

Half of Paradise Study Guide

Half of Paradise by James Lee Burke

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Plot Summary

Half of Paradise is the first book written by twenty-something James Lee Burke. Burke would go on to become a prolific novelist.

The book is focused on the lives of three men: Avery Broussard, J.P. Winfield, and Toussaint Boudreaux. The men have little in common except that their actions and circumstances take them to places heretofore unknown. None fares well in the end.

Avery Broussard is the first character mentioned in the book and one of the three main subjects in the book. The book begins with a relatively young Broussard returning home from a six month stint on the oil rigs. Broussard had left the farm in rural Louisiana to see a bit of the world. For six months, Broussard worked on the rigs on the Gulf Coast, but now the job was done. Broussard takes up where he left off on the family farm, doing his best to save the last remaining piece of the once admirable sugarcane plantation. After Broussard's father dies, it seems that the family legacy also dies. Eventually, Broussard loses the farm.

Broussard is an alcoholic that does not always make the best judgments. One night while sitting with an old moonshiner, things go awry and Broussard is arrested for running moonshine. Broussard is sentenced to one to three years in a work camp. Broussard meets up with one of the others arrested that night, a crazy war veteran named LeBlanc. LeBlanc is combative and filled with rage, eager to lash out at anyone.

After a year, Broussard is released from jail. He goes to New Orleans, finds a job and rekindles an old romance. One night Broussard is arrested for a number of crimes involving alcohol and is sent back to the work camp.

The second character mentioned in the book is J.P. Winfield.

J.P. Winfield is an overnight success. After winning a rigged audition, Winfield is hired by Virdo Hunnicut. He begins playing in every club, hall and juke joint throughout the southern states. The road and hectic are taking its toll on Winfield and it is obvious that he is suffering from exhaustion. One night April, a girl with questionable moral fiber summons Winfield. April offers Winfield an introduction to Doc Elgin, a man that would be able to help Winfield with his problems. Winfield takes the Benzedrine offered by Elgin and quickly gives in to April's proposition.

Winfield's life is a whirlwind from the moment on. First Winfield learns that he will be the new sponsor for Live-Again, a new vitamin tonic water. Winfield will also travel with Jim Lathrop, a politician vying for a spot in the Senate. As Winfield's career takes off, he becomes addicted to drugs. Winfield becomes more famous; the drugs take a stronger hold.



Eventually, Winfield finds himself married to April, strung out most of the time, and seems to be throwing his career down the toilet. The end comes for Winfield when he has a drug-induced heart attack on the street. Winfield dies alone in the hospital.

The third and final character in the book is Toussaint Boudreaux.

Toussaint Boudreaux is an African American longshoreman with a gift for fighting. At thirty years old, Boudreaux has little time left to prove himself in the ring and make his name in the big time before his career is over.

In a time when it was not entirely common for blacks and whites to work together, Boudreaux forged a place for himself among the other longshoremen. It is not the ideal job for Boudreaux, but moving to New Orleans from a small town meant that one had to take whatever work was available.

Beside Boudreaux is his trainer, Archie. Boudreaux sees his chances fading after he breaks his hand in the ring, jeopardizing his chances for the big time. The future looks even bleaker when Boudreaux is imprisoned for a crime he did not commit.

Boudreaux is sentenced for the crime and will serve up to fifteen years in work camp. The book details Boudreaux's daily life in the camp until the day he escapes. Boudreaux is killed while attempting to return home to Baratavia.



Book 1, Summer's Dust

Book 1, Summer's Dust Summary

The first chapter of *Half of Paradise* by James Lee Burke focuses on Avery Broussard. Avery Broussard is the first character mentioned in the book and one of the three main subjects in the book. Broussard is a relatively young man, returning home from a six month stint on the oil rigs. Broussard had left the farm in rural Louisiana to see a bit of the world. For six months Broussard worked on the rigs on the Gulf Coast, but now the job was done. Broussard has mixed feelings about leaving the Gulf and returning to the family farm, a place once glorious but now on the verge of bankruptcy. Broussard spent the last of his money on a bottle of booze to drink on the way back to the farm. Broussard's drinking has worsened since he left the farm and it is apparent to all those around him even though he denies it.

Broussard is the only remaining child in the family since his brother was killed in Normandy. Broussard's father, Rafael, wants the best for Avery, but wants his son to do everything his way. Avery often balks at his father's unsolicited advice. Batiste is on hand to smooth the waters when necessary.

Avery's return to the farm was fortuitous. The money he earned on the rigs would help to pay the lands taxes, secure a second mortgage and permit the purchase of seed, fertilizer, and a tractor with which to plant sugarcane.

Father and son work diligently six days a week in the fields. Rafael dies of a heart attack. Batiste is crushed. After Mr. Broussard dies, Avery stays on to try to finish what he and his father started, a renovation and revitalization of the farm.

Chapter two focuses on J.P. Winfield. J.P. Winfield is a poorer than dirt hillbilly musician that wants nothing more than to make it to the big time, out of his hometown and soon-to-be former life. At this point in his life J.P. has never been more than sixty miles from home. At the age of twenty-seven, Winfield decides to take his first significant trek from home to audition for Louisiana Jubilee, a talent show that could springboard him to the big time. J.P. Winfield is a fish out of water in the audition. His only suit is cheaply made and threadbare. His shoes are unshined and falling apart at the seams. The clip-on bow tie he wears does little to polish the overall look. Still, Winfield is determined to push his nervousness aside and go after his dream.

Despite ill-treatment by Troy and skepticism from the other participants in the showcase, J.P. goes on to win and secures a job with Hunnicut on the Louisiana Jubilee. Winfield asks for an advance on his first pay and intends to spend the night getting drunk and in the company of a prostitute.



Chapter three introduces Toussaint Boudreaux, an African American longshoreman with a gift for fighting. At thirty years old, Boudreaux has little time left to prove himself in the ring and make his name in the big time before his career is over.

In a time when it was not entirely common for blacks and whites to work together, Boudreaux forged a place for himself among the other longshoremen. It is not the ideal job for Boudreaux, but moving to New Orleans from the small town of Barataria meant that one had to take whatever work was available. Those that went up against Boudreaux quickly learned it was a mistake, as the man could certainly hold his own in a fight. Boudreaux is a hard worker, determined to do everything he can to make his dream come true.

After a long hard day at the docks, Boudreaux goes in to town to prepare for his bout with an Italian heavyweight named Pepponi. Pepponi is only a couple of pounds heavier than Boudreaux, but Pepponi's reach is much longer, meaning that Boudreaux will have to work hard to get underneath the man's punches. The fight is long and hard and Boudreaux gets injured in the third round. Determination allows Boudreaux to stick it out and win the fight. Toward the end of the fight, Boudreaux realizes that his hand is broken and that in one fell swoop he may have ended his boxing career.

Boudreaux is tended to by his trainer Archie. Boudreaux's manager, Ruth, gives Boudreaux money to hold him over until his hand heals. Although no promises are made, Ruth tells Boudreaux to return to the ring after his hand is healed and he may get another shot at a high paying bout.

After being tended to by the doctor, Boudreaux goes to his tenement house apartment and ponders his fate. "Outside in the alley he heard drunken voices and the rattling of garbage cans. He looked up to the darkness and thought of his home in Barataria, south of New Orleans. He wondered if he would ever go back" (p. 47).

Boudreaux's broken hand means that his job at the docks is over. The next day he goes to look for a job, but there is nothing available on the first day for a man with a broken hand. On the third day, Boudreaux lands a job as a stock boy in a clothing store.

Two weeks go by and Boudreaux continues to look for work. Boudreaux is sitting in a pool hall reading the want ads when he is approached by a man asking about his hand. The man offers Boudreaux a job driving a truck. Boudreaux accepts the job at the Bonham Shipping Company and negotiates a wage for hauling a blind load across state lines.

Book 1, Summer's Dust Analysis

The first section, Summer's Dust, introduces the three main characters and subjects of the book: Avery Broussard, J.P. Winfield, and Toussaint Boudreaux.

Avery Broussard is a restless young man that has begun a battle with alcohol. Despite his father Rafael's attempts, Avery takes part in activities harmful to his health. Rafael



worries about his son, particularly since the boy was raised without a mother and is the only remaining child in the family. Rafael clearly mourns the son killed in Normandy and concentrates extra efforts to keep Avery on the straight and narrow.

Avery is resistant to his father's desires. Avery undergoes a noticeable personality change when he returns to Broussard Farm, becoming more of a son than of an independent man. Batiste is the peacemaker between the father and son and it is clear that Batiste's opinion matters greatly to both.

J.P. Winfield is desperate to get into the music business and proves early on that he will do whatever it takes to make it. Winfield tolerates Troy's ill-treatment and the snickers of others over his appearance and apparent nervousness. Still, Winfield is determined and greatly relieved when he learns he got the job to tour with the Louisiana Jubilee. Winfield's thick skin will serve him well in the business but it may also hurt him as the tendency to overindulge is already apparent, and being thick skinned may keep Winfield from accepting well placed advice.

