experience without fully grasping. This, in turn, aligns with Steinbeck's determination to replicate the feeling of being alive without using any kind of special literary approach or technique, for he believes that the best way to represent life's beautiful disorderliness is to simply let his readers experience what happens.

CHAPTER 19

The flag-pole skater is the most successful promotional stunt Holman's Department Store has ever done, driving in business from all over. "It was generally agreed, however, that a steel rod came up through the center of the platform at night and he strapped himself to it," Steinbeck says, though he adds that no one seems to care. On his second day, the skater says that someone is shooting him with a BB gun, and the staff at Holman's finds an old doctor shooting an air rifle from his office window. Meanwhile, Henri watches the skater almost religiously, deciding that he must build himself a platform and try the stunt. Indeed, everyone is captivated by this attraction—everyone, that is, except Mack and "the boys," who don't see the appeal.

It's worth paying attention to the fact that Mack and "the boys" aren't interested in the flag-pole skater. This is most likely because they don't care about money, except as an immediate means to an end. Since the flag-pole skater is first and foremost a promotional tactic to drive business into Holman's Department Store, they see the stunt for what it is: a desperate plea to convince people to part with their money.

One night, a "high-strung and brilliant young man" gets drunk and later jumps out of bed after having a fight with his wife. Going to Holman's he shouts up at the skater, saying, "Hey! How—how do you—go to the toilet?" In response, the skater says, "I've got a can up here." With this, the young man goes home and gets back into bed.

Although this short anecdote has little to do with Cannery Row*'s narrative or thematic development, it's worth mentioning because it showcases the fact that Steinbeck is committed to simply telling stories about the people who live in Cannery Row, regardless of whether or not his vignettes do anything to fuel the broader framework of the text. In this way, readers see that his decision to "open the page and let the stories crawl in by themselves" isn't just a gimmick, but a genuine attempt to represent the random array of human moments that define a community and life itself.*

CHAPTER 20

When Mack and "the boys" get back to Cannery Row, they have roughly one thousand frogs. Doc isn't home yet, so they start preparing for his party. Going to Lee's grocery store, Mack says, "I and the boys are pretty short and we're pretty hungry. You know the price of frogs is twenty for a buck. Now Doc is away and we're hungry. So what we thought is this. We don't want to see you lose nothing so we'll make over to you twenty-five frogs for a buck. You got a five-frog profit there and nobody loses his shirt." At first, Lee declines, but Mack reminds him that this is all for Doc, urging him to accept frogs as payment, since he will be able to simply sell the frogs back to Doc when Doc returns. After going to the Palace Flophouse to inspect the frogs—and to have a drink—Lee agrees.

Once again, Mack uses his powers of persuasion to convince someone to do something. In this case, he coaxes Lee into accepting a rather risky proposal, since it seems likely that either something will go wrong between now and the time Doc returns, or that Mack will find a way to leverage his position to his own advantage. And though Lee clearly understands that it's somewhat dangerous to strike these kinds of deals with Mack, he agrees—yet another testament to how convincing Mack can be when he presents himself as a kind man (of course, he is a kind man, but he's often motivated to do things that might not benefit others in the ways he that promises to).

As soon as Lee agrees to accept frogs as payment, Mack and "the boys" go crazy buying items from the store. First, they purchase things they'll need for the party, which Lee marks up in price because he knows no other store will take frogs instead of money. Soon, though, "the boys" lose sight of what they're supposed to be buying and start purchasing things like "silk arm bands" and other unnecessary items. Despite the fact that Lee keeps raising his prices, the gang doesn't get too upset, for "financial bitterness [can]not eat too deeply into" them, since they don't "measure their joy in goods sold, their egos in bank balances, nor their loves in what they cost."

Unsurprisingly, Mack and the boys get overexcited about having the ability to buy items from Lee's store. After all, they aren't usually able to buy much, since they rarely have money. However, this is only an indication of the fact that they don't truly care about whether they're rich or poor, and don't "measure their joy in goods sold." Rather, they live exactly how they want to live. Because they're so unaccustomed to having money, then, they easily forget that they're supposed to be shopping for Doc's party, once again losing sight of their desire to do something nice for him.

As the day goes on, Mack and "the boys" revel in their ability to purchase goods at Lee's. They also lounge in the Palace Flophouse and play with Darling, their new puppy. Sitting in the Flophouse and waiting for Doc to return, they decide that the party—which will take place in Doc's laboratory—should have decorations, so they return once again to Lee's store and buy "miles of crepe paper." Meanwhile, Eddie—who once used to work as a "fry cook"—tries to bake a cake, though it turns out to be a disaster, and Darling eventually eats some of it and then throws up in the leftovers.

