

The Winter of Our Discontent Study Guide

The Winter of Our Discontent by John Steinbeck

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Plot Summary

Ethan Hawley is married to Mary, and has two teenage children, Allen and Ellen. The family resides in a house that has been passed down to Ethan by his grandfather, in the New England town of New Baytown. Ethan's ancestors are Pilgrims, whalers and pirates. Ethan was raised by his father, his grandfather, and his Aunt Deborah, as his mother died when he was young. He has no siblings. He was educated at Harvard, and was a Captain in World War II. It is now 1960, and Ethan is a grocery clerk in the store he once owned.

Ethan walks to work daily, and sometimes goes to the old harbor. He has grown up in this town and knows everyone. His childhood friend is Danny Taylor, who is now the town drunk. Ethan has a special secret place down by the harbor where he goes to sort things out, as he has since childhood.

Allen is a young man who is worried about how others see him, and interested only in money. Ellen is dreamy, and a sleepwalker, who shares her father's fascination with an odd stone in the family's heirloom collection, a talisman.

The novel begins with Good Friday. Ethan encounters many people during the day, and each encounter foreshadows change in his life. The town banker advises him concerning Mary's recent inheritance. Mary's best friend, Margie, comes to the store and flirts openly with Ethan, and his rebuff causes Margie to slant her Tarot card reading for Mary in such a way to change Ethan's life. A salesman offers Ethan a bribe. The bank teller, Joey Morphy, tells Ethan his dream of robbing a bank, and in doing so teaches Ethan how not to get caught in a crime.

Marullo, who now owns the grocery store, attempts to help Ethan with business advice, but instead the two men get into an argument.

That night at home, Ethan's children announce they are entering an essay contest so they can win prizes and money. Allen tells Ethan he is tired of being poor, and Ellen asks him when they will be rich. Mary says Margie read her fortune and Ethan will be rich by July. Ethan is dismayed and surprised to find that his family thinks he is a failure. He goes on a late night walk to the harbor, visits his secret place, trying to sort things out. That night he sees Danny Taylor, his childhood friend, and attempts to help him.

On Saturday before Easter, Ethan walks with Joey Morphy to work and hears Joey's modern views about doing business. At the store, Ethan suggests to Marullo that he go back home to Sicily to see his family. Baker the banker stops by to ask the Hawleys to tea on Sunday, and Mary calls to let Ethan know her friend Margie is coming to dinner that night.

Margie comes to dinner at the Hawley house, and Ethan manipulates her into reading his fortune again because he knows she had changed it to spite him for his actions the



day before. Margie attempts to read it, but is disturbed by what she sees, and leaves early.

Ethan begins to think about how to get the fortune his family obviously wants, but he is unsure what will happen to his character if he follows the advice of others. On Easter Sunday, he and Mary attend church, and then go to tea with the Bakers. Mary believes they should follow Baker's advice because the alleged fortune is in the works.

Ethan goes back to see Danny Taylor because he is on his mind a lot lately. Danny is drunk, but they have enough of a conversation for Ethan to realize Baker has been there that night and tried to get Danny to sign away Taylor Meadow, the only land he has left. Ethan tells Danny to get cured and sober so he can fight this attempt. Ethan offers to pay for a cure and Danny asks for \$1,000.

The next day Ethan deceives Mary into thinking the money is for an investment recommended by Baker and takes the money to Danny's shack. The next morning there is a brown envelope under the store's door, and it is the deed to Danny's land, and Danny's will.

Part Two of the novel begins some months later, with the approach of the July 4th holiday. Morphy believes Marullo is in the country illegally, and Ethan calls the Immigration officials. Ethan is still sorting out the events of Easter weekend, and has made some decisions. Margie decides to make a definite play for Ethan, but gets nowhere. There are rumors in town that some of the town managers are under suspicion by the state attorney's office.

Ethan tells Baker several lies in order to manipulate him into providing Ethan with conveyance papers for the store and pulling money out of Mary's account. Baker's greed and need for Ethan to locate Danny makes him violate all the rules and comply with Ethan's requests.

Marullo tells Ethan he is a good honest man, and then gives him money and time off for a holiday. Later, he tells Ethan they should be partners.

The game of robbing the bank is no longer a game, and Ethan has decided to act on his plans. Just as he is about to begin the robbery, he is prevented from taking the action. Walder, the immigration official, comes to see him and tells him that Marullo has been deported and his last action was to give Ethan the store.

Ethan and Mary go on holiday alone, as Margie has volunteered to take the children to New York City. While on holiday, Mary receives a call from Margie telling them Allen has won honorable mention in the contest.

Allen is very dignified and calm about the prize, and Ellen is proclaiming him a hero. A celebration is planned for the next night.

The next day, Ethan negotiates a six percent cut from Biggers, and gets all the necessary papers from Baker. He is feeling better about everything, but then Chief



Stoney comes in and tells him Danny is dead. Ethan confronts Baker and reveals that Ethan is now the owner of the Taylor Meadow so coveted by Baker and his associates. Ethan negotiates a fifty-one percent cut.

Ethan goes home to a party, but is depressed. He goes out for a walk and is intercepted by Margie, who takes him to her house. She throws herself at him and says she will be his friend and keep all his secrets for a small percentage of Ethan's profit on Taylor Meadow. He leaves and goes back home.

A representative from the essay contest is at the house and tells Ethan they have discovered Allen's essay is not legitimate. It was copied from several nineteenth century speeches, and someone sent them a postcard from New York City advising them of the fraud. Ethan confronts Allen, but the boy does not see anything wrong with his actions.

Ethan grabs a packet of razors from the bathroom and leaves the house, but not before Ellen tries to stop him. Ethan heads for his special secret place by the harbor. He enters it with the intent to open his veins with the razors. When he reaches in his pocket, he finds the talisman. He realizes Ellen is the rightful owner of the talisman now, and struggles against the rising tide to get out and take it back to her.



Chapter One

Chapter One Summary

The *Winter of Our Discontent* by John Steinbeck is a story of Ethan Hawley, a man who has been approaching life complacently, then discovers that his family and friends consider him an abject failure. His struggle to determine the best course of action to regain the respect of those he loves includes a complete re-examination of all he has considered good and righteous, and to set a new course for his life. During the spring and early summer of 1960, circumstances and events occur that force Ethan to question even the purpose of life itself.

It is Good Friday morning, 1960, in the Hawley household in New Baytown. The main character, Ethan Allen Hawley, and his wife Mary have just woken up and are having a conversation. The couple discuss the religious holiday, the Biblical Romans, Ethan's forefathers of Pilgrims and whalers, and then move on to discuss Ethan's complaints about his boss Marullo. Mary tells Ethan that her best friend Margie is giving her a Tarot card reading today.

Ethan walks to work, and he pauses to speak to the neighbor's dog and to chase some sparrows away. Ethan is an intelligent man with a wry sense of humor. He meets up with Joey Morphy, a younger man who is fairly new to town, a bank teller next door to the grocery store where Ethan works.

Ethan and Joey discuss Marullo, and it is revealed that Ethan's family once owned the grocery store and a considerable amount of real estate in the town, but due to bad management and investments made by Ethan's father and Ethan himself, all the Hawley family has left is the home in which Ethan lives. The home was built during the time when the family were ship-owners and whalers and was passed down to Ethan when his father died.

Ethan served as a Captain in World War II, and Joey remarks that he has seen Ethan's name at the war memorial in the old harbor. The two men stop briefly in their walk to watch a bulldozer knock down an old hotel to make room for a chain store to be built in the town.

Joey talks about working at the bank, and how if he were to rob a bank he would be careful to follow some specific rules. Joey relays these well-thought out rules to Ethan, who listens respectfully, amused at the bank teller dreaming of robbing a bank.

Ethan prepares the grocery store for customers, and it is a meticulously clean store. Before opening, he sweeps the sidewalk, chases off a stray cat, and addresses the canned goods sarcastically. Soon after the store opens, Mr. Baker the banker comes by, pausing to talk to Ethan about investing Mary's money. Ethan reminds Mr. Baker that



investing is why he is now the grocery clerk and not the grocer. The recession after the war caused Ethan to sell off the family real estate just to keep the grocery store stocked.

Mr. Baker asks Ethan why he is still broke, and Ethan does not reply angrily, just says that what kills men is erosion and they get nudged into failure. He tells that Baker every day is full of fear and he is trapped. Baker encourages Ethan to do something about his situation. Baker hints there are great changes afoot in the town, and that an investment from Ethan with Mary's money could bring great fortune.

Baker is on a strict self-imposed schedule so cannot stay long to talk. Soon after he leaves, Margie comes in and begins flirting with Ethan. She mentions that a traveling salesman she has been spending time with has asked about Ethan. As Margie is leaving the store, she is a little angry because Ethan did not respond to her flirting. She remembers she is reading the Tarot cards for Ethan's wife today, and decides to make it more interesting.

After Margie leaves the store, Marullo arrives. He is a complete opposite of Ethan because he dresses in a sloppy manner, speaks in short bursts, and has descended from Italians, not Pilgrims. He calls Ethan "kid". Marullo talks about waste in the store, paying too much for meat, and suggests that Ethan weigh the meat before cutting off the fat, keep the vegetables and fruit a little longer, etc. Ethan blows up, threatens to quit, but then the rage leaks away from him. Marullo says Ethan is too friendly, trusts too many people, and Marullo will try to teach Ethan so he won't go broke again.

After Marullo leaves, the traveling salesman, Biggers, comes in. He offers Ethan a five percent cut on orders if he will get Marullo to switch suppliers to his company. Ethan refuses. Biggers leaves Ethan an expensive billfold and says everyone does business this way. Biggers advises Ethan to reconsider, and says he will be back in two weeks for his decision.

Joey Murphy comes into the store for lunch after Biggers leaves, sees the wallet, and finds a \$20 bill in there. He agrees with Biggers' philosophy that everyone does it, no one gets hurt. He tells Ethan he is lucky to have the opportunity to take bribes because at the bank there are no such loopholes. Ethan and Joey have an argument, but then make up. Ethan closes the store and wants to walk down by the gray waves of the old harbor, but has to take groceries home, so he does not.

