

Tortilla Flat Study Guide

Tortilla Flat by John Steinbeck

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Plot Summary

Danny returns from the army to learn he has inherited two houses in Tortilla Flat. After being arrested for drunk and disorderly and escaping jail, Danny talks an old friend, Pilon, into renting one house, thereby setting them up for conflict. To cover rent, Pilon sublets to friends Pablo Sanchez and Jesus Maria Corcoran. A candle that Pablo has dedicated to St. Francis but uses for profane purposes sets fire to the house. Pilon, Pablo, and Jesus Maria escape, sleep in the forest and raid a picnic to obtain a peace offering for Danny, who relents and accepts them as guests.

Pilon talks the Pirate out of living in a chicken coop with his five dogs and into joining the household, the better to gain access to the Pirate's horde of quarters. They learn his woodcutting income is dedicated to St. Francis for miraculously curing a dog. The Pirate's begging becomes the mainstay of the household's food supply. Big Joe Portagee comes home from the army and, after a term in jail for drunk and disorderly, meets Pilon and joins the household. They spend St. Andrew's Eve searching for treasure, but only dig up a useless U.S. Geodetic Survey marker. Pilon and Joe get drunk on the Seaside beach, and Pilon trades Joe's pants for wine while Joe sleeps. Pilon later reclaims the pants and Danny's hocked blanket from Mrs. Torrelli.

Danny falls for "Sweets" Ramirez and gives her a vacuum cleaner, although her house has no electricity. Needing to break them up, the paisanos steal the vacuum and trade it to Torrelli, who grows furious when he sees it has no motor. Jesus Maria befriends a Mexican corporal, who tells the paisanos his tragic story. Ever-sleepy Big Joe is pursued by Tia Ignacia and ends up making love with her in the road. The paisanos discover the Pirate's moneybag missing and turn savagely vigilante against Big Joe. The surrendered bag holds enough quarters for the Pirate to redeem his vow to St. Francis. Decked out in the paisanos' best clothing, the Pirate attends mass, hears his donation praised, and preaches to his dogs all the priest has said about Francis. The paisanos go on a robbery binge to provide for Teresina Cortez and her children after the bean crop is destroyed and contemplate the funny-but-sad cases—Cornelia Ruiz's pig, Tall Bob Smoke, and the Ravannos.

Danny grows depressed, disappears into the forest, runs amok and sells his house to Torrelli, who foolishly shows off the bill of sale, enabling the paisanos to grab and burn it. When Danny returns, the paisanos earn enough money to throw him the best party ever, with all of Tortilla Flat helping and turning out. Danny makes love to the women, challenges the men to fight, races off, and dies in a fall down a dry gulch. His military funeral is a major social event, but the paisanos cannot attend because they lack appropriate clothing. They watch from afar, raid Torrelli's for wine to celebrate Danny's memory, and allow the house to burn down as a fitting tribute. The talisman that binds them is broken, and they go their separate ways.



Chapters 1-5

Chapters 1-5 Summary

Danny returns from the army to learn he has inherited two small houses from the viejo, his grandfather. Feeling the burden of home ownership, Danny buys and drinks almost a gallon of red wine, becomes drunk and disorderly and is arrested. As a veteran, he receives only thirty boring days in jail. Tito Ralph, the jailer, and Danny go out for more wine. Danny is reported escaped and avoids recapture. He encounters his old paisano (friend), Pilon and the two agree to share their liquor. Danny feels lonely and talks Pilon into sharing Danny's house, though Pilon hopes it will not harm their friendship.

Everything in the house is battered and rickety. Pilon is sure they will be happy, but Danny worries, wishing their roles were reversed. Danny has no money to turn on the water, but they butcher a stolen rooster and sit by the fire eating. They agree that Pilon will pay 15 dollars a month rent, which Pilon figures something will happen before it falls due.

Pilon moves into the smaller of the nearly-identical houses and Danny and he engage in riotous living. Pilon worries about rent, so he cleans squid for Chin Kee, but spends it on wine. He schemes to obtain some of Mrs. Pastano's tamales and evil mixes into his soul. Souls capable of great good are also capable of great evil, Pilon thinks. Pilon meets Pablo Sanchez, and they go to Pilon's house, light a candle and drink wine. They talk and sing and become quite maudlin. Pilon asks Pablo to share his house for just fifteen dollars a month. The unlikelihood of payment changes nothing: it is a good deal.

Pilon and Pablo enjoy unhurried, golden mornings gossiping and wishing it would rain good wine. Pilon worries Danny might want to marry Rosa Martin, who is a money grubber. They visit Danny learn that Mrs. Morales' chickens are dead of food poisoning. Mrs. Morales and Danny gut the chickens and sell them to the butcher, causing no fatalities. Danny knows Mrs. Morales owns her house and has money in the bank, so he is interested in her. He asks Pilon for rent money to buy her candy and Pilon stalks away.

Pilon and Pablo encounter Jesus Maria Corcoran who offers to share his wine, which he bought with money from hocking a rowboat he finds on the beach at Seaside and buys wine, silk drawers, and whiskey for Arabella Gross. Arabella accepts the gifts but departs with some soldiers, and Jesus Maria still wants to buy Arabella a bra. Pilon and Pablo take Jesus Maria home and get him to agree to fifteen dollars a month rent. He refuses to pay three dollars up front on account. Pilon tells Jesus Maria about Danny's and Mrs. Morales. They send Jesus Maria to the wharf to beg for food, which he does grudgingly.

Pilon and Pablo are drinking and talking about their gift for Danny, who drinks too heavily, like other deceased friends, one who falls into a quarry and the other eats bad



fish. The narrator describes typical activities of the town for that era: stores closing for the day; people catching for gossip and various religious groups making ablutions and complaining about vice. As the sun goes down, Pilon and Pablo head home; stopping to charm Mrs. Torrelli for dinner and firewood.

Once home, Jesus staggers in, torn and bloodied from an attack by Arabella and the soldiers. Pilon is inspired to give Danny the unused bra as a gift to Mrs. Morales. During the night, a candle sets fire to paper, and the fire rapidly spreads to consume the house, though the occupants escaped unharmed. They decide their lesson is never to leave wine over night.

Chapters 1-5 Analysis

The first five chapters establish Danny, Pilon and Pablo as great wine bibbers and petty thieves. Danny is lonely and burdened with home owning. Shrewd Pilon sees this but moves in, nonetheless, and soon worries that being a tenant will become slavery. Danny and Pilon sharing wine, women, and a good fight points to the novel's climax: This is how Tortilla Flat defines a good party. "Drunk a second time," Pilon sublets half his house to Pablo and then to Jesus Maria Corcoran, a good man but also "an unwilling vehicle of evil." It is established that Tortilla Flat thrives on gossip about love lives. Danny is seeing the rich widow next door, and the paisanos feel obligated to protect him - the first of several times they meddle. The saga of the renters ends as Danny's second house burns to the ground—St. Francis' apparent revenge for the misuse of a candle dedicated to his honor. St. Francis, lover of animals, reappears later in the novel.



Chapters 6-8

Chapters 6-8 Summary

Danny visited the wreckage of his other house and feels angry at his careless friends but also relief that half his burden is gone. He resolves to punish them a bit, lest they consider him soft. Everyone loves Danny and Pilon and Pablo bring stolen delicacies to Danny as a peace offering. He berates them, but the smell of deviled eggs wins him over; the pink bra seals the reconciliation. Danny invites Pilon, Pablo, and Jesus Maria to live with him - on condition that no one touch his bed. Jesus Maria enthusiastically pledges them to keeping Danny in food - something the others paisanos worry will enslave them, but the promise cannot be renounced.

People see the Pirate daily in Monterey and either laugh or pity him, but do not know him. He shrinks from others as he goes about selling the pitchwood that he cuts in the forest every morning. Pilon watches the Pirate and knows his routine, up to even begging scraps for his five dogs. Pirate spends nothing of the .25 cents he earns each day, so he must be hoarding at least a hundred dollars. Pilon convinces himself that the Pirate has money but no brains, while Pilon has brains and no money. That night, Pilon visits the Pirate winning him over with a cookie. Pilon talks about Pirate's many friends who worry about him. The Pirate is unaware he has friends, has no complaints about his life, and grows suspicious when Pilon suggests that if the Pirate is hiding money, the Pirate ought to use it. The Pirate denies having money, closes the subject, but thanks his unknown friends for their concern. When Pilon discusses the issue with the others, they decide to invite the Pirate to live with them.

Every morning after moving in, the Pirate and the dogs awaken while the others sleep, make the rounds of the restaurants and wharves, and bring home larger packages. The men play a "cat and mouse" game with Pirate, trying to learn where his money is. Several times they are unsuccessful at following the Pirate's trail. On one such tracking venture, they lose him, but find him on the porch when they return to the house. He presents them with a large canvas bag containing nearly 1,000 quarters. Soon, the Pirate can buy a golden candlestick for St. Francis, to thank him for curing one of his dogs (which is later run over). The defeated paisanos put the bag under Danny's pillow, while the Pirate is overcome with happiness to have friends.

Big Joe Portagee spends half his civilian life in jail in before the war and three-quarters of his army time at hard labor. After another 30 days in jail from a wine binge, Joe is turned away at Torrelli's but is told about Danny's house. He encounters Pilon, who is preoccupied with St. Andrew's Eve, the night when every paisano seeks two-hundred years of buried treasures. Pilon explains to Joe that ghosts walk freely this haunted night. Other searchers zigzag in the woods, but no one acknowledges anyone else. Pilon points to what he thinks is a blue pillar of light and has Joe collect two sticks to form a cross to mark the spot. Pilon chants an incantation to claim the discovery, builds



a bonfire, and draws a large circle in the dirt around them. Joe wants to dig immediately, but Pilon explains it is dangerous to do so until the next night.

When Joe asks what Pilon will do with the treasure, Pilon tells Joe that one may not keep one's findings. Pilon is digging for Danny. Pablo, Jesus Maria, and the Pirate are also in the woods, but Pilon is sure he will find the treasure because his heart is clean and unselfish. Pilon feels he has changed enough that he will not go to hell. Joe falls asleep during Pilon's preaching. At dawn, Pilon erases all trace of their vigil and memorizes the location. The other paisanos find nothing, and Pilon keeps Joe from spilling the story. Watching Joe settle comfortably into a chair, Danny knows he will move in, and warns him away from his bed.