Although Mack and his friends have seemingly gone off-track with their planning, they have at least reoriented themselves so that they're once again thinking about Doc's party. Indeed, Eddie even turns his attention to baking a cake. However, his baking project doesn't go well, yet another warning sign that the boys' attempt to do something nice for Doc will likely cause trouble, despite the fact that they're doing this to show Doc their appreciation.

By the time the evening comes around, "the boys" are drunk because they keep buying "half pints of Old Tennis Shoes at fifteen frogs a crack." Finally, they spend the last of their frogs on Old Tennis Shoes and two jugs of wine, since they believe Doc loves wine. They then make their way into the laboratory—which Doc never locks—and start trying to decorate it, eventually deciding that they should place the crate of frogs (which now belongs to Lee) in the center of the room so that Doc will immediately see the bounty.

If Mack and the boys knew Doc as well as they claim to, they would most likely know that his favorite alcoholic drink is beer—after all, he likes beer enough to order it in the form of a milkshake. What's more, he seemingly drinks it constantly, meaning that Mack and his friends have no doubt witnessed this. As such, one would think they would buy him beer, not wine, but they're too preoccupied by their own excitement about the party to stop and think about this. This is yet another indication that this act of kindness is not as selfless as they'd like to think.

Soon enough, Mack and "the boys" finish the rest of the whiskey, and people start filtering into Western Biological and getting quite drunk. Lee, for his part, drinks so much that he has to go home. At this point, a number of men at **the Bear Flag** think that Western Biological is a "rival house," so they enter "whooping with joy." "They were evicted by the outraged hosts but only after a long, happy, and bloody battle that took out the front door and broke two windows." Later, a drunkard says something that Mack interprets as an insult to Doc—who is still absent—and so he hits him so hard he "crashe[s] through the packing case in among the frogs." Meanwhile, "someone trying to change a record" breaks the stylus.

First of all, it's crucial to note that Doc hasn't even arrived at his own party yet. Nevertheless, Mack and his friends have already settled into the raucous night, seemingly unbothered by his absence. This, of course, confirms that they aren't throwing this party solely for Doc's sake, but also for their own. On another note, Steinbeck describes the mayhem of this gathering in a rather romanticized way. Although he's writing about violence, he refers to the fight that Mack and the boys have as a "happy" battle. With this, he once again suggests that happiness and goodness can sometimes come in strange forms, though in this case what Mack and his friends fail to consider is that they're doing Doc a significant disservice by trashing his laboratory.

"No one has studied the psychology of a dying party," Steinbeck writes. "It may be raging, howling, boiling, and then a fever sets in and a little silence and then quickly quickly it is gone, the guests go home or go to sleep or wander away to some other affair […]." This is what happens now, as the partiers stream out of Western Biological, leaving the laboratory "littered with broken glass" and snapped records and food smeared on the floor. Then, "through the broken end of the packing case," the first frog jumps out, followed by another, and another, until all of the slimy creatures have sprung out into the streets, never to return.

With the frogs gone, Mack and "the boys" have done nothing for Doc but destroy his home. Readers see once and for all that their supposed act of kindness is simply an excuse to have a party, and this only harms Doc.

CHAPTER 21

Doc returns to Cannery Row at dawn. Tired from driving, he enters the laboratory in confusion. Looking around, his eyes "flame red with anger," and he tries to put a record on the phonograph but finds that it, too, has been broken. Then, he sees Mack come into the lab. "Did you do this?" he demands, and before Mack finishes speaking, Doc punches him in the mouth. Stricken, Mack sits on the floor, but Doc tells him to stand. "Put up your hands. Fight, you son of a bitch," Doc says, but Mack tells him to keep hitting him because he knows he deserves it. "Oh you dirty son of a bitch," Doc says, lowering his fists and sitting. "Go wash your face," he says to Mack before going to buy beer at the store, where Lee can't bring himself to look at him.

Yet again, readers see that Doc is capable of great anger, despite his overall virtuousness. At the same time, though, it's hard to fault him for this behavior, since Mack has utterly destroyed his home, and even Mack is cognizant of the fact that he deserves punishment. In turn, Doc can't bring himself to keep beating on his friend, since he knows it's pointless. After all, Mack didn't intentionally harm him.

When Doc returns, Mack is still washing the blood off his face, and Doc pours them each a glass of beer. Mack explains that he and "the boys" wanted to throw a party for Doc, saying, "She got out of hand. It don't do no good to say I'm sorry. I been sorry all my life." He then tells Doc that he used to have a wife, but that she left because she couldn't "stand" him anymore. "If I done a good thing it got poisoned up some way," he says. "I don't do nothin' but clown no more. Try to make the boys laugh." He was, he says, glad when Doc hit him, hoping that it might teach him a lesson, though he knows he'll never "learn."

