

The Tortilla Curtain Study Guide

The Tortilla Curtain by T. Coraghessan Boyle

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Plot Summary

Delaney Mossbacher is a left-leaning nature writer who lives a comfortable life in affluent style with his wife Kyra, a hard-working realtor. One day Delaney hits an illegal Mexican immigrant with his car. He never learns the Mexican's name, which is Candidó. The accident occurs when Candidó darts without caution into a busy street. Delaney tries to talk to Candidó, but the pedestrian only speaks Spanish and Delaney does not know Spanish. Delaney gives Candidó a twenty-dollar bill, and the badly injured Mexican hobbles off to his campsite, located off a nearby nature trail. Delaney realizes that Candidó must be living in the Topanga State Park, and he grows angry thinking of the fire hazard this illegal alien poses to the park.

In the collision with Delaney's car, Candidó has suffered a concussion. His left cheekbone is crushed, and an arm and a hip give him terrible pain. His wife, América, tries to nurse him back to health. América is seventeen and pregnant, and she has never worked for money. Candidó and América have been living in the park because robbers stole all their savings shortly after they crossed the border into the United States. Several days after being hit by Delaney's car, Candidó's fever breaks, but his injuries prevent him from seeking a laboring job. América goes to the labor exchange, a flimsy outdoor shelter where Mexicans look for day labor, in search of housekeeping work.

Delaney and Kyra have two dogs and a cat. They suffer a trauma when a coyote jumps over their backyard fence and kills one of the dogs, Schaverell. That evening, Delaney attends a meeting at the community center for Arroyo Blanco Estates, the exclusive neighborhood where he lives. The special meeting has been held to discuss a proposed gate, which will keep poor people and illegal immigrants out of their neighborhood. Delaney chastises his neighbors for trying to keep Mexicans out while inviting coyotes in by leaving food and trash in their yards. The meeting is led by Jack Jardine, Delaney's friend and lawyer. Jack has advised Delaney to avoid making an official report about his collision with Candidó. After the meeting, Jack's teenage son, Jack Jr., asks Delaney where he thinks the Mexican has set up camp. The next day, Jack Jr. destroys Candidó's humble camp.

Although he remains too sick to work, Candidó becomes angry when América goes up to the labor exchange and sits with the Mexican men who are looking for work. He worries for América's safety and feels guilty that he cannot provide for her. On her fifth day at the labor exchange, América gets hired by a fat white man to scrub Buddha statues. She works very hard, and the scouring solution burns her hands and throat.

Scared by the destruction of his campsite, Candidó sets up a new camp on a small sandbar beside a small dirty creek. There he builds a shelter from items that people have discarded. Since Candidó has no way of knowing that América has found work, he grows worried when she does not return to the lower canyon by late afternoon. He walks up the path to find her, and along the way encounters an aggressive light-skinned Mexican wearing a backward Padres cap. Along the road that separates the upper



canyon from the lower canyon, Candidó searches for América in a supermarket parking lot. Instead he sees Delaney, Jack Jardine, and Jack Jr. Candidó recognizes Jack Jr. as the boy who destroyed his camp, and he believes that Jack Jr. is Delaney's son.

Delaney takes a hike into the lower canyon. Along the path, he runs into the man in the Padres cap and his darker-skinned friend. Delaney feels threatened by the men, and he is angry because he thinks that they have been camping in the park, threatening the natural environment. He cuts his hike short. When he returns to his parking space, Delaney finds that his car has been stolen.

The next day, América and Candidó go to the labor exchange together. When the fat man pulls up, América goes with him to polish statues again, even though he underpaid her and touched her inappropriately the first time she worked for him. Her workday passes without incident. At the end of the day, she looks for Candidó at the supermarket but does not see him, so she heads back to their new campsite alone. On the trail, she encounters the man in the Padres hat and his friend. They rape América.

Kyra hires a contractor to build a backyard fence to keep out coyotes. She notices that one of the workers on the contractor's crew looks like the man Delaney said he hit with the car. Kyra goes to the Da Ros mansion, a real estate listing that is her personal favorite, to lock it up at the end of the day. There she encounters the man with the Padres hat and his poncho-wearing friend. They seem to have been camping on the property's lawn. Kyra tells them to leave and pretends that she lives in the house and has a husband inside. She decides that she will never again go to the Da Ros estate without making a phone call to her secretary.

Candidó returns to the campsite after working on Kyra's fence and sees that América has been attacked. She denies that her attack was sexual, but he knows the truth. He vows that if he ever sees the man in the Padres hat again he will kill him. After being raped, América feels a burning sensation whenever she urinates. She thinks that the burning is perhaps a normal pregnancy side effect, but she wishes that she could discuss it with her mother in Mexico.

Delaney attends a gathering of neighborhood men at the home of Dominic Flood. Flood, a client of Jack Jardine's, is under house arrest for banking crimes. At the gathering, men discuss the need for a tall wall to be built around all of Arroyo Blanco Estates. They believe that a wall will keep them safer from criminals. Delaney disagrees with the other men about the fence. One evening shortly after the meeting, Delaney, Kyra, and Jordan are enjoying their backyard when a coyote climbs over the new fence and takes Osbert, their remaining pet dog.

For weeks, Candidó has been occasionally successful at finding day labor. He has saved several hundred dollars toward first and last month's rent for an apartment. One day Candidó goes to the labor exchange and finds that the shelter has been torn down and a "NO TRESPASSING" sign is in its place. He decides that he must go to Canoga Park, a nearby town that has a large Mexican population, to look for work. América demands that he take her with him. They walk all the way to Canoga Park and enjoy a



small meal at a diner there. Then Candidó gets mugged, losing all the money he has managed to save. He and América walk back to the canyon, and he finds food for them in the dumpster behind a fast food restaurant. América is furious and disappointed, and she refuses to do anything but sit before the campfire for weeks afterward.

One night, Kyra locks up the Da Ros mansion and finds a hateful message spray-painted on the back of the house for her. After that, Delaney goes with her to the Da Ros estate each evening. To thank him, Kyra buys Delaney a metal ladder to climb over the backyard fence.

Kyra and Delaney have had a falling out over the issue of the community fence. She favors the fence idea because she thinks that it will keep out coyotes. Outside the Arroyo Blanco Estates community center, Delaney overhears Jack Jr. and a teenage friend discussing Mexicans in a hateful way. Walking alone, Delaney sees the man in the Padres hat and thinks that he is the man Kyra described seeing at the Da Ros estate. Delaney confronts the man but backs down when he sees that the man in the hat is doing work, delivering fliers that have a pro-fence message.

Candidó finds occasional work with an elderly, alcoholic building contractor. On the night before Thanksgiving, Candidó goes to the grocery store and someone gives him a free frozen turkey. He brings the turkey to América, and her spirits are lifted.

On Thanksgiving Day, Delaney and Kyra interrupt their meal preparations to attend an elegant party at Dominick Flood's house. They bring with them Kyra's mother, Kit, who is charmed by Flood. Suddenly, an announcement that fire has broken out in the lower canyon interrupts Flood's party.

Down in the canyon, Candidó has accidentally started a fire by lighting a match to cook the turkey. He and América run desperately up the hillside. By the time they make their way up to the upper canyon, Arroyo Blanco Estates residents have evacuated their homes. Candidó takes América to a gardener's shed that interrupts the community's wall, and she gives birth there. A cat enters the shed and provides comfort to América during the delivery.

The residents of Arroyo Blanco Estates wait behind a police barricade on a road outside the neighborhood. When two Mexicans—the man in the Padres hat and the man in the poncho—appear, Delaney and several others ask the police to arrest them for starting the fire. Delaney gets into a physical brawl with the man in the hat. Later, Delaney and his family return home to find that their cat, Dame Edna, is missing. Kit is embarrassed to find Dominick Flood's ankle monitor in her purse, and she realizes that he has used the fire as an opportunity to escape and flee the country.

América gives birth to a baby girl and names her "Socorro." Candidó climbs over the fence and steals supplies from the backyards of Arroyo Blanco Estates. Using discarded wood pallets and the unattached roof of a gardener's greenhouse, Candidó builds a structure for his family in the brush outside the wall. He kills Dame Edna for stew.



Delaney realizes that he has come to hate Mexicans. After some Hispanic-looking graffiti appears on the gate to Arroyo Blanco Estates, he sets up a trap of cameras and trip wires to catch the culprit. One night his cameras catch Candidó, and Delaney recognizes him from the auto accident.

América tells Candidó that she wants to go back to Mexico. She wants to show Socorro to her family. Candidó wishes that he could afford to put América and the baby on a bus, but the fire has burned their savings. América notices that Socorro appears to be blind.

After a long day of standing outside the post office in the hope that someone will hire him to do manual labor, Candidó steps onto the street and sees Delaney's Acura. Delaney furiously chases Candidó with his car, causing a collision with another vehicle. Delaney deserts his car and chases Candidó up the hillside and tracks him to his shack.

Rain comes down heavily. Delaney goes home to put on a rain jacket and get his gun. He develops some photos taken by his camera trap, and discovers that Jack Jr. is the culprit behind the graffiti. Knowing this, Delaney still feels hatred toward Candidó. Delaney destroys the photos and sets off to confront the Mexican.

At the moment when Delaney opens the door to Candidó's shack, the shack gets caught in a mudslide. Candidó tries to hold onto América and Socorro, but the baby gets lost in the mud. Candidó sees Delaney trapped in the slide, and he offers Delaney a hand to help him.