In the evening, Pilon and Joe sneak into Morales' yard and borrow tools. Joe admits to stealing Danny's small blanket as surety, and Pilon attacks and threatens Joe. Pilon drinks to sooth his nerves but does not share, and makes Joe dig alone. By midnight, the trench is three feet deep. At dawn, Joe hits something hard: a survey plaque similar to the one Johnny Pom-pomtries to sell and gets a year in jail and \$2,000 fine.

They walk down to the beach and Pilon uncorks the jug and shares with Joe, saying he is sorry not to see Danny's face when he gets the gold, but then rationalizing that wealth might not be good for Danny, and they ought do something to make Danny happy. They fall asleep and when Pilon wakes, he steals Joe's trousers, convincing himself they do not fit him properly and Danny's blanket must be avenged. Señora Torrelli gives him only a quart of wine for the pants and blanket, which he steals back and goes back to Joe, who is happy to have his pants back.

Chapters 6-8 Analysis

Petty theft weaves through these chapters. First, it serves a higher goal of pacifying Danny after the fire. After saving face, Danny lets them live into his house as guests, and Jesus Maria unilaterally vows to keep Danny provided with food. This foreshadows adding a fifth member to the crowded household, who at least is adept at finding food, and a sixth member, who is most at home in jail and whose thievery points to the great battle ahead. Pilon demonstrates his superstitious nature, which apparently is shared by all paisanos, and Pilon's rather flexible ethics, as he castigates stealing, then steals as punishment, and then steals again out of compassion. Note that the hoard of quarters, unlike the candle, is considered truly untouchable. St. Francis forms the link.



Chapters 9-11

Chapters 9-11 Summary

Dolores Engracia ("Sweets") Ramirez is normally hatchet-faced and lumpy, with a shrill voice, but several evenings a week can, through passion, appear attractive and inviting. She leans over her front gate, purring at passing men, but truly wants only Danny. She plans to invite him in for a glass of wine, and let nature take its course. One day Danny finds a keg of shingle nails, sells them to a rival supply company, and heads to Torrelli's. Sweets hails him; they share a drink; he assaults her virtue, and agrees for the sake of the neighbors to come back in the evening. At Torrelli's, he buys a gallon of wine for Sweets and invites Pablo to drink a single glass and they drink half a gallon. Danny buys a shiny, large aluminum vacuum cleaner, which Sweets displays proudly, though she has no electricity. His friends believe Sweets is wearing Danny out. Deep in his heart, Danny is tiring of Sweets, but does not admit it to himself.

The paisanos steal Sweet's vacuum and sell it to Torrelli for two gallons of wine. They drink the first, saving the second for Sweet, but when Danny says he is tired of her, they finish off the second gallon. Johnny Pom-pom reports that Torrelli is out to kill Pilon for selling him a machine with no motor. Danny is happy Torrelli has been avenged for the poor quality of his wine lately and believes they may shop elsewhere.

Jesus Maria is a humanitarian, trying to relieve suffering and sorrow and to share happiness and has a knack for finding situations that require good deeds. Jesus Maria meets a policeman, who is leading a 16-year old boy and a sick baby. The boy, a corporal in the Mexican army, has been loitering in the gutter. Jesus Maria accepts responsibility and takes them home. The boy tells baby Manuel twenty times a day, "You will be a general." The corporal marries a beautiful girl, who gives birth to this baby, but she is stolen by a capitán. After two attempts on his life, the shamed caporál leaves with the baby. The baby shudders and dies. Since Manuel will never be a general, Pilon says, the corporal himself must kill the capitán. The boys mourn the happy life the boy misses with such a father.

One day, in an all-day rain, Big Joe finds shelter under a rowboat. Later, he is invited into the home of Tia Ignacia, a 45-year-old widow, who is taciturn and harsh. By his fourth glass of wine, Joe relaxes. In the evening Tia Ignacia subtly flirts with Joe, trying to get him to her bed. When nothing happens, Tia finds Joe fast asleep, so she attacks him with a stick and throws him out the door. He begs to know what he has done. To stop the beating, Joe grabs her arms, and as he restrains her, falls in love. Patrolman Jake Lake is astonished to see them making love in the road, but leaves with just a warning.



Chapters 9-11 Analysis

Having filled the house, Steinbeck examines Danny and his friends' characters through three vignettes. The story of the vacuum cleaner reinforces Danny's petty thievery, entrepreneurial sense and inability to endure long-term romances. Sweets' rise in society thanks to a non-functioning appliance offers pathetic humor, while Torrelli's justified anger at being cheated builds towards a great confrontation. The story of the corporal is likewise pathetic and shows the friends at their best (albeit hotheaded). The trappings of military rank form a motif, emphasizing the poor corporal's plight. Finally, Big Joe's inability to stay awake unless moving gets him in even deeper trouble than when his pants are stolen. Steinbeck lets the reader guess that Joe will fall asleep and get beaten, but surprises the reader with the public lovemaking and its clever dialog.



Chapters 12-14

Chapters 12-14 Summary

Every day, the Pirate comes home, stows his equipment, entrusts his quarter to Danny, and the paisanos solemnly witness its deposit in the bag that is the center of their friendship, trust, and fraternity. After a shipwreck, they all comb the beach for objects to sell and return home after netting five dollars and buying wine. Pirate goes to put a quarter in his bag and finds the bag missing. Joe arrives home shortly after that, drunk and carrying a gallon of wine. The other men attack him and he tells them where the bag is hidden. They rough him up rather badly and make small cuts on his back and rub salt in them to teach him not to steal. They clean Joe up and put him in bed, giving him glasses of wine in a flood of pity and "Christian" charity.

The men take the coins to Fr. Ramon and explain the miracle of the dog's healing and the fact that the Pirate wants to buy a candlestick in honor of St. Francis. The priest agrees that it is a miracle and says he will announce the donation in church on Sunday. The men pull together their best clothing and outfit the Pirate to look decent in church. The Pirate believes this will improve his social station and has already noticed people being nicer to him. Walking home, the paisanos all feel touched by holiness and are subdued.

Danny uses the five dollars from the salvage operation to buy hamburger, onion, bread, and candy for a party in the Pirate's honor. They question whether the Pirate actually sees St. Francis shining like the sun and telling the "dirty man" to be good to doggies. The paisanos feel the saints looking down on them and charge the Pirate to recall everything in church and tell them. Pilon says sternly that the dogs must stay home to avoid sacrilege. It is three hours before the paisanos sing their first obscene song, late before they think about easy women, and they are too sleepy to fight. It is a good marker in their lives.

Sunday morning, the paisanos wash the Pirate and supervise his dressing. He begs to take the dogs and keep them outside, but the paisanos stand firm. Reaching the Church of San Carlos, the Pirate performs the rituals, sits, focuses on St. Francis and his new candlestick and never looks away. He believes the statue smiles. In his sermon, Fr. Ramon mentions the donation, tells the story of the miracle, and relates incidents from St. Francis' life. Suddenly, the Pirate's dogs rush in and swarm the Pirate. Fr. Ramon and the congregation laugh. Embarrassed, the Pirate takes them outside, lectures them and leaves them to sit through the end of the service. People are still laughing, but Fr. Ramon tells him not to be ashamed of being loved by his dogs and tells more St. Francis tales. Wishing his dogs could hear them, the Pirate is the first one out and leads the dogs at a trot to the pine forest, where he arranges them like a congregation, and manages with inspired memory to recall the priest's words nearly word-for-word. As silence falls over the forest, the Pirate is sure the dogs see St. Francis.



Señora Teresina Cortez lives in a pleasant cottage with her aged mother, Angelica, and eight young children. Sundays, Angelica goes to church grimly dressed in black, sits motionless as the statues, and once a month goes to confession. Teresina is puzzled about the process of making and delivering children, but she turns this question over to the Mother of Jesus. With her provocative eyes, Teresina is the despair of Fr. Ramon in confession.

Teresino's children, Alfredo, Ernie, and Panchito are in first grade, for the third, second, and first time, respectively. A visiting nurse questions Alfredo about his diet of beans and tortillas morning, noon, and night. The school doctor pays a visit and sees the vieja ladle boiled beans on the kitchen floor to be instantly hunted and devoured. Testing the children, he finds them the healthiest little beasts ever. Every year, the Monterey bean threshers leave chaff behind, which landowners allow Teresina and the children to winnow, yielding 300-400 pounds. Teresina burns a candle each year until the beans are harvested, but this year burns two and a downpour still destroys the harvest.

Jesus Maria has not visited Teresina in months, but drops by on the day the old year's beans are used up. The men begin a minor crime wave to supply food for the children. Teresina is delighted until the children develop diarrhea and cry constantly. She is ashamed to mention it, but eventually does: beans are the only proper food. The paisanos slink home, hold a conference, and after midnight raid the Western Warehouse Company, liberating four 100-pound sacks of pink beans, which they deposit secretly at Teresina's door. She proclaims it a miracle; the vieja repents; the men sleep happily, and Teresina wonders which is responsible for this pregnancy.

The paisanos consider clocks and watches useful only for barter. The sun is a better indicator of when to get up and sit on the front porch. Danny's bed remains his alone. The others sleep on the floor in the bedroom beneath sheepskins, coats, or carpeting, except the Pirate, who with his dogs has a corner in the living room. There are no curtains, but cobwebs, dust, and rain marks obscure the glass. Cleaning them would permit too much light and poisonous night air. The remains of iridescent bluebottle flies on which the spider family feeds keep it dark enough to sleep until noon. The men awaken gradually, trudge down to the gulch half asleep, and eventually start tea. Flies form halos around their heads as they begin planning today and tomorrow. Slowly, they begin telling all the stories they have stored up, usually involving Cornelia Ruiz's latest adventure and its moral lesson. Cornelia likes only love and fighting. Yesterday, Emilio Murietta takes her a pink little pig that he finds in the gulch. He says they are wonderful pets and good food. Cornelia accepts the pig and is nice to Emilio. When some ladies visit, Cornelia lets them pet the pig, but when Sweets steps on its tail, the pig squeals; its mother bursts in, smashes up furniture, bites Sweets, rips off Cornelia's skirt, and escapes. Cornelia vows to beat Emilio.