In this moment, Mack acknowledges that whenever he tries to do something "good," he ends up veering toward destruction. In this way, Steinbeck suggests that true kindness—which is a selfless expression of goodwill—is rare and perhaps not as easy to embody as some people think.

"Doc," Mack says, "I and the boys will clean up here—and we'll pay for the stuff that's broke. If it takes us five years we'll pay for it." In response, Doc tells him not to say that. "No you won't, Mack," he says. "You'll think about it and it'll worry you for quite a long time, but you won't pay for it. There's maybe three hundred dollars in broken museum glass. Don't say you'll pay for it. That will just keep you uneasy. It might be two or three years before you forgot about it and felt entirely easy again. And you wouldn't pay it anyway." Mack agrees that Doc is right, but asks what he can do to make up for what's happened. "I'm over it," Doc replies. "Those socks in the mouth got it out of my system. Let's forget it."

Again, Doc demonstrates his ability to empathize with other people. In this case, he puts himself in Mack's shoes despite the fact that Mack has done him wrong. By doing this, he's able to see the toll that paying for the glass would take on Mack. And because he himself is so generous, he doesn't think it's worth it to put Mack through that kind of "uneas[iness]." Indeed, he says that hitting Mack in the mouth was enough to get the anger "out of [his] system." Steinbeck suggests that everyone will of course succumb to anger now and again, so it's better to simply express this anger in small ways, since doing so enables one to forgive and forget more easily.

CHAPTER 22

Steinbeck describes Henri, whose name isn't really Henri and who has "steeped himself in stories of the Left Bank in Paris" so much that he almost sees himself as a French artist. Years ago, he decided to build a boat, but he works slowly because he rarely can afford the necessary materials. This, however, "is the way he want[s] it, for Henri never want[s] to finish his boat." Still, he enjoys living in the boat, which is stuck on land. Over the course of the last decade, he has been married twice and has had a number of lovers, but they all leave for the same reason: the boat is too small, and they miss having a toilet. "Each time he was left alone," Steinbeck writes, "he mourned formally for a while but actually he felt a sense of relief."

When Steinbeck says that Henri "mourn[s] formally for a while" before feeling a "sense of relief" when a lover leaves him, he suggests that it's a misconception to think that grieving is always a terrible thing. Indeed, Henri simply goes through the motions of this kind of sadness, but in reality he actually finds "relief" in this melancholy. In this way, Steinbeck intimates that sadness and melancholy can actually fuel a certain kind of happiness or—at the very least—contentment.

Whenever his lovers leave him, Henri likes to "buy a gallon of wine," lie down in the boat, and drink heavily. "Sometimes he cried a little all by himself but it was luxurious stuff and he usually had a wonderful feeling of well-being from it." During one of these moments, he sees two people standing outside his boat. Emerging from the cabin, he sees a man and a little boy, who is laughing. As the man smiles at Henri, he takes a blade from his pocket and cuts the boy's throat, though the child goes "right on laughing." Seeing this, Henri screams so loud that it takes him a moment to "realize that neither the man nor the baby [are] still there."

Steinbeck's assertion that Henri's crying is "luxurious stuff" confirms the notion that there can be pleasure and contentment (or "well-being") in feeling melancholy or lonely. On another note, it's difficult to know what to make of Henri's vision, as Steinbeck neither confirms nor denies whether what he sees is really there. However, readers ought to embrace the ambiguity of this scene, since the vagueness of the entire situation resembles what Henri himself must feel, thereby honoring Steinbeck's desire to let life itself "crawl" onto the page.

Running to the laboratory, Henri tells Doc what he's just seen. "Is it a ghost do you think," he asks Doc. "Is it some reflection of something that has happened or is it some Freudian horror out of me or am I completely nuts? I saw it, I tell you. It happened right in front of me as plainly as I see you." Doc, for his part, says he can't be sure, and when Henri asks him to come back to the boat, he replies, "No. If I saw it, it might be a ghost and it would scare me badly because I don't believe in ghosts. And if you saw it again and I didn't it would be a hallucination and you would be frightened."

Doc's unwillingness to go to the boat with Henri provides insight into the way he views reality. Indeed, Doc is a pragmatic man who holds firmly to his ideas about the world around him. However, he's also a curious, inquisitive, and flexible thinker who understands the disorder and chaos of everyday life, meaning that he has no problem acknowledging that his entire worldview might be wrong. Because he doesn't want to refigure the way he moves through life, then, he refuses to go back to Henri's boat, thereby preserving his belief that ghosts don't exist.

Just then, a girl arrives to go on a date with Doc. Upon hearing Henri's story, though, she agrees out of curiosity to accompany him back to the boat. Disappointedly, Doc watches them leave. "The girl never did see the ghost," Steinbeck writes, "but she was fond of Henri and it was five months before the cramped cabin and the lack of a toilet drove her out."