Part 1, Chapters 1-2 (pages 3-29)

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Delaney Mossbacher is a left-leaning nature writer who lives a comfortable life in affluent style with his wife Kyra, a hard-working realtor. One day Delaney hits an illegal Mexican immigrant with his car. He never learns the Mexican's name, which is Candidó. The accident occurs when Candidó darts without caution into a busy street. Delaney tries to talk to Candidó, but the pedestrian only speaks Spanish and Delaney does not know Spanish. Delaney gives Candidó a twenty-dollar bill, and the badly injured Mexican hobbles off to his campsite, located off a nearby nature trail. Delaney realizes that Candidó must be living in the Topanga State Park, and he grows angry thinking of the fire hazard this illegal alien poses to the park.

Delaney Mossbacher, a liberal humanist who lives in Arroyo Blanco Estates, hits a pedestrian with his car while he is transporting newspapers, cans, and bottles to the local recycling center. The pedestrian, a dark little man with a black and gray mustache, steps in front of Delaney's car in a move that strikes Delaney as suicidal. Delaney thinks that the little man is obviously insane. Although he does not feel responsible for the accident, Delaney worries how the collision will affect his driving record.

Delaney drives an Acura with a vanity license plate that reads "PILGRIM." Before looking for the victim, he surveys the damage to his car. Only the headlight and turn signal have been damaged. Dizzy and sweaty, Delaney stands in the road while dozens of cars go by.

Finally, Delaney starts to look for the pedestrian. He follows a glint of light reflected off a metal shopping cart in the nearby brush. Delaney cautiously steps down a rough path that winds over the steep hillside. He begins to think that he has been the victim of a scam perpetuated by gang members on unsuspecting, fully insured motorists.

A faint groan from nearby vegetation leads Delaney to discover the injured walker. The man has a badly scraped face and a bloody hand. He holds a paper bag torn by slivers of glass. Inside the bag is a package of tortillas. Delaney offers to help the man, and he asks the man why he ran in front of Delaney's car. The pedestrian replies in Spanish, a language that is unfamiliar to Delaney. Delaney tries speaking to him in French instead. The Hispanic man asks Delaney for "monee." Delaney gives him a twenty-dollar bill, and the man walks away with a limp.

Delaney drives by the recycling center twice, each time forgetting to stop. When he finally unloads his recyclables with shaky hands, Delaney cannot stop thinking about the little man and his injuries. He thinks that the man must be an illegal immigrant, since he had refused Delaney's offer of medical treatment. He remembers the shopping cart and realizes that the man must be homeless, living in the Topanga State Park shelter.



Delaney's guilt turns to outrage as he thinks about the fire hazard the homeless man must pose to the dry canyon.

Without thinking, Delaney drives into the recycling center's warehouse. There he notices that the workers are all Mexican men dressed similarly to the injured pedestrian. A forklift operator pulls up next to Delaney's car and asks him something in Spanish, but Delaney does not know how to respond.

Delaney takes his car to an Acura dealer to be fixed. Kenny Grissom, the salesman who sold Delaney the car, asks Delaney what he hit. Delaney tells him that he hit a dog. With a laugh, Kenny tells Delaney that he once hit a three-legged dog, and that the dog ended up with no legs.

Delaney calls his wife Kyra at work and tells her that he has had an accident. She inquires nervously about her son Jordan, and Delaney says Jordan was not in the car. Delaney tells Kyra that he hit a Mexican man. Kyra asks whether he has called Jack, who is their neighbor and lawyer. When she asks whether Delaney took the man to the hospital, Delaney says no and repeats emphatically that the man is Mexican.

Candidó's head hurts so much that he feels as though an atomic bomb has exploded inside it. He vomits up some of the egg and burnt tortilla he ate for breakfast. He recalls crossing the street to buy an orange soda and tortillas at the grocery store that has low prices, and then getting run down by a "pink-faced *gabacho*." Candidó thinks that América will nurse him when she returns. She will brew a tea from manzanita berries to heal his pain. Candidó walks along the path, falling down twice before drifting off to sleep.

América feels worn out and disheartened after walking eight miles and wasting bus fare to Venice for a sewing job that never materialized. She has spent the day searching for a machine shop that a Guatemalan woman told her about, but finds the building boarded up and deserted. As she walks back down the canyon along the side of the road, América reads the face of every driver who passes her and imagines them saying, "Go back to where you belong." By the time she makes it to the state park, the sky is dark and America feels hunted by headlights.

América finds Candidó at the bottom of the path. At first she thinks that he is a pile of rocks or laundry. Then she assumes that Candidó has gotten drunk, which enrages her since she has spent the day looking for work. Finally América realizes that Candidó is injured, and she knows that she is in the worst trouble of her life.

Candidó lies on a blanket near a campfire, remembering a time when he was a boy and his father killed an opossum for food. He feels as trapped as the opossum was when his father caught it. In the fire, América cooks a stew that contains meat bought with Candidó's twenty-dollar bill. In spite of aspirin and brandy, which América bought along with the meat, Candidó's pain overwhelms him. He remembers his mother's death when he was six years old. Candidó recalls feeling that he had killed her by not praying



enough. His mother's coffin was sealed in glass, because there was no refrigeration in Tepoztlbn. América is afraid that he will die, and she urges him to see a doctor.

The next morning, Candidó wakes up and urinates blood. He speaks gibberish and cannot say who América is. She watches him as he falls back asleep. Finally, at the end of the second day, Candidó's fever passes and he awakes and asks América for some beans.

Candidó is happy to see his wife, and he remembers that she is seventeen years old and pregnant with his first child. He is still feeling a great deal of pain. He knows that he has a concussion, and he feels that his left cheekbone is crushed. His left arm hangs uselessly, and his hip bothers him. Candidó worries that his injuries will prevent him from doing work.

On the fourth day after the accident, América puts on her good dress in order to go seek work at the labor exchange. Candidó objects to the idea of her going there, because he does not want strange men harassing her. Candidó feels that he should be working instead of América. Twice in the three weeks that he and América have been living in the canyon, he has gotten day labor for three dollars an hour. He remembers how men attacked a 12-year-old girl who was left alone in a locked shack when her parents went to work at the dump in Tijuana. Three times he had managed to protect the girl by fighting off men with a length of pipe, but they got to her once when Candidó was not near.

América tells Candidó to rest. She says she can do whatever work a man can do, and she reminds Candidó that he promised her she would have a house in the United States. He is speechless, remembering how they had their savings stolen soon after crossing the border. América sets off, hoping that someone needs help with housecleaning.

Part 1, Chapters 1-2 (pages 3-29) Analysis

T.C. Boyle begins *The Tortilla Curtain* *in medias res*, which is Latin for "in the middle of things." When an author employs the *in medias res* technique, he begins the story in the middle of an intense action sequence. In this novel, the story begins moments after Delaney's car has collided with Candidó. The drama of Candidó and América's struggles in the United States actually began weeks earlier, when they arrived in California and found themselves penniless. Candidó and América have been enduring homelessness for weeks before Candidó encounters Delaney. By starting this story at the point when Candidó and América's lives become entwined with Delaney, Boyle emphasizes how different Delaney and Candidó are. The juxtaposition of the two characters will be clear in every aspect of the men's existence, from their education and income levels, work ethics, attitudes toward children, and even what they eat.



Part 1, Chapters 3-4 (pages 30-62)

Part 1, Chapters 3-4 (pages 30-62) Summary

In Arroyo Blanco Estates, each Spanish Mission style house sits on one-point-five acres and must be painted white with an orange tile roof. The subdivision includes a private golf course and tennis courts. Arroyo Blanco Estates is where Delaney, his second wife, Kyra, and her son Jordan live. The family has two dogs and a cat.

On the morning that Candidó begins to feel he has lost control of his wife, Delaney performs his usual morning duties. Delaney prepares breakfast for Jordan and Kyra and lets the dogs go outside. Typically, while Kyra sets off to her job as a realtor, Delaney drives Jordan to school. Then Delaney returns home and begins his workday, writing a monthly column for a nature magazine. He dedicates his time from nine until one to writing. This morning, as Delaney motivates Jordan to eat his breakfast, Kyra enters the kitchen to take her morning coffee, orange juice, and vitamins. She begins to stuff envelopes with "forget-me-not" messages to former clients.

At 7:32 a.m., as Delaney clears the kitchen table, he hears a breathless shriek from the yard. Delaney runs outside, where one of the family dogs cowers, and jumps over the fence in pursuit of the coyote that has taken the other dog. He fumes because his neighbors leave food debris outdoors in spite of the fact that it attracts coyotes. Instead of worrying about coyotes, Delaney's neighbors fear Salvadorans, Mexicans and blacks, and they focus their energies on wanting a manned fence to keep strangers out of Arroyo Blanco Estates.

Later that evening, Delaney attends a gathering at the Arroyo Blanco Community Center. Jack Jardine presides over a meeting to debate a proposed security gate. Many residents voice their opinions about the gate. A woman named Doris Obst raises concerns about how much the gate will cost. Jim Shirley warns that thieves have been known to get in through garage doors. An athletic looking man objects to the idea of a gate, saying that he and his wife came to Arroyo Blanco Estates because they wanted to live in an open community. Jack Cherrystone, an actor who does voiceover work for movie trailers, says that he is as liberal as anyone, but he feels that the gate is a necessity.

Delaney, who has been hiding the remains of his wife's dog in his pocket, stands to speak. He starts to talk about the danger of coyotes, but others in the room demand that he speak to the question at hand or step down. Delaney continues to speak as people hiss. He waves Schaverell's gnawed foreleg before the horrified crowd. Saddened, Delaney leaves the meeting early and sits outside the building while the other residents vote on the gate.

Jack Jardine's son, Jack Jr., approaches Delaney to ask where he saw the Mexican who collided with his car. Delaney remembers that when he sought the counsel of Jack



Sr., at the Jardines' home, Jack Jr. was also in the living room. Jack Jr. has bright red hair. Delaney recalls that the lawyer advised him to forget the accident because the man was an illegal who could not pursue the matter in court. Delaney wonders why Jack Jr. is interested in the location of the Mexican's camp.