Pablo observes that life never turns out the way one plans, and illustrates this by the story of Tall Bob Smoke. Bob has the body of a true vaquero but cannot ride. He wants to be admired and loved but is born to be laughed at (and sometimes pitied). One year, he carries the flag in a parade when his horse faints, sending him and the flag flying. He is the dogcatcher, but cannot lasso a dog. He is so ashamed, he vows to kill himself to



make people sorry for laughing at him. He sits in his room with a pistol at his head, so someone can find him and talk him out of it. He practices, but no one comes by. Finally, when Charlie Meeler comes by the second night, he tries to disarm Bob and the gun goes off, blowing away the end of Bob's nose. Now people laugh even harder, but at least feel sorry about doing so. Sometimes the Pirate lends Bob his dogs, so people will think he has caught them.

Jesus Maria observes that being laughed at is worse than being whipped, and tells about his boyhood friend, Petey Ravanno, and his 60-year-old father, Old Pete. They live alone, the two brothers and four sisters being dead or gone away and do everything together, including spending weekends in jail for drinking. Gracie Montez is not a good girl. At twelve, she has her first baby when the fleet comes in. She is pretty, quick and sharp-tongued and runs from men but is sometimes caught. It is not easy to get close to her, but her eyes promise something no other woman delivers. Jesus Maria has run after Gracie, but Petey is different; he grows sick longing for her. Old Pete asks Gracie to be nice to Petey, but she laughs, as does her 14-year-old sister 'Tonia. Old Pete is dejected when 'Tonia rejects his advances because hot blood runs in the family. Petey cuts squid to buy Gracie presents, which she accepts but continues to laugh. It drives Petey crazy. He cannot sleep and vows to make her marry him in church, so she can no longer run away. He proposes; she laughs; he throws a rope over a rafter, kicks the box away, but Old Pete comes in time to save him. Gracie then marries Petey and becomes a good woman and churchgoer. Petey becomes mayordomo of the squid yard.

The paisanos enjoy a story with meaning. Danny recalls a girl in Texas who does not change and is known as "Mrs. Second Platoon." Pablo signals for quiet so Jesus Maria can continue. When Petey and Gracie move to their own home, Old Pete is lonely and bored and begins lusting for 'Tonia, acting just as his son had. Petey laughs at his foolishness. Needing money for presents, Old Pete goes to work at the service station. When 'Tonia continues laughing, Pete decides to stage a hanging. Knowing the other workers arrive every morning at 8 AM, he is ready in the tool house. When he sees them, he steps off the workbench, but the wind blows the door shut, and Pete is not missed for an hour. The paisanos' smiles have changed at this story, which is funny but squeezes. 'Tonia and Petey laugh at the old fool and begin flirting with each other. As the sun sets, Pilon recalls as a young boy throwing rocks at train engines, so the firemen will throw coal at him, which Pilon then take home to his mother. Perhaps if they throw rocks at passing fishermen from the pier, the fishermen will throw back mackerel, making a fine meal.

Chapters 12-14 Analysis

These chapters touchingly complete the Pirate's saga, bringing his vow to fruition and allowing him to tell his beloved dogs stories about St. Francis, the lover of animals. His borrowing clothes from his friends foreshadows the conclusion, when again they cannot all be fittingly attired for church for Danny's funeral service. Before the Pirate's triumph comes Big Joe's savage beating, which shows the paisanos at their worst, but also at their most moral, defending the sacred trust to which they have pledged themselves.



Note the reference to Christ being offered wine at his crucifixion. The religious theme continues in Teresina's tale, as her inability to keep track of pregnancies gives her pious mother reason to doubt the virgin birth during the bean famine, and the family's poverty frees the paisanos to commit larceny in the name of charity. Finally, the story of the pig gives another instance of a gift going awry, while the two concluding morality tales show one does not always get out of life what one expects, a theme that develops further in the concluding chapters.



Chapters 15-17

Chapters 15-17 Summary

Monterey is changeless and the routine in Danny's house is even more monotonous. Danny begins dreaming of bygone days of freedom, before the weight of property fell on him. Unlike his earlier, unencumbered life, he does not drink or adventure. He is responsible for his house and friends. Danny mopes until one night he runs away into the pinewoods.

The paisanos figure Danny must have a lover, but when his absence stretches to a week, they worry and search the woods. They hear curious rumors of his drunken, thieving, violent behavior and people's fear of him. Following up on the story of his being jailed after a fight at the wharf, they learn he has escaped and faces six months. The paisanos want to stake out Torrelli's, but Torrelli turns them away, telling them how after swapping blankets and cooking pots for a gallon of wine, Danny mistreats Torrelli's entire family. Torrelli chases Danny away and threatens the penitentiary. During the night, they hear Danny sneak into the kitchen but are too slow to catch him. The house is filled with worry and sadness. The paisanos suspect they should go to confession. They no longer gossip about Cornelia Ruiz but cringe at stories of Danny's moral decay and are jealous of his fun. Sin-for-sin, Danny is breaking records and faces penances that Old Ruiz does not match in a lifetime. The last straw comes when Danny sneaks in and steals Pilon's shoes. That is no prank, but a crime of the worst kind against friendship. They vow to tie Danny to his bed and cure him.

Torrelli never visits anyone and rarely shows emotions other than anger and suspicion. Torrelli is happy, knowing that in his pocket is a piece of paper that will let him get even with a "nest of snakes." He will throw the paisanos out on the street and into the woods. Torrelli approaches, triumphant and catlike. He is sorry to say they may not live here any more. They are shocked until he pulls out Danny's signed bill of sale for twenty-five dollars. They have until noon to clear out before the police come. Pilon moves closer to look as Jesus Maria and Pablo block the doors, and Joe's uses his pick handle to knock Torrelli to the floor. The paper disappears into the stove. Torrelli curses them as thieves, rats and dogs, but they play dumb. Danny and Tito Ralph come, carrying heavy bags. Danny denies signing any paper. As they go indoors to eat and drink, Pilon believes they should do something nice for Torrelli some time.

Danny is tired and listless and disinterested in gossip, even too listless to swat flies. Jesus Maria believes he is "sick of fun." The paisanos vow to work a day cutting squid to earn enough to throw Danny a party. Tortilla Flat comes alive with electric news of a party. People run to the squid yard to verify that the paisanos are working, but because of conflicts, hedge their bets. Instructions emerge from the squid yard about the party. Mrs. Morales selects music; Mrs. Soto heads to her chicken coup; Mrs. Salochico makes dulces; Woolworth is bought out of crepe paper, and instruments are tuned. When confirmation comes that the paisanos have fourteen dollars to spend on wine,



Torrelli is overwhelmed with business and so caught up in the spirit that he throws in a few gallons for his friends. Dresses are hung out to eliminate the mothball smell.

Danny remains oblivious to dozens of passers-by, but at 4 PM, he stretches and saunters off toward Monterey. Instantly, people fall to decorating his house, bringing in chicken, rice, dumplings, wine, and even potato whiskey. At 5:30, the paisanos arrive home, tired, bloody, triumphant and happy to the point of tears. More food arrives and the tumult increases. Apprehensive police investigate and accept a glass of wine. People in Monterey tell Pilon and Pablo they have seen Danny at the pier, and the two men hurry there. Later, Pablo claims to see a cloud like a great black bird hanging in the air over Danny, and to have crossed himself and said two Hail Marys. Pilon denies this but does not interfere with Pablo's story. They ask if Danny is sick and suggest seeing a doctor. After they tell him about the grand party they are throwing for him, he looks again at the black water, announces he is ready to party and leads them running up the hill.

In years to come, this party is remembered with reverence as the best ever, taking into account glorious cuts and bruises, fights among clots of men, women laughing and shrieking in protest. Fr. Ramon is astounded at the next week's confessions, as Tortilla Flat loses all constraint. No one can compare with Danny that night. A future historian may write about his "extraordinary endurance and strength" and "aim toward reproduction," but those present simply say that Danny is a man. No woman admits afterward that she is ignored. His prowess is exaggerated - but even a tenth of his supposed feats would be overstatement for anyone else. They say he drinks three gallons of wine; in a few years, it will be thirty, and in twenty years, they will say the clouds spell his name, the moon drips blood, and the wolves bay prophetically. As people wear out and leave, Danny and The Party rage on, with the fire department standing by expectantly.

Many drunken witnesses agree in the composite about what happens next. Danny grows huge and terrible, his eyes flaring like headlights. He tears off a table leg and challenges the world to fight him. Men shudder as Danny stalks out to find his Enemy. People hear Danny's Opponent answer, then a shrill cry of defiance, a thud and silence. Pilon fears something is wrong and rushes out with everyone following. In the dry gulch Pilon finds Danny, broken and twisted, forty feet down. Pilon calls for a doctor and a priest. Within fifteen minutes, a frantic mob drags four doctors and Fr. Ramon out of bed and pushes them to Danny's house, where the paisanos have carried him and lain him in bed, candles all around. When Fr. Ramon arrives, the paisanos withdraw, because last rites cannot be viewed decently. When the priest and doctors emerge, all know what has happened. The women wail, the men drift off, and the bedroom door stays shut.

Death is a personal matter, but funerals are social functions, requiring a polished car, dark suit, black shoes, and flowers with cards identifying the donor. Funerals are the most rigidly codified and complex of social functions. Two days dead, Danny is the object of excitement because he is entitled to Tortilla Flat's first military funeral. He is embalmed at government expense and Squadron A, 11th Cavalry, including band and



firing squad, have orders to render him honors. Women shop for dresses; children beg flowers in gardens by day and steal more by night. Clothes are cleaned and mended. Danny's friends are horror-stricken because they alone cannot attend for lack of decent clothes. There is no one to borrow from because everyone is attending. They could steal enough for one good suit, but not six. Some may ask why they could not attend in rags; is that not less disrespectful than staying away? They curse their fate and everyone with good clothes. Pilon suggests they watch from afar, and while they know seeing a funeral is less important than being seen, they agree it is the best they can do. They feel like failures.

Friday is sunny and businesses are closed. Danny's empty bed seems like an officer's riderless charger. The paisanos agree Danny would enjoy such a morning. They celebrate his virtues and forget his faults, and share stories about his goodness, courage, and piety. When time comes for church, they stand across the street and watch the luckier people. They hear the music. They see the army squad approaching, mournfully, watch Danny loaded aboard and the parade form up and move out, majestically. Everyone in town who matters takes part. In shame and misery, the paisanos slink , and then run, to the cemetery and hide in the tall grass. The military service is short with gunfire and taps. The Pirate is proud of the dogs' howling. The paisanos hurry away, lest they be seen.