The fact that this woman is willing to accompany Henri back to his boat in search of a ghost is a testament to her kindness and ability to empathize, for she clearly sees that he is under emotional duress and needs someone to come with him. This, in turn, leads to yet another one of Henri's relationships—one that ends, like all the others, with a pleasant but melancholic kind of loneliness.

CHAPTER 23

In the aftermath of the disastrous party, Mack and "the boys" are ashamed of themselves. Hughie and Jones even start working at the Hediondo Cannery, and Hazel picks a fight and purposefully loses it just to "feel a little better." Worst of all, everyone in town talks about the event, failing to understand that the gang only wanted to honor Doc. As such, "the boys" keep to themselves. "For there are two possible reactions to social ostracism," Steinbeck writes, "either a man emerges determined to be better, purer, kindlier or he goes bad, challenges the world and does even worse things. This last is by far the commonest reaction to stigma."

Steinbeck goes out of his way in his section emphasize how devastated Mack and the boys are to be essentially shunned by their community. Although their intentions were good when they planned Doc's party, they went about showing him their appreciation in a very misguided way, causing the entirety of Cannery Row to think of them as malicious men. As such, they retreat into themselves and think about how they can be "better, purer, [and] kindlier," for the only other option is to become confrontational, which is not in their nature.

As Mack and "the boys" keep a low profile, Doc makes an interesting "observation" about them (for he is not, contrary to what they think, mad anymore). Sitting with a friend and drinking beer one day, he looks at the crew and says, "Look at them. There are your true philosophers. I think that Mack and the boys know everything that has ever happened in the world and possibly everything that will happen. I think they survive in this particular world better than other people. In a time when people tear themselves to pieces with ambition and nervousness and covetousness, they are relaxed. All of our so-called successful men are sick men, with bad stomachs, and bad souls, but Mack and the boys are healthy and curiously clean. They can do what they want. They can satisfy their appetites without calling them something else."

Doc's words in this passage echo what Steinbeck says in Chapter 2 about Mack and the boys and how their relaxed, easygoing qualities allow them to prosper in life. This kind of prosperity, he goes out of his way to mention, has nothing to do with financial success. Rather, Mack and his friends are "healthy and curiously clean" because they don't obsess over things that don't matter. Whereas their contemporaries have "bad stomachs" because they allow greed to rule their lives, Mack and his crew lounge around like "philosophers." In turn, Steinbeck frames Mack and the boys as superior intellectuals because of their disinterest in the vices that run society and ruin good people.

Doc's friend says he thinks Mack and "the boys" are the same as everyone else except that they don't have money. "They could get it," Doc says. "They could ruin their lives and get money. […] They just know the nature of things too well to be caught in that wanting." Going on, he says, "The things we admire in men, kindness and generosity, openness, honesty, understanding and feeling are the concomitants of failure in our system. And those traits we detest, sharpness, greed, acquisitiveness, meanness, egotism and self-interest are the traits of success. And while men admire the quality of the first they love the produce of the second."

In this moment, Doc articulates one of Cannery Row*'s most fruitful messages—namely, that society as a whole praises qualities that it doesn't actually encourage or embody. Although everyone around Mack and the boys claims to covet "kindness and generosity," they actually fail to recognize it when they encounter it, a notion made evident by the fact that people consider Mack and the boys nothing but a group of vice-ridden bums. Instead of actually behaving according to their supposed worldviews, the majority of people in Doc and Mack's society commit themselves to "greed" and "self-interest," rendering themselves hypocrites.*

During this time period, "evil" seeps throughout the community. Sam Malloy, for his part, has a "number of fights with his wife." What's more, "a group of high-minded ladies in the town demand that dens of vice must close to protect young American manhood," forcing Dora to close **the Bear Flag** for two weeks. Meanwhile, Doc takes out a loan from the bank in order to pay for all of the glass that was broken during the party. "There is no explaining a series of misfortunes like that," Steinbeck writes. "Every man blames himself. People in their black minds remember sins committed secretly and wonder whether they have caused the evil sequence."

The idea that "evil" is something that can disperse throughout an entire community illustrates the extent to which Steinbeck believes in the power of relationships. He thinks that unified groups of people have the ability to affect one another, thereby emphasizing the importance of communal goodwill and kindness, since trying times call for especially strong systems of support and fellowship.