Chapter One Analysis

Ethan departs his comfortable home and loving wife to a Good Friday full of temptations and emotion. A pleasant walk to work with Joey Morphy, the bank teller, brings up memories of the war, memories of his ancestors, and a surprising talk about bank robberies. Once at the store, however, temptations begin. First, it is the banker who advises risky investments while traversing the sidewalk missing cracks. Then his wife's best friend flirts openly with him and his refusal sets in motion a critical part of the story with Margie's fortune telling for his wife. Marullo, the man who now owns the grocery



store once belonging to Ethan's family, angers Ethan by telling him to be more dishonest with the customers in order to make more money. The next arrival to the store is Biggers, a traveling salesman (drummer) who offers a bribe to switch the store's orders to his company. Ethan refuses amidst Biggers' protestations that everyone does business this way nowadays, and Ethan feels good about turning down this temptation until Joey stops by for lunch and echoes the philosophy of Biggers, that everyone does it.

This is a troubling day for Ethan, who discovers that the people he respects hold an entirely different view of the world than he does. There is much foreshadowing in this chapter: Margie's decision to slant the fortune she will give Mary, Baker the banker implying that Ethan could, with the banker's guidance, become rich again; Biggers offering additional wealth through dishonesty, and Joey's bank robbing dream. The old fashioned ethics long embraced by Ethan are being challenged in this modern world.



Chapter Two

Chapter Two Summary

Ethan returns home on Good Friday and tells his wife he has much to tell her, but before he can begin, Mary has her own news. Their teenage children, Allen and Ellen, have decided to enter the National I Love America essay contest sponsored by Hearst Papers, and may win a chance to be on television, meet the President, and become celebrities. Allen and Ellen are very excited about the possibility of winning money and ask Ethan if they can use some of the old books that are in the attic to do their research.

Mary's other news is that Margie has read her fortune and Ethan is going to be rich and important, beginning in July. Mary goes on to say that now she can hold up her head, Ethan will stop wallowing in his failure, and everybody in town will stop laughing at him. After this revelation, Ethan does not share his news.

Chapter Two Analysis

Ethan discovers two critical points in this chapter that will affect his life from that moment on, and it jolts him out of his complacency. His children do not appear to share his view on life, they are not happy with their current status in life, and they view this essay contest as a way to rescue them. Mary, his beloved wife, has found her rescue in a fortune conjured up by Margie, the woman who made a pass at Ethan earlier the same day. Through this fortune, Ethan finds out that his wife has been deeply ashamed of their status in the town, and that she is clinging to this alleged fortune because she believes it will change everything.



Chapter Three

Chapter Three Summary

Ethan watches his wife sleep, and knows from previous conversations that she goes to sleep quickly and never dreams. On the other hand, he fights sleep and when he does succumb, dreams busily all night. He lies there in bed on the Good Friday night, reviewing the events of the day. He cannot fall asleep, slips out of the bedroom, dresses in the kitchen, and goes out for a walk in the night.

He thinks about the town, and of his family. He calls himself and his father "ancestor people", as they both learned heritage lessons at the knee of Ethan's grandfather. Ethan thinks of Mary, who he met in Boston before shipping out for the War, and she wrote to him constantly. He thinks she has now tired of making the best of a bad situation.

As Ethan walks, he sees the night constable Wee Willie, and signs of Danny Taylor, the town drunk who used to be his best friend from childhood. Ethan went to Harvard and Danny went to the Naval Academy. There was a scandal and Danny was expelled; from that time, all he has done is drink. Danny still owns land, Taylor Meadow, but lives in a shack.

Ethan walks towards Old Harbor and goes to his secret place, a cement enclosure that is somewhat hidden from the dock, where he can see the ocean, but no one can see him. He reflects that it is big changes that take him there. Mary doesn't know about this place, and he wonders what he does not know about her. He calls his time at the place "taking stock", and tonight he ponders Mary and the fortune, whether or not he wants money in his life again, and what was truth. Marullo's truth? Baker the banker's truth? Joey's truth?

Ethan sees the old harbor as a time when there was dignity, according to his father. His grandfather presented a somewhat different side, noting that the ship owned by him and Baker's father was burned in the harbor under mysterious circumstances.

On the way home from the harbor, Ethan runs into Danny Taylor, gives him a dollar, and tells him he needs to stop drinking. Danny replies that he may be the town drunk, but at least he is not a grocery clerk.

Ethan comes back home and Mary is awake in bed. He jokes with her, and then tells her he will make their fortune.

Chapter Three Analysis

In this chapter, the author moves us from third person to first person, into Ethan's mind, but the reader still doesn't know how Ethan really feels about the changes happening in

his life. Ethan brings up the problems to be considered, but then his mind drifts to his father, his grandfather, his Aunt Deborah, and there are no answers, no resolutions.

Ethan retreats to a childhood hiding place to sort out his thoughts, but comes to no solution. On the way home he finds out that not only does his wife think he is a failure, even the town drunk thinks he is better off than Ethan. Ethan's feelings of discontent are deepened in this chapter, and the author uses Ethan's troubled and random thoughts to elaborate on Ethan's old fashioned upbringing, and to introduce Danny Taylor.



Chapter Four

Chapter Four Summary

It is Saturday before Easter, and when Ethan awakens he thinks of his Aunt Deborah, and that this is the day Jesus was in Hell fighting the Devil. Eager to get to the store for once, Ethan reflects on how he talks to his wife and she talks to him but they never really listen.

On the way to the store, he runs into the Chief of Police, Stoney, and they discuss a bank robbery in a nearby town. At the store, Ethan feeds the stray cat instead of running it off, and Joey is in the back alley, entering the bank at the back entrance as usual; except this time Joey rigs the door where it does not lock. Joey says they do it all the time, it's just more convenient that way. Joey reiterates his rules of life: money gets money, never take the first offer, if someone wants to sell you something, he's got a reason, and a thing is only as valuable as who wants it.

Ethan again addresses the canned goods and forgets to open the store doors until Margie pounds on the door at 9:15 am. This time he really notices her and realizes she is very sexy. Baker sticks his head in the store door and invites Ethan and Mary to his house for tea on Sunday so they can discuss the investments he wants Ethan to make.

Marullo comes in later, and Ethan suggests Marullo go home to Sicily and see his family. After Marullo leaves, Biggers the drummer comes in and Ethan gives him back the wallet. The man looks at Ethan in a different way. Mary calls and says she invited Margie to dinner. Ethan tells her about tea with the Bakers on Sunday.

Chapter Four Analysis

Change is in the air for Ethan. He feeds the stray cat he has been chasing off, he tells the police chief to check out for Danny, he consults Baker, he suggests Sicily to Marullo, he sees Margie as a real person, he turns down a bribe, and he remembers how much he loves his wife. The goodness in Ethan is winning in this chapter, but there is considerable foreshadowing in each encounter. In this chapter, the author reinforces Ethan's long held beliefs, but shows how Ethan is now questioning all aspects of his life.



Chapter Five

Chapter Five Summary

Ethan comes home for dinner, and his wife is cooking chicken she bought at another grocery store. Ethan dresses, and his son asks if he can look at the Masonic sword and hat that belonged to Ethan's father and grandfather. Allen asks Ethan how they lost the real estate and the whaling ships. Ethan changes the subject. Allen asks Ethan if he will come to the attic to look at the old books. Ethan thinks of the attic and the wonderful books and being a child and exploring up there. In the attic, Allen wants all the "patriotic jazz" for the essay. Allen says he wishes he were a pirate like his ancestors because he wants money. He says he is the only kid in town with no motorbike.

When Allen goes downstairs to read the paper, he tells his wife that Margie is carrying a torch for him. Ellen comes in and after a moment asks her father when they will be rich.

Margie comes for dinner, and displays none of the flirting she did at the store. She acts like the perfect best friend for Mary, and this confuses Ethan. Afterwards, the teenagers go to the movies, and Ethan begins to manipulate Margie into telling his fortune in front of Mary. He has a quick searing pain as she brings out the cards.

Margie has trouble reading the cards, then apologizes for not being able to do the fortune and leaves right away. Mary and Ethan are left wondering what happened.

Chapter Five Analysis

Ethan is once again confronted by why he does not have more money, this time by his son and daughter, separately. The woman who has been flirting with him comes to dinner with his family, but behaves differently, even falsely in the presence of his wife. The fortune (Ethan's possession of money or the lack of it) is brought up again and again, and he manipulates Margie into reading the Tarot cards and his wife into agreeing to it. Here the foreshadowing of doom is intensified for the reader, as Margie lays out the cards once, twice, and three times, studies them, and after displaying the death card, puts them all away and says she needs to leave. Mary and Ethan are left in her wake, wondering what happened.

Ethan experiences two physical manifestations of his emotional distress during this evening of dinner with his wife and the woman who is alternately flirting with him and being his wife's best friend. He is joking, full of sarcasm and light banter, and then has searing sharp pain. After dinner he must get a cold washcloth for his eyes because the "seemed to bulge from pressure".



Chapter Six

Chapter Six Summary

Ethan is thinking about decisions and how he traditionally makes them. He believes that a man is changing all the time. Ethan believes that he has always been a "good man".

He begins to acknowledge there are a lot of "good men" in the town doing questionable acts, such as fixing tickets, selling items at an inflated price, using their privileged knowledge to buy land, and more. He believes that he needs to set aside time to think about what do to do about the events in recent days, then realizes the decision has already been made. He reflects upon the day, and how people he saw every day had looked upon him differently now that he was exhibiting some confidence.

His thoughts turn to Danny Taylor, but Ethan does not want to think about Danny right now, so he uses an old trick taught to him by one of his sergeants in the military. Instead of pushing a bad memory away, he welcomes it, starts at the beginning, remembering everything, and sooner or later the memory goes away.

Ethan remembers the childhood he and Danny Taylor had together, then Danny went to the Naval Academy and Ethan went to war. Ethan begins to wonder if turning into a clerk after losing the family fortune was not a virtue, but laziness like Danny's drinking. He thinks of the pressure of Mary, Allen, Ellen, the banker, and of Margie's contrived fortune telling. Ethan feels that all of this wondering is reflected not only in his life but the town and the country as well, all full of unrest and discontent.