Passing Torrelli's deserted house, they take two gallons of wine to drink in Danny's memory. At 7 PM, Tito Ralph comes with a box of cigars, which they light and open the second gallon. Pablo tries to sing "Tuli Pan." They sing about women because Danny likes lively women. Relighting his cigar, Pilon flips the match onto an old newspaper. Each man starts to stamp it out, but then all realize that Danny's house must burn down as a symbol of holy friendship, good parties and fights, and love and comfort. They watch the flames spread and leave only when the roof catches. Pilon, having learned his lesson, takes the remaining wine. The trucks arrive too late to do anything but keep the fire from spreading. As the people who gather to watch melt into the darkness, Danny's friends look at the smoking ruin, then at one another, and walk away, no two together.

Chapters 15-17 Analysis

Tortilla Flat reaches its climax in Danny's dreadful depression and weeks of banditry and mayhem. Given what happens at The Party, the paisanos' worry about mental illness may not be wrong. The long-building confrontation with Torrelli arrives and the trickery is predictable. Note the narrator's asides to Torrelli. Having talked often about needing to do something nice for Danny, his friends accept a job consistently shown as detestable in order to afford a party to which the whole community - recently afraid of the new Danny - rallies. Danny is the life of the party until he snaps. It is a terrible last memory for the mourners. Note how Steinbeck interjects the dry, academic scholar of The Party whom he prophesies in the Preface, seeking to turn Danny and his friends into a myth, and describes how Danny is posthumously deified and The Party turned into popular myth. The final chapter shows the grieving paisanos unable to attend the funeral, which

is a great social event. This parallels the mass when the candlestick is dedicated, as the burning of the house parallels in all details the accidental burning of the first house.



Characters

Danny

The novel's protagonist, Danny, is a bowlegged, 25-year-old paisano from the Tortilla Flat area of Monterey, CA, at the time the U.S. enters World War I. In a fit of drunken patriotism, Danny enlists with friends, Pilon and Big Joe Portagee, serves as a muleskinner in Oklahoma, and returns home to find he has inherited two houses from his grandfather. With a weakness for wine, Danny gets drunk, jailed, escapes, meets up with Pilon and talks him into renting one of his houses. Danny feels both the pride and burden of being a property owner and landlord. He is spending the night with rich neighbor, Mrs. Morales, when the rental house burns to the ground. After castigating his paisanos properly, Danny accepts Pilon as a guest, along with Pilon's roommates, Pablo Sanchez and Jesus Maria Corcoran. Pilon then befriends the Pirate and brings him into the house to reside in one corner of the living room along with his five dogs. The other roommates sleep in Danny's bedroom subject to his one rule: no one uses his bed.

Danny cannot sustain relationships with women for more than a week. Since inheriting the houses, he is the target of every female's attention. After breaking up with Mrs. Morales (and keeping the bra he had planned to give her), he buys a vacuum as present for Sweets Ramirez, whose house has no electricity. The paisanos worry he spends too much time with Sweets, but he is tiring of her by the time they warn him that the town is laughing at him for promising to install electric wires.

Danny also grows bored with the responsibilities of homeownership so flees into the woods and the freedom of his early years. His friends try to find Danny, fearing he has lost his mind. Stories reach them of Danny stealing and beating people. If caught, Danny will spend six months in jail. He steals household items from his own house to hock for wine and signs over his house to Torrelli for twenty-five dollars. Danny eventually shows up and falls back into depression. When wine brings him out of it, the paisanos decide on a grand party to thank him for all he has done for them. Everyone in Tortilla Flat joins in preparation. Pilon and Pablo find Danny, peering despondently into the black water at the pier. When they tell him about the party, Danny grows enthusiastic and races home ahead of them. He is the life of what becomes "The Party" in local myth, a larger-than-life figure - a demigod - drinking harder than anyone, making love to all the women and finally challenging the universe to fight him. He races out of the house, screaming at an unseen Enemy and is found at the bottom of a 40-foot deep gulch. The paisanos carry him home and summon doctors and the priest. Danny dies and his funeral is a great social occasion from which the paisanos are excluded because of their ragged clothing. After remembering Danny's good points and forgetting the bad, they allow the house to burn to the ground as a testimonial to him.



Pilon

Danny's old friend from Tortilla Flat, Pilon is invited to rent for fifteen dollars a month one of the two houses Danny inherits. Neither expects the rent to be paid. Practical and crafty, Pilon sublets half of his house to Pablo Sanchez for fifteen dollars and the two together recruit Jesus Maria Corcoran as a third renter at fifteen dollars. After the house burns down, Pilon directs the stealing of a picnic lunch to bring to Danny as a peace offering. He is relieved to be Danny's guest rather than tenant. Pilon makes it his business to know everything about everyone. Seeing the Pirate living in squalor but earning 25¢ a day cutting and selling pitchwood, he calculates Pilon must be hoarding at least a hundred dollars, so Pilon visits the Pirate at night, gaining entry with a sugar cookie, to convince Pirate that his many friends are worried about him. He then convinces the paisanos to take in the Pirate, the better to get their hands on the fortune. Learning that the money is dedicated to St. Francis of Assisi, Pilon repents and searches for another way to thank Danny for his goodness. He and Big Joe Portagee spend St. Andrew's Eve superstitiously hunting for buried treasure in the woods and, when it does not materialize, fight and get drunk. On the beach, Pilon steals sleeping Joe's trousers to trade for wine. Given less than he expects, Pilon steals back the pants and blanket. Pilon is convinced all females are perverse.

Pilon leads the paisanos' efforts to break up Danny and Sweets Ramirez, stealing the vacuum cleaner Danny has given her and trading it for wine. When Torrelli discovers the machine has no motor, he threatens to kill Pilon. During Danny's run amok, Pilon assumes leadership. When Danny sneaks in and steals Pilon's shoes, he declares it no prank but a crime against friendship, and they vow to tie him down in bed and cure him. Pilon leads the resistance at Torrelli's attempt to evict them from the house; works hard to pull Danny out of depression when Danny wanders back, apparently tired of having too much fun; runs to find Danny when he falls down the 40-foot gulch; helps carry him to his bed, and is on hand, discretely, in the living room, when Danny dies. Pilon suggests the paisanos observe the funeral from afar rather than staying away, for lack of proper clothing. When his discarded match lights a small fire, Pilon rescues the remaining wine, having "profited by every lesson."

Jesus Maria Corcoran

The son of a rich, respected prizefighter, Jesus Maria is a red-bearded, humanitarian with a "grasshopper brain," an aficionado of wine and women and an opportunistic thief. After stealing a rowboat to buy alcohol and underwear for Arabella Gross, who rejects him, found by Pilon and Pablo Sanchez and convinced it is unhealthy to sleep in the night air. They charge him only fifteen dollars a month rent. Next time he sees Arabella, the soldiers with whom she consorts beat him, and the paisanos confiscate the bra he has failed to give her because Danny needs a gift for Mrs. Morales. When the paisanos' house catches fire, Jesus Maria sounds the alarm and has to break the bad news to Danny, who does not know he is a tenant. When Danny relents and lets the burned-out



paisanos live in his remaining house as guests, Jesus Maria excitedly vows to keep him fed.

Jesus Maria regularly tries to relieve suffering and sorrow and to share happiness. He has a knack for finding situations that require good deeds, and Pilon believes Jesus Maria would be a saint if he went to church. One of Jesus Maria's finest deeds is rescuing from police custody a 16-year old Mexican corporal, who is carrying a sick baby. The paisanos hear the corporal's tragic story, try to care for the little one, and are ready to avenge them after the child dies. While he takes part in the methodical beating the paisanos administer to Big Joe Portagee for borrowing four dollars from the Pirate's bag of quarters, Jesus Maria is the first to offer mercy, untying Big Joe's thumbs and giving him wine because the Savior's enemies comforted Jesus Christ in like manner. Hearing the Pirate's story of seeing a vision of St. Francis, Jesus Maria recalls his dying grandmother seeing the Holy Virgin. Once, as the paisanos sit telling stories, Jesus Maria observes that being laughed at is worse than being whipped and tells the story of his boyhood friend, Petey Ravanno, and Petey's 60-year-old father, Old Pete.

The Pirate

A huge man with a bushy black beard, shabby clothing, good heart, and limited intelligence, the Pirate lives in seclusion and destitution in a chicken coop with a pack of protective and obedient dogs named Enrique. Pajarito, Rudolph, Fluff, and Señor Alec Thompson. Laughed at by people and sometimes pitied, the Pirate cuts and sells firewood for 25¢ a day and mysteriously buries the coins. He feeds himself and the dogs by begging scraps from restaurants. Pilon, who knows everything about everyone, watches the Pirate and calculates his hoard at a minimum of one hundred dollars. Pilon convinces himself that the Pirate has money but not the brains to use it wisely, while Pilon has brains but no money with which to help Pilon live like a human being. Pilon visits the Pirate and, after an uncomfortable silence, claims the Pirate's many friends are worried about him but too poor to help him. The Pirate is unaware he has friends and further, has no complaints about his life.

Accepted into Danny's house with his dogs and assigned a corner of the living room in which to sleep, the Pirate is overwhelmed with love towards the other men who live in the house. He expands his collection route and provides most of the food for the household. When he digs up his hoard, he presents it to the paisanos explaining that when he has 1,000 quarters he will purchase a beautiful candlestick and 1,000 hours of candles to burn before the statue of St. Francis in San Carlos. He tells of praying for the recovery of one of his dogs, seeing the saint shining like the sun and telling the "dirty man" to be good to doggies.

The bag becomes the symbol of their brotherhood, so when it disappears, there is a crisis. The Pirate breaks into tears and then joins the vigilantes who wait for Big Joe, who by his absence is the obvious thief. The paisanos beat him to a pulp but recover the bag. Counting the quarters, they see find there are \$1,007, allowing the Pirate to buy good clothing and still make the donation. When he buys a gaudy neckerchief and



belt, the paisanos donate decent parts of their own wardrobe to outfit him for mass Sunday morning. The Pirate feels naked on the street without his dogs he is not allowed to take with him to the Sunday service where the Priest announces the Pirate's gift. The dogs break out of the house while the Pirate is at Mass. The Pirate is going through the motions of the service, but is focusing on the new candlestick. The Pirate is mortified when the dogs rush into church, and takes them outside, ordering them to sit there through the rest of the mass. After Mass, the Pirate races with the dogs into the woods, where he arranges them like a congregation and repeats the priest's stories about St. Francis nearly word-for-word.