América returns from her job search having had no luck getting work. She brings Candidó some rotten vegetables and fruit. The following day he tries to stop her from leaving camp, but she sets off again to find work. Candidó spends the day enjoying the natural beauty around him and worrying about América.

In a flashback, Candidó recalls América as the four-year-old sister of his first wife, Resurrección. At twenty, Candidó marries Resurrección. Candidó leaves his wife at home in Tepoztlbn each summer to work on U.S. farms. In his seventh year of marriage, he returns one winter to find his wife living with another man, pregnant with that man's child. Candidó fights the man and collapses, thus becoming the town laughingstock. Then Candidó loses himself in drunkenness. He crosses the border but gets caught and sent back to Mexico. In Tijuana, Candidó becomes a street performer, dancing and eating fire for *turistas*. He hits rock bottom and moves back to Tepoztlbn to live with his aunt. One day, he runs into sixteen-year-old América on the street and tells her that when he returns to the United States he will bring her with him.

Now Candidó is thirsty, and there is no more clean water. He and América have been careful to always boil water from the stream before drinking it. Now, however, he is mad from thirst. He drinks dirty water and gets a bad case of diarrhea. As he hears *gabacho*-accented cries heading toward him, Candidó prays to the *Virgin Sagrada*.

América is the only woman at the employment office. Although she was too afraid to talk to anyone while she waited there all day yesterday, she now approaches the man in charge. After several hours a white woman appears and tells América that she is also looking for cleaning work. América feels shocked that she will have to compete with this woman if a job becomes available.

The labor exchange closes at noon. Disheartened, América leaves the office. She notices that the men she has sat with all morning now look at her hungrily. She remembers how, after she and Candidó crossed the border, men attacked them and she was almost raped. When U.S. officials drove her back over the border, they gave her a blanket to cover her naked, bleeding body. América walks along the road, thinking that she should duck into a yard and steal food from a garden as she did yesterday.

Back at the state park, Candidó lies at a distance from their camp, feeling sick. He sees teenagers destroy his and América's things and throw them into the water. One of the boys has red hair. After they leave, Candidó crawls out from his hiding place and finds a message painted on the rocks: "BEANERS DIE."



Part 1, Chapters 3-4 (pages 30-62) Analysis

Candidó's flashback indicates that América is not simply his wife, but a symbol of new hope for Candidó. When Candidó is in the depths of despair, he runs into América on a street and remembers her as an innocent child from the same family as the wife who cuckolded him. His marriage to América is in effect a do-over, a chance to replace the experience of his first marriage with a positive union. América's name is likewise symbolic, representing the United States of America, where Candidó hopes to build a new, happy life.



Part 1, Chapters 5-6 (pages 63-97)

Part 1, Chapters 5-6 (pages 63-97) Summary

Delaney takes a calming walk through Arroyo Blanco. A large American car with a booming sound system and tinted windows slows down next to him. As he returns home he thinks the car may have contained criminals, and he ponders the proposed gate. He finds Kyra waiting up for him in a sheer silk negligee. She asks about the dog, and he tells her where to find its bone, wrapped in a baggie in the freezer. Kyra has terrible nightmares that night.

The next day, Kyra arrives at the empty Manzoob house for a showing. She sees herself in a bathroom mirror and is bothered by how red her nose looks. She survives the rest of the day by taking Excedrin. At the end of the day, she locks up the Da Ros place, a twenty-room mansion that is the type of house she dreams of owning one day. Thinking about her own life, which suddenly strikes her as shallow, Kyra lingers in the home longer than necessary.

Delaney composes his monthly magazine column. He writes of wanting to take an overnight camping trip in his beloved canyon. Delaney mentions various plants that he will see as he makes his way down the trail. In the column's narrative, Delaney hears the cries of coyotes as he beds down for his night in the canyon.

Before América sets off for her fifth day of looking for work, she quarrels with Candidó. He does not want her to go to the labor center, because he is afraid for her safety. She accuses him of failing to provide for her, and Candidó hits her so hard that her head snaps backwards. At the labor exchange, while she waits for someone to come looking for her type of work, one of the men who is also waiting gives her a cup of sweet coffee. He has light skin but the dark eyes of a Mexican. Although she does not trust the man, América takes his coffee because her stomach is empty.

A fat man with a big car that has leather seats pulls up, and Candelario Pyrez, the Mexican who runs the labor exchange, arranges for him to hire América. The pay will be twenty-five dollars for six hours of work. Mary, the drunken white woman, tells the fat man in English that he should hire her instead. The man decides to hire both women.

Candidó, still feeling terrified by the teenagers' destruction of the campsite, decides to find a safer spot where he and América can sleep. He wades through the dirty creek and locates a small sandbar. Candidó builds a shelter from discarded debris. By the time he finishes, it is late afternoon and he realizes that América does not know how to find him. Candidó makes his way back to their old camp. América is not there. Candidó, exhausted and sick, starts to climb up to the street.

While making his way out of the park, Candidó crosses paths with an aggressive Hispanic with light skin. The man carries a rucksack and asks Candidó for advice about



where to sleep. Candidó tells him that the park is not safe and explains how teenagers destroyed his camp. Up at street level, Candidó looks for América in an Italian grocery. He bumps into a man with sideburns and feels embarrassed about his poor, starving condition.

It is now six o'clock. América continues to work, polishing statues of Buddha for an importer, while Mary drinks from her flask and complains about the task. América has worked eight hours nonstop, and she hopes that the fat man will pay her for the extra two hours of work.

Part 1, Chapters 5-6 (pages 63-97) Analysis

Boyle employs heavy irony in Chapter 6, when América finds work for an importer. The Buddha statues that she polishes bear a sticker that says, "JIM SHIRLEY IMPORTS." Both América and the statues are imported. Ironically, América earns less for one day of hard labor than each of the statues is likely to cost a buyer. The fact that the Buddhas are from another country makes them quite valuable on the market, yet América's foreignness means that she has little value in both the workplace and in American society.



Part 1, Chapters 7-8 (pages 98-142)

Part 1, Chapters 7-8 (pages 98-142) Summary

Delaney is preparing dinner, and he realizes that he has run out of pasta. He tells Jordan to get in the car so that he can go to the supermarket. Jordan stays in the car while Delaney shops. In the store, he runs into Jack Jardine. Delaney reluctantly greets Jack, feeling embarrassed about his behavior at last week's neighborhood meeting.

The two men discuss the gate, and Jack says that society will not be what it once was unless they regain control back of the borders. Delaney accuses Jack of being a racist. Jack says that the United States does not need any more immigrants. Delaney concedes that the gate will protect the community from urban crime. As Jack, Jack Jr., and Delaney walk outside, they see a tall man with sideburns tell Candidó to watch where he's going. Delaney recognizes Candidó. The man with sideburns shoves Candidó onto the back end of Delaney's car. Candidó looks, as though in a daze, at Jack, Jack Jr., and Delaney.

Kyra shows the Da Rose place to a couple of potential buyers named the Greuterts. Although her commission would be huge, Kyra finds it hard to talk about the home in positive terms. She realizes that she is reluctant to sell the house because she herself has grown attached to it. The Greuterts spend two and a half hours looking through the house, and then the husband declares that it is not the home for them.

Delaney thinks that he should do a series of columns about animals that have been transplanted to the canyon. This theme is fitting, because he is also new to the area. The words don't come to him, though, so Delaney drives down to the trails to take a hike. Near the creek he sees a campsite with two sleeping bags, empty food containers, and magazines. The sight fills Delaney with rage, and he makes a mental note to report these environmental criminals to the police.

Farther down on the trail, Delaney hears voices speaking Spanish. One is high-pitched, and the other low. It sounds like an argument. Delaney remembers hearing about a young woman who was sexually assaulted on a desolate hike, and he wonders whether he should intercede. Then he sees the man who accosted Candidó on the trail the previous day. Delaney has a bad feeling about the light-skinned Mexican, who claims that he is also on a hike. He is with a friend who wears a poncho. Delaney suspects that these are the two campers who littered the trail with a campsite.

After a short, ostensibly pleasant conversation with the Mexicans, Delaney heads up to the road. He resents cutting his hike short on account of the men he saw on the path. When he reaches the road, Delaney notices that his car is gone. He wonders whether the police have towed it. He asks the crew of men who are doing road work, but they do not speak English. Finally, the crew's English-speaking foreman says that he has not seen a tow truck. At Li's market, Delaney uses a pay phone to call Kyra, who is still at



work. He tells her that they stole his car. She asks who "they" are, and Delaney mentally pictures Candidó driving his Acura.

Outside the discount supermarket, Candidó sees a man in a Mercedes drop América off in the parking lot. Candidó follows his wife into the store and watches as she selects a carton of eggs. She sees Candidó, smiles proudly, and shows him the money she has earned. Candidó also detects a look of shame but does not ask about it. That night, he helps her swim across the stream and to their new camp. They remove their wet clothes and eat their dinner naked. Candidó notices that América's pregnancy has started to show.

In the morning, Candidó and América are the first to arrive at the labor exchange. Candidó has a limp, and his arm hangs stiffly at his side. Although he jumps up eagerly every time a truck pulls up in search of laborers, Candidó does not get chosen for work. The man in the Mercedes picks up América. She goes with him alone, since Mary has not shown up looking for work today.

América cleans the Buddha statues and is bothered by the fumes of the cleaning solution. She realizes that the man has forgotten to give her rubber gloves, but she continues to scrub. Finally, she cannot take the pain anymore, and she finds a bathroom where she rinses her hands. She also uses the toilet, although she feels guilty for being in the bathroom.