He wonders what will happen if he changes. He realizes that he does not want advice.

Chapter Six Analysis

Finally, in this chapter the reader is allowed to see inside Ethan's mind, and the true confusion that is beneath the sarcasm and silliness. Ethan is beginning to see that although he has conducted his life in the manner of a good man as he believes his father and grandfather would have done in his present condition, the rest of his known world—his wife, children and associates—see him as a failure. He examines his view of the world as if he is a ship and there are tiny tugs shifting and pulling, and he as the captain must now decide where to go. He acknowledges that people all around him are breaking the rules and he wonders what will happen if he does the same.

In this chapter, the author shows Ethan beginning to compare his current situation with his experiences in the war by relaying the methods used by one of his officers to handle stress.

The author is also showing the reader that every man is tempted daily, but here is Ethan who up until this moment has never considered straying from the path set before him by



his Pilgrim and seafaring ancestors. Being an intelligent man from such auspicious ancestry, straying is a major step, a turning point in his life. Ethan says early in the chapter that a decision had already been made by the dark jury of his mind, but the exact nature of that decision has yet to be revealed.



Chapter Seven

Chapter Seven Summary

It is Easter Sunday morning, and Mary is wondering what Mr. Baker wants to talk to them about. Suddenly, Mr. Marullo has come to the door of the Hawley home, something he has never done, and wishes to speak to Ethan outside. Marullo tells Ethan he has heard about Ethan refusing the kickback offered by Biggers, gives Ethan a sack of cheap candy for the kids, and leaves.

Ethan and his family, all shined and polished, go to church. Entering the church, he is again beset with memories of his Aunt Deborah's religious teachings, being an altar boy, taking communion, being taught the right way of conducting his life.

Ethan makes several sarcastic comments to Mary as they walk home from church and Mary seriously questions his faith. He continues bantering with her, but not really telling her anything. Mary goes to freshen up and Ethan takes a quick nap, dreaming that he finds Danny and Danny is melting.

Ethan awakens and reflects on money and how it has never been something he actively sought. When he and Mary reach the Baker house for tea, Baker comments on his memories of Ethan's grandfather. Mr. and Mrs. Baker offer tea to Mary and Ethan, and the conversation surrounds tea services, weaving together a pleasant introduction to business. Ethan disturbs the pattern by bringing up his earlier dream of Danny, and is surprised to see how quickly Baker, Mrs. Baker, and even his fragile wife Mary angrily dismiss Danny as someone who is of no concern to any of them.

After a moment, Ethan begins to question Baker on the loss of Ethan's father's money, which happened while Ethan was at war, and had been a result of advice from the Baker family.

Baker's explanation is vague, and Ethan moves on to ask Baker about how Ethan might replenish his own fortune.

Baker suggests that the ladies might be bored with business talk, and they leave. The conversation turns to investing, but there is some confusion about where the money might come from. Baker hints that Mary's inheritance would be the perfect amount.

Baker offers to get Ethan in on the ground floor of new development, but specifics are not shared. Ethan is asked to trust Baker, based upon the long family relationship.

As they walk home, Mary asks about the conversation between Ethan and Baker. When Ethan says he is hesitant to do what Baker recommended, Mary says she will do it if he will not. She is certain that Baker's recommendations are a result of Margie's slanted fortune telling.



Mary and Ethan argue over the money, and Mary's words are hurtful, as she calls Ethan just a grocery clerk. He is about to truly become angry when she disarms him with a smile and they walk home in peace.

Chapter Seven Analysis

Ethan begins to explore his new attitude, to see how he could obtain the fortune promised by the Tarot cards. His nap-time dream of Danny is disturbing, where Danny's essence runs through Ethan's fingers and he cannot put Danny back together again. Ethan attends church, steeped in memories, and then tea with the banker and his wife opens up questions about Ethan's father's loss to the bank. Ethan is derided by the Bakers and his own wife when he expresses his true feelings about Danny. While he is being careful and cautious about investing Mary's money, Mary herself seems ready to release funds to Baker, no questions asked, just because of Margie's creative fortune telling. Ethan feels surrounded by forces pulling him towards this make-believe fortune.



Chapter Eight

Chapter Eight Summary

Ethan remembers killing small animals as a child and young man, hunting rabbits and ducks and squirrels. But the war retired his appetite for killing; Mary asked him to get rid of rabbits in the garden and he does, but it made him physically ill.

Ethan decides to go for a walk that evening, and Mary says she will not wait up. He goes to see Danny. Ethan asks Danny if he would go to the hospital to get better if Ethan made all the arrangements. Danny says to never trust a drunk. Danny says someone else was just there asking him to sign something, and Ethan figures out it was Baker, asking Danny to sign away Taylor Meadow. Ethan works it out that the meadow is the only true flat land and that Baker and his associates must want to build an airfield there.

Ethan explains to Danny that if Baker gets Danny declared as incompetent, Baker would be named guardian and Danny would be placed in an institution. Danny listens, and then he says he might take the cure Ethan offers. He accuses Ethan of wanting the meadow too, but Ethan denies it. Danny asks Ethan for \$1,000, no signatures, just trust. Then Danny walks out and Ethan goes home to Mary.

She awakens and they make love in the moonlight. She makes some sandwiches for them, and Ethan asks her for the \$1,000, allowing her to believe it is for an investment that Baker suggested. After Mary goes to sleep, Ethan hears his daughter sleepwalking and follows her down the stairs.

Ellen goes to the cabinet where the family treasures are kept and pulls out an odd stone brought back by one of the whaler ancestors. It is a talisman that contains a strange light and feel, and when she is done caressing it, Ellen replaces it in the cabinet and goes back to bed. Ethan touches the stone and finds it still warm from her touch.

Chapter Eight Analysis

The events of the past few days are weighing heavily on Ethan, and he seeks out his best friend, offering a cure. But Danny reacts like everyone else in Ethan's life, with suspicion of his intelligence and motives. As the night goes on, Ethan questions the motives of the people around him, including Baker, Marullo, Margie, and even his daughter Ellen.

Baker is revealed as the villain in the story, bringing expensive whiskey to Danny to trick him into signing over the valuable property.

The talisman is introduced in this story, along with mention of Ethan's Aunt Deborah telling him that it could bring him good luck. This object will play an important part throughout the remainder of the book.



Chapter Nine - Ten

Chapter Nine - Ten Summary

It is the Monday after Easter, and Ethan walks to work carrying the Masonic case. The weather is a cold rain and raw gusty wind, like Ethan's thoughts of the night before. Morphy joins him, and says he heard about Ethan and Mary having tea with Mr. and Mrs. Baker, and about Marullo thinking of going to Sicily. Morphy asks Ethan to join him for coffee, and while they are talking about Marullo, Morphy says he has a theory. Morphy tells Ethan that Marullo has probably never been home to Sicily because he entered the country illegally and could not get a passport to go back.

Morphy asks about the Knights Templar case and Ethan explains he is getting some of the feathers bleached and restored. Morphy asks if Baker is a Mason as well, and when Ethan says yes, Morphy says maybe that is why there is such ceremony in opening up the vault every morning. Morphy talks more about the safe and the time lock, and when the two men enter their respective places of business through the back alley, Ethan notices that once again Morphy is not latching the side door to the bank, but placing a wadded tissue to keep it open.

Ethan enters the grocery store and feels he is seeing it through different eyes. He pulls out the hidden cash register change and finds an old .38 stored near it. He toys with the idea of robbing the bank, using the knowledge he has, and then takes the game further, counting out the steps in the alley, determining the exact procedure.

Chief Stoney comes in to buy groceries and comments that he had seen Danny all cleaned up that day and Danny had the Chief witness his signature on some paperwork. The exact nature of the papers Danny presented were hidden from Chief Stoney's view.

Ethan awakens Tuesday morning to the sound of jets from the nearby military base. His son loves them, but the sound always fills Ethan with dread. Ethan believes that the dread is not the jets, but the malice that they represent. It seems to him that everyone in the town, and even in the country, is nervous and restless and uneasy.

Mary wakes up and is ill with a hangover. When Ethan gets to work, there is a brown bank envelope shoved under the door. There are three pieces of paper: Danny's will, a signed deed to Taylor Meadow, and a note to Ethan from Danny. Ethan keeps the first two and flushes the third in the store's toilet.

The store becomes very busy and Mr. Marullo helps out. Mary comes in with a list of groceries and the bank envelope with the \$1,000 in it. Marullo sees Mary hand Ethan the money but does not say anything. When the crowd thins, Ethan brings out the old gun and suggests Marullo get a permit for it. Marullo and Ethan talk again about Marullo going to Italy. Marullo seems to have something on his mind, and finally he suggests to Ethan that they become partners. Before they can discuss it further, Marullo leaves.



Baker comes in at that moment and tells Ethan that Mary has withdrawn \$1,000. Ethan professes not to know about it, and allows Baker to believe Mary has gone to a nearby town to buy furniture. Baker calls Ethan wishy-washy and then berates him for not having more control over his wife.

Mary has arranged for them to have dinner that night at a restaurant with Margie and one of her boyfriends. Ethan calls Mary to tell her he may be a little late, and he goes down to the harbor. He buys some fish, sees some people he has known all his life, then stops by Danny's shack and leaves the money. Danny is not there.

While Ethan is dressing for dinner, Ellen comes in and asks about copying someone else's words for her essay. He tells her not to do it, and she tells him he never listens.

Margie meets them at the door of the restaurant with her date, Mr. Hartog. The two couples have dinner and then Ethan believes he sees Danny walk by the restaurant. Ethan does not run after him, although he wants to, and for the rest of the evening he no longer feels a part of it. Mary does not notice his behavior, but Margie does.

Ethan keeps thinking of Danny and knows in his heart Danny is gone.