Big Joe Portagee

Danny's pre-World War I friend with whom he enlists, Joe spends three-quarters of his Army hitch in the brig for a variety of offenses. He is not good at following orders and is prone to falling asleep whenever he is not busy. He returns home after all the victory celebrations are over. He gets drunk immediately, breaks up a brothel when he runs out of money and wine, spends a comfortable month in the civilian jail, and learns that Danny owns a house, which explains why Joe has not been able to find his friends. In seeking them, Joe encounters Pilon, who is heading into the woods to seek treasure on St. Andrew's Eve. Joe goes along, spends the night in vigil, and next night returns to help dig up the find. When Pilon finds out that Joe has stolen one of Danny's blankets as surety on a gallon of wine, Pilon attacks him as a thief and dog and makes him do all the digging. When the find is a useless government plaque, the two walk to Seaside in disgust, where they drink up the rest of Joe's wine. While Joe sleeps it off, Pilon steals his trousers, hocks them for more wine, and steals back the pants and blanket. Having spent hours hiding from a Girl Scout troop, Joe is grateful.

Big Joe falls asleep while being pursued by a 45-year-old widow, Tia Ignacia. She attacks Joe with a stick, swearing at him, and throwing him out the door. He staggers, begging to know what he has done. To stop the beating, Joe grabs her arms, and as he restrains her, is suddenly filled with love. Patrolman Jake Lake is astonished to see them making love in the road, but drives away after just giving them a warning. Jesus Maria next happens to drop in on Teresina Cortez on the day her year's supply of beans run out. He hurries to Danny's to rally the paisanos to provide for the children. A minor crime wave follows and the children survive.

Big Joe triggers the paisanos' greatest conflict by borrowing four dollars from the Pirate's bag of quarters and burying it in the yard. The vigilantes sit silently in cold fury, waiting for Joe, who arrives, unsteady, carrying a gallon of wine. With a snake's speed, Danny floors him with a stick. They bind his thumbs, revive him, and beat him methodically on the chest and legs, ignoring his deafening shrieks. When they pause, Joe confesses. They roll him over and beat his back with equal ferocity, until he loses consciousness. They tear off his shirt, crosshatch his back, rub in salt, and cover him with a blanket. Danny judges that Joe will be honest now. The paisanos then take pity on Joe, lay him in bed, wash away the salt, and keep his glass full of wine. Joe moans at every touch and, while morally unaffected, is likely to live up to Danny's prophecy.



Pablo Sanchez

Danny's friend, with whom, in a drunken act of patriotism Danny signs up for the army during World War I. Pablo is promptly jailed upon release for stealing a goose. He is as promptly paroled for eating too much in jail. Pablo is drunk when Pilon encounters him in the woods after a fight with Danny and moves into Danny's second house on a fifteen dollar a month sublet basis. Pablo buys a candle to dedicate to St. Francis, which he lights to illuminate the room at night. No one notices as the candle sags, catches the wall on fire, and ultimately the house burns to the ground. After admonishing them sufficiently, Danny allows them to move into his house as guests. Pilon and Pablo form an almost inseparable pair throughout the novel. At one point, Pablo is alone when he meets Danny, who has left Sweets Ramirez "for delicacy's sake" during the daytime. Danny buys a gallon of wine for Sweets, invites Pablo to drink a single glass, and hides the rest until nighttime. When he invites Pablo to accompany him buying another gift, Pablo knows it is because Danny wants to keep Pablo away from the jug. During the paisanos' beating of Big Joe, Pablo wields the can opener used to crosshatch Big Joe's back and rub in salt. Once, as the paisanos swap stories, Pablo observes that life never turns out the way one plans, and illustrates with the story of Tall Bob Smoke. On the docks on the night of "The Party," Pablo claims to see a cloud like a great black bird hanging in the air over Danny. He crosses himself and says two Hail Marys. Pilon denies seeing the cloud, but does not interfere with Pablo's story. As they celebrate Danny's memory over wine, Pablo tries to sing "Tuli Pan," because Danny always liked women.

Señor Caporal

A young soldier from Torreón, Mexico, Señor Caporal carries his ailing newborn, Manuel, to Monterey, CA, where a policeman arrests him for loitering. The humanitarian Jesus Maria Corcoran befriends him and takes him to Danny's house, where the paisanos grow angry to learn that the mother has left him for his Captain. The corporal is determined that his baby should grow up to be a general - to be in a position to avenge his father, Pilon assures him. The baby dies and the friends mourn the happy life he has missed with such a good father. They are proud to have known him. The corporal returns to duties in Mexico.

Teresina Cortez

A 30-year-old mother of eight, who cannot figure out how she continually gets pregnant, Teresina, while carrying her ninth, depends on her worn-out 50-year-old mother, Angelica, to care for Alfredo, Ernie, Panchito, and five others. The first three are all in first grade. They live on beans, that the grandmother cooks and strews on the kitchen floor, but are healthier than any child the school doctor has examined. The beans come from gleaning after the fall threshing. When a drenching rain destroys a whole year's crops, Jesus Maria, who has not visited in months, drops by, rallies the paisanos to provide for the children, and a minor crime wave ensues as the men steal to feed the



children. Much of the food that the men shower upon Teresina and her family is spoiled and causes the children bowel troubles. She is ashamed to inform the paisanos but eventually does, so they "liberate" four-hundred pounds of pink beans for her. Teresina proclaims it a miracle and the vieja, who has blasphemed the Virgin for ignoring her prayers, repents. Teresina, who delivers her ninth child, wonders which paisano is responsible for the tenth.

Tia Ignacia

On the edge of Tortilla Flat lives Tia Ignacia, a 45-year-old widow, mostly Indian, taciturn and harsh. She invites Big Joe Portagee in from the rain and offers him a glass of wine. By his fourth glass, Joe relaxes. In the evening by the fire, Tia Ignacia inspects Joe and tries to get him to take off his coat to dry by the fire, but Joe concentrates on the wine. Presently, she grows indignant at being ignored, tries to create mood by blowing out the lamp, and, hearing his chair creak, prepares to fend off his expected advances. When nothing happens, Tia Ignacia talks about Joe's luck to be here and suggests he could receive the kind of comfort Cornelia Ruiz offers her visitors. Hearing a little crash, Tia Ignacia worriedly lights the lamp and discovers Joe fast asleep. Her Indian blood boils, and she attacks Joe with a stick, swearing at him and throwing him out the door. He staggers, begging to know what he has done. To stop the beating, Joe grabs Tia's arms, and as he restrains her, is filled with love. Patrolman Jake Lake is astonished to see them making love in the road, but drives away with just issuing a warning.

Arabella Gross

A cannery worker with a reputation as a loose woman, Arabella Gross is the object of Jesus Maria Corcoran's affections. He buys her wine, whiskey, silk drawers, and a pink bra, but she runs off with soldiers. Later, she helps beat Jesus Maria when soldiers accost them both for drinking their hidden whiskey.

Mrs. Morales

Danny's neighbor over the fence from his first house, Morales is 50-years-old but pretty in some lights, owns her own home, and has two hundred dollars in the bank. Her chickens are attractive to Pilon, but Danny is more interested in her. The chickens die when fed bad green beans and are replaced. Ignoring advice about food poisoning, Danny and Morales gut the dead chickens and sell them to a butcher. Morales buys wine with the profits and Danny goes visiting. He spending the night with Mrs. Morales when his rented house burns down, and too many other nights for his paisanos' comfort. Wishing to buy her a box of candy, Danny asks for three dollars in back rent, which they resent, and plot to break them up. Danny has already gotten tired of Mrs. Morales before he is able to deliver the pink bra his friends give him. Morales disappears for the rest of the novel until "The Party," for which she dusts off her phonograph and selects loud records.



Johnny Pom-pom

A Tortilla Flat paisano not in Danny's inner circle, Johnny Pom-pom pops up several times as a moral example or deliverer of news. He is first mentioned as the finder of a U.S. Geodetic Survey marker and tries to sell the metal from the marker. He gets a year in jail and a \$1,000 fine. Later, he tells the paisanos about Torrelli's anger over the defective vacuum cleaner, and Tito Ralph's firing as jailer for letting Danny escape from jail.

Tito Ralph

The Monterrey, CA, jailer, Ralph is the best jailer ever, unless drunk. He loses Danny in the woods after they go drinking on a boring night during Danny's first incarceration. A second time, he loses his job when, believing himself to be an inmate, he breaks out twice and accompanies Danny to the house before The Party.

Dolores Engracia Ramirez

Nicknamed "Sweets," Dolores Engracia Ramirez lives in a little house, does housework for ladies in Monterey and belongs to the Native Daughters of the Golden West. Normally hatchet-faced and lumpy, with a shrill voice, Sweets several evenings a week becomes passionate enough to be attractive and inviting. She leans over her front gate, purring at passing men, "Ai, amigo, a'onde vas?" Learning of Danny's inheritance, Sweets wants him as much as any female around, and, if he passes by, intends to invite him in for a friendly glass of wine and allow nature to take its course. One day Danny does stop in, but when he assaults her virtue, she asks him to come back in the evening, for delicacy's sake, i.e. because of the neighbors. Danny buys Sweets a shiny aluminum vacuum cleaner, which she proudly displays and demonstrates its ease of use, humming like a motor. Through it, Sweets climbs the social scale and shows Danny such gratitude every evening that his friends worry about his health when the affair lasts too long. Pilon, Pablo and Jesus Maria seek to divert her attentions and, while she is flattered and takes note for the future, she remains dedicated to Danny. Deep in his heart, Danny is tiring of Sweets, but does not admit it to himself.

Father Ramon

The pastor of San Carlos Church in Monterey, CA, Fr. Ramon appears to be a typical Roman Catholic priest with a special attachment to St. Francis of Assisi, a saint who so loves animals he was known to preach to them. Hearing from the paisanos how St. Francis miraculously heals the Pirate's ailing dog, Fr. Ramon accepts \$250 in quarters to buy a 1,000-hour candle and splendid candlestick to place before the saint's statue. During mass, he acknowledges the donation and talks about St. Francis. He does not reprimand the Pirate when his dogs raise a ruckus and invade the church. Fr. Ramon has a difficult time dealing with confessions the Sunday after "The Party" thrown at



Danny's house the night of his death. The priest hurries to Danny's deathbed, dragged out of bed, not knowing what ministrations he might have to administer or to whom.