Perhaps worst of all, Darling becomes sick, and nothing Mack and "the boys" do seems to revive her. As such, Hazel and Jones go to Doc's and ask for help. When he comes to the Palace Flophouse to examine her, he tells them to "force feed her" "strong soup and eggs and cod liver oil." Upon his departure, the gang follows his directions, and Darling pulls through the next morning. "At last a crack had developed in the wall of evil," and **the Bear Flag** reopens. What's more, Lee Chong forgives Mack and "the boys," cancels their "frog debt," and gives them a pint of Old Tennis Shoes. With everything restored, Mack visits Dora and asks what he and his friends could do to show their appreciation for Doc, and she says, "Why don't you give him a party he does get to?"

Even though Doc has suffered because of what Mack and his friends did, he is still willing to help them by treating Darling. In turn, readers see once again that he is capable of putting the needs of other people before his own interests. Of course, this only inspires Mack once again to show his appreciation, and so he devises yet another plan to throw Doc a party. This time, though, it seems as if his motivations are a bit more pure, but it's also not hard to see that this too could end very badly.

CHAPTER 24

Mary Talbot is a "lovely" woman who loves parties. However, she and her husband, Tom, don't have very much money, so she can't "give parties all the time." As such, she often hosts tea parties for "the neighborhood cats." During a period of particularly pronounced financial woes, though, she finds it difficult to cheer up Tom, who isn't feeling well and is lamenting their lack of money. "Why don't we face it for once?" he says as she tries to put flowers under his nose. "We're down. We're going under. What's the good kidding ourselves?" Mary, for her part, tells him that they are "magic people" who can persevere, but he only says, "I just can't talk myself out of it this time. I'm sick pretending everything. For once I'd like to have it real—just for once."

Although Tom and Mary don't factor heavily into the rest of the novel, what Tom says in this scene is important, since it aligns with Steinbeck's belief that sometimes unhappiness is simply part of life. In this moment, Tom wants to be "real" about his discontent. By saying, "What's the good kidding ourselves?" he suggests that it's not worth trying to deny one's own unhappiness. After all, melancholy and discontent are facts of life, which means there's no reason to ignore or repress such feelings.

In response to Tom's misery, Mary says she might host a party, but Tom says it's "no use." As such, Mary leaves and starts inviting the "neighborhood cats" to a tea party. At one point, though, she finds a cat mauling a mouse, and she yells in horror. Running outside, Tom sees the cat perched on the fence and throws a rock at it. Going inside, they sit in the kitchen and have tea, and Mary says, "I know how cats are. It isn't her fault. But—Oh, Tom! I'm going to have trouble inviting her again. I'm just not going to like her for a while no matter how much I want to." Ending this vignette, Steinbeck writes, "Mary Talbot gave a pregnancy party that year. And everyone said, 'God! A kid of hers is going to have fun.'"

Admittedly, this is an odd way to end this vignette. First, Steinbeck never makes it clear whether Mary is crazy or simply bored and playful. The fact that she treats stray cats like party guests suggests that she isn't fully sane, but Steinbeck doesn't give enough information to make a definitive judgment. Second, the author's decision to jump forward in time—to the Talbots' "pregnancy party"—is a strange narrative choice, one that leaves readers wondering what, exactly, to make of this short anecdote. In the end, it's helpful to remember that Steinbeck has set out simply to let life "crawl" onto the page. As such, he is free to create snapshots of quirky characters without necessarily wrapping them up or tying them into the broader framework of the novel.

CHAPTER 25

Everyone in Cannery Row senses a "change." "It's all right not to believe in luck and omens," Steinbeck writes. "Nobody believes in them. But it doesn't do any good to take chances with them and no one takes chances." This is why even Doc—a "pure scientist" devoted to rational thinking—is wary of bad "omens." "Most people in Cannery Row simply do not believe in such things and then live by them." Now that the "evil" spell has lifted, though, no one can deny their own good fortune. As such, Mack and "the boys" are optimistic about the new party they're planning for Doc. "Last time we forced her," Mack says, referring to the party itself. "You can't never give a good party that way. You got to let her creep up on you."

Steinbeck's assertion that everyone in Cannery Row claims to not believe in "omens" but then "live[s] by them" provides an interesting commentary on the relationship between reality and superstition. In the same way that Doc doesn't want to go with Henri to his boat because he's afraid he might see a ghost and thus have to refigure the way he views reality, the people living in Cannery Row commit themselves to their beliefs but remain unknowingly open to things they claim to reject out of hand.

News of the party spreads through town, but Mack and "the boys" are still planning the specifics. They decide it ought to be a surprise birthday party, but they don't know Doc's birthday, so Mack visits the laboratory and—pretending to be curious about his horoscope—asks when he was born. "October 27," Doc says. "It must be remembered that Doc had known Mack a very long time," Steinbeck writes. "If he had not he would have said December 18 which was his birthday instead of October 27 which was not." Having secured this (false) information, Mack leaves, and Doc tries to guess what he and "the boys" are cooking up. "For he had recognized it as a lead," Steinbeck notes. "He knew Mack's technique, his method. He recognized his style." Later, when he finds out about the party, he feels "slightly relieved" that it's only a birthday celebration.