Chapter Nine - Ten Analysis

The holiday weekend is over, the store is very busy, and Ethan is playing a game of robbing the bank in his head. Ethan is filling his commitment to Danny, dealing with Marullo and Baker, seeing the world through new eyes. There is foreshadowing in Ellen's comments, Marullo's offer, Baker's derision, and Margie's insight. Tension and suspense is building, just as the weather in New Baytown is unseasonably cold and stormy.

Chapter Ten is a very short chapter, but heavy with meaning. It is the last chapter of Part One, so the five days covered in Part One are closed out with Mary suffering from her overindulgence, Ethan avoiding Morphy on his walk to work for an unexplained reason, Ethan allowing the stray cat to come into the store, Ethan cleaning the shop with vigor and thoroughness, and Ethan finding the brown envelope from his childhood friend, granting him the deed to the property everyone in town is wanting so badly.



Part Two, Chapter Eleven

Part Two, Chapter Eleven Summary

It is now early June of the same year, and New Baytown is described as a village that was built on the wealth of whale oil, but is now in decline. June is bringing energy and vigor to the townspeople, and they are starting gardens, cleaning and repainting boats. Ethan and Morphy are talking at the store, and Morphy tells Ethan he should open up a store next door because all the people like him.

Before he shuts the store for the evening, Ethan places a call to the Immigration Department in New York City.

Ethan goes home and is not in a good mood. When he asks his son, Allen, what he wants to be when he grows up, Allen says he wants to be on TV, like a boy he heard about. The boy was caught cheating in the game, but he won a lot of money, and Allen admires that. Allen says everybody does it.

Ethan tells Allen he will make it possible for him to have money by working at the store with Ethan. Allen protests, and Ethan says that is the way this family has worked in the past. Allen leaves the room in anger. Ellen comes in and says she has been reading a lot of Henry Clay's speeches. When the children are both out of the room, Mary confronts Ethan angrily for his talk with Allen. Ethan does not respond angrily, only goes outside to mow the lawn Allen has neglected to mow.

Part Two, Chapter Eleven Analysis

The story is no longer in first person, but the point of view is through Ethan's eyes. This represents a distancing from the reader, to create more mystery about Ethan's behavior and actions.

Ethan is surrounded with opinions from Murphy, from his children, and from his wife, of how he should conduct his life. The author shows that even Ethan's town is not as good and prosperous as the one beside it, because it has not progressed from the whaler days. Change is in the weather, going from a late spring to an early summer. The author is showing the reader that Ethan is no longer just wondering about what to do, he has made a decision in at least one regard by calling the Immigration Department about Marullo. The mood for this chapter is growth, repair, planting, and a departure from stagnation and cold.



Chapter Twelve

Chapter Twelve Summary

Margie's life is a constant struggle to maintain her looks, and she reviews the strategy of her pursuit of the security of a husband. She has known many men in town, including Danny, Marullo, Stoney, and various traveling salesmen. They all know her, but do not know that she has been with the others. They share their secrets with her, and because of this, Margie knows more about what is going on in town than any other person. She is not proud of this situation, but she comforts herself with the fact she does not use this information for her own benefit. However, she sees no problem with using the information to help someone else.

Margie has taken Ethan on as a project, to release him from his pain. She sees changes coming in him that no one else seems to see.

Margie is receiving alimony from her first husband, but she feels time is running out. She knows it is time for her to find a husband, find security, and win the fight against the aging process before it is too late.

She dresses in her sexiest outfit and heads out her door. She walks with purpose, greeting everyone she meets and assessing them. All of the men, from old to young, eye her and some even whistle. Margie goes into Ethan's store and sees that he is speaking to a stranger. She just pops in, says hello, promises Ethan she will be back, and then goes to the bank. Joey Morphy waits on her, and they flirt as always. Margie does not see him as a prospect, but as a confirmed bachelor. Morphy tells her stories and they laugh, and as she is leaving the bank, she sees Baker and remembers that he once made a pass at her. She sees the stranger from Ethan's store coming into the bank.

Margie goes to Ethan's grocery store and asks him about the stranger. Ethan says the man was asking about Marullo, but he doesn't know anything else. Margie does not believe him. Margie and Ethan discuss the fortune that she read for Mary, and Margie suggests he reward her for this favor. Ethan teases back, saying he will take her in the back room, and Margie suddenly realizes he could never do such a thing.

Mr. Baker comes in, and when Margie departs, Baker asks Ethan if the government man has been in the store. Then Baker asks Ethan if he has seen Danny. Ethan admits he loaned Danny \$1,000 to get the cure and Baker is shocked.

Ethan mentions to Baker that he heard Baker went to Albany recently, but he doesn't remember how he knows this. This news upsets Mr. Baker, and he reveals that the state is looking into New Baytown politics. Abruptly, Baker says he must find Danny Taylor and insinuates that if Ethan finds him, Ethan will no longer have to work as a grocery clerk.



Chapter Twelve Analysis

The chapter opens up with Margie's point of view, third person. She thinks about her fight with aging, and as she walks through town she has a heartless assessment of every man she passes. The author presents this woman as having no other options in life but to snag a husband or lover to support her. She dresses to seduce, then when she does meet with Ethan, they decide that he could never have an affair with her and she leaves. She has chosen him as her project, is best friends with his wife, and plants the seed of fortune in the family's mind, but she cannot close the deal.

There is foreshadowing of decision making in Margie's sense of urgency in this chapter, as the author increases the focus on her emotions by using her point of view, third person in the beginning paragraphs.

Although the chapter begins with the reader inside Margie's mind, it reverts back to Ethan's point of view when the conversation between Margie and Ethan is over.



Chapter Thirteen

Chapter Thirteen Summary

Ethan realizes that rather than starting a process he can control, the process is becoming a thing of its own, independent of its creator. He wonders if he started it, or simply did not resist it when it began. He reflects that strength and success are admired, above criticism, above morality. He watches what he started grow with only the slightest guide and touch from him. He believes that no one knows of his thoughts, with the possible exception of Margie.

Ethan reviews the events, and knows that the "storm" must break Friday or Saturday before the set date of July 7th. He thinks of moves he needs to make on Thursday and Saturday.

On Monday, June 27, Marullo walks into the grocery store and seems pensive. Ethan suggests Marullo go away for the 4th of July holiday, and then suggests that Marullo see a specialist regarding the pain in his arms.

Marullo tells Ethan he is a good man, and tells him to take off for a few days. Marullo hands him the keys to Marullo's Pontiac, and three twenty dollar bills, and leaves the store.

On Thursday, June 30, Ethan awakens and the world seems all in black and white. He has too many thoughts in his head, so he uses a method taught to him by a fellow officer during the war. The officer spent a half hour each morning thinking of his family, then put those thoughts away in an imaginary cabinet for the rest of the day so he could give his full attention to the matter of waging war and staying alive. The officer was subsequently killed in battle, and Ethan thinks that this had been a good and reflective life. Ethan knows he needs to be especially alert today.

Ethan reviews his family: Aunt Deborah, a strong woman; his father, grandfather, and even his mother who he did not know. He reviews Allen, his son, who he knows to be miserable, and tells him silently it will be over. He reviews Ellen, his daughter, who he knows will be more beautiful than her mother. He reviews Mary, who lies beside him, and she awakens. He tells her the good news about the time off and the use of the Pontiac. Mary is thrilled and begins choosing their destination. Ethan asks her for more money and implies again that it is an investment recommended by the banker.

Ethan walks to work, and catches up with Joey at the coffee shop. Ethan volunteers to bring Joey some sandwiches and remarks that Joey seems low. Joey just says he is busy, and the two men go to work. While sweeping the sidewalk in front of the store, Ethan sees Mr. Baker and asks to speak to him in private. Ethan tells Baker he believes Mr. Marullo is in trouble with Immigration, and that Marullo has offered to sell Ethan the store for \$5,000 cash. He tells Baker that Marullo has gone out of town, and that if



Baker can draw up the papers and leave the amount and date blank, Ethan can get these signed. Baker agrees to do so, and then tells Ethan that Marullo has just recently pulled all of his money out of the bank.

Ethan expresses his concerns to Baker about buying the store, and asks if a quick title search can be done. Ethan is very convincing in his innocence. Baker and Ethan discuss the ins and outs of making this transaction work to Ethan's advantage.

Chapter Thirteen Analysis

The author tightens the focus and increases the suspense by reverting back to Ethan speaking in first person in this chapter. He is in the comfort of his bed, reviewing his plans, reviewing and assessing the people he loves, much like Margie did in her walk through town. At the store, he has a surprise encounter with Marullo, who gives him money and time off. Ethan has a confidential conference with Baker, and tells Baker two lies: that Marullo selling Ethan the store, and that Marullo has told Ethan he is being deported. Ethan is manipulating Baker into a sense of urgency. Ethan's thoughts hint at moves that need to be made this day and on Saturday; the Thursday move is now revealed through his conversation with Baker.

Ethan represents goodness in this chapter, engaged in a battle of the minds with the evil banker. Ethan is using deception and manipulation.



Chapter Fourteen

Chapter Fourteen Summary

It is July 1st, representing a boundary marker for Ethan, and he awakes from a deep sleep. He believes that he can change back to the way he was once his plans are done, just as he stopped killing men once he was no longer a soldier. What he has done to Marullo and to Danny Taylor weighs on his mind. He gets out of bed and retrieves the talisman from the cabinet, placing it in his pocket as he departs for the store.

He reflects that July is not a time of growth, but one of stagnation, waiting for August for changes. He feels he is walking around the town saying goodbye. He watches the new flag, the one with fifty states, going up, sees his name on the war memorial, and for a moment wishes his name was listed with the ones who died in the war.

Once at the shop, he is very busy, then Baker comes in, bringing him the \$5,000 in marked bills, the conveyance papers with the dates and amounts blank, and the deed search results. Baker says he is going out of town for the holiday, but lets it slip that there was a grand jury hearing in the state capitol about the town manager.

Chief Stoney comes in, implies that bad things are happening in the town. Ethan mentions the gun he found in the store, and Stoney confesses that he spoke against the town manager in the grand jury.

Joey comes into the store as Ethan is closing down. Joey tells Ethan he is feeling jumpy, like something bad is about to happen.