América feels uneasy because of the groping incident in the *patrun's* car yesterday, but she knows that it is dangerous for her to continue working with her bare hands. She knocks on the door to the man's house. América pantomimes putting on gloves, and he leaves her alone in his kitchen. He returns and impatiently thrusts a pair of yellow rubber gloves at her.

At the end of the day, the man drives América to the supermarket lot. He does not put his hand in her lap this time. He gives her twenty-five dollars without making eye contact. América waits for Candidó at the supermarket, which is where they have agreed to meet at the end of the day. After several hours of waiting, she gives up on Candidó and heads down the trail toward their campsite alone.

Along the trail, América encounters the light-skinned man and his poncho-wearing friend. The light-skinned man says that he knows she is married. Afraid, América tries to run away, but the man overpowers her and begins to sexually assault her. He stops his attack briefly to take out a new stick of gum.

Part 1, Chapters 7-8 (pages 98-142) Analysis

Boyle employs foreshadowing to highlight the light-skinned Mexican's sinister quality before that character proves himself a villain. Earlier in the book, the man gives América a cup of coffee saturated with sugar, this is not a healthy drink for a pregnant woman. When Delaney encounters the light-skinned man on the hiking trail, Delaney feels threatened, even though the words they exchange are pleasant. Further foreshadowing

of América's attack comes in the form of the man in the Mercedes, who violates América sexually by petting her thigh. The rape of América is, thus, a grimly anticipated event.



Part 2, Chapters 1-2 (pages 143-183)

Part 2, Chapters 1-2 (pages 143-183) Summary

Delaney goes to the Acura dealer to get a new car. He is able to obtain one that looks like his stolen car, for four and a half thousand on top of the money from insurance. Kenny Grissom, the Acura salesman, tells him that auto theft happens all the time. He blames the Mexicans. Delaney thinks how much he dislikes Kenny Grissom.

Delaney drives his new car to an Indian restaurant, where he meets Kyra for lunch. They discuss their plan to build a new, taller fence in their back yard. Delaney wants to tell Kyra that losing his car has made him sad and angry and feeling resentment against Latinos. He feels like a victim. He just swallows his beer.

Outside the restaurant, as Delaney and Kyra wait for the Mexican valet attendant, Kyra notices a dog crying in a parked Jeep. She becomes outraged about the dog's mistreatment and confronts the dog's owner. The man tells Delaney and Kyra to "fuck off" before he drives away.

The conflict with the dog owner has added to Delaney's bad mood. He decides to take a hike to calm his rage. He drives to Stunt Road to hike in the mountains over the ocean. Delaney is pleased to see that his car is the only one at the trailhead. As he begins his hike, Delaney starts to worry that the new car will get stolen, and he sits down in the brush to keep an eye on it.

On the way to a meeting, Kyra pulls into a convenience store parking lot to check out a group of fifty Mexican men. The men have gathered in the lot in search of work. Kyra notices the seedy looking apartments behind the lot and decides to find a way to call INS on these men. She believes that they will bring down the home values in the area.

Later, Kyra returns home and surveys the work that Al Lopez and his crew are doing on the backyard fence. She notices that one of the laborers has a graying mustache, a limp, and a face that is swollen and bruised. She thinks that this must be the man Delaney hit with his car, and she feels a sad, empty space open inside her.

At the end of the day, Kyra goes round to all her listings and shuts the houses for the night. At the Da Ros property she sees a shopping cart inside the gate and walks around the large lawn to see whether the house has squatters. She finds two Mexican men, including a light-skinned man who wears his baseball cap backwards. Kyra tells them they must leave, and says that she lives in the house with her husband. The men claim that they are on a hike and agree to get off the property.

At the end of the day, when all the other hopeful laborers have left the employment office, Al Lopez drives up and hires Candidó to replace a lost worker. As Lopez's truck passes through the Arroyo Blanco Estates gate, Candidó recalls that none of the neighborhood's houses existed the first time he was in the area, six years ago.



In a flashback from six years earlier, Candidó remembers fleeing a police officer in Oregon and hiding in a barn. Candidó is unaccustomed to snow or cold and unfamiliar with U.S. geography. When the farmer who owns the barn discovers him, he unexpectedly gives Candidó a hot breakfast and puts him in contact with a Latino woman. She helps Candidó buy a bus ticket headed in the right direction.

In his memory, Candidó takes the bus to Los Angeles and finds steady work as a gardener. One day INS agents round up Candidó, and many others. Candidó flees the line and two younger men run away with him. They jump a fence and head toward the highway. As INS agents catch up to the three men, Candidó jumps into traffic. The two younger men follow him and get hit by cars. For seven days, Candidó camps out in the canyon before finally heading south to his wife, Resurrección.

Now Candidó feels fortunate to have recovered from his collision with Delaney's car. He figures that a man cannot cross heavy traffic without getting struck more than once. He is proud about earning fifty dollars for the day's work.

Candidó makes his way down the canyon and finds América sitting at the fire as she mends her dress. She refuses to look at him. América does not admit that she has been raped, but Candidó can see from her welts that she has been attacked. She says that the light-skinned man with the baseball hat and his Indian friend have stolen her money. Candidó tells her that he will buy her a new dress.

After the attack on América, she stays at the hidden campsite all the time. She tries not to think of how the two men raped her. América's bladder burns and she wonders whether this pain is from the rape or because of her pregnancy. She wishes that she could call her mother to talk about what being pregnant should feel like. One day, América senses that she is being watched. She sees a coyote in the brush, and she stares at it until she notices that the animal is gone.

After three weeks of working off and on for Al Lopez, a legal immigrant replaces Candidó on Lopez's crew. Lopez explains that he can get into trouble for hiring Candidó without papers. Candidó spends some of his earnings on a bottle of wine and gets drunk before the campfire. He has hidden about two hundred and fifty dollars in a peanut butter jar buried behind the broken car. Candidó has used some of his earnings to buy América maternity clothes at the Goodwill store. He worries because he has not earned enough money to secure an apartment for them and the baby. Candidó suspects that the attack on América was sexual, and he swears that he will kill the two men if he ever sees them again.

Part 2, Chapters 1-2 (pages 143-183) Analysis

The *wall* is a powerful recurring symbolic element, or motif, in *The Tortilla Curtain*. Acting on his father's advice, Candidó "acts like a wall" in times of hunger or danger. In other words, he refrains from showing fear and despair. In the Oregon flashback scene, Candidó tries to be stoical, as his father suggests, but starves and freezes nonetheless.



His salvation does not follow from being wall-like, but rather from being so clearly in need that the farmer chooses to help him. Candidó's attempt to close himself off to others is reflected in the wall erected by the residents of Arroyo Blanco Estates. Their wall may keep malignant forces out, but it will also close off the neighborhood to kindness and succor from outside their community.



Part 2, Chapters 3-4 (pages 184-210)

Part 2, Chapters 3-4 (pages 184-210) Summary

In the back yard, Delaney is grilling tofu as Kyra dries off from a lap in the swimming pool and Jordan chases a ball. The dog, Osbert, chews a toy. Kyra tells Delaney how she placed a call and ended the line-up of Mexican laborers outside the 7-Eleven in Shoup. Delaney realizes that he is not as bothered by the laborers' loss of rights as he would have been just weeks ago.

Kyra's story reminds Delaney of a men's neighborhood gathering two nights earlier. In his memory of that event, Jack invites Delaney to a party at a house a couple blocks from Delaney's home. The host's name is Dominick Flood, whom Delaney meets for the first time that evening. Flood, one of Jack's legal clients, is under house arrest for banking crimes. He flatters Delaney when he praises Delaney's magazine column.

At the gathering, men from the neighborhood discuss recent crimes in Arroyo Blanco Estates. In one recent incident, three Mexican disguised themselves as lawn workers to get past the gate and rob three homes. One man notes that Sunny DiMandia, a woman in her sixties, was attacked after leaving her back door open. Flood says that he has arranged to have the labor exchange closed so that Mexicans will be discouraged from coming to the area.

Suddenly, Delaney is snapped out of his memory as a coyote jumps over the fence. The coyote grabs Osbert and climbs back over the fence before Delaney can stop it. Delaney notes ruefully that the tall fence did nothing to stop the coyote, but it forces him to walk around to the gate to chase the coyote.

Candidó goes to the labor exchange but finds that the shelter has been torn down and a "NO TRESPASSING" sign posted in its place. Candelario Pyrez tells Candidó and the few men who linger that they should leave because INS officials will be coming. Candidó is furious. He walks around the lot outside the Chinese grocery. He thinks about stealing a purse and briefcase that a woman has left on her car's front seat, but she returns to her car and gives Candidó sixty cents. He feels mortified by her small charity.

Candidó returns to the campsite and tells América that he must look for work in Canoga Park. She demands that he take her with him. She sews most of their savings into the cuff of Candidó's pants. They make the long walk to Canoga Park, starting before dawn. Candidó takes her to a taqueria, and América washes up in the restroom. Then they spend hours standing on street corners in search of work. A light-haired man with a pony tail approaches Candidó and offers to let them stay in a room at his aunt's house for twenty dollars for two nights. Candidó sets off with the man to look at the room, leaving América behind.



Part 2, Chapters 3-4 (pages 184-210) Analysis

Boyle applies a generous dose of irony to his characterization of Dominick Flood. The man is a convicted criminal, yet he is the best dressed person in the novel, and he has the nicest house in Arroyo Blanco Estates. In spite of his illegal activities, the neighborhood men flock to Flood for guidance. It is extremely ironic that Flood, a known thief, has enough political sway to shut down the labor exchange where honest workers like Candidó try to find jobs.