Once again, Doc proves that he is a kind and patient man. Although he gives Mack the wrong birthday and is deeply suspicious of him, he doesn't stop him from planning the party. Even when he hears about it, he doesn't instruct Mack to halt the preparations, most likely understanding that he and his friends really want to do something to show him (Doc) how much they appreciate him. As such, he puts himself at risk, knowing that his house might once again be trashed. Needless to say, he does this to please Mack, thereby demonstrating his humility and kindness.

CHAPTER 26

Two boys named Joey and Willard play in Cannery Row. Willard wants to fight, so he keeps provoking Joey, but Joey doesn't take the bait. "Where's your old man now?" Willard asks menacingly. "He's dead," Joey replies. "What'd he die of?" Willard asks, and Joey reluctantly tells him that his father committed suicide by taking rat poison. Laughing, Willard says, "What'd he think—he was a rat?" Joey tries to laugh alongside his friend, but Willard goes on, talking about how Joey's father thought he was a rat. Still, though, Joey doesn't become angry, instead saying, "He couldn't get a job. Nearly a year he couldn't get a job." This kills Willard's joke, but when Joey finds a penny, Willard stomps on it. "I saw it first. It's mine," Joey yells. "You want to try to make something of it?" Willard replies. "Why'n't you go take some rat poison?"

Not everyone in Cannery Row is full of kindness or empathy. Indeed, Willard is the opposite of someone like Doc, who will sacrifice himself for the good of a friend. He's even quite different than Mack, who at the very least wants to do nice things for his friends. In contrast, Willard only wants to insult his friend. And unlike Mack and Doc, Willard is also greedy, finally finding a way to provoke Joey by laying claim to the penny that should, in truth, belong to Joey. By showing readers this kind of mean-spiritedness, Steinbeck is able to emphasize the admirability of Doc and Mack's goodhearted natures. At the same time, the sad story of Joey's father is a reminder of the devastating poverty that is common among the people Steinbeck writes about.

CHAPTER 27

Everyone in Cannery Row is excited about Doc's surprise party. Because they think it's his birthday, they brainstorm presents. For instance, the prostitutes at **the Bear Flag** decide to make him a silk quilt. Lee Chong prepares "a twenty-five-foot string of firecrackers and a big bag of China lily bulbs." Sam Malloy, who is an avid collector, settles on giving Doc "the connecting rod and piston from a 1916 Chalmers." As for Mack and "the boys," they decide that Doc would like 25 cats, and so they devise a plan to catch them in a cage trap. Even Gay hears about the party from his place in the Salinas jail and makes a compromise with the sheriff so that he can attend.

The vast range of gifts that people prepare for Doc is an illustration of the different ways in which people express their appreciation for his friendship. As such, each gift represents the fact that kindness manifests itself in many different forms.

Having a beer at a bar, Doc hears a drunk talking about the party. "His reaction to the idea was not simple," Steinbeck writes. "He felt a great warmth that they should want to give him a party and at the same time he quaked inwardly remembering the last one they had given." Nonetheless, he sets about preparing for the party by locking up his valuables. After all, he knows that the event will "cost him plenty." He also goes to the butcher and orders steak and an assortment of other foods, in addition to whiskey, knowing that Mack and "the boys" won't provide food or enough drink.

Although Doc intuits that his own surprise party is going to "cost him plenty," he's still willing to go along with the entire ordeal. In fact, he actively contributes to the party to make sure everyone will have a good time. In this way, readers see once again how committed Doc is to being kind to others.

CHAPTER 28

Like everyone else, Frankie wants to give Doc a nice gift, but he has no money. Nonetheless, he finds a "black onyx clock" with a bronze figure atop it that looks like Doc. Going into the shop where this clock is displayed, he asks how much it costs, and the owner tells him it's 75 dollars. "Frankie walked out without replying," Steinbeck writes. The boy then goes to the beach and lies beneath an "overturned rowboat," trying to put the clock out of his mind. By nightfall, though, he hasn't stopped thinking about the beautiful piece, so he returns to the shop, breaks the window, grabs the clock, and runs away. Unfortunately, a nearby police officer chases him down, and though he's remarkably fast, he doesn't get away.

Because Doc has been so kind to Frankie, the boy wants to do something in return. As such, Steinbeck once again illustrates the ways in which kindness creates more kindness. Unfortunately, though, Frankie doesn't go about expressing his appreciation for Doc in an appropriate manner, since stealing ultimately means harming someone else (in this case, the shop owner). This, Steinbeck intimates, is not a good way to commit an act of kindness, which shouldn't negatively affect anyone.