Toussaint Boudreaux is a man grasping at a dream; a dream that may be slipping away faster than he knows. Boxing is Boudreaux's passion, and everything else is simply a necessary evil. Boudreaux faces a personal crisis when his hand is broken.

The meeting between Boudreaux, Erwin and Bonham is a turning point in Boudreaux's life. The man exercises bad judgment in accepting a job delivering unknown goods across state lines, a job that may land him in jail.



Book 2 Chapters 1-2

Book 2 Chapters 1-2 Summary

Avery Boussard: Avery is sitting around a campfire with a bootlegger name Tereau. Tereau is three parts Negro, one part Chitimacha Indian. No one knows how old Tereau is, but Avery thinks to himself that a Negro must be mighty old before he turns gray. Tereau is waiting for people to buy and haul away his moonshine. Tereau is unsure why Avery would want to be a part of an illegal operation since he has not broken the law before. Avery says that ever since the farm was taken away from him there was little else to do.

The men chat until LeBlanc and Gerard arrive. The bootleggers are cautious to the point of paranoia regarding the presence of the state police on the river. One bootlegger suggests scrapping the whole deal, which seems to be fine with Tereau.

LeBlanc and Gerard decide to take the moonshine and go out onto the river anyway. LeBlanc is nervous and is convinced they are being watched. The boat takes off, and for the first time, the bootleggers shoot at the police boat. Tereau and Avery rush to get away but have an accident with the wagon. The wagon is incapacitated, the mules have to be put down, and Tereau is too injured to go on. Avery insists on saving Tereau.

Tereau is safely ensconced in the safety of an old tree by the river where he will wait for old man Landry to rescue him in the morning. Avery makes his escape. Along the way, Avery can see that LeBlanc has been apprehended by the state police. Avery overhears that Gerard tried to swim away and most likely drowned. LeBlanc refuses to tell the cops where the others went.

Just before dawn, Avery sits down on the other side of the marsh, convinced that he is almost in the clear. A flashlight shines down on him from the bank and Avery is face to face with a revolver being held by a cop.

J.P Winfield: J.P Winfield is an overnight success. He begins playing in every club, hall and juke joint throughout the southern states. The road and hectic are taking its toll on Winfield and it is obvious that he is suffering from exhaustion. One night, April summons Winfield. April offers Winfield an introduction to Doc Elgin, a man that would be able to help Winfield with his problems. Winfield goes with April to her hotel room to meet with Elgin. After hearing about Winfield's issues Elgin offers the rising start some Benzedrine, a stimulant, with the assurance that it will not harm Winfield but it would get him through the worst of the fatigue.

Winfield takes the Benzedrine and quickly gives in to April's proposition. Afterward Winfield tries to rest to no avail. Winfield goes to his meeting with Hunnicut and learns that he has been booked to go to Nashville that night. Winfield will be the new sponsor for Live-Again, a new vitamin tonic water. Winfield balks at the order and refuses to go,



citing fatigue. Even a \$400 advance does not seem to pique Winfield's interest. After a long conversation, Winfield finds himself on a train to Nashville.

Toussaint Boudreaux: Boudreaux goes to his first day of work at Bonham Shipping Company. Boudreaux is not told where he is going, just that he needs to get to Mobile as quickly as possible and that a map in the glove compartment would give him the rest of the directions. Boudreaux is immediately suspicious of the behaviors of Bonham and his people. Asking questions only annoys everyone, and in the end Boudreaux takes the truck and goes out on the open road.

The driver that was supposed to follow Boudreaux to Mobile waits half an hour before leaving the parking lot. The driver does not know that Boudreaux has stopped alongside the road and is waiting for him. The other driver is angry at Boudreaux but permits the new man to follow him to Mobile. However, Boudreaux quickly learns that the man has no intention of allowing him to keep pace. Boudreaux's truck has a governor on it so that it cannot go above 50 MPH. The other truck takes off, going at least 70 MPH, and disappears from view almost immediately.

Boudreaux finally decides to see what he is hauling and breaks into the truck. There are crates filled with animal furs and pelts. Boudreaux is puzzled. Just as Boudreaux decides to abandon the truck, he is approached by two police officers. Boudreaux learns that the truck and pelts are part of a robbery. Boudreaux is arrested.

Book 2 Chapters 1-2 Analysis

Avery begins to make more bad choices when he decides to keep company with an old bootlegger. There are many bootleggers that appear throughout the story, peddling moonshine across state lines and into dry counties throughout the south. LeBlanc and Gerard, two bootleggers that intend to buy Tereau's whiskey, approach the pair and prepare to take possession of the goods. Tereau is paid, and despite the instincts of LeBlanc, the men take off. The whole thing goes south when the men fire at the police boat.

Tereau and Avery are in a panic, and with good reason. The attempt to get away quickly is necessary, but Tereau drives too recklessly to do any good. Tereau gives up almost immediately but Avery cannot, in all good conscience, leave the old man. LeBlanc is incensed when he is caught and refuses to help the police. Avery, still in a panic, thinks he has managed to get away. He has not. Avery is filled with dread over his predicament.

J.P. Winfield takes the first big step down the wrong path when he accepts the Benezdrine from Doc Elgin. It is clear that the Doc is not an entirely upstanding man and has done this sort of thing before. April is also a metaphor for Winfield's upcoming problems, but Winfield seems almost powerless to stay away.

The scene between Winfield and Hunnicut is telling. Hunnicut bought Winfield's soul with the contract and intends to sell Winfield's talents whenever and wherever it suits

him best. Although Winfield balks, he is between a rock and a hard place and eventually gives into going to Nashville.

Boudreaux wholly ignores his instincts regarding his employment with Bonham. It is true that he needs the money, but the behaviors of the other employees and Bonham himself should have caused Boudreaux to turn the other way and fast. Boudreaux chooses to take the money and ignore his gut instinct until he is out on the road. The behavior of the second driver is even more telling and it becomes clear to Boudreaux that he is being set up for something. Boudreaux is baffled by the news of the robbery, but instantly knows that he will take the fall.



Book II, Big Midnight Special, Chapters 1-3

Book II, Big Midnight Special, Chapters 1-3 Summary

Avery Broussard: Broussard ends up in the drunk tank in the local jail. The trial had been over for a week. As suspected, Broussard pleads guilty and is sentenced to one to three years in a penal work camp for running moonshine. LeBlanc is also convicted of running moonshine. LeBlanc is sentenced to the same one to three years, with an additional seven years for armed assault.

The other inmates take an instant dislike to LeBlanc and therefore, Avery. LeBlanc causes trouble from the moment he goes inside and ends up spending a lot of time in solitary confinement. There are many fights between the other inmates and LeBlanc. Avery tries to explain that LeBlanc "ain't right in the head" since he came back from the war. No one seems to care.

The animosity increases to such a level that LeBlanc is nearly beaten to death by a con name Big Johnny. The warden attempts once again to punish the men. LeBlanc is taken away by ambulance and Avery is separated from the rest of the population until he can be picked up the next day to go to the work camp. Batiste visits Avery but is denied permission to see him or leave the items he brought along with him from the parish.

J.P. Winfield: J.P. continues to do well in Nashville. He has a daily radio show and his career is getting bigger by the day. Winfield is having lunch when he receives a telegram from Hunnicut. Hunnicut has big news and wants Winfield to return to Louisiana. Winfield wants to know why. Hunnicut says that they will be campaigning for Lathrop, a political running for the Senate. Winfield objects saying he knows nothing about politics. Hunnicut says he doesn't have to know anything about politics, just come back to Louisiana.

When Winfield gets back to New Orleans he learns that Troy has been put into the "junkie ward" in the hospital because he has been mainlining heroin and finally went off the deep end. On the way to Hunnicut's room, Winfield runs into Seth. During their conversation, Seth tells Winfield that Elgin is a quack and is sleeping with April.

Lathrop wants Winfield to write a song for his campaign. Winfield argues that he is not a songwriter. Hunnicut insists and reminds Winfield that it was Lathrop's influence that got him the gig in Nashville.

Winfield goes to see April. By this time he is starting to suffer from withdrawal since he took the last of his pills on the train. Winfield tells April about his drug use. April encourages him to switch to cocaine, but Winfield is not interested. After making love to April, Winfield takes the cocaine while waiting for Elgin to arrive.



The political campaign begins.

Toussaint Boudreaux: Boudreaux stands in line for roll call at the work camp. Boudreaux is supposed to be in detention for fighting, but someone else has taken his place so he is back on gang five, a group of seven prisoners that will be turned out on work detail for the day. A new man has joined gang five, a man named Avery Broussard. Broussard does not get off on the right foot with the gang commander.

Burke describes the barren work camp and its facilities, from the barren earth to the blazing hot sun. Each of the seven men is discussed in brief, including Big Daddy, a prisoner that knew John Dillinger.