Ethan goes home to find the house in an uproar because Mary wants to go to one place for their holiday, and the children want to go somewhere else. Allen's rock music is very loud, and Ethan heads to the living room to angrily stop the noise, but the music is interrupted by a radio announcement that the towns' managers are in trouble.

Ethan thinks again of his plan, and wonders when the game in his mind became a plan. He rationalizes his proposed actions. He oversleeps that next morning, and goes to the coffee shop before work. Joey meets him there, and tells Ethan that he believes the town scandal must have been what had him on edge the day before.

Ethan goes to the store, and thinks about his plan. He knows he will get the store back from Marullo, but he needs capital to pay the grocery vendors, keep the store stocked, and more. He has decided to rob the bank today. He reviews his plan minute by minute, and waits until it is time to act.



Chapter Fourteen Analysis

The author accelerates the action in this chapter, with the bank robbery plan being revealed as no longer a mental game but an actual detailed plan that Ethan fully intends to execute. His plan covers all the rules given out by Joey back in the spring. Ethan has manipulated Marullo into being deported by turning him in to Immigration; Ethan has the necessary paperwork from Danny to own the airfield; Ethan has manipulated Baker into putting the store into Ethan's name; and, with the bank robbery, Ethan will have sufficient capital to keep the store from being a failure again. The town manager scandal is a subplot, enhancing the author's theme of good versus evil, and foreshadows Ethan slipping from being a "good man" into being a bank robber.

Again in this chapter, Ethan reverts to his military way of thinking, which also prepares him to commit an act of crime. He believes that he can take these actions, then go back to being a good man.



Chapter Fifteen

Chapter Fifteen Summary

Few people are out and about this Friday morning, and Ethan makes sure to speak to each of them as he is sweeping the sidewalk that morning so he has sufficient alibis. At the appointed time, he will return to the store, set the old faulty toilet to continually flush, don a mask and a raincoat, enter the bank through the rigged open door, be in the bank at the moment that the timed vault is opened, use the old gun to indicate to the bank personnel to put the money in a bag, then return to the store. Anyone who comes into the store will believe him to be in the bathroom, and Ethan would be completely disguised from the bank tellers.

While he is in his final preparations, Ethan continues to rationalize his actions. Just as he is about to begin, the man from the Immigration Department shows up. Ethan aborts his plan immediately, and is considerably shaken with emotion and anticipation, and of course, discontent.

The government man, Walder, comes in the store to tell Ethan that Marullo has been deported, and that Walder came to New Baytown on his day off to tell Ethan that Marullo has given Ethan the grocery store. While Ethan and Walder are talking, customers come in and out, and Walder helps out, weighing tomatoes, ringing up customers.

Marullo told Walder he came to the United States with high hopes, but soon found that everyone was cheating and lying, so he adapted to fit in. Marullo sees Ethan as a monument to everything he once believed in, and thinks that by doing this act of giving the store back to the man who once owned it will somehow redeem Marullo. Marullo says he is doing this "so the light won't go out".

Ethan reacts to this development with deep depression.

Chapter Fifteen Analysis

Suddenly, everything has changed, and Ethan's plans are ruined. He is extremely unhappy. He had manipulated events to allow him to get his store back for very little cost, and his plan to rob the bank would have provided the working capital. As he is about to execute his detailed bank robbery plan, he is stopped. His plan to cheat Marullo is foiled by Marullo giving Ethan the store. The reader is shown the theme of bad people being punished and good people (even those who have evil thoughts, like Ethan) rewarded.

The theme of light in the midst of darkness is again noted in this chapter. Honesty and goodness are shown as sparks.



Chapter Sixteen - Eighteen

Chapter Sixteen - Eighteen Summary

Ethan is still at the shop after Walder departs, and it is a busy day. Joey comes in, but Ethan doesn't reveal anything to him. Joey tells Ethan that he was still so edgy today that he and the rest of the clerks kept the foot alarms close by. Ethan calls his wife to say he'll be late. Ethan begins his sarcastic lecturing to the canned vegetables again, and then feels the talisman in his pocket. He thinks about the strange light in the talisman, and then about Marullo's statement about the light that he doesn't want to go out. Ethan wonders what his payment will be to keep the light from going out. Ethan heads home and realizes he left all the money in the store in the Templar hatbox. He decides not to go back because carrying the hatbox might raise questions at home. The wind is rising, bringing rain, as he leaves the store.

Ethan walks home slowly, looking at all the stores, thinking again of his Aunt Deborah who spoke to him using magic words that he still remembers. When he arrives at home, he is greeted with the news that Margie has volunteered to take Allen and Ellen to New York City with her for the weekend so Mary and Ethan can take a holiday alone. Ethan does not tell Mary about the store now being his or about the money he removed from her account. Ellen tells him that the talisman is missing from the cabinet. He pulls it from his pocket and they put it back. Mary asks him why he took it from the cabinet, and Ethan responds that he carried it for good luck and it worked.

On Sunday, July 3rd, it rains as Ethan and Mary head to Montauk for their holiday. They check into an inn, have a nice dinner with too much wine, and the next morning Ethan brings Mary breakfast in bed. He tells her he owns the store because he bought it from Marullo, who has been deported. Mary is overcome with happiness, and cries.

They walk on the beach, but instead of relaxing, Mary is now anxious to return home to relish their new status. While they are lunching at the inn, Margie calls to let them know Allen has won honorable mention in the essay contest. Ethan checks them out of the inn and buys over one hundred sparklers to celebrate.

Chapter Sixteen - Eighteen Analysis

As the shock of his plans changing sinks in, Ethan finds out the bank robbery might have failed anyway, due to Joey's heightened sense of danger. He mulls over the Marullo's words about "the light" and wonders what will happen now. There is strong symbolism in this chapter, with Ethan leaving the store windows wide open and the money in the store, as if everything is open and clear now. The wind and rain on his walk home show impending change and more storms in Ethan's life.



Chapter seventeen is a brief chapter, with more references to light as Mary "flickers out of the screen door like a flame". Although Ethan's original plans have been aborted, he continues to be secretive.

Margie makes a wonderfully generous move to take the children while Ethan and Mary go on holiday, which is surprising since Margie has designs on Ethan. The author is again showing the good and bad sides of Ethan and Margie, a theme that runs throughout the story.

Chapter eighteen shows Mary and Ethan having a break from the town, from the day-to-day routines, from the children, but Ethan cannot shed his gloomy feelings. He tells a lie to Mary, saying that the store has been sold to him for \$3,000 when it actually was given to him. Ethan is astonished that Allen has won an essay contest because he does not hold Allen's intelligence in high regard.

The theme of light is repeated in this chapter, with Mary inspecting the "shiny days to come" and with Ethan buying sparklers to celebrate his son's accomplishment

The Winter of Our Discontent

Summary

Analysis



Chapter Nineteen

Chapter Nineteen Summary

Ethan and Mary return home, and Allen's dignified behavior surprises Ethan, but not as much as the behavior of Ellen. Ethan had expected Ellen to be jealous, but she is her brother's biggest fan and celebrant. Ellen regales the story of how they all found out about his winning, how the award will be presented, and all the details. Afterwards, Ellen drifts in and out of the room, and Margie leaves soon after Ethan and Mary arrive home. Allen decides to stay up past his bedtime, but when the household is finally asleep, Ethan is aware that Ellen is sleepwalking, and he sees her go to the cabinet and touch the talisman again.

Ethan lies in bed and has an imaginary discussion with his grandfather, who reminds him of the ship owned by the Hawley and Baker families sinking mysteriously. When Ethan falls asleep, he dreams that Allen has become an atheist, and that Danny has sent a request for absurd things from Ethan. Ethan gathers the items in his dream, and when he encounters Danny, Danny is working in a mailroom and has very chapped lips. Ethan awakens from the dream just as he kisses Danny on his chapped lips.

Ethan goes to his grocery store, feeds the stray cat, puts the \$3,000 from Mary's account aside for paying bills, and promises himself he will put it back in her account when things pick up. Ethan reflects that 1960 is a year of change for him and the country, with fears and discontent turning into anger.

Baker comes in, shaken about the town manager scandal. He suggests that Ethan run for town manager. Ethan tells Baker he has the papers from Marullo, and tells Baker the same lie, that Ethan purchased the store for \$3,000. Baker asks Ethan if he has seen Danny, and Ethan says no. Ethan asks Baker about the ship, but the conversation does not result in anything.

Biggers, the drummer, shows up about the five percent cut he offered Ethan back in the spring. Ethan does not tell him that he now owns the store, and negotiates the cut to be six percent. He gives Biggers the first order.

Chief Stoney comes in and tells Ethan they have found Danny Taylor dead at Taylor Meadow. Ethan shuts down the store and sits in the dark.

Chapter Nineteen Analysis

Ethan sees his son as a dignified celebrity and his daughter as someone who is happy for her brother's success. He is momentarily proud of them both. Ethan's plans regarding his store have changed, but he is adapting by manipulating Baker some more, and by ensuring more money through the deal with Biggers. Although he knew inside that Danny was truly gone, actual news of his death shakes Ethan to the core.

This chapter takes the reader from the height of happiness with Allen's winning, Ellen's kindness, and success with Baker and Biggers, but comes crashing down with the news of Danny's death.



Chapter Twenty

Chapter Twenty Summary

Ethan goes into the bank and Joey sees him, offering his condolences. Baker sees Ethan and asks him into his private office. Baker says Ethan should not blame himself for Danny's death, and Ethan becomes angry.

Ethan shows Baker the two documents Danny left for him, giving Ethan the Taylor Meadow that Baker and his associates had been trying to get their hands on for months. Baker realizes Ethan has possessed these documents all along and Baker has been manipulated. Ethan negotiates fifty-one percent of the new airfield plan, and Baker is forced to agree. Ethan says he is going to raise the ship from the harbor floor as well. Baker still wants Ethan to be town manager, but Ethan refuses, saying he has a conflict of interest, and it is not ethical.

As Ethan is leaving the bank manager's office, he tells Baker he believes Baker is the one who turned Marullo into the immigration officials.