Part 2, Chapters 5-6 (pages 211-230)

Part 2, Chapters 5-6 (pages 211-230) Summary

Chapter 5 takes the form of Delaney's magazine column, "Pilgrim at Topanga Creek." Delaney writes about the coyote, an animal that has been on his mind lately. The adaptable coyote is ideally suited to its environment, happy among suburban lawns and the wild canyon. Delaney writes about coyotes' attacks on dogs and infants and the subsequent need for humans to control the coyote population. He says that the coyote is not to blame, because it is only trying to survive.

Kyra is starting to resent the Da Ros place, because nobody wants to buy it. She feels nervous during the two visits she must make to the house every day. She has filed a complaint about the squatters with the Sheriff's Department, but nothing has come of it. Kyra has an arrangement with Darlene, a worker at her office, wherein Kyra will call whenever she arrives at the Da Ros house and then call again when she leaves. If she has not made the second call within fifteen minutes, Darlene is supposed to call 911.

After the coyote takes Osbert, Kyra sends Jordan to stay with his grandmother. Jack calls and invites Kyra to canvass the neighborhood with him to drum up support for a plan to surround Arroyo Blanco Estates with a stone wall, and Kyra agrees. She thinks that the wall would help keep out coyotes. Jack tells her that coyotes do not hunt what they cannot see. Delaney disapproves of the wall, because he knows it is intended mainly to keep out Mexicans. As a result of this disagreement, Kyra begins sleeping in Jordan's bedroom.

One night, Kyra locks up the Da Ros estate, moving quickly. She no longer wants to linger there. Outside, she is horrified to see a message left for her in black spray-paint on the rear wall of the house. She sees the words, "PINCHE PUTA."

Delaney plays one-on-one paddleball with the wall at the Arroyo Blanco Estates community center. Later, he sits on the sidewalk outside and overhears a conversation inside. Jack Jr. and a friend speak about Mexicans. They agree that Mexican girls give good oral sex, and they say that Mexican girls gain ten pounds a year after the age of sixteen. Delaney is horrified by the boys' talk. He hopes that Jordan will not develop similar prejudices.

Delaney thinks about how lonely he is, now that Jordan is staying at his grandmother's house. He wishes that he could persuade Kyra to have another child. As Delaney walks home, a man approaches Delaney and introduces himself as Todd Sweet. Delaney recognizes him from the community meeting about the gate. Sweet asks Delaney to help him campaign against the proposed wall, but Delaney does not commit to supporting Sweet. He thinks that there will be war in his living room if he goes against Kyra and Jack and the other men who were gathered at Flood's home.



Walking alone, Delaney sees the Mexican who wears his hat backward. He remembers him from his hike, and he thinks that this man must also be the Da Ros squatter whom Kyra described. The man carries a white bag over his shoulder. Delaney confronts the man and asks him what he is doing there. The man pulls fliers out of his bag. The fliers announce a special meeting of the Arroyo Blanco Estates property owners' association.

Part 2, Chapters 5-6 (pages 211-230) Analysis

In Delaney's mind, coyotes and Mexicans are becoming intertwined. He sees the coyote as a symbol for illegal immigrants. After each pet dog's death in the jaws of a coyote, Delaney grows more suspicious of Mexicans. Yet Delaney's liberal political views stop him from recognizing and coming to terms with his prejudice. Delaney's column in Chapter 5 illustrates his confused thinking on both coyotes and Mexicans. He notes that coyotes are not vicious but rather only acting on their natural urges. On the other hand, Delaney highlights actions that humans have taken to kill coyotes and lessen the risks the animals pose to people and the environment. This article can—and will, in a later chapter—be misinterpreted as a call for animal control of the coyote population. Readers' confusion with the column mirrors Delaney's own mental confusion and ambivalence on the topic of Mexicans.



Part 2, Chapters 7-8 (pages 230-257)

Part 2, Chapters 7-8 (pages 230-257) Summary

América waits for Candidó for an hour, feeling nervous alone on the street in Canoga Park. When Candidó returns, he has been beaten. He reports that all their money has been stolen. Candidó convinces América to go into a gas station and ask for the key to the restroom, because he is a bloody mess. Inside the bathroom, they both clean themselves.

Candidó walks América back toward their campsite. She does not realize where they are headed until they hit the busy road that separates the lower canyon from the upper canyon. América is furious with Candidó for failing to provide for her and the baby. Candidó jumps into a dumpster behind the Kentucky Fried Chicken, but América refuses to eat the chicken scraps he finds. She thinks that even in the dump at Tijuana, they didn't have to resort to eating garbage.

Fall has arrived, and Delaney does not find any romance in it. In the hills above Los Angeles, fall means hotter, drier weather. Sitting in his home office, Delaney contemplates his next column. He decides to research lizards and turkey vultures. The doorbell rings, and Delaney finds a work crew ready to extend the new community wall into his backyard. Delaney lets the men into the yard, thinking how he resents this wall. Yet he never returned Todd Sweet's phone calls, and he didn't even go to the decisive community meeting to cast his vote. Delaney returns to his desk, but finds that he cannot concentrate on his writing with the sounds of work and a Mexican radio station coming from his yard.

Later, Delaney helps Kyra close up the Da Ros place for the night, as he has done every night since the spray paint incident. Kyra surprises him with a gift of a ladder, which will enable Delaney to climb over the fence to get to the hilly trails behind their house. Kyra tells Delaney what makes the Da Ros house special, but he advises her to drop the listing because it has not sold for nine months.

Kyra and Delaney go to the grocery store to pick up items for their Thanksgiving feast. They have invited extended family, plus the Cherrystones and Jardines. When they check out, the clerk gives them a 12-pound turkey, because the store is offering a free turkey to everyone who spends more than fifty dollars on groceries.

Candidó has had a hard time finding work. He stands outside the post office with a few other men some days, but he worries that immigration agents will spot him. Candidó gets on-again off-again work with Sesor Willis, an alcoholic building contractor. Sesor Willis pays eight dollars an hour, and Candidó is able to start a new apartment fund in the peanut butter jar.



Candidó has noticed a change in América since their return from Canoga Park. She refuses to move or to bathe. Even though Candidó occasionally brings her a little treat, like a baby rattle or booties, América never smiles.

Sesor Willis tells Candidó that there will be no work for four days, on account of the Thanksgiving holiday. Candidó stops at the grocery store to buy food, as well as two beers for himself, to celebrate *El Tenksgeevee*. In the checkout line, he hears two young men laugh when the clerk offers them their bonus turkey. The men offer it to Candidó, but he tells them that he does not speak English. They thrust the turkey into Candidó's hands, and he is happy to have it. When he shows the frozen bird to América, she smiles.

Part 2, Chapters 7-8 (pages 230-257) Analysis

Candidó's free turkey is an unexpected blessing to him, and it serves as a poignant reminder of the elusive American dream. For Candidó, Thanksgiving is also a source of bitter irony. It is a feast meant to celebrate a plentiful harvest, yet Candidó rarely has enough food to eat. The Pilgrims first celebrated Thanksgiving in honor the help given them by the Indian Squanto when they were recent immigrants to America. Nobody has welcomed or helped Candidó and América since their arrival in the country, however.



Part 3, Chapters 1-2 (pages 261-283)

Part 3, Chapters 1-2 (pages 261-283) Summary

It is a windy Thanksgiving Day. Kyra's mother, Kit, has arrived, and she joins Delaney and Kyra at an early party at Dominick Flood's house. Jordan stays home with the maid, Orbalina. Delaney worries about the turkey they have left cooking at home. Kit, who is divorced and attractive, hits it off with the charming Dominick Flood. Kyra is also pleased to meet Flood, and she enjoys socializing with her Arroyo Blanco Estates neighbors and Flood's other friends.

Flood has hired waiters in tuxedos, who serve a lavish spread of food. As Delaney fills his plate, he sees Jack Jardine, his wife Erna, and Jack Jr. They discuss the fence, which Erna says makes her feel safer. Jack notes that Delaney's column on the coyotes inspired a lot of angry letters to the editor, from readers who thought that Delaney was advocating population control. Delaney says that they misunderstood what he had written.

Suddenly someone yells that a fire has broken out in the canyon. Delaney, Kyra, and Kit go home to check on Jordan. They join Jordan and Orbalina to watch the raging fire on a TV news report. Delaney decides that they should evacuate the house. Kyra says she needs to save the photo albums. Delaney decides he will take his computer and books.

América remembers how angry she felt when Candidó returned her to the canyon. She holds him responsible for all her troubles, and she has begun to go mad with resentment. One day, however, she hears a bird's lonely love song, and she begins to recover. When Candidó brings her the turkey, América shows him that her anger has passed. As she begins to cook the turkey, she feels so happy to be alive again that she does not notice the roar of a nearby fire. She and Candidó set off on a bone-bruising flight up the hill.

For Candidó, the fire is pure terror. He helps América wade through the stream and climb a pile of discarded appliances up to the road. At the top, they see a swarm of firemen and police activity. They run to the back of the closed Chinese grocery and drink from a water hose. Candidó is amazed by how his match started this terrible fire. He and América have left the campsite without taking the peanut butter jar, so all they have of their money is sixteen dollars. Afraid of the police, Candidó decides that they should make their way up to the upper canyon and hope to find shelter in an empty home.

Halfway up to Arroyo Blanco Estates, América begins having contractions in the brush. Candidó makes his way up the hillside and finds the white stucco wall. He follows it in the dark until he feels the doorway to a shed. Inside the shed is running water from a spigot. Candidó brings América to the shed, and she feels that she is about to give birth. A beautiful Siamese cat enters the shed, and América thinks of it as her midwife.