The men talk about their lives as they use shovels and picks to dig ditches. Two of the men plan to break out. Once again Boudreaux butts heads with Evans and Evans threatens to send him to detention. Boudreaux could not care less.

Boudreaux meets Broussard. LeBlanc was also supposed to be present but remains in the hospital after the run in with Big Johnny. Boudreaux and Broussard talk. Boudreaux gives Broussard advice on how to work a pick without getting exhausted.

During their off time the men play poker and dice games. General day to day activities are covered.

Three weeks into Broussard's stay at the work camp, LeBlanc arrives. LeBlanc's reputation precedes him and it is clear that there will be trouble.

During the first day down in the trenches, LeBlanc demands a drink of water. The trusty brings the water barrel. The water has come from the swamp and is not fit to drink. The men typically drink it because it is all they have. The condition of the water explains why the men frequently contract dysentery.

LeBlanc refuses to drink the water and a fight ensues. LeBlanc demands clean water, or else the trusty and Evans will be forced to drink the tainted water. A huge row occurs and LeBlanc tries to attack Evans. Broussard tries to get LeBlanc to calm down, but to no avail. LeBlanc is hauled away.

Book II, Big Midnight Special, Chapters 1-3 Analysis

Despite the dire nature of his circumstances, Avery is still trying to make the best of his situation. He feels the need to protect LeBlanc from himself as much as from the others, but to no avail. The animosity between the older inmates and LeBlanc continues to accelerate until there is physical violence. Nothing the warden does seems to stop the problems.

Warden Leander is a hard man that will not take any guff from his prisoners and works hard to prove that fact.



The situation worsens when LeBlanc and Big Johnny get into a fight. The outcome is so severe that even Big Johnny cannot get away with it. LeBlanc's condition, particularly the internal bleeding, makes the reader wonder if he can or will survive.

Leander tries to assert his authority over everyone he comes in contact with showing off his ego and control issues. Batiste is also punished by the recent activity because he is denied a visit with Avery, something that Avery could use more than anyone knows.

Winfield is beginning to sink into his addiction. He has not been on the scene long and he is already looking for a way to get away. Winfield begins taking more drugs and his behavior is affected in a negative way. Winfield snaps at Seth for the remarks he makes about April because he foolishly believes that he and April have something together. Winfield does not want to hear bad things about Doc, either. Seth can tell that Winfield is in trouble. Hunnicut also sees the changes in Winfield's behavior and does not like it. Although Winfield is angry with Seth for making the remarks about April, it is clear that Winfield realizes that Seth is right.

Many of the men at the work camp seem to have settled in and are doing what it takes to keep below the radar and do their time. Boudreaux has been known to cause trouble and does not seem to care if he gets sent to detention, which is a common occurrence.

Boudreaux meets Broussard and the men discuss their circumstances. Some type of bond is formed because of where they were raised. Boudreaux offers advice to Broussard, which Broussard resents.

LeBlanc arrives like a wild tornado. It does not take long until LeBlanc is causing trouble, making threats, and alienating everyone around him. It seems that LeBlanc has no emotion or control, intimating that his condition is getting worse and that his situation is causing even more rage than he had before. The reader is left to wonder what will happen to LeBlanc after he threatens Evans and is taken away. It seems that LeBlanc's stay at the work camp will be short.



Book II, Big Midnight Special, Chapter 4

Book II, Big Midnight Special, Chapter 4 Summary

Avery Broussard: It is the next day and Broussard, Boudreaux and the other inmates from gang five are cleaning their barracks. There is a five o'clock inspection and the men are determined to be prepared. Broussard and Boudreaux discuss the unrelenting heat and the fact that LeBlanc was forced to stay overnight in detention, known as "the box". It is against regulations for someone to be kept there overnight. The men say that no one can stay in the box for two days. The temperature inside is at least 100 degrees.

Broussard speaks to Benoit about purchasing a knife. Benoit says he has no knife. Broussard presses the issue. Benoit reiterates that there is no knife, and even if there was, Broussard cannot have it. Broussard offers Benoit \$2 for the knife. Again, Benoit refuses. Broussard guesses that Benoit is going to give the knife to Billy Jo as payment for a gambling debt incurred the night before. Broussard tells Benoit that Billy Jo will sell the knife to LeBlanc. LeBlanc plans to take the knife and use it to kill Evans. Broussard is trying to prevent the murder. As a last ditch effort, Broussard points out to Benoit that if the murder occurs the jailers will easily connect the knife to Benoit. Benoit will most likely spend twenty years for his part in the murder, if he makes it out at all.

LeBlanc is brought back to the barracks. He is badly burned, weak, and filled with rage. The other inmates tend to LeBlanc the best they can. LeBlanc tells Evans that he intends to kill him.

The rains finally come and the work must be stopped because of the torrential downpour. Visibility is almost nil, and some of the gangs get mixed up and cannot find their way back. Benoit is in this group and no one cares enough to help him get out of the ditch. Evans does not care that Benoit is with his gang five and not with gang three.

One by one, the men help each other out of the ditch. When everyone is out and assembled it is clear that Billy Jo and Jeffry are missing. The other gangs are searched and it is discovered that the men finally went through with their escape plan. The men had talked about their escape for a long while. The day had finally come and only one or two of the gang actually saw them leave. Evans goes into a rage, saying that the other men knew about the escape and would pay. LeBlanc threatens Evans again, saying that it doesn't matter what Evans does or thinks because he won't be alive much longer.

The men are forced to stand out in the cold rain while Evans and another guard go after the escapees. Daddy Claxton complains about being cold and wet. As an old man, Claxton gets sick easily and tells the guard that he cannot recover from another bout of pneumonia. The guard says he would help if he could.



Brother Samuel says that the men have been caught. He had tried to heal Billy Jo, but he still had a spirit in him, as evidenced by the devil wart on his hand. Brother Samuel believes that the men are standing before their judgment day.

Hours go by and the rain lets up only slightly. LeBlanc continues to snip at Rainack, getting himself in more and more trouble. Unlike Evans, Rainack is not easily ruffled. LeBlanc continues on with his threats, going so far as to threaten Rainack if Claxton isn't allowed to get back on the bus. The other men badger Rainack as well, saying that he will kill Claxton by making him stand out in the rain just as surely as if he pitched the old man in a ditch.

There are shots fired relatively close to where the bus is parked. Claxton thinks the shots are too close to have been fired at Billy Jo and Jeffry. Eventually, Evans and the deputies come back and announce that the escapees have been shot and killed. Evans makes the men look at the bodies of Billy Jo and Jeffry to show that attempting to escape is futile.

LeBlanc says he plans to kill Evans. Another fight begins. This time LeBlanc jumps on Evans and begins choking him. LeBlanc is angry because this is not the way he wants to kill Evans. The deputies hit LeBlanc repeatedly until he lets go.

Book II, Big Midnight Special, Chapter 4 Analysis

Broussard continues to try and protect LeBlanc, although his motives are unclear. The bond formed in the bayou was not a strong one and it seems that LeBlanc is likely to rebuff and aid from his fellow moonshiner.

It is clear that Broussard is one of the more intelligent inmates, although his logic is often lost on the other men.

LeBlanc's behavior gets increasingly worse and he acts out more than ever. LeBlanc enjoys instigating arguments and pushing people beyond their limits. He especially enjoys tormenting Evans, who is weak in LeBlanc's eyes.

The treatment of the prisoners is cruel as they are forced to stand in the rain. Burke creates Rainack as a character that would be almost sympathetic to Claxton's needs if he would not get into trouble. As the men wait, Claxton becomes ill.

Evans' behavior upon his return from the woods is confrontational and filled with an overinflated ego. Evans baits the men and yet is still surprised when LeBlanc attacks.



Book II, Big Midnight Special, Chapter 5

Book II, Big Midnight Special, Chapter 5 Summary

J.P. Winfield: Lathrop's campaign returns to New Orleans. Lathrop is determined to win the Negro vote in any way he can. Lathrop will make promises he may or may not keep, put on a big smile and give the people wine until they will agree to almost anything.

Winfield is along for the ride, performing the song he did not want to write for Lathrop's campaign. Winfield goes back to his hotel and walks to April's room. April is in the shower. Winfield calls Elgin and demands that Elgin visit and bring more drugs. Elgin reminds Winfield that he still owes for the last two deliveries and that he has many other people to see. In the end, Elgin agrees to arrive the next day.

Winfield's addiction to cocaine has worsened, although it is not as severe as April's situation. Winfield waits for April to come out of the shower. The couple talks and Winfield takes the last of his stash. April wants to know when Winfield is going to start to mainline because he can't continue to eat his "candy" forever, that too much "sugar" will make him sick. April does a mainline for Winfield, who goes into a drug-induced stupor. The next morning, Winfield is furious at April for the drugs she shot into his system. April laughs at Winfield and says he should be nice to the woman he is going to marry. April is pregnant.