Later, Doc comes to the police station and asks if the chief can let Frankie out on "parole." "I don't think the judge will do it," the chief says. "We've got a mental report. You know what's wrong with him?" Doc tells the chief that he's aware of Frankie's condition, and the chief says, "And you know what's likely to happen when he comes into puberty?" adding that "the doctor thinks" he should be "put away." "We couldn't before," he says, "but now he's got a felony on him, I think we better." Turning to Frankie, Doc asks why the boy took the clock. "I love you," Frankie says, and Doc runs out of the station, gets in his car, and goes "collecting in the caves below Pt. Lobos."

There are plenty of characters in Cannery Row *who are outcasts living on the margins of society, but Frankie is one of the most tragic ones, for he is more alone than anyone else. This is because of his mental abilities, which the surrounding society is unable or unwilling to accommodate. Now that he's out of Doc's hands, unfortunately, there's no one to accept him in spite of his challenges. It is perhaps because Doc recognizes this crushingly sad fact that he runs out of the jailhouse and goes "collecting," for he knows that there's no longer anything he can do to help Frankie.*


CHAPTER 29

By the time evening comes on October 27th, Doc is ready for the party. While he waits, Mack and "the boys" prepare to walk over to the laboratory. When Hazel asks how they should transport the cage of 21 cats to Western Biological, Mack says, "We won't. Remember how it was with the frogs. No, we'll just tell Doc about them." Meanwhile, Dora prepares to leave **the Bear Flag**, where she has instituted a rotating schedule for the night so that all of the prostitutes will be able to attend the party at some point without leaving the brothel empty. "Over at the laboratory," Steinbeck writes, "Doc had a little whiskey after his beer. He was feeling a little mellow. It seemed a nice thing to him that they would give him a party." As he waits, he puts on "sentimental" music and sits there feeling "sad."

In the last moments before Doc's party, he feels a mixture of gratitude and melancholy. On the one hand, he feels "sad" while he sits and waits for the party, which he knows will be raucous and possibly harmful to his property. On the other hand, he recognizes that it's "a nice thing" that his friends want to celebrate him. This is what makes Doc such an emotionally intelligent person, as he is capable of embodying multiple feelings at once.

CHAPTER 30

After waiting for a while, Mack and "the boys" walk to the laboratory. "Being as how it's your birthday, I and the boys thought we would wish you happy birthday and we got twenty-one cats for you for a present," Mack says, and Doc pretends to be surprised. Shortly thereafter, the other residents of Cannery Row enter, presenting Doc with their gifts as they arrive. "The stiffness was going out of the party quickly," Steinbeck writes. As Doc plays "dance music," everyone settles in and drinks, and Doc retreats to the kitchen to cook steaks. "The first fight was not a bad one," Steinbeck notes. "One of the group from La Ida made an immoral proposal to one of Dora's girls. She protested and Mack and the boys, outraged at this breach of propriety, threw him out quickly and without breaking anything. They felt good then[…]."

Slowly, Doc relaxes into the party environment, clearly enjoying the opportunity to spend time with his friends, even if doing so means risking his property. Once again, Steinbeck presents fighting as a happy and virtuous activity, one that makes Mack and the boys feel good because they can do something to really show Doc their appreciation of him. Indeed, by throwing these men from La Ida out of the party, they find a physical manifestation of their desire to do Doc a favor.

Before long, people begin dancing, and the party starts to "take on depth and vigor." As Doc cooks, he drinks and feels "better and better," and when the whiskey runs out, he starts opening "gallons of wine." "Doc," Dora says, "play some of that nice music. I get Christ awful sick of that juke box over home." With this, Doc begins to play beautiful, wistful music, and everyone sits "quietly with their eyes […] inward." Then, when the music stops, Doc rises, opens a book, and reads a long and nostalgic poem about lost love, memory, and the past. When he stops, almost everyone is crying. "Hazel was so taken by the sound of the words that he had not listened to their meaning," Steinbeck notes. "But a little world sadness had slipped over all of them. Everyone was remembering a lost love, everyone a call."

Once again, Steinbeck showcases the ways in which melancholy and happiness can mix with one another. In particular, the characters at Doc's party experience a "little world [of] sadness," but no one seems to think this is unpleasant. In fact, the general reaction is quite positive, as each person revels in the memory of a "lost love."