Chapter Twenty Analysis

Ethan shows his hand to Baker the banker, as a result of Danny's death. Ethan is revealed not to be the pleasant fool and failure that everyone in town thought he was, and now his future is secured by fifty-one percent of the airfield project. However, although the reader can rejoice in Ethan's successful manipulations, it is known that Ethan cannot be happy with losing his best friend in the process, and with tricking Marullo.



Chapter Twenty-One

Chapter Twenty-One Summary

Ethan arrives home and the house is lit up for a party in celebration of Allen's win. When he speaks to Allen, he finds that the young man is planning a career in television and will not have time to work in a small town grocery store. Allen tells Ethan that someone from the television station has been trying to reach Ethan. Ellen stays close to Ethan, still complimenting Allen and watching all the festivities. Ellen asks if she can take the talisman out of the cabinet and hold it for awhile.

After dinner, Ethan grabs his grandfather's cane and leaves the house for a walk. Ellen wants to go with him, but Ethan tells her no. As he leaves the house, Mary briefly mentions Danny Taylor, but her main concern is about the man from the television station calling.

Ethan walks through town, headed for the harbor. Margie intercepts him, and Ethan allows her to take him to her house. Margie tells Ethan she knows all about what he has done, and that he is ready to be her lover now because he needs her to keep quiet about everything. She says maybe a small percentage of his deal would make that happen and they could be lovers too. Margie reveals that the source of her alimony income, her first husband, has had a stroke, and she needs to work something else out.

Ethan leaves her house without even kissing her. As he approaches his own house, there is a large car out in front, and the television man has come to see Ethan.

The man, Dunscombe, wants to speak privately with Ethan, and informs him that the network has discovered that Allen's essay was plagiarized from a combination of Henry Clay's speeches and various other important nineteenth century speeches. Therefore, it cannot be accepted and they will need to take Allen's name off the honorable mention winning list. Dunscombe says they would never had known if they had not received a New York City postcard with an anonymous note on it telling them what speeches to look at in order to discover the error.

Ethan tells the man to get out, and then goes upstairs. Allen is angry; Ellen is cowering next to her mother. Allen says everybody does it, and cannot see that he did anything wrong. He is angrier about Ellen turning him in. Ethan tells Mary he is going back out.

Before Ethan goes out, he goes to the bathroom and puts a packet of razors in his pocket. He thinks of getting the talisman out of the cabinet.

As he reaches the door, Ellen runs to embrace him, telling him she is afraid he won't come back. He is afraid she will feel the razor blades in his pocket.



Chapter Twenty-One Analysis

Ethan's world has come crashing down upon him. His best friend is dead, and that fact is treated lightly by everyone else. His son turns out to be a cheater, and his daughter is the one who let the authorities know. Margie has betrayed her own rule of not using her privileged information to enhance her own situation. Ethan feels tossed about, with lights going out all over his life. His need to escape this cascading sense of failure of himself and everyone around him overwhelms him, and he turns away from his home and family to go out into the rainy night. Ellen knows her father is about to do something monumental and tries to stop him by going with him, but he rejects her as well. He heads off into the night with a packet of razor blades, and perhaps the talisman as well. The author shows Ethan thinking about taking it with him, but does not reveal the action itself.



Chaper Twenty-Two

Chaper Twenty-Two Summary

Ethan wades into his secret place at the old harbor, as the tide is rising. His billfold full of money and papers gets soaked. The rain abates into a thin mist, and the tide brings tiny jellyfish into his place, stinging Ethan. He can see the stars, some mast lights on the harbor. He thinks of Aunt Deborah's light, Marullo's light, and his grandfather's light, still burning.

Ethan believes his light has gone out. He wants to go home, but not his real home—the home where lights are given. He thinks of goodbye, with a warm bath and an open vein.

The increasing tide coming into his place moves his arms and legs and rolls him about in the water, and he reaches for the razor blades. He discovers instead that he has brought the talisman with him, and remembers the light and the warmth of Ellen's hands on the talisman.

He begins to struggle to get out of the place, and the tide is fighting him. He realizes he must return the talisman to its new owner, and he must do this so another light does not go out.

Chaper Twenty-Two Analysis

Ethan returns to his decision making place, obviously to commit suicide by cutting his veins with the razors and letting the warm water take the blood away. He feels his own light is out and not worth saving; however, at the last moment the author reveals that Ethan has indeed taken the talisman with him. The talisman reminds Ethan of the goodness of his daughter Ellen, who did the right thing by revealing Allen's lie, and Ethan realizes he must get the talisman back to her.

The darkness of Ethan's thoughts is reflected in the darkness of the night full of rain, and the ships whose mast lights go out as Ethan is being stung by jellyfish. The light of Marullo's dream is reflected in Ethan's belief that his daughter will carry on the light he himself no longer feels worthy of carrying. The chapter, and the novel, ends with Ethan struggling to escape this former place of comfort, to resist the strong tides holding him there, and to come back out to face the world again. The author does not let the reader know if the struggle is successful.



Characters

Ethan Allen Hawley

Ethan is the main character of the novel, and the plot involves his life from the time of Good Friday in 1960 to that year's 4th of July holiday weekend. He is an intelligent man who is well read. He was raised by his grandfather, his father, and his Aunt Deborah, because his mother died when he was young. He has no brothers or sisters. He is married to Mary, and has two teenage children, Ellen and Allen. Ethan is proud of his heritage, descending from Pilgrims, whalers, and pirates. He lives in a home built by his family and passed on to him. His ancestors are all dead now, and all that is left is Ethan and his son Allen to carry on the family name.

Ethan's relationship with his wife Mary is simple. He loves her but does not confide in her. He keeps his own counsel, choosing to tell different people different versions of the truth. His true character comes out more when he is conducting his sarcastic lectures to the canned vegetables. The reader is also kept in the dark about his true intentions until his actions are revealed.

Ethan is a clerk at the grocery store that his family once owned. The bank foreclosed on Ethan because he could not keep the store stocked with groceries, and sold the store to an Italian immigrant, Alfio Marullo. Ethan is unhappy about this situation, but at the beginning of the novel, seems to accept his fate as a grocery clerk, and copes by using sarcasm and jokes.

During the short amount of time covered in the novel, Good Friday to the end of the July 4th holiday weekend, Ethan is buffeted by temptations and events out of his control, and the reader sees him change from a complacent grocery clerk to someone who manipulates others, considers crime, and ultimately decides to attempt suicide.

The character of Ethan is presented as a man who believes he is handling a bad situation with grace and goodness, but is then confronted by temptations and the revelation that everyone in his life sees him as a failure. Ethan tries to deal with these events by calling upon the memories of his grandfather and Aunt Deborah, by alternately believing and disbelieving in fate, and by the lessons he learned during World War II. At the end, his character is a man totally lost, with no one to turn to, with his symbolic light going out.

Margie Young-Hunt

Margie Young-Hunt is a single woman who lives in New Baytown. She is Mary Hawley's best friend, and lives a life of mystery and seduction. Margie is a main character in this novel because she alone sees the changes in Ethan as he struggles with his temptations, and in fact, she is one of his temptations. The author's choice of character



names for Margie is interesting because she is young but aging rapidly, and her life is focused in hunting for a husband or secure provider for her future.

Margie is a sympathetic character in Ethan's life, and she behaves in his best interests until the end of the novel when she abandons all her tightly held principles and makes an all-out pitch for Ethan. She seems very perceptive of Ethan, even more so than his own wife.

Margie's ruthless assessment of the men in town shows how truly self-centered she is; although her outward appearance is sexy and appealing, the nature of the woman is revealed to be concentrated on her own survival.

Mary Hawley

Mary Hawley is Ethan's wife. She does not work outside of the home, and she leans heavily on Ethan for decisions. She is a good Catholic girl and admonishes Ethan when he is sarcastic about the church and their children. Mary is easily swayed by other characters in the novel, especially her best friend Margie Young-Hunt. Mary clings to the rigged fortune told to her by Margie, and finally reveals to Ethan just how unhappy she is with their status in town.

Mary seems completely unaware of Ethan's struggle, manipulations of others, and overall discontent. She immerses herself in the change of status when Ethan tells her he has the store back, and in Allen's newfound celebrity status. When Margie makes her final pitch for Ethan, he tells Margie that Mary is strong and stalwart and will outlast Margie. Ethan loves Mary completely, but does not share any of his plans or thoughts with her.

Mary is a staunch defender of her children, often becoming angry with Ethan when he confronts the children about their attitudes. She is surprisingly disloyal to Ethan, buying groceries at another store, and threatening to give her inheritance money to the banker against Ethan's wishes. At the end of the novel, Ethan turns away from Mary as well, and it is his daughter Ellen, not Mary, who is frightened about Ethan leaving and makes a last moment attempt to keep him from leaving the house.

Ellen Hawley

Ellen is Ethan's daughter. She is seen through Ethan's eyes as a young woman who will someday be prettier than her mother. Ethan believes that Ellen is a bit selfish, tending to be jealous, and he is very surprised when Ellen is Allen's biggest supporter when he wins honorable mention in the contest. Ellen slips in and out of the plot, but her role is critical to the events that bring Ethan into his discontent, and it is Ellen who comes to Ethan's mind during his suicide attempt.

Ellen is a dreamy, shadowy figure in the novel, being a sleepwalker, being the one who suddenly appears at Ethan's side in critical moments of the plot.



Ellen's unsuspected act of goodness, turning in her brother to the authorities for cheating on the essay, brings her character out of the shadows into the forefront. Ethan realizes that here, in Ellen, is the hope and light he thought was gone from his life.

Ellen and Ethan both see the talisman as a touchstone, a representation of luck and goodness in their lives.

Allen Hawley

Allen Hawley is Mary and Ethan's son, and Ellen's older brother. He is very concerned about how others view him, and is dismayed that his father has not kept or replaced the wealth of the family. Allen is looking for a quick route to fortune and fame, and the last thing he wants to do is follow in his father's footsteps. He loves loud airplanes, rock and roll, and admires people who are rich, no matter what method was used to obtain that money.