April insists on getting married, but Winfield is not too keen on the idea. On the day they go to the courthouse to apply for their license, Winfield gets drunk. After paying for the license, he leaves April to go to a bar where he can get a prostitute. Three days later Winfield and April get married.

Book II, Big Midnight Special, Chapter 5 Analysis

Winfield is to the point that he is almost on autopilot, simply doing what he is told to do. Winfield was first controlled by Hunnicut, then by Lathrop, the drugs, and finally, April. Winfield's drug habit is getting increasingly worse, and when he is not taking drugs, he is drinking. Winfield also shows a lack of concern or interest about anything beyond his weekly supply from Elgin.

Once again April shows that she is an opportunistic woman that will do anything for money, from selling drugs to prostituting to getting pregnant.



Book II, Big Midnight Special, Chapter 6

Book II, Big Midnight Special, Chapter 6 Summary

Avery Broussard: After serving a year and five weeks, Avery Broussard is up for parole. In Broussard's favor, Evans was too lazy to ever file any reports on the people in gang five, so Broussard's record is clean. Broussard worked out in the ditches until a guard came to get him at noon. The parole board met on Fridays at the warden's house. The board members are an expressionless group that show no emotion when they speak regardless of the topic. Broussard is asked a series of questions and answers each to the board's satisfaction. Broussard is informed that he had only served one year, a third of his sentence, because he had stayed out of trouble and had obviously made a mistake when he was younger. Broussard deserved another chance. As soon as the decision is approved, Broussard would be released. A guard tells Broussard that it typically takes four or five days to receive the official release.

On Broussard's last day, he collected his belongings from the trusty that had taken them when he first arrived. It was noted that Broussard was most likely the only person who would ever leave gang five, as it was for lifers and troublemakers. Billy Jo and Jeffry were dead; LeBlanc was locked up in the "nut house"; and although Boudreaux would be eligible for parole, it would be a long time in coming.

Broussard says goodbye to Boudreaux and says that he would see him again some day in New Orleans.

Broussard is taken to the front gate and let loose. The guard makes a comment about a return visit. Broussard hitchhikes to the main road. While waiting for someone to pick him up, Broussard drinks a pint of whiskey. Although it is not as good as old Tereau's stuff, it pleases Broussard just the same.

Broussard ends up in New Orleans, where he finds a cheap place to stay and work as a welder on a pipeline. One night, Broussard is walking around in the Quarter and goes into a bar for a drink and to hear the musicians play. There Broussard meets Wally, a semi-refined man who asks to borrow money. The men end up walking around the city together, drinking, and then they end up at a party. Broussard sees Suzanne at the party. The couple leaves and they go to Café du Monde to catch up on old times. Suzanne is sad to see that Broussard is drinking again. Regardless, Suzanne invites Broussard to dinner the following night.

Book II, Big Midnight Special, Chapter 6 Analysis

Broussard begins to make the best of his situation by getting a job. It turns quickly, however, when the drink becomes a main focus once more. Broussard loses focus quickly and always seems to be out searching for some intangible thing he is not likely to find.



Wally is obviously a con man in a gentleman's suit. Like Broussard, Wally is a heavy drinker and will go wherever there is a party or free booze. Once at the party, Wally has no problem abandoning Broussard. This is fine with Broussard, since Wally keeps making strange and untrue statements about Broussard's life as a writer and romanticist.

Broussard may get another chance at a new life when Suzanne re-enters the picture.



Book III, When the Sun Begins to Shine, Chapter 1

Book III, When the Sun Begins to Shine, Chapter 1 Summary

Toussaint Boudreaux: Boudreaux and Brother Samuel are out in the fields clearing stumps when Boudreaux takes his chances at escape. The only guard in the area is Evans, and the others are far enough away that there will be plenty of time for Boudreaux to get away before anyone notices he is missing from gang five. Boudreaux and Brother Samuel pull out a large stump using a team of mules. Boudreaux puts the pieces into a wheelbarrow and takes them to the large fire where they will be burned to ash. Boudreaux keeps a piece of a limb in the bottom of the wheelbarrow and feigns having trouble with the front wheel. Evans barks at Boudreaux to fix the problem, but will not permit the man to go to the shack for a spare. As Evans draws close, Boudreaux hits him across the forehead with the limb. The limb breaks in Boudreaux's hand, but Evans goes down and stays there. Boudreaux makes his break.

Boudreaux runs through the woods until he hits the river. Boudreaux jumps in the river and crosses, knowing that the dogs will search the banks of the river before going over to the other side to try and regain the scent. This will buy more time. Boudreaux makes his way out onto the highway but does not dare to be seen. Boudreaux cuts through fields and basks in the glory of being in the sun without seeing other inmates, guards, barren soil or gray concrete buildings. Boudreaux must wait until dark before he can break into a local general store. While he waits, Boudreaux presses his face to the rich soil and tells himself that it would be no hardship to stay right there, in that place, forever.

Boudreaux has seen cops, but so far so good. Boudreaux breaks into the store and takes everything he thinks he will need on the run. Boudreaux plans to return to Baratara, where his family will hide him until the police have given up the search. After that, Boudreaux will leave the state.

Loaded up with new clothes, a gun, ammunition and food and water, Boudreaux locates a cabin where he can spend the night. Exhaustion has set in. The next day, Boudreaux is awakened by the sounds of barking dogs. Boudreaux flees the cabin, leaving everything behind. The dogs are relentless and Boudreaux is almost caught as he crosses a dry river bed.

Boudreaux continues to run, but the police are closing in. Shots miss Boudreaux by inches. Boudreaux knows that if he can get to the top of the slope, he will be safe until morning. The police would have two options: they could put themselves out in the open and charge up the slope to face Boudreaux or approach from behind through the marsh. Both were ruled out. Charging the slope would mean suicide. The marsh was so low,



sandy and cluttered with logs that it would take at least twelve hours to get to Boudreaux's location. The police settle in for the night.

Boudreaux needs water more than he needs to rest. Boudreaux tells himself that he can battle mosquitoes and hunger, but the brutal July heat requires water. Although drinking swamp water is bad, it is all there is at hand. Boudreaux soaks a shirt in it and also drinks. It is not long before Boudreaux knows that swamp fever is coming on as his vision blurs, dizziness sets in and there are pains in his abdomen that remind him of having a hot piece of metal twisted in his gut. Boudreaux begins to wonder if he can make it out alive.

Dawn comes and the police come after Boudreaux. The pain is still there, cramping his entire body, but the worst of the fever is gone. Still, there is no way Boudreaux could run. He keeps to his plan to face off with the police on the top of the slope. Shots are exchanged. Several of the troopers are shot. Evans releases two dogs, both of which get to Boudreaux. Boudreaux does not want to hurt the animals but has no choice. Eventually, Boudreaux runs out of ammunition. The shots from the machine guns come closer. At the last minute before Boudreaux is shot, he decides not to shoot Evans who is directly in his sights. Boudreaux knows that there will always be another Evans. Boudreaux is shot in the stomach and dies.

Book III, When the Sun Begins to Shine, Chapter 1 Analysis

It is unclear why Boudreaux decides to escape from the work camp knowing the odds are stacked heavily in favor of the troopers. Boudreaux knows the land and feels that it will give him an advantage after a decent head start. Being out in the world again is a blessing for Boudreaux, who swears that nothing was this beautiful and rich before he went into prison.

The reader begins to root for Boudreaux as he finds the cabin and takes refuge for the night. Boudreaux's plan is a good one, but he underestimates the strategy set forth by the troopers. Still, Boudreaux thinks he can make it. Ironically, Boudreaux may have made it. Swamp fever incapacitated Boudreaux and was a main factor in getting the man killed.

In the end, Boudreaux accepts his fate with grace.



Book III, When the Sun Begins to Shine, Chapter 2

Book III, When the Sun Begins to Shine, Chapter 2 Summary

J.P. Winfield: Winfield goes to see a doctor, complaining of blackouts. The doctor asks why Winfield thinks he is blacking out and Winfield claims not to know. Winfield admits to taking barbiturates but denies taking anything stronger. Winfield explains that he has been taking the drugs for a long time and is clearly addicted but needs them to support his lifestyle and career as a singer. The doctor tells Winfield he needs to stop.

The doctor gives Winfield a check up. The first problem is that Winfield's blood pressure is too high. The second issue is that Winfield has a heart murmur. The doctor explains why Winfield needs to give up the drugs that the stimulants put too much strain on the heart. Winfield says he doesn't think he can quit. The doctor offers to put Winfield in touch with a doctor at a private hospital where they deal with cases such as this, but Winfield refuses. The doctor sends Winfield on his way.

On the way out of the doctor's office, Winfield recalls April's story of being in treatment. She was confined to a small room, subjected to shock treatments, and was eventually weaned off the drugs. A couple of weeks after April left the hospital, she was hooked again. Winfield tells himself he cannot bear to go through all of the physical and emotional torture and not see any results. Winfield is resigned to being hooked on the drugs.