"Jesus, that's pretty," Mack says. "Reminds me of a dame—" but he stops short. As the guests refill their glasses, they grow quiet. "The party was slipping away in sweet sadness," Steinbeck notes. Just then, though, a group of men who work on a "tuna boat" come clomping up the steps asking, "Where's the girls?" When Mack asks these men what they're talking about, they say, "Ain't this a whore house?" "You made a mistake, Mister," Mack says, his tone curiously happy. "Well, what's them dames in there?" one of the men says, pointing at Dora Flood's prostitutes. "They joined battle then," Steinbeck writes. "Dora leaped for the kitchen and came roaring out with a meat grinder. Even Doc was happy. He flailed about with the Chalmers 1916 piston and connecting rod."

When Steinbeck writes that the party "slip[s] away in sweet sadness," he perfectly articulates the way that sadness can combine with a certain pleasant feeling, one that recalls the overall sensation of "well-being" that Henri experiences when he cries his "luxurious" tears after his lovers leave him. Despite this feeling of melancholy contentment, though, it's worth noting that the people at Doc's party eagerly welcome the opportunity to forget about their nostalgic sadness by fighting, as Steinbeck once again frames physical conflict as potentially cathartic and joyful instead of malicious and wrong.

"It was a good fight," though there is extensive damage to Doc's laboratory. Eventually, the men from the "tuna boat" are beaten, at which point police sirens echo throughout Cannery Row, prompting the partygoers to hide in Western Biological, giggling all the while. When the coast is clear, though, they begin partying once more, and the police officers loop back, though they only join the festivities. In fact, even the men from the "tuna boat" return and are "embraced" and welcomed into the party. "Doc sitting cross-legged on the table smiled and tapped his fingers gently on his knee." As he watches the party rage on, someone lights "the twenty-five-foot string of firecrackers."

Steinbeck describes a scene of utter chaos. Interestingly enough, this party doesn't seem much different than the last one Mack and the boys threw in Western Biological, but this time there is a crucial distinction: Mack and his friends haven't lost sight of their intentions to celebrate Doc (and Doc is actually present). Indeed, Doc is having a fantastic time. Although Mack and his crew were perhaps misguided when they tried to throw Doc his first party, there's no denying that they were right to think he would enjoy such a spectacle. In this way, Steinbeck proves that their intentions have been good for the entirety of the novel, though they are only now able to bring these intentions to full fruition.

CHAPTER 31

Steinbeck writes about a "well-known gopher" living in "a thicket of mallow weeds" in Cannery Row. The gopher is quite happy with this living arrangement, for the soil is good, there aren't any nearby traps, and the local cats aren't interested in killing him. However, the gopher becomes "impatient" because he can't find a female companion. "He sat in the entrance of his hole in the morning and made penetrating squeaks that are inaudible to the human ear but can be heard deep in the earth by other gophers." Unfortunately, though, no female appears, so he emerges and finds another gopher hole, into which he pokes his head and—though he smells a female—is mauled by another male who bites off two of his toes. After recovering in his own hole, the gopher eventually moves to a garden, where he's surrounded by traps.

In the penultimate chapter of Cannery Row, *Steinbeck crafts a portrait of loneliness by focusing not on his human subjects, but on the animal kingdom. In doing so, he manages to convey a message upholding that loneliness and the desire to be loved are both universal parts of being alive. Indeed, even gophers experience the melancholy that comes along with living in solitude. The gopher must leave his perfect hole and live in a more dangerous place in order to find companionship, ultimately suggesting that living comfortably isn't always the best way to connect with others. Readers can apply this to human life by considering the fact that greed often cuts people off from the things that matter most in life: community, love, and interpersonal connection.*

CHAPTER 32

The morning after the party, Doc wakes up and finds lipstick on his beard. Looking around, he surveys the damage and smells a combination of firecrackers, wine, whiskey, and perfume. Rising, he walks to Lee's to buy beer. "Good time?" Lee asks. "Good time!" he replies before returning to the laboratory. On his way, he hears "cool, soft, soothing music" in his mind. After doing a bit of tidying up in Western Biological, he puts on a record of Gregorian music and washes dishes. Then, when the record finishes, he picks up the book of poetry he read the night before and reads aloud once again. Putting the book aside, he returns to the kitchen sink and continues reciting the poetry as he runs the water. "Even now / I know that I have savored the hot taste of life," he delivers, wiping tears from his eyes.

The poem that Doc reads both at the party and to himself the following morning is an eleventh-century Sanskrit poem known (in English) as "Black Marigolds." The poem is largely about a condemned man's love for a young princess, and, as such, deals rather heavily with nostalgia. When Doc recites the lines, "Even now / I know that I have savored the hot taste of life," readers will recognize the mixture of melancholy and happiness that defines Cannery Row, *since the poem celebrates the beauty of life (the "hot taste") while insinuating the sad fact that the experience of being alive is fleeting and often painful. Happy to be alive but sensitive to life's tribulations, then, Doc is able to fully appreciate the human experience, which is emotionally charged and wonderfully complex.*

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