The Ravannos

A childhood friend of Jesus Maria, Petey Ravanno hangs himself when cruelly rejected by the beautiful Gracie Montez, but his father, Old Pete, cuts him down in time. Gracie marries Petey, reforms her ways, but their moving into a separate house leaves Old Pete lonely. He falls in love with Gracie's more-beautiful younger sister, 'Tonia, and in desperation tries Petey's ploy to win her over. He times the hanging perfectly for the opening of the gas station where he works, but the wind blows the door shut and no one finds his body for hours. Everyone laughs over his tragic end, and Petey begins dallying with 'Tonia.

Cornelia Ruiz

The only part of life that varies in Tortilla Flat is the succession of Cornelia Ruiz's sweethearts, who recycle. A woman who is happy only when loving and fighting, Cornelia has a reputation for man hopping and her love life is a staple of gossip. At the same time, she piously pays for memorial masses for her late, wicked father, ten years after his death. Emilio Murietta brings her a little pink pig that he finds in the gulch, convinces her they make wonderful pets and later good food, but when the pig ruins her gathering of ladies, she vows to beat Emilio. Trying to interest Big Joe Portagee, Tia Ignacia offers Cornelia's kind of "comfort." Disinterest in "Cornelia" stories is proof of Danny's depression and in his mourning paisanos after his death.

Tall Bob Smoke

A man referred to in the story who wants badly to be admired, Bob is the local dogcatcher and flag-carrier in parades, but is laughed at mercilessly. Determined to end the laughter, Bob sits two days with a loaded gun, hoping a visitor will see him aiming at his head and prevent his suicide. When Charlie Meeler grabs the gun, it goes off, shooting off the tip of Bob's nose. People feel sorry for Bob then and treat him nicely.

The Torrellis

Tortilla Flat's chief bootlegger, Mr. Torrelli (no first name mentioned) is anti-social and mercenary. When angry, the paisanos cast aspersions on his Italian (Corsican) ancestry. Chubby Señora Torrelli is better appreciated, nicknamed "Butter Duck" by Pablo and Pilon. Despite the husband's "exaggerated and wholly quixotic ideal of marital relations," they take courteous and flattering liberties with Señora Torrelli to obtain wine, food, or firewood. When she offers Pilon only a quart of wine for Big Joe Portagee's trousers, he grows angry, steals back the pants and Danny's blanket and criticizes all women. Pilon's selling Torrelli a vacuum cleaner with no motor is the last



straw, and Torrelli vows to kill Pilon. Danny is happy Torrelli has been punished for the poor quality of his wine lately and believes they may shop elsewhere. When Danny disappears, the worried paisanos realize they should stake out Torrelli's, but Torrelli will not let them in, telling them how after swapping a gallon of wine for blankets and cooking pots, Danny mistreats Tortelli's entire family. Torrelli threatens the penitentiary. Danny returns later in his spree and sells blankets and kitchen pots to Torrelli in exchange for twenty-five dollars and Danny's signature on a proof of purchase of the house. Stunned, the paisanos grab and burn the unrecorded bill of sale. Torrelli does not hold a grudge when business for The Party is good, and throws in a few gallons of wine for his friends. Passing Torrelli's deserted house after Danny's funeral, the paisanos steal two gallons of wine to drink to Danny's memory.



Objects/Places

Danny's Houses

The focus of much of the action in Tortilla Flat, Danny's house is a shabby wooden structure covered with flaking whitewash overgrown with an untrimmed rose of Castile, a rickety porch with rocking chairs, and an overgrown, garbage-strewn back yard. Nevertheless, this property in the poor Tortilla Flat section of Monterey, CA, is, according to the Preface, a place of "sweetness and joy, philanthropy and, in the end, a mystic sorrow," not unlike the mythic Round Table. The narrator tells the story to prevent future generations from thinking that Danny, his friends, and the house itself are unreal legends.

Danny's house is one of two identically-laid out houses that he inherits after World War I from his late grandfather. Originally, he rents the smaller house to his friend, Pilon, but it accidentally burns down, so Pilon and two friends he has taken in as tenants all move in with Danny. Later they acquire two more housemates and five dogs. Danny's bed is out of bounds to everyone, but this is the only house rule. They sleep late every day and sit barefooted on the rickety front porch in the afternoons, slapping at flies, drinking wine, and gossiping. Danny falls into a deep depression and eventually runs away - and amok. During it, he steals blankets and cooking pots from his own house and sells the stuff for twenty-five dollars and his signature on a bill of sale for the house. The paisanos avoid eviction by assaulting Torrelli and burning the evidence. Danny returns, falls back into depression, and dies during "The Party" given in his honor, prepared and attended by all of Tortilla Flat. He falls down a 40-foot deep dry gulch behind the house and is carried to his bed by his paisanos. They return to the house after his funeral to drink to his memory, and when a discarded match starts a small fire, they instinctively know the house must be sacrificed to Danny's memory.

Carmel

A town located across the Peninsula from Monterey, Carmel provides a bonanza for the paisanos when one evening a Coast Guard cutter grounds on the rocks and they joyfully comb the beach for useful items, which they sell for five dollars to a speculator rather than carry their findings home.

China Point

A town on the Monterey Peninsula between Monterey and Pacific Grove, China Point figures in the story as the site of Chin Kee's squid yard. Danny finds working there beneath his dignity as a homeowner, and his paisanos find the bloody work particularly distasteful and undertake it only when hard-pressed for money. They all show up for work on the day of "The Party" to raise money for a great celebration. People in Tortilla Flat place bets on whether the paisanos will last the day, as Pablo cuts his hand, Chin



Kee kicks the Pirate's dogs, and Pilon looks grim. They earn fourteen dollars, which equates to fourteen gallons of wine.

Monterey

An old city on the coast of California, Monterey sits on a sloping hillside above a blue bay and beneath a dark pine forest. Americans and Italians who catch and can fish populate the lower parts of town, while up the hill live paisanos in the shabbier "Tortilla Flat," from whence they wander in and out of town. Monterey is central to a cluster of towns on and near the peninsula: Carmel, Pacific Grove, and Seaside. The town is described as changeless: the movement of the sun, the running of the red bus to Pacific Grove, the cannery stink, the patient and cynical fishermen on the rocks. Only one street in Monterey is regularly mentioned in the novel, Alvarado, which runs inland from the wharves and bristles with businesses including a bank, post office, a National Dollar Store, and a movie theater. Simon's Investment, Jewelry, and Loan Company (a pawn shop) appears to do a brisk business. Monterey houses a U.S. Army Presidio, so soldiers wander the streets, particularly along the waterfront, where the warehouses are located. As a veteran, Danny is embalmed at government expense and Squadron A, 11th Cavalry, including band and firing squad, have orders to render honors at his funeral. Most of the paisanos on Tortilla Flat attend Fr. Ramon's San Carlos Church. Danny is buried there in the nearby fenced cemetery.

Pacific Grove

A town further out on the Peninsula than the town of Monterey, Pacific Grove includes a quarry, where Rudolfo Kelling falls to his death and appears to be largely inhabited by huffy Methodists, who exercise their mouths about vice and prostitution in Catholic Monterey and demand an investigation.

Paisanos

People whose ancestry mixes Spanish, Indian, Mexican, and various Caucasian types, paisanos have lived in California for 100-200 years. They speak both English and Spanish with a distinctive accent. Those who inhabit the poor houses of Tortilla Flat are untouched by commercialism. They consider themselves pure Spanish and white, attributing their skin color to suntan, and look down on the Americans and Italians who live down the hill in Monterey and among them (the Torrellis), and when angry the paisanos explode in colorful, racial epithets. They work only when necessary, preferring to steal under circumstances that allow them to feel justified. Many are externally pious but easily moved to blasphemy when things go wrong, and even the worse of them sense their sinfulness and consider and/or attend confession and penance.



St. Andrew's Eve

The night every paisano who is not in jail spends in the woods, seeking the phosphorescent glow given off by two hundred years of buried treasures. Danny's friends spread out in the woods to find him a fortune, to thank him for all his help. The story concentrates on Pilon and the recently-returned Big Joe Portagee. Pilon explains how this is the one night a year when spirits roam freely, looking after their hordes. Mortals zigzag through the trees, looking for light, avoiding one another. When Pilon sees a light, he marks the spot with a cross formed of branches and surrounds their campfire with a circle, upon both of which he invokes God's protection. In the morning, they memorize the location, obscure signs of their presence and wait until the next night to dig without attracting any other treasure seekers' attention. They are dismayed to dig up a U.S. Geodetic Survey marker.

Seaside

A stretch of sand dunes just north of the Monterey Peninsula, Seaside is within walking distance of Tortilla Flat. Jesus Maria Corcoran steals a rowboat there to sell for wine, and Pilon and Big Joe Portagee walk there in frustration after finding a U.S. Geodetic Survey plaque that they cannot sell. Pilon is angry with Big Joe and while Joe sleeps steals his pants to exchange for wine. A girl scout troop gathers on the beach for a hot dog roast, forcing Joe to hide until Pilon relents and returns with his pants.

Torreón

Torreón is the hometown of an unnamed Mexican army corporal, who Jesus Maria and the paisanos briefly befriend.

Tortilla Flat

The seedier part of Monterey, CA, unpaved, unlit, only partly with electric service, heavily weeded, and tucked into the dark pine forests uphill from town, Tortilla Flat is not flat. The inhabitants are mostly paisanos.

Themes

Sex

Tortilla Flat bristles with sexuality, and promiscuity is the rule. Clearly all the primary male characters are acquainted with the insides of the whorehouses along the waterfront, but most of the action takes place one-on-one. Wealth is a factor. After Danny inherits two houses, all the females in town want him, and he has a series of short-term affairs. If he does not tire of a woman within a week or so, his housemates conspire to break them up, because it is not healthy to be with one woman too long. Danny sees the older Mrs. Morales because she owns property and money; he rationalizes that she still looks good in some light.

A sense of propriety nevertheless remains. When "Sweets" Ramirez gets her way and Danny responds to her alluring, "Ai, amigo, a'onde vas?" she asks him, for the neighbors' sake, to return after dark. When Tia Ignacia lures in Big Joe and plies him with wine, she hopes to raise his passions to where she will have, pro forma, to fend off his advances. Instead, he falls asleep; she in a fury attacks him, and then they end up making love in the mud outside her door. A passing motorcycle cop warns them not to get run over.