Election Day comes and Lathrop wins by a landslide. Everyone is excited about the victory except for Winfield, who seems to care about almost nothing any more. Seth tries to get Winfield excited about the victory and talks about the bonuses and prostitutes promised to them. April comes in and argues with Seth and Winfield. April detests Seth, and Winfield often ends up in the middle.

Winfield tells April he has decided to go back home for a few days. April wants to go, but Winfield refuses. Winfield promises to be back before the Saturday show and leaves for the train station.

On the train ride to Louisiana, Winfield meets a trainman. The men hit it off and talk about travel and music. The trainman plays well and Winfield is pleased to have his company. After the trainman disembarks from the moving train, Winfield stands back and enjoys the night breeze as it hits his face. Winfield begins to think about all of the things he had planned. There were so many songs he had wanted to write about the countryside, the trains, and so many other things. Yet the only song Winfield had written was the campaign song for Lathrop. Winfield laments the lack of creativity and begins to see himself slipping away.



Winfield arrives in his hometown, unsure why he has made the trip. Winfield's father abandoned the family when J.P. was just a child. J.P.'s mother died from cancer. J.P. and his sister were raised on the family farm by an older brother. The brother was murdered for getting involved with a Negro woman. The sister became promiscuous. No matter how hard J.P. tried, the girl kept running off. The last time J.P. had heard, his sister was working in a brothel in Little Rock.

The town has not changed much. Winfield goes into the barbershop and runs into some old friends. The group sits around and talks for a while and then they go out for drinks. Winfield leaves as the others talk about putting together a game of craps. Winfield pays for the drinks and leaves the bar.

Winfield goes to the hardware store and buys bait and tackle. He spends the afternoon fishing on the river, making a decent catch of several fish. Winfield walks back into town and has a cook fry the fish in cornmeal. Later in the evening, Winfield goes back to the pool hall, as it is the only thing in town that is open.

A craps game is held at the pool hall. Winfield joins in and does not play well. After a while, Winfield and Clois leave the pool hall and go out to Miss Sarah's place on the highway. It had been a long time since Winfield had visited the brothel.

The men go into the brothel and chose their women. They return to the pool hall later that night and stay until it closes. The next morning, Winfield wakes with a bad hangover. After remedying himself as much as possible, Winfield returns to the river to spend another pleasant day fishing. Winfield asks a young Negro boy to take him to another location. The boy is hesitant because he does not want to get into trouble. Finally, the boy relents.

Winfield and the boy spend an hour and a half fishing with great enjoyment. At the end of the time, Winfield pays the boy the fifty cents they agreed on, and Winfield also gives the boy his tackle since Winfield would no longer need it.

It was not long before Winfield is back on the train to Nashville, high on cocaine, and lamenting the direction his life has taken. Winfield stays stoned on cocaine and whiskey for two days, not bothering to shower or change clothes. On Saturday, April tries to bring Winfield around for the evening performance. Winfield is surly and wants nothing to do with the performance. April tells Winfield that if the hicks knew about his real personality and lifestyle, his career would be over. In the end, Winfield goes on stage, although he is clearly not prepared to perform. Hunnicut does not see Winfield before he goes onstage, which is the only reason Winfield is allowed to go on. Winfield's playing is horrendous and the singing is equally bad. People in the wings tell Winfield to get off the stage. The crowd is not sure how to react. When it becomes clear that Winfield is not joking around, the crowd begins to boo Winfield off the stage.



Book III, When the Sun Begins to Shine, Chapter 2 Analysis

Winfield is burning out quickly and feels the need to get away from the life he always thought he wanted. Returning to his hometown seems like a good idea, although there is no one left there for him. The best time Winfield has on the trip back home is the conversation and impromptu jam session with the nameless trainman. It seems that the trainman is living the kind of vagabond life often romanticized in literature. The trainman disappears into the night, leaving Winfield to lament his lost dreams and wonder how his life could take such a drastic turn in two short years.

Winfield ends up running into old friends, but even that does not seem to satisfy him. The thing that seems to please Winfield the most is fishing on the river. Being on the river sitting, in the shade and catching various types of fish is the closest thing Winfield will ever get to being able to go home again. Even the wild night with Clois and the others cannot soothe Winfield's weary soul.

The experiences in his hometown, particularly the joy Winfield felt while fishing, are snapped off like a light when Winfield starts on the journey to return to his present life. Winfield tries to numb himself with alcohol and cocaine, staying wasted for two days. Winfield seems to care about nothing any more, even the performances. April tries to get Winfield together but only manages to get her husband to shower and change before going onstage. Winfield's disastrous performance will certainly have very severe consequences.



Book III, When the Sun Begins to Shine, Chapters 3-4

Book III, When the Sun Begins to Shine, Chapters 3-4 Summary

Avery Broussard: Broussard goes to Suzanne's house the next afternoon to have dinner. Suzanne lives on Dauphine in the Quarter, a perfect place for a blossoming artist. Suzanne still receives an allowance from her father, although the family disapproves of Suzanne's bohemian lifestyle. The apartment on Dauphine is a premium place, filled with items from all over the Quarter, representing many different nationalities. Suzanne is pleased with what she has been able to do on her own and is thrilled with the place she lives in and uses as an art studio.

Broussard is somewhat uneasy, although it has nothing to do with the situation, only his memories of the former relationship with Suzanne. A strong sense of longing washes over Broussard and he works hard to focus on the dinner and conversation.

The couple sits on the couch in Suzanne's living room, and it is not long before the situation turns romantic. Both knew it would. Suzanne objects slightly at first, saying that she wants no regrets. They go to the bedroom and make love. Suzanne confesses that she has always belonged to him and no one else. It takes prompting to get Broussard to return the same sentiment. They agree to meet the next night at a hotel where they can spend the entire night together. Broussard leaves.

The next day Broussard gets finished with work and goes to meet Suzanne at her apartment. They have dinner in the Quarter and then go to a hotel where they spend the night together. The evening is passionate and long. It seems that the need for each other grows exponentially every time they are together. The next day Broussard and Suzanne go to a cabana on the beach. They enjoy the day and each other, drinking cognac and playing in the surf. The relationship is to the point that it almost seems desperate. Suzanne clings to Broussard physically and emotionally, more so by the minute. Suzanne wants to spoil Broussard by taking care of him in every way she can. Broussard seems to be giving in a bit more, needing less prompting to say good things.

Suzanne jokes that she is becoming a degenerate, her appetite for sex, Broussard and drink getting stronger with each passing hour. Broussard and Suzanne spend another evening together at the apartment. Broussard begins to complain that Denise is home too much. Broussard and Suzanne spend every free minute together. Suzanne gives into Broussard's plan to go to the race track. Suzanne falls madly for a black horse that loses but gives her the desire to own one. Suzanne plans to ask her father to buy a horse for her.



Broussard goes to see his parole officer for a second time. Broussard is civil at best. The man requires proof of employment, which he has already received. The new letter must be notarized. If Broussard is not gainfully employed, he will have to go before the board for review.

The day at the track turns out to be fun and Suzanne is happy that they went. That night Broussard asks if Suzanne would like to get an apartment together. Suzanne considers it but wants to see what plans Denise has before working out the details.

J.P. Winfield: Hunnicut is furious with Winfield. The show the night before was a complete disaster. Hunnicut rants and raves about Winfield being a hophead and throwing away his career. The conversation turns into an argument. Winfield yells back at Hunnicut. Hunnicut tells Winfield that he made the singer's career and without Hunnicut and Lathrop, Winfield would be nothing. Hunnicut goes on to tell Winfield that there is no way he would be able to get a job anywhere because people in Nashville and Little Rock will not hire junkies. The argument becomes even more inflamed when Hunnicut calls April a slut; Winfield tells Hunnicut to get out of his hotel room because he smells bad.

Hunnicut fires Winfield and storms out of the room. April comes in and tries to talk sense into Winfield, saying that Hunnicut will not let him perform for a while but that Winfield still has a job. Winfield does not seem to care.

Winfield goes to Jerry's for a drink and an afternoon with a whore. The girl falls asleep on him and Winfield is angry and demands another girl. By this time, Winfield is so drunk that he cannot perform. He tries to make the girl stay and she summons Emma. Emma is furious over Winfield's actions and sends in an enforcer with a club. The man has to do little to put Winfield straight as Winfield is blind drunk. A short fight ensues. Winfield's hand is smashed and the man is filled with pain. Emma takes the club and smashes Winfield across the jaw. The big man takes Winfield out to the railroad tracks and dumps him off. Winfield is unconscious.

Winfield stays knocked out for the better part of the day. Two bums rob him while he sleeps. Winfield eventually wakes up and walks into town, where he collapses onto the sidewalk. A taxi driver calls for an ambulance. Winfield is rushed to the emergency room where he waits for treatment. Winfield is taken into surgery. Doctors work on his heart and discover two ruptured chambers. The doctors do what they can but cannot open the chest and massage the heart because the procedure would require a surgeon.