Allen is vain, not very intelligent, and selfish. He does not feel it necessary to do chores, help his father, or contribute to the family's wellbeing in any form. He appears to accept his new celebrity status with dignity, but when his cheating is revealed by his sister he physically attacks her and then truly cannot see what he has done wrong by cheating. His philosophy reflects that of many of his fellow countrymen at that stage in American history: if everybody else is doing it, Allen wants a piece of the action.

Joey Morphy

Joey is a bank teller, and is fairly new to New Baytown, but he seems to know everything that is happening to everyone. He is a confirmed bachelor, likes the ladies, and takes good care of himself. The job as bank teller is just one in a long line of attempted professions for Joey, who seems restless and on the move all the time. He does a good job, though, and his boss Mr. Baker allows him to take over much of the duties at the bank. From Joey, Ethan is privileged to learn the inner workings of the bank, and this assists Ethan in his plotting.

Joey is a keen observer of life, and passes these observations on to Ethan, who seems somewhat naive. Joey's rules of money and dreams of robbing a bank propel Ethan into taking action he would have never done otherwise.

Joey serves as a mentor and teacher to Ethan about life and how business is conducted in modern times. Although Ethan does not completely embrace Joey's outlook, Ethan does utilize the information provided by this man about town.

Baker the Banker

Mr. Baker is the town bank manager, and his first name is never revealed, therefore distancing the reader from the man himself. He is married, descended from the same



proud lines as the Hawleys, and somewhat older than Ethan. Baker is portrayed as a stiff character who has immense power in the town. Baker advises Ethan to risk his money on unnamed investments, but Baker himself is a man who walks carefully down the sidewalk in order to keep from stepping on cracks, an odd superstition for such a powerful man.

Baker's character role in this novel is the villain. He represents money, power, greed, and evil. Baker's family has continued to be wealthy over the years, whereas the Hawley family has fallen on hard times. Baker attempts to cheat Danny Taylor out of his land, manipulate Ethan into another risky investment, and admonishes Ethan for being a failure and still broke.

Baker's evil ways are rewarded with being fooled by Ethan regarding the land and the store, being associated with a town manager scandal.

Alfio Marullo

Marullo owns the store where Ethan works. He is older than Ethan, and wealthy. Marullo does not appear to have any family or friends in the town, and has been in America for over twenty years. Marullo came to America with high hopes, but over the years has turned cynical and disillusioned about his dreams. When Ethan advises him to go home to Sicily, Marullo begins changing. He is kind to Ethan, who hates him for being successful where Ethan has failed.

Marullo gives Ethan valuable business advice, money for a holiday, the use of his personal vehicle, and eventually, the grocery store for free.

Ethan turns Marullo into the immigration authorities, and continually views him as the usurper of his life. When Marullo is deported and Ethan owns the store once again, Ethan begins to think of the way Marullo saw him, as a light that cannot be allowed to go out. Marullo was not stupid, as Ethan saw him, nor was his heritage any less distinguished as Ethan's lineage.

Marullo is a pivotal character in the novel because he is the landlord, the stranger in a strange land, who reaches out to Ethan and sees Ethan as he once saw himself, as a good man.

Captain Hawley

Captain Hawley is Ethan's grandfather, a whaler and ship owner, who is now deceased. Ethan holds his grandfather in much higher regard than he does his father, as the Captain was a strong man and was able to retain the family fortune. Ethan holds imaginary conversations with his grandfather, and it is the Captain who continually reminds Ethan about the family heritage and the trickery of the Baker family.



The author uses Captain Hawley's Masonic hatbox and his narwhal cane to bring the past forward into Ethan's present symbolically throughout the novel.

Aunt Deborah

Ethan's mother died when he was young, so his Aunt Deborah was the only significant female in his childhood. She is now deceased, but Ethan thinks of her often. She inspired creativity and curiosity in young Ethan's life, by the use of magical words and cultivating his imagination. She is represented in the plot by the talisman which is treasured so much by Ellen and Ethan.

Chief Stoney

Stonewall Jackson Smith is the Chief of Police of New Baytown. He is seen as an honorable man and is a strong but minor character in the novel. Chief Stoney is seen as a symbol of authority, but he too trips on the path of goodness when he is revealed to be married man, yet one of Margie's lovers. The Chief's character plays the role of the one who tells the grand jury about the town's unethical behavior, and delivers the message to Ethan that Danny is dead.

Danny Taylor

Danny Taylor was Ethan's best friend in childhood, and is also a descendant of the town's forefathers. Because of a scandal at the Naval Academy, Danny has become the town drunk. Danny represents a "there but for the Grace of God, go I" character for Ethan, and the goodness in Ethan compels him to attempt to help Danny. Because of this attempt, Ethan ends up with the coveted Taylor Meadow, and Danny dies.

Danny is predominant in Ethan's thoughts all through the novel, as a good man gone bad, and is only replaced in Ethan's tortured mind when he finally turns to Ellen as his example of goodness and light.



Objects/Places

Grocery Store

The store is never named in the novel, but it is Ethan's place of humiliation, contemplation, plotting, conversations and eventually success. The plot revolves around characters being in or around the store, and almost all of the major plot points take place there. Ethan addresses the produce, the canned goods, the condiments, and even the stray cat there as if they were his true friends. The store is used symbolically on a daily basis, with Ethan sweeping it, cleaning it, and dealing with life there.

Ethan's Special Place

This is a place no one knows about except Ethan, and it is where he sorts things out. It is a secretive place near the pier on the harbor and is actually more dangerous than a sanctuary should be. Ethan has used this place since he was a child, and as usual has shared it with no one. He either goes to this secret place or wants to throughout the novel, and at the end, this is where he has his epiphany about Ellen and her light of goodness.

Hawley Family Home

The home is on Elm Street, within walking distance of everything, and this is where all of Ethan's true treasures reside: his wife and children, his books, his family's heirlooms. Almost every chapter in the book begins with Ethan snuggled warmly in his bed at home and ends with his crawling into bed and contemplating the events of the day. All important decisions are made in the home, and at the end, it is this security and warmth that he rejects, going to his secret place to sort things out. By leaving the light and warmth of his home, he is symbolically choosing darkness and the end of his own life.

Talisman

A talisman is an object full of mystery and special powers. The talisman in this story is a stone with strange carvings that seems to have an inner light. It was brought to the family home by one of the seafaring ancestors, and it is kept in a special place in the cabinet in the dining room. Ellen is especially drawn to it.

Bank

The town bank is the domain of the bank manager, Mr. Baker, the villain of the novel. In Ethan's plot to rob the bank, he is planning an attack on his bastion of power. It is described as a cool, clean place with hidden vaults, and the mystery of the Masonic



rituals is used to describe the timed opening of the vault every morning. The bank's location in town is right next to Ethan's store, and is therefore always in the forefront of Ethan's thoughts.

New Baytown

New Baytown is Ethan's home town, and he has only left it to go to Harvard and off to war. Its gradual seedy decline, as compared to neighboring towns, is a result of the town, like Ethan, dwelling on the past, living in its history, and not making progress towards the modern future. It is a simple town with generic street names, Elm Street, High Street, and others, and is populated with standard characters. It is not a large town, but evil people like Baker and his associates have designs on bringing New Baytown into the future by cheating Danny Taylor out of his land and placing an airport there.

Masonic Items

The Masons are a brotherhood organization where membership is by invitation only, and often the membership is offered from father to son. There are many rituals and symbolic instruments involved in these rituals, and the Hawley family has a sword, a hat, and a box to carry some of these items in. These items are also referred to as belonging to the Knights of Templar. The organization is centuries old.

Narwhal Cane

This is a carved cane that was used by Ethan's grandfather during the later years of his life. Ethan carries it with him on the last night of the novel, and it becomes symbolic of Ethan's heritage as he struggles with the modern world.

Old Harbor

There are many symbols of Ethan's heritage and ancestry in the novel, and the Old Harbor is probably the most graphic. The harbor where the whaling ships once stood proudly and the townspeople gathered to trade, resupply, and view these magnificent ships has now been replaced by a more modern harbor. Ethan visits the old harbor often in the story, and it is the home of his secret place. The old harbor represents the very foundation of Ethan's knowledge of how life should be, how a man should conduct his life, and it stands abandoned by the modern world, just as his views on life.

Margie's House

It is tiny and immaculate, set in a large overgrown garden. The aroma of honeysuckle is heavy in the air the night Ethan comes to her house, which increases the atmosphere of



seduction. There are narrow stairs, low ceilings, and Margie describes her home as a "Pleasure Dome". This is the place of Ethan's most primal temptation.

The Alley Cat

The cat is gray, elusive, eats what he can steal, but not so interested in being fed when Ethan actually puts food out for him. The cat is used by the author to symbolize so much in Ethan's life that are shadows that seem important but that he has yet to determine what part they play in his life.

Tarot Cards

The cards themselves are standard fare, but the entrance of these fortune-telling instruments into the novel bring an air and introduce the metaphysical into Ethan's world of logic, reason, and unbreakable rules. Wielded by Margie, the cards become an even greater source of power and confusion for Ethan, who until now has viewed the world as black and white.



Themes

The Temptations of Man

In this novel, a man who believes himself to be good is beset with a variety of temptations that are universal in nature, but specific to Ethan Hawley as he struggles to rationalize the behaviors of modern thinking versus the old fashioned values he was taught as a child.

Ethan is a man who has been complacent about his place in life, as a grocery clerk in the store his family used to own. On Easter weekend of 1960, Ethan comes to realize that his family and the townspeople see him as a failure, not as a good man accepting his fate. With this dilemma in his mind, Ethan is confronted with a series of temptations.

He is approached by a traveling salesman, who offers him a substantial bribe to get the store owner to switch to the salesman's company for orders. At first Ethan refuses with indignation, but in Part Two of the novel, Ethan not only accepts the bribe, but negotiates a higher percentage, and does not make the salesman aware that Ethan is now the store owner. In this instance, Ethan initially rejected the bribe, then turns the tables in such a way that the evil salesman is bested at his own game. Technically, this is no longer a bribe but a discount.