Tia Ignacia cites the kind of comfort that Cornelia Ruiz offers to her visitors during her come on. However much the paisanos of Tortilla Flat carry on, they enjoy a constant diet of titillating stories about Cornelia's ever-changing string of lovers. They delight in hearing about the whoring of the beautiful, young Montez sisters (Gracie, who has her first baby at 12 when the fleet comes in, and the even more wanton and desirable 'Tonia, for whom Old Pete hangs himself). The sisters supposedly run from men but sometimes allow themselves to be caught. Teresina Cortez has nine children by age thirty, the first conceived at age fourteen; they come with such amazing regularity that she doubts a male is even needed to conceive them. Monogamy is in no sense sacrosanct. When Pablo dallies with "Butter Duck" Torrelli, Pilon worries about her husband's "exaggerated and wholly quixotic ideal of marital relations," and is thankful that the Italian does not come storming home.

Religion

Tortilla Flat takes a bemused view of religion. The Methodists nearby assume Roman Catholic Monterey is a den of vice and demand investigations, and clearly, Fr. Ramon carries a burden hearing confessions, even if most of the sins seem venial. Cornelia Ruiz is the most wanton soul, the constant butt of gossip in Tortilla Flat, but she pays piously for memorial masses for her evil father ten years after his death. The paisanos wonder if money gotten through sin invalidates a mass, but leave that to the priests to decide. St. Andrew's Eve is said to be the night when every paisano not in jail takes to the woods, hunting buried treasures. Searchers zigzag through the woods avoiding one



another for fear the other might be a spirit. Pilon wears his saint's medallion on the outside for protection and, hearing a fog siren, shivers and mutters a Hail Mary. When he sees a pale blue pillar of light rising from the ground, Pilon marks the spot with a cross and draws a large circle in the dirt around the spot, both actions accompanied by appropriate incantations.

The Virgin Mary is the object of most devotions in the book, and when misfortune falls, she is blamed for greedily accepting candles without delivering results. When the bean crop fails and the Cortez family faces starvation, the grandmother calls in question the doctrine of the Virgin Birth, since her daughter, too, forgets who conceives her many babies. When the paisanos' banditry restores beans aplenty to the pantry, Teresina declares it a miracle and the vieja repents of her blasphemy. It seems likely, however, that she relapses on a regular basis. By contrast, Jesus Maria, who has his own vices, is constantly looking for and happening upon ways to help others. Pilon believes Monterey would have a living saint in their midst if only Jesus Maria went to church. Those who attend mass regularly are shown going through the motions and sitting stonily.

St. Francis of Assisi, lover of animals, is woven through the novel. When Pablo buys a candle dedicated to his honor but absentmindedly uses it for ordinary purposes, the house burns down and Francis is said to enjoy a great candle that night. When one of the Pirate's dogs is healed miraculously by Francis, the Pirate begins laying aside a quarter a day to make good on his vow to place a candlestick and 1,000 hours worth of candles before his statue in San Carlos Church. Hearing this story, Jesus Maria recalls his dying grandmother seeing the Holy Virgin, and Danny recalls his father seeing both saints and bad things, depending on his current behavior. On the eve of the candlestick's dedication, the paisanos feel the saints looking down on them and charge the Pirate to recall everything in church and tell them. The Pirate cannot concentrate on the mass, and immediately takes the dogs afterwards into the forest, arranges them like a congregation, and preaches to them, almost miraculously remembering the priest's words. The descriptions of the dark church's interior and the forest setting are equally ominous.

Stealing

Theft is rife in Tortilla Flat. Everyone knows it is wrong, but in a non-cash society, everyone takes part. Sometimes the thieves rationalize their actions; Pilon figures a wandering rooster will eventually be run over anyway, so he grants it a speedy death and dismembers it so no one can identify it en route to the dinner table. Anything left lying unattended is certain to be picked up and converted into wine on a gallon per dollar basis. Jesus Maria, the great humanitarian, steals a rowboat he happens upon on the beach at Seaside. He figures it is worth twenty dollars, but accepts seven and uses the money on gifts for a would-be lover. Danny happens upon a keg of copper shingle nails outside one supply company and sells them as scrap to a rival company. Immediately he heads to Torrelli's to convert the cash into wine. The great salvage operation that takes place after a Coast Guard cutter grounds at Carmel is a quasi-legal



variant. Notably, speculators are on hand to pay cash for the findings, saving the paisanos the effort of lugging it all home.

The paisanos enjoy stealing most when they are doing it for a higher purpose. When Jesus Maria discovers Teresina Cortez's family faces starvation after the bean crop fails, the paisanos vow to put laziness behind them and provide for the many children. They begin gathering fish and vegetables, robbing without the stigma of theft. Big Joe repeatedly steals Mrs. Palochico's goat. Food accumulates in Teresina's house and the smell of spoilage fills the neighborhood. The Monterey Police Department complaint book shows a minor crime wave. The culmination is when, after midnight, they sneak past a sleeping guard to raid the Western Warehouse Company, liberating four 100-pound sacks of pink beans, which they deposit secretly at Teresina's door. She proclaims it a miracle.

Theft among friends, however, is not tolerated. When Danny runs amok, sin-for-sin breaking records, the last straw comes when he sneaks into the house and steals Pilon's shoes. That is no prank, but a crime against friendship - the worst kind - and the paisanos vow to tie him to his bed and cure him. Earlier, when Big Joe breaks the sacred trust and steals the Pirate's bag of quarters, the paisanos arm, sit silently in cold fury, waiting for him to come home. When he does, they bind his thumbs and beat him methodically on the chest and legs, learn that the bag is buried at the front gate and that Joe has borrowed only four dollar, after which they flip Joe over, and beat his back with equal ferocity, until he loses consciousness. They crosshatch his back, rub in salt, and cover him with a blanket. Danny judges that Joe will be honest now. When Joe comes to, groaning, the paisanos ignore him until Jesus Maria unties him and gives him wine, noting that the Savior's enemies thus comforted him. They lay Joe in the bed, wash away the salt, and keep his glass full of wine. Joe moans at every touch. Counting the quarters and discovering there are enough for the Pirate to make good on his vow to the church, the paisanos know better than taking 1,000 quarters to a bank. The bankers can only think the coins are stolen from slot machines.



Style

Point of View

Tortilla Flat is narrated in the third person past omniscient by someone (unnamed) who is sympathetic to his young characters even at their most larcenous. He allows them to speak for themselves in their own voices in first person in extensive passages of dialog, and is careful to identify them and capture their emotions.

The preface sets up this as an apologetic work. The narrator fears that dry scholars will some day write up the "story of Danny and of Danny's friends and of Danny's house," how they flourish "as an organization beautiful and wise." It would be a shame to reduce them to "primitive symbols" or legends such as Sir Arthur, Roland, or Robin Hood. Having set the novel in and around Monterey, CA, shortly after Armistice Day, 1918, the narrator describes Danny coming home from the army, learning he has inherited two houses from his late grandfather, worrying what freedoms home ownership will cost him, trading insults with fishermen, getting drunk, causing mayhem, and meekly accepting arrest, because he greatly respects the law.

The novel continues in this simple, straightforward way, describing Danny's house filling with paisanos and dogs, watching them drink massively, steal, fight, make love, help their fellow human beings, and deal with the leader's apparent mental breakdown. The narrator is hostile only to Mr. Torrelli, Tortilla Flat's premier bootlegger. Dissatisfied customers complain about him constantly, and he is shown being cuckolded despite his jealous vigilance. When Torrelli is outright cheated by the paisanos in the matter of a vacuum cleaner with no motor, the narrator allows Danny to say he has it coming to him and perhaps they should take their business elsewhere. Poor Torrelli speaks for himself, refusing to talk to his friends after Danny assaults and insults his family during a drunken debauch, but still does not come out sympathetic. He is demonized during his march to the house to evict the paisanos, battered and robbed of his proof of purchase, but nevertheless comes to The Party, providing wine, attends Danny's funeral, and still is robbed by his friends in the end. The other characters, for all their faults and foibles, are treated with sympathy and understanding that life often does not turn out as one wishes.

Setting

Tortilla Flat is set primarily in protagonist Danny's ramshackle house in the unpaved, unlit, and weed infested portion of Monterey, CA, called Tortilla Flat. Here houses are set into dark, ancient pine forests. Below Tortilla Flat is Monterey, which, in the years after World War I is still a small town, whose residents depend primarily on fishing and the Cannery for their livelihood. The protagonist and his paisanos (friends) see no reason to work unless they need a specific amount of money for a specific purpose. Instead, they steal or otherwise appropriate items that they trade for wine, which they



imbibe in copious amounts. The houseful of talkative paisanos spends afternoons rocking on the rickety front porch, drinking, swatting flies, gossiping and planning what to do next. Behind the house is a gulch that they frequently visit without explanation of purpose. Only at the end does it come out that it is 40-feet deep, making a fall lethal.

Monterey is described as changeless in terms of the natural movements of sun and tides, the running of the red bus to Pacific Grove, the cannery stink and the patient and cynical fishermen on the rocks. The post office, station, poolrooms, and wharf are mentioned in passing. On the wharf, Pilon and Pablo find a perhaps suicidal Danny peering into the dark water and convince him to come back to the house for The Party. Most of the characters are in-and-out of the comfortable Monterey jail at one point or another.

Otherwise, brief scenes are set in Carmel, China Point and Pacific Grove on the Monterey Peninsula and Seaside just north of the peninsula on the coast.

Language and Meaning

The preface declares straightforwardly that, "this is the story of Danny and of Danny's friends and of Danny's house," how they flourish "as an organization beautiful and wise," how they, knight-like, have adventures, work for good, and in the end lose their talisman and disband. The narrator wants their story not to be told by dry scholars, who reduce them to "primitive symbols" or legends such as Sir Arthur, Roland, or Robin Hood. This declaration points to the dramatic conclusion and helps make the novel seem historical and objective. Between preface and ending, the narration is rich and descriptive, nature being pictured in minute details to create or reflect the emotions the characters feel.