Winfield is put into a room where he dies alone just after midnight.

Book III, When the Sun Begins to Shine, Chapters 3-4 Analysis

The situation between Broussard and Suzanne becomes unhealthier by the minute. Both are drinking, but so far it is not to excess. Suzanne's behavior shows classic co-



dependence as she seems to waiver every time Broussard objects to an idea or seems to be angry or upset about something.

Suzanne worries that Broussard may be forced to go back to the work camp, something that would supposedly destroy her. Broussard pretends that it does not bother him, although Suzanne knows it is not true. Broussard has nightmares about being back at the camp. Broussard is civil to his parole agent but not entirely friendly and cooperates only because he knows it is required. Broussard will do anything to stay out of jail.

Getting an apartment together seems like a wonderful idea to both Suzanne and Broussard. It seems that it would be a recipe for disaster as the relationship would change drastically. Suzanne's two main worries are that Denise would have to make other plans before they could live together and that her father would find out about the arrangement and be disappointed in her.

Winfield's downfall is imminent. The last straw seems to be when he chose to forsake the only thing that was important to him. The incident with Hunnicut, although it was obviously inevitable, is the final nail in Winfield's coffin. Although the relationship could be remedied, Winfield decides to go off and have a drink and then spend the afternoon with a whore. Winfield has completely lost any semblance of reason and tries to force the second girl to stay. Emma backs up her claim and has Winfield beaten and tossed out like a bag of trash.

Winfield could not have sunk any lower than lying by the railroad tracks, beaten and unconscious. The bums have no respect for the famous musician and take his last few dollars. Winfield collapses on the street and it takes a few minutes to figure out that he is in need of medical attention, not just drunk. Winfield dies alone in a hospital room, returning to his former self as a loner that chooses to shun everything around him.



Book III, When the Sun Begins to Shine, Chapter 5

Book III, When the Sun Begins to Shine, Chapter 5 Summary

Avery Broussard: It is a Friday afternoon and Broussard is headed home to the apartment. Broussard and Suzanne are having a party and a barbecue. On the way home, Broussard stops to get a haircut and some red wine. Back at the apartment, Broussard finds a group of people enjoying themselves and drinking while Suzanne works the barbecue. Broussard and Suzanne seem to be the happy couple.

As usual, there is at least one person in the group that is obnoxious and troublesome. In this case, it is Wally. Wally is extremely drunk. Wally wants to talk to Broussard about literature even though he knows it is neither Broussard's passion nor his profession. In fact, Broussard knows little about literature, but Wally persists to the point of being confrontational. Wally keeps asking questions about French authors and challenges the one or two comments Broussard makes in reply. Suzanne continually tries to get Wally to go and fetch a bottle of scotch or have some wine with the other friends, but Wally will not go away. A friend tries to take Wally away, telling him that the others want to hear about the two poems he has had published or about the short story being considered by Atlantic Monthly. Wally balks. Broussard asks Wally to walk with him to get some cigarettes. Wally continues to be combative for a few minutes and then, realizing his behavior, agrees to leave.

Later in the evening, things have settled down. Broussard and Suzanne make plans to get away for the night since it has been four days since they have been together. Things are going well between them and the couple seems to be happy and content. Suzanne asks Broussard to go out and get more beer. Wally insists on going along because the young portrait painter is on his last nerve. Wally hopes the man will leave in the few minutes he and Broussard will be gone.

Broussard takes Suzanne's car and goes to the grocery store without event. On the way back, Wally puts the beer on the front seat and opens one to drink it. Broussard does not see a sign for a one way street. Once Broussard is on the street, Wally tells him it is one way and they must turn around. As Broussard is turning around in a driveway, a cop car pulls up and blocks in the sports car. The officer approaches the car and asks Broussard for his license. Broussard complies. The officer notes that Broussard's license has expired. Broussard claims innocence. The cop questions Broussard about the one way street and the beer. Broussard swears that he is not drunk. Broussard, Wally and the cop argue back and forth. The men are arrested.

Wally is freed at the police station. Broussard has lied about his former conviction, but someone eventually recognizes his name. Even though Broussard is not drunk, he is



charged with drunk driving, driving up a one way street, an expired license, and possession of alcohol in the car.

Broussard sees his life flash before him as he contemplates having to go back to the work camp. Instead of two years it is likely he will get ten to fifteen.

Book III, When the Sun Begins to Shine, Chapter 5 Analysis

Aside from drinking, Broussard has kept his end of the deal with the parole board. It seems that for all intents and purposes, Broussard has created a new life with a good job, new friends, and most importantly, Suzanne.

Broussard continues to watch over friends that most likely do not deserve to be protected as they do not seem to accept the help. Broussard's treatment of Wally is a large part of his downfall as it is Wally that does the most arguing with the officer who may have let Broussard go. Wally is also drinking in the car, which does not help matters.

Broussard tries to lie about his conviction but fails. The police are not surprised, as this is a common occurrence. Despite Broussard's protests, the charges are filed and the board will be notified that he has broken parole. The irony is that Broussard is not drunk, although he had been drinking. It is as if circumstances beyond his control have sent him back to the place he fears and loathes most.



Characters

Avery Broussard

Avery Broussard is the first character mentioned in the book and one of the three main subjects in the book. Broussard is returning home from a six month stint on the oil rigs. Broussard had left Louisiana to see a bit of the world. For six months Broussard worked on the rigs, but now the job was done. Broussard has mixed feelings about leaving the Gulf and returning to the family farm, a place once glorious but now on the verge of bankruptcy. Broussard is the only remaining child in the Broussard house since his brother was killed in the military. Broussard's father wants the best for Avery but wants his son to do everything his way. Broussard spent the last of his money on a bottle of booze to drink on the way back to the farm. Broussard's drinking has worsened since he left the farm and it is apparent to all those around him, even though he denies it.

After Mr. Broussard dies, Avery stays on to try to finish what he and his father started, a renovation and revitalization of the farm. Avery has mixed feelings about staying in the rural area, yet seems to be torn between his own desires and a sense of duty to the land, his family, and the memories of his ancestors. Broussard will also ensure that Batiste is taken care of as it is the right thing to do.

Broussard is an alcoholic who does not always make the best judgments. One night while sitting with an old moonshiner, things go awry and Broussard is arrested for running moonshine. Broussard is sentenced to one to three years in a work camp. Broussard meets up with one of the others arrested that night, a crazy war veteran named LeBlanc. LeBlanc is combative and filled with rage, eager to lash out at anyone.

After a year, Broussard is released from jail. He goes to New Orleans, finds a job and rekindles an old romance. One night Broussard is arrested for a number of crimes involving alcohol and is sent back to the work camp.

J.P. Winfield

J.P Winfield is a poorer than poor hillbilly musician that wants nothing more than to make it to Nashville and out of his hometown and soon-to-be former life. At the age of twenty-seven, Winfield decides to take his first significant trek from home to audition for Louisiana Jubilee, a talent show that could springboard him to the big time. JP Winfield is a fish out of water in the audition. His only suit is cheaply made and threadbare. His shoes are unshined and falling apart at the seams. The clip-on bow tie he wears does little to polish the overall look. Still, Winfield is determined to push his nervousness aside and go after his dream.

Winfield is clearly a naïve soul that may know what he wants but does not have the means to get it. In the beginning of the story, Winfield has only his prize guitar, his love of Leadbelly's music, his talent, and ambition.



Winfield has the talent but little else. Winfield needs guidance, which he receives from several none too scrupulous people including Hunnicut, his future manager. Winfield goes over the top with his first taste of success and quickly falls into a life of debauchery. As Winfield's career soars, the more people are willing to cater to his desires, something that will ultimately ruin the talented musician.

J.P Winfield is an overnight success. After winning a rigged audition, Winfield is hired by Virdo Hunnicut. He begins playing in every club, hall and juke joint throughout the southern states. The road and hectic life re taking its toll on Winfield and it is obvious that he is suffering from exhaustion. One night, April, a girl with questionable moral fiber, summons Winfield. April offers Winfield an introduction to Doc Elgin, a man that would be able to help Winfield with his problems. Winfield takes the Benzedrine offered by Elgin and quickly gives in to April's proposition.

Winfield's life is a whirlwind from the moment on. First Winfield learns that he will be the new sponsor for Live-Again, a new vitamin tonic water. Winfield will also travel with Jim Lathrop, a politician vying for a spot in the Senate. As Winfield's career takes off, he becomes addicted to drugs. Winfield becomes more famous; the drugs take a stronger hold.

Eventually, Winfield finds himself married to April, strung out most of the time, and seems to be throwing his career down the toilet. The end comes for Winfield when he has a drug-induced heart attack on the street. Winfield dies alone in the hospital.