Part 3, Chapters 1-2 (pages 261-283) Analysis

Delaney writes about feeling at home in nature, yet it is América who is the novel's most natural character. Earlier in the novel, she has communed with a coyote and created medicine from wild flowers. In this section, she escapes insanity with the help of a bird's call and endures the pain of labor with the assistance of a friendly stray cat. América's connections with the natural environment represent her innocence. She is similar to the Biblical Eve before Eve was cast out of the Eden. Delaney and Kyra, on the other hand, live in a house that is a far distance from nature. Their high-tech surroundings illustrate a loss of innocence.



Part 3, Chapters 3-4 (pages 284-308)

Part 3, Chapters 3-4 (pages 284-308) Summary

Behind a police barricade at the top of Topanga Canyon, Delaney and his evacuated neighbors wait for further police instructions. Delaney attempts to make a joke about the burnt turkey, which angers Kyra. Jack Cherrystone gives Delaney a swig of a bottle of Scotch. Delaney sees two Mexicans, the man in the Padres cap and the man in the poncho. He tells the police officers that these men have been camping in the canyon and are probably responsible for the fire. Cherrystone and others, including a heavysset drunk woman wearing a nose ring, begin to yell at the two men. Unlike his last encounter with the man in the cap, Delaney meets the light-skinned Mexican's gaze and feels ready to fight. As the cops arrest the two Mexicans, the man in the baseball cap spits at Delaney, and Delaney pounces on him. The police break up the brawl.

Later, when the residents of Arroyo Blanco Estates are allowed back in their homes, Delaney feels ashamed of how he blamed the man in the cap for the fire. He knows that there is no proof the man is responsible. As Jordan searches the house for the cat, Dame Edna, Kyra makes some phone calls and learns that the Da Ros house has been burned. Kit finds Dom Flood's ankle monitor, with its cut strap, in her purse, and realizes that she has been duped by Flood. Delaney reasons that Flood has used the evacuation as an opportunity to flee the country.

Candidó keeps watch on América, who is hugging the cat. She cries out that she has to move her bowels, and then the baby is born. Candidó cuts the umbilical cord and is surprised to see that the baby is a girl. América says she will call the baby "Socorro."

At dawn, Candidó realizes that the fire has spared his family. He climbs atop the shed and jumps down to the yard behind it. From the backyards of deserted houses, he takes dog food, sacks of vegetables and grass seed, tools, wooden pallets, and the green plastic roof from a greenhouse. He steals dog food, aluminum pet dishes, and the blanket from inside a dog house. Scared by a dog barking in a yard next door to Delaney's house, Candidó is relieved to find Delaney's step ladder, and he uses it to climb over the fence.

In the brush below the fence, Candidó builds a small shelter for his family. He uses the pallets for walls and covers the plastic green roof with brush for camouflage. Candidó sees that América has eaten a pile of oranges, and he thinks that she must have protein for breastfeeding instead. He decides to kill the cat for stew.

Part 3, Chapters 3-4 (pages 284-308) Analysis

In these chapters, Candidó, whose name translates to "innocent," continues to earn this name. Even in a most desperate situation—that is, when his newborn child needs shelter—Candidó can only reconcile himself to stealing building materials by keeping a



mental list of the items he has taken and to which house he must return them to when he no longer needs them. The only items he feels no guilt for stealing are the bowls that belong to a dog. Candidó's daughter also has a meaningful name. In Spanish, the word *socorro* means "help." For América, the girl's name is a desperate plea. If América is able to prove that her baby was born in the United States, then Socorro will be a legal U.S. citizen. As a citizen, Socorro would be able to help her parents stay in the United States. It is bitterly ironic that Candidó and América could not afford to get their daughter the legal recognition that a hospital birth would have granted.



Part 3, Chapters 5-6 (pages 309-331)

Part 3, Chapters 5-6 (pages 309-331) Summary

Kyra surveys the fire's damage to the Da Rose estate, and finds that not one piece of the home remains intact. She figures that the Mexicans are to blame for the fire. Kyra thinks that they are like the barbarians outside the gates of Rome, only they are already inside. She returns home, and she and Delaney discuss how the police let the two suspected Mexican men go free.

Delaney and Kyra go out walking, hand in hand, to look for Dame Edna, who has been missing for three days. Jack Jardine pulls up in his car and asks them to get into his car, so he can show them something. Jack drives to the front gate of Arroyo Blanco Estates. There, on the white wall, someone has defaced the gate with big black graffiti. Jack says that the symbols look Hispanic.

November passes into December, and Delaney realizes that he has begun to hate Mexicans. He is angry that the two Mexicans who got arrested were let free because the police cannot share information with the INS. Every evening, Delaney sets up cameras along the fence near the gate. He uses trip wires, so that if people move near the gate they will be caught on film. Delaney also cuts his sleeping time in order to monitor the front gate personally.

One morning Delaney sees that the wires have been tripped, so he goes to the Cherrystones' house to develop the film. Jack Cherrystone has a darkroom. Delaney is surprised to see Candidó's face appear on the prints. He remembers Candidó's silver-flecked mustache, his crushed cheekbone, and his blood on Delaney's twenty-dollar bill.

Candidó has gone down to their old campsite and retrieved the peanut butter jar, only to find that the bills burned in the fire. He uses the coins, which endured the blaze, to buy some groceries and a small package of diapers. América tells him angrily that she wants to take a bus back to Mexico. He feels that he cannot survive without her. He would rather kill the three of them than to lose América and the baby back to Mexico.

América grows more and more afraid. In spite of their circumstances, she believes that Candidó is a very good man, a hard worker and a good provider for his family. He has stuffed newspaper into the slats between the pallets to insulate their handmade shack, and he has even dug a trench between the structure and the Arroyo Blanco Estates' sprinkler system so that the shack has running water. América thinks that Socorro is a citizen of the United States, but there is no paperwork to prove it. She and Candidó discuss the possibility of returning to Canoga Park again, to find a priest who will baptize their baby. One day, when she is alone, América takes Socorro outside to get fresh air, and then she notices that the baby stares blankly at nothing.



Candidó finds more cats to kill, always telling América that they are eating rabbit meat. Men no longer gather in front of the post office looking for work, and Candidó dares not show his face there. He hopes that he will see Sesor Willis again. He thinks that a little money is all he needs to return to Mexico, where his aunt will probably give his family shelter. Feeling desperate, Candidó stands outside the post office one day, but nobody offers him work. All the *gringos* who pass him seem to have a new hate for Mexicans, as a result of the fire.

The next day, Candidó returns to the post office. Rains have flooded the lower canyon now. He thinks that perhaps the fire was lucky, since it kept his family from being washed away by the floods. A postal worker tells Candidó then he needs to leave, so Candidó tries standing outside the Chinese grocery and then near the lumberyard. Then Candidó heads toward the Italian market, where he plans to look for food in the dumpster. A car swerves and almost hits Candidó. He recognizes its driver as the man who hit him months ago, and then sent his son down to the canyon to harass and torment him.

Part 3, Chapters 5-6 (pages 309-331) Analysis

The lives of the novel's main characters, Candidó and Delaney, continue to mirror each other. Both men have endured a prolonged rejection from their wives. América's affections toward Candidó cooled when he failed to procure an apartment for América and the baby. Kyra forced Delaney out of their bed because he refused to support the neighborhood fence. Now, however, each man has conformed to his wife's expectations. Candidó has built a shelter for his family, and Delaney has begun thinking of Mexicans as a threat that must be kept from the neighborhood. The similarity in romantic plots illustrates the shared humanity that bonds the two men, foreshadowing the moment of human connection between the two men that occurs at the end of the novel.



Part 3, Chapters 7-8 (pages 332-355)

Part 3, Chapters 7-8 (pages 332-355) Summary

When he sees Candidó walking alongside the road, Delaney swerves onto the gravel curb to stop him. He dials 911 and shouts at Candidó to stay where he is. Candidó walks into traffic, causing a woman in an oncoming pickup truck to veer into Delaney's Acura. She is angry, and Delaney tries to explain himself when a cop comes to investigate the collision. As the Acura gets towed away, Delaney sets off in the rain to follow Candidó's footprints.

Deluged by heavy rainfall, Kyra pulls off to the side of the road. She is driving in Agoura, on her way to pick up Jordan at a friend's house. Kyra makes a wrong turn and discovers a rural area with hills and sheep. She sees a FOR SALE BY OWNER sign and follows a long driveway to find a three-story mansion that makes the Da Ros place seem garish by comparison. As she approaches the house's owner, Kyra begins to envision this house as the anchor for a new subdivision. She thinks the real money is to be made not in real estate but in developing.

As Delaney hunts Candidó, the thought occurs to him that perhaps Candidó started the fire. It is getting dark, so he decides to go home for a flashlight. At the Arroyo Blanco Estates gate, he sees new graffiti. He takes the camera and goes home to retrieve his gun, which Jack Jardine has convinced him to buy for "home protection."

The Cherrystones are not home, so Delaney lets himself in with their hidden key. When he develops the film, he is surprised to see Jack Jr. and friend, rather than Candidó, caught in the act of spray-painting the gate. Nevertheless, Delaney thinks that the Mexican is guilty of wrecking Delaney's car, of stealing dog food and plastic sheeting, and of setting the fire. He destroys the pictures and sets off to find Candidó.

Candidó returns to the shack and tells América that he was almost hit again by the crazy *gabacho*. She tells him that Socorro is blind, and that she thinks it is related to the burning pee she suffered after the men attacked her during her pregnancy. Before Candidó can respond, Delaney enters the shack with a gun. Delaney sees the girl and the baby, before suddenly they are all carried away by a rush of water. Candidó, América, and the baby ride a pallet like a surf board down the hillside. Candidó loses control of the pallet and falls through the water and the rocks, until the roof of the post office stops him. América sobs, because the baby is lost. Delaney's head pops out of the water. Candidó extends his hand to lift Delaney to safety.