Much of the book consists of dialog. The characters converse in a quaint form of English using the thee/thou form for second person. They often resort to conditional and passive constructions when speaking philosophically about life, most often about the burden of home ownership. Spanish words and phrases pop up, either familiar ones such as "amigo" or cognates understandable without translation. Most often - and understandably - the Spanish occurs at moments of explosive emotion, in the form of an explicative. The preface mentions that paisanos, people of mixed Spanish, Indian, Mexican, and Caucasian bloods, have a particular accent when speaking either English or Spanish, and it is not difficult to picture this. The narrator is free with adverbs qualifying the speakers' emotions. The characters all love to tell and hear stories, and a number of vignettes are set in drinking-and-gossiping settings on the front porch or around the stove.

Throughout the book, the narrator paints individuals and places in terms of common elements, in a sort of extended synecdoche. The clearest example is three ranks of military figures, pictured with increasingly grand uniform elements. In the final chapters, as the terrible climax nears and unfolds, the narrator turns in soliloquies to individual



characters and groups of characters, warning them of impending danger. It is an effective tool for heightening the tension.

Structure

Tortilla Flat consists of seventeen numbered chapters with descriptive headings. A brief preface sets up setting in time and place, establishes the prewar relations of three characters, and declares that the story is being written to prevent Danny, his house, and his friends from being distorted into legendary characters.

The first five chapters introduce Danny as the sudden owner of two houses, one of which he rents to Pilon, who sublets to Pablo Sanchez and Jesus Maria Corcoran. The conflict inherent in renting to friends is overcome when they inadvertently burn one house down. St. Francis makes his first appearance in the novel because the candle that starts the fire is dedicated to him, but misused. The next three (6-8) chapters show the friends getting back into Danny's good graces by bringing him a stolen picnic lunch and moving in as guests rather than tenants. A fifth housemate, the Pirate and his five dogs, is invited into the house when this seems the easiest way to get their hands on his horde of money. He ends up being the house's chief provider of food through his begging. Big Joe Portagee arrives after his discharge from the army and quickly falls afoul of Pilon, the unofficial second-in-command.

Having filled the house, the next three chapters (9-11) provide three outside vignettes: Danny romancing Sweets Ramirez; Jesus Maria befriending the Mexican corporal and his dying newborn; and Big Joe being romanced by Tia Ignacia. Chapter 12 throws the household into violent conflict as Big Joe betrays the sacred trust of the Pirate's coin bag. He is beaten brutally and tortured, even after confessing and telling where he buried the money. It is a disturbing scene that ends abruptly and moves to them rallying to dress the Pirate decently enough for him to attend mass on the Sunday after his donation buys a candlestick to St. Francis. The Pirate touchingly preaches to his dogs and they see a vision.

After the paisanos commit a burst of enthusiastic and altruistic petty crimes to feed Teresina Cortez's enormous household of infants, the final three chapters turn dark, focusing on Danny's descent into depression. His mood becomes so bad that he disappears into the forest and begins a campaign of larceny that embarrasses the paisanos and makes them jealous. To keep himself in wine, Danny sells Torrelli the house, but the friends grab the bill of sale and burn it when Torrelli tries to evict them. Danny comes home, still sad, and the paisanos work a full day cutting squid - a reprehensible activity, demonstrating their nobility of purpose - to throw him a party. All of Tortilla Flat helps prepare and attends. Danny makes love to all the women, challenges all the men to fight, runs off to battle an unseen Opponent, tumbles into the gulch and dies becoming an instant hero and demigod. The paisanos cannot dress properly to attend the funeral but watch from afar and return to the house to celebrate Danny's memory. A discarded match starts a small fire that the paisanos realize must be allowed to consume the house. They disband.



Quotes

"Two gallons is a great deal of wine, even for two paisanos. Spiritually the jugs may be graduated thus: Just below the shoulder of the first bottle, serious and concentrated conversation. Two inches farther down, sweetly sad memory. Three includes more, thoughts of old and satisfactory loves. An inch, thoughts of bitter loves. Bottom of the first jug, general and undirected sadness. Shoulder of the second jug, black, unholy despondency. Two fingers down a song of death or longing. A thumb, every other song each one knows. The graduations stop here, for the trail splits and there is no certainty. From this point on anything can happen." Chapter 3, pg. 18.

" 'Where did this whiskey come from?'

"'From those soldiers,' said Jesus Maria. 'They had it under a culvert. Arabella knew it was there, and she told me. But those soldiers saw us with the bottle.'

The story was gradually taking shape. Pilon like it this way. It ruined a story to have it all come out quickly. The good story lay in half-told things which must be filled in out of the hearer's own experience. He took the pink brassiere from Jesus Maria's lap and ran his fingers over it, and his eyes went to musing. But in a moment they shone with a joyous light.

'I know,' he cried. 'We'll give this thing to Danny as a gift to Mrs. Morales.'"Chapter 5, pg. 33.

"Danny saw them coming, and he stood up and tried to remember the things he had to say. They lined up in front of him and hung their heads.

'Dogs of gods,' Danny called them, and 'Thieves of decent folks' other house,' and 'Spawn of cuttlefish.' He named their mothers cows and their fathers ancient sheep.

Pilon opened the bag he held and exposed the ham sandwiches. And Danny said he had no more trust in friends, that his faith had been frostbitten and his friendship trampled upon. And then he began to have a little trouble remembering, for Pablo had taken two deviled eggs out of his bosom. But Danny went back to the grand generation and criticized the virtue of its women and the potency of its men.

Pilon pulled the pink brassiere from his pocket and let it dangle listlessly from his fingers.

Danny forgot everything then." Chapter 6, pg. 39.

"The town hadn't changed much, except for prohibition; and prohibition hadn't changed Torrelli's. Joe traded his overcoat for a gallon of wine and went out to find his friends. True friends he found none that night, but in Monterey he found no lack of those vile and false harpies and pimps who are ever ready to lead men into the pit. Joe, who was not very moral, had no revulsion for the pit; he liked it.

Before very many hours had passed, his wine was gone, and he had no money; and then the harpies tried to get Joe out of the pit, and he wouldn't go. He was comfortable there." Chapter 8, pg. 56.



"The friends nodded politely. 'It may be,' said Pilon. 'I have not heard of this practice.' 'I say twenty times a day, Manuel, you will be a general some day. You will have big epaulets and a sash. Your sword will be gold. You will ride a palomino horse. What a life for you, Manuel! The man said he will surely be a general if I say so.'

Danny got up and went to the apple box. 'You will be a general,' he said to the baby. 'When you grow up you will be a great general.'

The others trooped over to see whether the formula had any effect. The Pirate whispered, 'You will be a general,' and he wondered whether the same method would work on a dog.

'This baby is sick all right,' Danny said. 'We must keep him warm.'

They went back to their seats.

'Your wife is in Mexico—' Pilon suggested." Chapter 10, pgs. 84-85.

"All of a sudden Jake Lake cried out in astonishment and stopped his motor. 'What the devil! Say, what the hell is this?'

Big Joe twisted his neck. 'Oh, is that you, Jake? Say, Jake, as long as you're going to take us to jail anyway, can't you just wait a minute?'

The policeman turned his motor around. 'You get out of the street,' he said. 'Somebody'll come along and run over you.'

His motor roared in the mud, and the flicker of his little headlight disappeared around the corner. The rain pattered gently among the trees of Tortilla Flat." Chapter 11, pg. 92.

"They walked back up to Danny's house, and the dogs walked behind them. The Pirate felt that he had been washed in a golden fluid of beatitude. Little chills and fevers of pleasure chased one another through his body. The paisanos were glad they had guarded his money, for even they took a little holiness from the act. Pilon was relieved that he had not stolen the money in the first place. What terrible things might not have happened if he had taken the two-bitses belonging to a saint! All of the friends were as subdued as though they were in church." Chapter 12, pg. 98.

"Once a month, in the afternoon, she went to confession. It would be interesting to know what sins she confessed, and where she found the time to commit them, for in Teresina's house there were creepers, crawlers, stumblers, shriekers, cat-killers, fallers-out-of-trees; and each one of these charges could be trusted to be ravenous every two hours.

Is it any wonder that the vieja had a remote soul and nerves of steel? Any other kind would have gone screaming out of her body like little skyrockets." Chapter 13, pg. 105.

" 'Oh! Petey was crazy. He went home and put a rope over a rafter and he stood on a box and put the rope around his neck and then he kicked out the box. Well, Petey's father came in then. He cut the rope and called the doctor. But it was two hours before Petey opened his eyes, and it was four days before he could talk.'



Jesus Maria paused. He saw with pride that his friends were leaning in toward the story. 'That was the way of it,' he said.'" Chapter 14, pg. 119.

" 'But where will he come?'

The light struck all of them at once. 'Torrelli's! Sooner or later Danny will go to Torrelli's. We must go there to catch him, to restrain him in the madness that has fallen upon him.' 'Yes,' they agreed. 'We must save Danny.'

In a body they visited Torrelli, and Torrelli would not let them in. 'Ask me,' he cried through the door, 'have I seen Danny? Danny brought three blankets and two cooking pots, and I gave him a gallon of wine. What did that devil do then? My wife he insulted and me he called bad names. My baby he spanked, my dog he kicked!'" Chapter 15, pgs. 126-127.

"Danny's party was lifted out of possible comparison with all other parties that ever were. What man came out of that night without some glorious cuts and bruises? Never had there been so many fights; not fights between two men, but roaring battles that raged through whole clots of men, each one for himself. Oh, the laughter of women! Thin and high and brittle as spun glass. Oh, the ladylike shrieks of protest from the gulch. Father Ramon was absolutely astonished and incredulous at the confessions the next week. The whole happy soul of Tortilla Flat tore itself from restraint and arose into the air, one ecstatic unit. They danced so hard that the floor gave way in one corner. The accordions played so loudly that always afterward they were windbroken, like foundered horses." Chapter 16, pgs. 141-142.

"Death is a personal matter, arousing sorrow, despair, fervor, or dry-hearted philosophy. Funerals, on the other hand, are social functions. Imagine going to a funeral without first polishing the automobile. Imagine standing at a graveside not dressed in your best dark suit and your best black shoes, polished delightfully. Imagine sending flowers to a funeral with no attached card to prove you had done the correct thing. In no social institution is the codified ritual of behavior more rigid than in funerals." Chapter 17, pg. 145.



Topics for Discussion

What is your favorite "romantic" gift in the novel, and how does it advance the story?

What is your favorite animal in the novel, and what part does it play in the story?

How does squid cutting fit into the story?

How does St. Francis of Assisi unify the novel?

What does St. Andrew's Eve reveal about the paisano belief system?

Is the torture of Big Joe justifiable?

Why do the paisanos separate after Danny's second house burns down?