Toussant Boudreaux

Toussaint Boudreaux is an African American longshoreman with a gift for fighting. At thirty years old, Boudreaux has little time left to prove himself in the ring and make his name in the big time before his career is over.

In a time when it was not entirely common for blacks and whites to work together, Boudreaux forged a place for himself among the other longshoremen. It is not the ideal job for Boudreaux, but moving to New Orleans from a small town meant that one had to take whatever work was available. Those that went up against Boudreaux quickly learned it was a mistake, as the man could certainly hold his own in a fight. Boudreaux is a hard worker who is determined to do everything he can to make his dream come true.

Beside Boudreaux is his trainer, Archie. Boudreaux sees his chances fading after he breaks his hand in the ring, jeopardizing his chances for the big time. The future looks even bleaker when Boudreaux is imprisoned for a crime he did not commit.

Boudreaux is sentenced for the crime and will serve up to fifteen years in work camp. The book details Boudreaux's daily life in the camp until the day he escapes. Boudreaux is killed while attempting to return home to Baratavia.



Batiste

Batiste is the Negro grandson of the freed slave that accompanied Broussard's grandfather to the homestead in Louisiana. Batiste has been with the Broussards ever since Avery was a child and is really the only family Avery has left. Batiste often acts as a hired hand, yet it is clear that there is a deep relationship between Batiste and Avery and that Batiste will stay by Avery's side until the end.

Archie

Archie is an ex-Navy man turned professional boxing trainer. It is Archie who works diligently by Boudreaux's side, trying to give the boxer the benefit of his experience while trying to propel him into the big time.

Virdo Hunnicut

Virdo Hunnicut is the producer of Louisiana Jubilee and the man that first hires JP Winfield to perform. Hunnicut becomes Winfield's manager and agent.

Tereau

Avery is friends with an old bootlegger name Tereau. Tereau is three parts Negro, one part Chitimacha Indian. No one knows how old Tereau is, but Avery thinks to himself that a Negro must be mighty old before he turns gray. Tereau is cunning and wily but slowing down in his old age.

Bootleggers

There are many bootleggers that appear throughout the story, peddling moonshine across state lines and into dry counties throughout the south. The bootleggers are cunning and clever enough to evade the police most of the time. Should the bootleggers fail to evade the law they will spend one to three years in prison for their misdeeds. Two of the main bootleggers introduced in the story are LeBlanc and Gerard.

Suzanne

Suzanne is Broussard's girlfriend. Suzanne and Broussard were childhood sweethearts until she went off to college. Now, years later, Suzanne is back in New Orleans making a living as a painter while being subsidized by her father. Suzanne and Broussard resume their relationship, which seems to help stabilize Broussard.

Evans

Evans is a guard at the work camp. Known for his short temper and mean streak, Evans is the target of LeBlanc and others. It is Evans that leads the search party after the escapes.

April O'Brien Winfield

April is an opportunist that supports her drug habit by selling drugs and prostituting herself. April gets pregnant and forces J.P. to marry her.



Objects/Places

The Broussard Farm

The Broussard Farm is the home to Avery Broussard, his father, Rafael Broussard, and Batiste, a Negro houseman and friend to the family. The farm has gone from being a place once glorious but now on the verge of bankruptcy. The farm is located in Martinique Parish and has been owned and operated by the Broussard family since the 1850s, when Avery Broussard's great grandfather bought it from the Louisiana government when he arrived from the West Indies. The great-grandfather built a house and turned the land into one of the largest and most profitable sugarcane plantations in the south. Alongside the owner was a free slave who would help to build the plantation and stay by his friend and benefactor's side until his death in 1870.

Over the years, war and other great tragedies befell the farm and the two thousand acres purchased by Broussard's great-grandfather has whittled down to a mere twenty acres, which was not enough to support the farm or the family. The French colonial house is in disrepair, as are the outbuildings, and it is clear that something must be done to save what is left of the property.

It is the hope that with the return of Avery there will be enough money to pay down the debt and allow for the purchase of seed and the help to harvest it. The seed is purchased and there is hard work ahead. Mr. Broussard is getting too old to manage the farm but refuses to give up until the day he dies out in the fields. The fate of the farm remains in Avery's hands.

Louisiana

Louisiana is the backdrop and main setting for all three of the stories in *Half of Paradise* by James Lee Burke. Louisiana is portrayed in great detail and with authenticity as it is Burke's native state. Burke paints vivid imagery by detailing the oppressive summer heat, large wrap around porches, cypress trees and hanging moss.

While some of the characters live in rural areas, a great deal of the story takes place in and around New Orleans. New Orleans seems like a large and frightening place rife with opportunities for the characters. The city offers music from the greats to the excesses of Bourbon Street, bars, and brothels.

Broussard's experiences on the Gulf are also discussed with the sandy beaches and whitecaps breaking on the shore.

While the story does not give a date in which the story is set, the descriptions invoke images of the 1920s, a time when the world was still in the grips of hardship, job opportunities were rare and yet people still lived with a sense of abandon.



The Boxing Ring

The boxing ring is the second home for Toussaint Boudreaux as he battles to become a heavyweight champion at the age of thirty. It is also the site of Boudreaux's downfall when a crippling injury ruins his career.

The Music Industry

The music industry is the place Winfield longs to be. With his twelve-string guitar in hand, Winfield takes his knowledge of Leadbelly and other greats to the stage where his talent eventually over rides his lack of polish and sophistication. It is also the music industry that will give Winfield access to drugs and other indulgences which will end the career he worked so hard to achieve.

Nashville

Nashville is the heart of the country music scene. After two years of touring and performing, Winfield has carved out his niche in Nashville, making him a famous commodity.

Work camp

The work camp is a prison facility used to house prisoners from all over the south. There are all types of criminals from short timers like Broussard to long timers like Boudreaux and lifers like Claxton and the others on gang five. The place is bleak and harsh. The worst part of the work camp, aside from the brutal back breaking work is Evans, a guard with a mean, sadistic streak.

Barataria, Louisiana

Barataria is the home of the Boudreaux family. It is a small town in the bayou where people take care of their own and no one likes the law. It is where Boudreaux intends to go after breaking out of jail.

Little Rock, Arkansas

Little Rock is one of the cities in which Winfield performs on a regular basis.



New Orleans, Louisiana

New Orleans is the center of attention in the last part of Broussard's story. There are cafes and bars everywhere, which pleases Broussard. Broussard stays on in New Orleans after obtaining a job and rekindling his romance with Suzanne.

The French Quarter

The French Quarter is a section of New Orleans that caters to the artists and musicians. The place is filled with a mix of cultures.



Themes

Addiction

Addiction is one of the main themes in the book. Two of the characters, Avery Broussard and J.P. Winfield are both die hard addicts. Broussard is an alcoholic and Winfield is a junkie.

Addiction is a disease that grabs ahold of its victim and does not let go. On Broussard's case, he was drinking heavily before he returned home to Martinique Parish. Broussard's father did not approve of the drinking, so Avery tried unsuccessfully to hide it. The drinking became worse after Rafael died and there was no one to try to stop Avery from destroying himself. It is addiction that led Broussard to make bad decisions, ones that would cause him to go to prison for a crime he had little to no part in but just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Unlike Broussard, Winfield's addiction kills not only his spirit but his physical body. Winfield's addiction to alcohol, cocaine and various barbiturates puts too much strain on his heart and causes him to lose everything the minute he collapses on the sidewalk.

Burke does not lecture about addiction, he merely shows how something can grab on to someone so quickly that the person has no idea what has happened. The craving for the substance becomes so strong that eventually nothing else matters but the drug. Winfield's case is a prime example.

Dreams

Each of the character has some dream he is fighting for to some degree. Only Broussard's dream is somewhat vague, particularly after he loses the farm to the bank. The other two characters, however, have very specific big dreams.

Winfield wants nothing more than to leave his small hometown and make it to Nashville. Winfield has a lot to contribute to the world of music through his twelve-string guitar and, eventually, through the songs he intends to write. Winfield makes some compromises in order to get his dream. Some compromises are voluntary; some are born out of ignorance. The more famous Winfield becomes, the more he loses sight of the dream. Winfield does what he is told to do. The drugs and the obligations to Hunnicut, Lathrop and April seem to take away whatever pieces of the dream Winfield has left.

Boudreaux goes to New Orleans from Barataria with the hopes of becoming a heavyweight champion. Boudreaux is willing to do whatever it takes to realize the dream. It is all over in one fell swoop when Boudreaux breaks his hand. There will be another chance to achieve the dream, but Boudreaux will never get that chance.



Self-fulfilling Prophecy

Each of the main characters seems to have a self-fulfilling prophecy. No matter where they are in life each takes actions - consciously or unconsciously - that will lead him into a life of despair and spiritual bondage. The self-fulfilling prophecy overrides everything else and often surprises its victim. No one is more surprised by his downfall than Avery Broussard. Broussard seemed to be doing almost everything right yet he ends up going back to prison.