Part 3, Chapters 7-8 (pages 332-355) Analysis

Throughout the novel, the primary conflict has been of the man versus man variety. Every plot point has resulted from human action. Unlike the fire, which was caused by Candidó's match, the flooding is a force of nature. At the moment when conflict switches



from man versus man to man versus nature, the men recognize their common humanity and begin to work cooperatively. In the final image of the novel, as Candidó gives his hand to Delaney, Boyle reminds readers that Candidó and Delaney are united by their humanity.



Characters

Delaney

Delaney Mossbacher, the novel's protagonist, is a heavy-shouldered man who stands five-foot-nine and weighs one hundred and sixty-five pounds. He has red hair. Delaney wears glasses. He is a liberal humanist and an environmentalist. Delaney belongs to the Sierra Club, Save the Children, the National Wildlife Foundation and the Democratic Party.

Delaney lives in Arroyo Blanco Estates with his wife Kyra and their stepson Jordan. Like his wife, Delaney is a perfectionist who jogs, eats healthy, eschews smoking, and drinks only occasionally. Delaney works at home and bears the primary responsibility for his stepson Jordan's care.

Originally from New York, Delaney has lived in Los Angeles for two years. He writes a monthly column for an environmental magazine. Sometimes Delaney writes about animals that have been transplanted to the canyon, because he feels a connection to them as an outsider. Delaney's job requires him to write only a few hours each day. He uses the remainder of his time to go on hikes and to cook gourmet meals. Delaney's comfortable lifestyle is partly funded by his inheritance.

At the start of the novel, Delaney has a clean driving record. He drives an Acura with a vanity license plate that says "PILGRIM." In the novel's first chapter, he accidentally hits a Mexican with his car. Later, Delaney's car gets stolen. Near the end of the novel, Delaney collides with another vehicle as he chases Candidó off the side of the road.

Delaney struggles to find his voice to combat prejudice against Mexicans. He speaks out against a community gate, but after the gate goes up he is not willing to take a stand on the issue of the wall. Delaney tries to avoid conflict. Delaney lost his one and only fight, in high school, and he remembers the incident with humiliation. After the canyon fire, however, Delaney tackles the Mexicans that he believes started the fire. He begins to think of himself as the neighborhood's protector and sets up a trap of cameras to catch Mexicans when they graffiti the fence.

Delaney enjoys being a stepfather to Kyra's son Jordan. When Jordan leaves to stay with his grandmother, Delaney finds himself lonely. Delaney would like to have a child with Kyra. He and his first wife, Louise, decided to have an abortion when Louise got pregnant.

Candidó

Candidó is first seen lying injured in the brush at the side of a trail, his face badly scraped and his hand bloody. He wears a khaki shirt and pants that look cheap. At the start of the novel, he and his wife América are new immigrants to Los Angeles. They



came from Tijuana four months ago, and they have been living in the canyon for three weeks.

Although he is only thirty-three, Candidó's black hair and mustache are peppered with gray. His premature graying indicates not only Candidó's struggles, but also the fact that he tends to take on a great deal of responsibility. For instance, when he and América were staying at the dump at Tijuana before crossing into the United States, Candidó made himself responsible for keeping an unknown girl safe from the men who wanted to rape her.

Candidó grew up in Tepoztlbn, in the south of Mexico. Candidó's mother died when he was a child, and at the time he felt guilty for her dying. Candidó's father remarried a woman named Consuelo, whom Candidó does not like. With Consuelo, his father had nine children, whom he loved more than his firstborn son.

On his first trip up North, Candidó lived in a two-room apartment in Echo Park with thirty-two other men. He has spent many summers up north, doing agricultural work to support his first wife, Resurrección. Candidó's first wife left him for another man. After his wife left, Candidó was humiliated and turned to alcohol. América is a younger sister of Resurrección.

The first time Candidó was near Topanga Canyon, during a summer when he worked up north, he escaped immigration by running across eight lanes of highway traffic. When he tries to recreate his luck on the road below Arroyo Blanco Estates, Candidó gets hit by Delaney's Acura. The collision leaves Candidó badly injured. For the rest of the novel, he has a concave place under one eye and he walks with a limp.

Candidó is an honest man who works hard. Despite his injuries, whenever Candidó finds work he is the fastest man on the team. Candidó does not steal until the birth of his baby makes him desperate, and even then he keeps a mental list of the items he vows to return to their owners. Candidó's cleverness and his knowledge of home construction enable him to build a shelter for América wherever they are.

Kenny Grissom

Kenny is the auto salesman who sold Delaney his Acura. Kenny tells Delaney that he once struck and killed a three-legged dog with his car. He also tells Delaney that Mexicans are responsible for most auto thefts.

Kyra Menaker-Mossbacher

Kyra Menaker-Mossbacher, Delaney's wife, is a beautiful blonde woman who uses her good looks to her advantage. Kyra is an agnostic, an environmentalist, and a Democrat. She is always in a hurry and walks in long strides. Kyra has an explosive personality. She reacts to every problem as though it is a major issue.



Like her husband, Kyra is a perfectionist who jogs, eats healthy, eschews smoking, and drinks only occasionally. She drinks coffee lightened with skim milk, for the calcium, and she makes her son Jordan eat a healthy breakfast of granola and fruit.

As a realtor, Kyra is the family's breadwinner. She focuses on creating goodwill among her clients in order to encourage repeat business. Kyra knows how to pitch a home to potential buyers to make them want to live there. Her ambition to be a top seller leads her to work many hours each week.

Kyra has fallen in love with a mansion known as the Da Ros place. She would like to live there herself someday. Every night, when she goes to the Da Ros place to lock it up, she lingers there. After a run-in with Mexican squatters on the lawn of the Da Ros place, Kyra becomes afraid of going there and begins closing up as fast as she can. The Da Ros incident, combined with a concern for housing prices in the neighborhoods where she has listings, increase Kyra's negative feelings about Mexican immigrants.

Kyra joins the neighborhood campaign to build a wall around Arroyo Blanco Estates. Her pro-wall stance is partly influenced by the devastating loss of her two beloved pet dogs to coyotes. Kyra believes that the fence will keep coyotes out of her yard.

América

América is Candidó's seventeen-year-old wife. Before coming north to the United States, she has never been farther than the neighboring town in Mexico. América has long black hair and an innocent looking face. She is the much-younger sister of Candidó's first wife, Resurrección. Candidó thinks that América looks just like Resurrección, only better.

At the start of the novel, América is five months pregnant yet weighs little more than one hundred pounds. She receives no medical care during her pregnancy, and she is malnourished. After getting raped by two men, América has a burning sensation when she urinates. América gives birth without the aid of a doctor in a dirty gardener's shed. Her baby, Socorro, initially appears healthy, but is soon discovered to be blind.

Like Candidó, América dreams of finding success in America. She initially seeks work as a seamstress, but only manages to find several days of work cleaning statues for an importer. América is a hard worker who does not take breaks. After being attacked, América stays hidden at the campsite and does not look for work anymore.

Being homeless is especially hard on América because she worries about having a home for her child. As her pregnancy progresses, and Candidó fails to save enough money to secure an apartment, América becomes deeply depressed and refuses to speak to her husband. By the end of the novel, América has decided to return to Mexico the first chance she gets.



Jordan

Jordan, Kyra's six-year-old son, dedicates himself to Nintendo, superheroes and baseball cards. He has fair hair like his mother.

Jack Jardine

Jack Jardine, Delaney's neighbor and lawyer, has strong negative opinions about Mexicans. He counsels Delaney to forget about the auto accident. He feels that Delaney will not be held liable for the collision because the Mexican is an illegal immigrant who cannot seek legal help. Jack has served as president on the Arroyo Blanco Estates homeowners' association for the past two years. He believes that the United States has more than enough immigrants. Jack drives a classic 1953 MG TD.

Jack Jr.

Jack Jr. is the eighteen-year-old son of Jack Jardine, Delaney's lawyer and neighbor. Jack Jr. is a gangly redhead with mud-brown eyes. He has a partially shaved head and several earrings. Jack Jr. makes racist jokes and damages Candidó's campsite.

Jack Cherrystone

Jack Cherrystone, a neighbor and friend of Delany and Kyra, does voiceover work for movie trailers. He has a deep voice and an animated personality. Jack is a proponent of building a gate and wall to keep intruders out of Arroyo Blanco Estates. He is an amateur photographer with an in-home dark room.

Resurrección

Candidó married Resurrección, the older sister of América, when he was twenty years old. She was unable to become pregnant by Candidó. After seven years of marriage, Resurrección left Candidó for another man, whose child she carried.

Sally Lieberman

Sally Lieberman is a realtor from a company called Sunrise. She is in her mid-forties. Sally works out and dresses well.



Candelario Pyrez

Candelario Pyrez, a young Hispanic man, runs the labor exchange. He drives a white pickup truck. When the labor exchange closes, he warns Candidó to stay hidden for a while.

Mary

Mary is a drunken *gringa* with long hair and a nose ring. Besides América, Mary is the only other woman who looks for work at the labor exchange. América figures that Mary gets paid more money for the same work América does, because Mary can speak English to the *patrun*.

Louisa and Bill Greutert

The Greuterts are potential buyers for the Da Ros mansion. Bill owns an investment firm. They are looking for a rustic home in a faraway location, to escape the influx of immigrants in the Los Angeles area.

The light-skinned Mexican

The light-skinned Mexican is a villainous character who taunts Kyra and rapes América. He wears a San Diego Padres hat backwards. His jeans are new. He chews gum, at times taking a stick slowly from his pocket in an intimidating manner. The light-skinned Mexican has dark eyes like sinkholes. His voice sounds feminine.