In Winfield's case, his dream ended with the first time Elgin gave him the Benzedrine. From that moment on nearly everything Winfield did was damaging to his career and himself. Winfield spiraled quickly into the pit of his addiction, fulfilling his loathing for others as well as his own insecurities. Although Winfield's situation was caused by his own actions, the actions of April were a part of the prophecy. April, too, seems to be one that will succumb to her addiction as Winfield does in the end.

The turn of events in Boudreaux's life seem to sneak up on him as if he is an innocent bystander. Once Boudreaux is in the work camp, things change. Boudreaux acts out when he may not have done so before. The culmination of Boudreaux's self-fulfilling prophecy takes place when he is lying, nearly incapacitated, on top of the slope waiting to face off with Evans and the others.

Style

Point of View

The point of view used in *Half of Paradise* by James Lee Burke is third person omniscient. The third person point of view works well in this collection due to the diverse nature of the subjects and their characters. The experiences of the characters in these stories may vary widely, particularly in light of the severe depression going on in the country at the time as well as the class and race of the character.

As a result, Burke's use of third person omniscient allows the reader to be able to experience all of the story, giving a more detailed and thorough description of people, places and events that would not be accessible through the first person point of view.

This is especially important due to the clash in cultures, social standings, and locations. Good examples can be seen in the life of Avery Broussard where his father, Rafael, reminds his son that he comes from a good family of prominence and even though the family has fallen on hard times, it is vital for Avery to remember his ancestry and act accordingly.

Class is also an issue for JP Winfield whose dirt poor hillbilly upbringing gains him a great deal of shunning and mockery from those he needs to impress the most.

Racial issues come into play in Broussard's life as well through the character of Batiste, a black "servant" that is more of an employee and trusted friend than anything else. Toussaint Boudreaux also has issues with racism, particularly when he works on the docks and has to make grand efforts to get along with his co-workers.

Setting

The settings used throughout Burke's works vary only slightly and are restricted to the southeastern United States, mostly Louisiana. This is in keeping with Burke's knowledge of love of the south.

The places depicted in the stories are rural, somewhat economically depressed, and portray the condition of the country and the specific region as it was during the time period. Although the time period is never specifically discussed, the reader can assume by the text that the story takes place in the 1920s.

Some of the best descriptions of setting, from the coastal region to the small rural towns to the bustling city of New Orleans are shown throughout the tale of each character.

In the case of Avery Broussard the setting is most clear. Broussard Farm was once a highly profitable and respected sugarcane plantation. Now a mere twenty acres are all



that is left and the lack of financial support is obvious in the French colonial house that is in disrepair.

JP Winfield explores new settings in his role as a music star, many unlike those he is used to, and knows how to fit into the social structure. The towns are still struggling and poor but offer opportunities to Winfield that he would not have had otherwise.

The boxing ring is the second home for Toussaint Boudreaux as he battles to become a heavyweight champion at the age of thirty. It is also the site of Boudreaux's downfall when a crippling injury ruins his career. Yet it will always be the place Boudreaux longs for, even after being incarcerated with little to no hope of ever returning to the dream.

Language and Meaning

James Lee Burke's first novel depicts a time in the south in which the language is regional and rough, with a heavy influence of slang and mispronounced words. The language used is representative of many aspects of southern life, from upbringing, to race, class, and education. Some of the people who are well educated still use the accepted slang which sometimes seems out of place although it would be acceptable in that time and place.

There are many references to various stereotypes and monikers that are representative of the times. The most noticeable of these is "Negro", although there are other words that are considered highly unacceptable and taboo in modern society. However, in the context of the stories, the language is appropriate, if the reader can get past being offended by what are considered to be racial slurs.

The reader will not have great difficulty in understanding most of the language, although there are some instances when it seems misused. The language often works well when used in dialogue but may seem frivolous when used elsewhere.

There are some instances where the language does not seem out of the ordinary, even by modern standards. Overall, the use of southern vernacular, both slang and proper, works well in allowing the reader to catch a glimpse into the mind of the reader and the thoughts, feelings, and socially accepted behaviors of the time.

Structure

Half of Paradise by James Lee Burke is a work of fiction. Overall, the book contains 480 pages. The average length of the chapters is 30 pages.

In Book 1, there are 5 chapters. The shortest chapter is 16 pages in length; the longest chapter is 29 pages in length. The average length of the chapters is 21 pages.

In Book 2, there are 6 chapters. The shortest chapter is 23 pages in length; the longest chapter is 65 pages in length. The average length of the chapters is 34 pages.

In Book 3, there are 6 chapters. The shortest chapter is 19 pages in length; the longest chapter is 43 pages in length. The average length of the chapters is 30 pages.

The book is created so that each character has its own section. The first character presented is Avery Broussard; the second character presented is JP Winfield; the third and final character presented is Toussaint Boudreaux. Each chapter contains the story of each character laid out in order.



Quotes

"When you associate with people of a lower social class as an equal, they bring you down to their level. You don't bring them up to yours."

Rafael Broussard, p. 11

"He wanted to write a song. It would contain all the things he felt inside him. It would have the sadness he saw in the country around him, feeling of the niggers singing in the fields, it would be like the songs they sang on the work gangs in the Salvation Army camps, or like sitting on the back porch alone, watching the rain fall on the young cotton."

p. 24

"Outside in the alley he heard drunken voices and the rattling of garbage cans. He looked up to the darkness and thought of his home in Barataria, south of New Orleans. He wondered if he would ever go back."

p. 47

"The show was broadcast throughout four states, and JP's name became well known to those people who sit by their large wooden radios with the peeling finished and tiny yellow dial on Saturday night to listen to their requests and hope that their letters will be read between the advertisements of cure-all drugs and health tonics."

p. 78

"'You guys don't know when you got it good,' Leander said. 'The only time you're going to get out of the tank is to sandpaper the concrete. I told you I don't take crap in my jail.'"

p. 129

'You'll break down,' Evans said. 'I've seen guys bigger than you crack.'"

p. 196

"There was a single report followed by two more and then someone firing in rapid succession. A minute passed and it was quiet except for the even patter of the rain."

p. 251

"You ain't got no more decency than a whore."

Winfield to April, p. 272

"He walked in the shade of the trees. The trunks looked dark and cool, and off in the distance he could see the cotton fields and the red clay land and the Negroes chopping in



the long green rows."
p. 291

"They were clearing a field of stumps on the day he escaped."
p. 315

"Avery went to see the parole officer, a sallow middle-aged state appointee in an outmoded business suit with big lapels and an off-colored bow tie."
p. 406

"A few minutes later J.P. laid on the sidewalk unconscious. He didn't know he had had a heart attack."
p. 440



Topics for Discussion

Why do you think Avery left Broussard Farm to work on the oil rigs? What were the issues that caused Avery to stay away for six months? Do you think the issues involve his father? What is Avery's opinion of his father's core beliefs and lectures on maintaining one's social standing?

Do you think JP is insulted by the treatment by Troy and Hunnicut during the audition? Why is Troy so cruel? What is it about JP that encourages Hunnicut to give him a spot on the Louisiana Jubilee? Does JP live up to his own hype? How would you feel in JP's position?

It is said repeatedly that LeBlanc "ain't right in the head" after he returned from fighting in the Marianas against the Japanese. What do the people mean? How has LeBlanc changed? What is LeBlanc's explanation? Do you think the explanation is valid? Explain. Do you think LeBlanc is mentally unstable, sociopathic, or affected by some aspect of the war such as PTSD? What type of help could have been available to LeBlanc if his condition understood?

Boudreaux ignores his instincts and takes the job from Bonham even though it is clear that there is some illegal activity going on. What would you do in Boudreaux's place? What is the first sign that there was something amiss? What is Boudreaux's reaction? Why does he go ahead with the assignment? Why is Boudreaux alarmed by the actions of the other driver? What is Boudreaux's reaction to the pelts in the truck? What might Boudreaux say to the police to convince them of his innocence?

Why do you think Avery Broussard wants to protect LeBlanc? What is it about LeBlanc that warrants Broussard's trust and assistance? What advice do the other men give to Broussard? What is Boudreaux's opinion of the entire LeBlanc situation? How far will Broussard go to protect others? How does Broussard attempt to help Claxton and others in need? How might you handle a similar situation?

Examine Boudreaux's choice to break out of the work camp. Why do you think Boudreaux chooses that specific day and time to escape? Is the plan sound? What does Evans think about the escape once he regains consciousness? What are Boudreaux's plans? Does Boudreaux think he is safe once he reaches the cabin? Do you think Boudreaux could have escaped if he had not contracted swamp fever? Explain.

Examine the irony that surrounds Broussard's downfall. How does the situation occur? Do you think Broussard should have been arrested? Is Wally to blame for what happened? How could Broussard avoid being arrested? At what point does Broussard realize the extent of his troubles? What do you think will happen next?