Dominick Flood

Dominick Flood, a charming man with a nicely decorated home, is one of Jack's legal clients. Flood is under house arrest for crimes he committed when he ran a chain of banks.

Al Lopez

Al Lopez runs a handyman service. Kyra hires him to extend the height of her backyard fence.

Todd Sweet

Todd Sweet is an athletic looking man who opposes the idea of fencing in Arroyo Blanco Estates. He wants Delaney to help him campaign against the fence.



Kit Menaker

Kit Menaker, the mother of Kyra, is an attractive fifty-five-year-old divorcee. She is charmed by Dominick Flood on Thanksgiving.

Orbalina

Orbalina is Delaney and Kyra's maid. She is Hispanic.



Objects/Places

Delaney's car

Delaney drives an Acura with a vanity license plate that says "PILGRIM." The Acura's right headlight gets damaged when Delaney hits Candidó with his car.

Bag of tortillas

When Candidó is struck by Delaney's car, he carries a small brown bag that contains a package of tortillas. The package is labelled "*Como Hechas a Mano.*"

Opossum

Candidó's father catches a wild opossum for dinner when Candidó is a child. Candidó thinks that it tastes like a wet rat.

Candidó's mother's corpse

Candidó's mother dies when he is six years old, and he feels that he has killed her by not saying his prayers. His mother's coffin is sealed in glass, because the body smells. Young Candidó thinks that the corpse opens her eyes and told him to go to the devil.

"Pilgrim at Topanga Creek"

Delaney writes "Pilgrim at Topanga Creek," a monthly column for a nature magazine called *Wide Open Spaces*. The column contains a naturalist's observations on life.

Arroyo Blanco Community Center

Like all the structures in Arroyo Blanco Estates, the community center is a white stucco building with an orange tile roof. It features a kitchen, a wet bar, a stage, a P.A. system, and seating for two hundred people.

Sacheverell

Sacheverell is Kyra's dog. A wild coyote kills Sacheverell.



The gate

The residents of the Arroyo Blanco Estates subdivision want a gate to keep strangers out of their community. Delaney thinks that the gate is an exclusionary, antidemocratic absurdity.

"BEANERS DIE"

After ripping up América's dress and throwing away Candidó's campfire equipment, Jack Jr. and his friend paint this message on the rocks at their campsite.

Labor exchange

At the labor exchange, Hispanic men seek daily work. The exchange has a wall-less structure that keeps the workers out of the sun while they wait.

Da Ros mansion

The Da Ros mansion is a home that is on the market with Kyra as the seller's realtor. It is on the edge of Malibu and has twenty rooms. The house went on the market after Mr. Da Ros committed suicide.

Buddhas

América gets work scrubbing Buddha statues for an import company.

Jeep

In the parking lot outside an Indian restaurant, Kyra sees an Afghan crying in a green Jeep. She confronts the dog's owner about his mistreating the animal.

The wall

After the gate fails to keep the residents of Arroyo Blanco Estates safe from intruders, they construct a tall white stucco wall to keep out coyotes and criminals.

Dame Edith

When América gives birth in a shed along the wall surrounding Arroyo Blanco Estates, the shed also provides shelter for a stray Siamese cat. América thinks of the cat as her midwife. The cat is Jordan's pet, Dame Edna. Candidó later kills the cat for stew.



Socorro

Socorro is the daughter of América and Candidó. She is born in a gardener's shed. América soon realizes that the baby is blind. Socorro is lost in a flood at the end of the novel.



Themes

The American Dream

The "American Dream" is the belief that anyone can become prosperous in the United States if they work hard enough and have the determination to succeed. In this novel, Boyle examines that notion. The characters who labor the hardest, Candidó and América, are the poorest people in the novel. Even with an injured arm and a limp, Candidó puts more effort into his building projects than fellow workers do. On the other hand, Delaney works part-time at a job that involves nothing more than reflecting on the wildlife he observes while taking leisurely hikes. Kyra's work as a realtor, as Boyle presents it in the novel, involves chatting with people inside beautiful homes. Delaney and Kyra live a comfortable life that affords them a great deal of free time. Unlike Candidó and América, the Mossbachers have time to do work for the sake of fun. They spend their free time pursuing such activities as cooking and gardening, which a poor laborer might get paid the minimum wage to do. Delaney and Kyra do not need to work hard to afford their lifestyle, because they already have certain advantages that cause them not to fret over finances. Delaney's advantage is his trust fund, and Kyra's is her first-class education from Stanford University. Candidó and América, on the other hand, have no familial wealth or education to help them achieve their goals.

Borders

The novel contains many physical borders that separate Candidó and América from their rich neighbors. The largest border is the one that they have already crossed, the border that separates the United States from Mexico. No one in the novel can alter the presence of that border, yet the residents of Arroyo Blanco Estates choose to erect the novel's other borders. The wealthy homeowners build a gate to separate themselves from Mexicans. When that fails to keep immigrants out of their neighborhood, they put up a tall fence. These physical structures reflect the borders in their minds that keep them from thinking of Mexicans as their fellow human beings. The road that separates the upper canyon, where Arroyo Blanco Estates is located, from the lower canyon, where Candidó and América make camp, also acts as a border between two types of people. The people with high status live above the road, while the humblest indigents live below it. Many moments of conflict in the novel occur when characters cross that border. For instance, Candidó is hit by Delaney's car when he crosses the road, and Delaney's car gets stolen when he hikes below the road.

Ideals versus actions

During the novel's first community meeting, Jack Cherrystone claims that he is liberal, yet he favors the idea of a gate to keep outsiders away from Arroyo Blanco Estates. The tone of his comment suggests that if even a liberal supports the idea of a gate, then it



must be a good idea. Cherrystone does not consider the fact that he may not actually be as liberal-minded as he believes he is, since his actions do not match his liberal ideals.

The character who struggles most with the conflict between actions and ideals is Delaney. When the idea of a fence is proposed midway through the novel, Delaney says that he opposes the fence, but he never acts to affirm this stance. He also says that he favors letting coyotes live naturally, but he writes in his column about the positives of coyote population control. Saying that coyotes and Mexicans should be allowed to roam freely is merely Delaney's way of maintaining his self-image as a liberal. If he tried to reconcile those words with his deeds, which include setting up a camera trap to catch Mexicans painting the gate and hunting Candidó with his gun, Delaney would be forced to admit that liberal ideals have little to do with the way he conducts his actions.

Style

Point of View

The novel is told from the third-person point of view, from the limited perspective of one character. The perspective changes many times throughout the novel. At different times, the narration reflects the thoughts of Candidó, América, Delaney, and Kyra.

Setting

Arroyo Blanco Estates is a new upscale housing development in southern California. All the houses look the same, with white walls and red tile roofs. The lawns in Arroyo Blanco Estates are meticulously landscaped. Shiny expensive cars can be seen driving along the neighborhood's uncrowded roads.

Below Arroyo Blanco Estates is a busy road. Alongside the road are several groceries, a post office, and a temporary shelter that serves as the labor exchange for day workers. The road curves because it is built into the side of a mountain.

Below the busy road, a path winds through colorful untamed vegetation in a state park. Topanga State Park has nature trails that lead down into the canyon. The park includes a creek and high walls of stone. The trails are usually empty, because the park is not a popular hiking destination.

Language and Meaning

Boyle writes in modern English with common vocabulary that would not challenge most readers. He alternates between extremely short sentences containing just three words to long sentences that use fifty or more words. Boyle does not often make use of such literary devices as simile and metaphor.

Structure

The novel is comprised of three parts, and each part has eight chapters. The parts are titled "Arroyo Blanco," "El Tenksgeevee," and "Socorro." The chapters do not have names. Part One introduces the reader to the novel's main characters. In "Arroyo Blanco," Boyle sets up the two primary conflicts in the novel—that is, Candidó's struggle to provide for his family, and Delaney's struggle to make sense of how he feels about Mexicans. In Part Two, the action rises as Candidó's financial situation worsens in spite of his determined efforts to earn money. Also in "El Tenksgeevee," Delaney becomes more aware of the Mexicans around him and has negative experiences with several Mexican immigrants. In Part Three, the tension continues to build because the fire in the canyon magnifies Delaney's negative feelings about Mexicans, and the birth of Socorro

increases Candidó's desperate need to obtain food and shelter for his family. The novel ends without a real resolution. Boyle stops the novel in the middle of the action, leaving the reader to wonder whether Socorro has survived the mudslide and how Candidó and Delaney will treat each other after Candidó has saved Delaney's life.



Quotes

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the reader to wonder whether Socorro has survived the mudslide and how Candidó and Delaney will treat each other after Candidó has saved Delaney's life.



Topics for Discussion

Compare and contrast Candidó and Delaney. How are their attitudes toward work, family and politics different or similar?

In this novel, Boyle presents characters and situations that are touched by immigration, yet the author refrains from choosing sides in the immigration debate. Does reading *The Tortilla Curtain* either challenge or affirm your beliefs about illegal immigration?

The Tortilla Curtain does not have just one protagonist, but instead is told from the viewpoints of Candidó, América, Delaney, and Kyra. If you had to label one character as the hero of this novel, whom would you choose?

Analyze the language and structure of Delaney's magazine essays and reflect on how Boyle uses those pieces of writing to inform the reader about Delaney's character traits.

The novel ends without a clear resolution. The loss of Socorro and Candidó's outstretched hand provide conflicting images of death and redemption. Does the ending leave you feeling mostly hopeful or mostly sorrowful?

Candidó's name comes from Voltaire's novel *Candide*. What similarities exist between Candidó and Voltaire's protagonist, Candide?

The auto collision in Chapter One sets off a chain of devastating events. Consider other actions Delaney could have taken, rather than giving Candidó twenty dollars before leaving the scene of the accident. How would these alternate actions change the novel's outcome?