Mary's best friend Margie tempts Ethan sexually. Margie is an attractive single woman, and could have her pick of the men in town, but she chooses Ethan because he represents her best chance at security. Ethan was never even aware of Margie before Good Friday except in a peripheral sense, but her actions have brought her to the forefront. Margie seems exceptionally sensitive to Ethan's feelings, and responds to his moods throughout the novel. Ethan recognizes that cheating is becoming common in modern America, but he loves his wife and it is against his nature to betray the family. At the end of the novel, Margie makes a major play for Ethan, bringing him to her house, and even threatening to talk about his business manipulations if he does not give her a percentage and become her lover. Ethan maintains his admiration for his wife, and rejects Margie on all levels.

Danny tempts Ethan by offering him the deed to his land, but Ethan persists in just trying to help Danny get cured of his alcoholism. Because of this altruism, Ethan eventually ends up with the land anyway, so Ethan can be said to have resisted that temptation and kept his good intentions. However, once Ethan obtains the land, he uses that knowledge and possession to manipulate Baker.

Baker tempts Ethan with promises of fortune, but Ethan turns these temptations into manipulations of Baker. When Ethan realizes that Baker needs Danny's land to complete a town renovation project that will make Baker even more wealthy, Ethan tries to convince Danny to get sober and fight this attempt. When Danny turns the fight over to Ethan through giving him the land and then dying, Ethan continues to work against



Baker's desires. Finally Ethan displays his ownership and negotiates fifty-one percent of the profits. Ethan uses his windfall from Danny to elevate his status and position in his family's eyes.

Ethan is tempted to turn Marullo into the authorities, and acts decisively on this temptation. Marullo does not know who turned him in, but considers Ethan a light in the darkness of America and gives him the store. Therefore, Ethan is rewarded with good fortune even though he did not resist this temptation.

Ethan is tempted to become a criminal and execute his plan to rob the bank, but is stopped just before he can. He has rationalized this temptation by comparing it to killing men when he was a soldier. That behavior, usually unacceptable in peacetime, was acceptable in war. Ethan believes that he can commit this crime, then revert back to his old self. He has not resisted this temptation, but circumstances prevented him from acting on it.

At the end of the novel, Ethan is tempted to commit suicide as the only way out of his predicament. At the last moment, he decides to struggle against the tide and go back to his family.

Other characters in the novel are tempted as well. Allen was tempted to cheat on the essay in order to get instant wealth. He acted on the temptation and was caught. Margie was tempted to abandon her philosophy of using her privileged information to help others only, but in the end chose to use it to help herself. Chief Stoney was tempted to hide the truth from the grand jury, but decided to do the right thing instead. Mary is tempted to circumvent Ethan and give her inheritance money directly to the banker, based on the assumption that Margie has foretold an accurate fortune, but she allows Ethan to control the money instead.

In each case, the temptations presented are compared to the time of Hawley's ancestors, when townspeople acted out of dignity and compassion. The modern times are presented as ruthless, restless, and full of discontent. People are tempted to discard the old ways in favor of the new and unethical methods because it will bring more prosperity. However, the author shows in each case that abandonment of the old ways causes depression and anger.

Light represents Good, Dark represents Evil

The author consistently uses daytime, night, stormy dark weather, suffused lighting, and many other dark/light phrases to create moods and foreshadowing in the story.

At the beginning, when the reader is being acquainted with the store, it is described as having a beautiful light coming in through the windows, almost like a church. As each day progresses, with characters and conversations and the plot developing, the light grows dimmer and the weather turns gray. In some instances, Ethan even draws the shades to keep light out as he contemplates robbing the bank and on the day he finds out Danny is dead.



The talisman so treasured by Ellen and Ethan is said to be touched with an inner light and warmth. Mary, who is always presented as a good wife, has actions described consistently with light and breeziness.

The reader's attention to the theme of light is focused when Walder tells Ethan of Marullo's desire to give the store back to Ethan to reward him for being good, so "the light won't go out". At the end of the story, as Ethan is attempting suicide, he feels his light has gone completely dark. It is only the presence of the talisman, with its strange light and warmth, that reminds Ethan of the goodness of his daughter Ellen.

Everybody's Doing It

There is a prevailing opinion expressed by several of the story's characters that unethical behavior can be condoned by virtue of the fact that someone has done it, succeeded through doing it, and therefore it is okay to do it.

Joey Morphy expresses this feeling when he is envious of the bribe Ethan has been offered, and surprised when he hears that Ethan was offended by the act. Allen has decided to model his future after his heroes who have cheated and lied to obtain a fortune. The idea of following in his father's honest footsteps is the last thing Allen wants, and as soon as he is afforded an opportunity to cheat, he does so. Even when he gets caught, he does not understand the problem. "Everybody does it" is his constant refrain.

In the town of New Baytown in 1960, it is an accepted fact that people in power are fixing traffic tickets, using their privileged information to buy underdeveloped land, and manipulating those less informed into paying higher prices for items. The modern world is fast paced and tricky, and the opinion of the masses is that if you don't run over someone else first, they will run over you.

Ethan has serious problems accepting this philosophy, and although he does manipulate some of the people into behaving in a way that will benefit him in the end, these are bad people and in the author's view, it is acceptable in that case. Ethan maintains at the beginning that he is a good man, and when he sees his family and town moving toward the modern standards or lack of standards, it is sufficient enough to cause him to attempt suicide.



Style

Point of View

The author only deviates from the main character's point of view in part of one chapter, when the point of view is given over to Margie. In all other chapters, the point of view is from Ethan either by first person or third person. The author creates suspense and distances the reader from Ethan's true feelings by reverting back to third person in Part Two, but allows the reader back inside Ethan's head soon thereafter, to accelerate the plot.

The other characters in the story are drawn very lightly, offering a limited view of their feelings. Their positions are reflected in Ethan's reactions to them, and their purposes in the story are strictly defined. The other characters, except for Margie, are not mentioned unless they are in Ethan's presence or in his thoughts.

Setting

The majority of the novel is set in New Baytown, a small coastal town in New England America, during the short period of Easter weekend to the 4th of July weekend in 1960. The town is an old whaling seaport that has declined in prosperity over the years. The streets have common names, and the townspeople are mostly descendants of whalers and merchants from the previous century.

Most of the action in the story revolves around the Hawley family home, the grocery store, Ethan's secret place in the old harbor, and Ethan's walking route to and from these places.

Setting this novel during the first year of the 60s places the characters in strictly defined roles, with the man serving as the breadwinner and the woman not working outside of the home and deferring to her husband and other males for direction and advice. The early 60s were a time of change for the country as it grew into fifty states, expanded militarily, and found its place in the world politics. The atomic fears, political upheaval with upcoming elections, changing social behavior and unrest on so many levels shows even in a small town like New Baytown.

Language and Meaning

The novel was written in 1960 and published in 1961, and the language reflects many ideas that were topical at the time. Ethan wants his wife to be a part of the decision making process concerning her money, but she tends to be old fashioned and wants the men to decide.



Ethan's language is that of a well-read and intelligent man, and he reasons out problems using his religious, university, and military training. Ethan tends to use a large vocabulary, especially when addressing the canned goods at the store, and quotes from poetry, Shakespeare, and the Bible when he is being sarcastic with his wife and family. Ethan gives Mary a variety of pet names, which sometimes marginalizes her in the eyes of the reader.

Marullo's speech is short and rough, like his actions, and communication between he and Ethan is not clear. Joey Morphy speaks like a man who has been around, and he presents his ideas in the form of rules for behavior.

The conversations in the novel are short and to the point, moving the plot along and clearly defining the character who is speaking. Ethan's thoughts and conversations are more detailed, more descriptive, and because he is the main character, more shrouded in meaning and portent than those of the other characters.

Ellen says little in the novel, but her words are pivotal. She asks about using someone else's words in an essay, she mentions Henry Clay specifically to Ethan, and at the end, it is her words that implore Ethan to stay with the family instead of going out into the night.

Structure

This novel consists of twenty-two chapters of various lengths. It is broken into two parts, one concerning the events around Easter weekend in 1960, and part two concerning the events just before and just after the 4th of July holiday the same year.

The chapters usually begin with Ethan awakening in the morning and end after a pivotal point in the day, or with him retiring at night. The plot has several twists and turns, with Ethan being presented with a temptation, and his resolution. Ethan is a good man, but he finds that his actions have not been good enough to keep his family happy and keep the respect of the townspeople.

Ethan attempts to address this problem in his life while dealing with the rapidly increasing temptations to be dishonest. Ethan wants to satisfy his family's desire for money, but he wants to continue being a good man as well. The novel spends considerable time in Ethan's thoughts as he works out the best way to handle the problem, and reassesses his values and tries to determine what is true. Ethan's thoughts continue to debate the old fashioned way of life taught to him by his grandfather, his Aunt Deborah, and his father against the unethical and cheating ways of modern America.

The novel's pace is fast and much is covered in a very short period of time. Steinbeck's style is economical and simple, allowing the reader to concentrate on the ethical problems at hand rather than delving into a myriad of subplots. Steinbeck shows Ethan as symbolic of an emerging America, rich in history and good deeds, but needing to progress and conform to an increasingly demanding world.



Quotes

"Readers seeking to identify the fictional people and places here described would do better to inspect their own communities and search their own hearts, for this book is about a large part of America today."

John Steinbeck, in the Author's Foreward

"Men don't get knocked out, or I mean they can fight back against big things. What kills them is erosion; they get nudged into failure. They get slowly scared. I'm scared." Chap. 1, p. 14

"Sometimes a man seems to reverse himself so you would say, 'he can't do that. It's out of character'. Maybe it's not. It could just be another angle, or it might be that the pressures above or below have changed his shape. You see it in war a lot - a coward turning a hero and a brave man crashing in flames." Chap. 6, p. 87

"What was happening could be described as a great ship being turned and bunted and shoved about and pulled around by many small tugs. Once turned by tide and tugs, it must set a new course and start its engines turning. On the bridge which is the planning center, the question must be asked: All right, I know now where I want to go. How do I get there, and where are the lurking rocks and what will the weather be?" Chap. 6, p. 92

"Do you think I live to live without no motorbike? Must be twenty kids with motorbikes. And how you think it is if your family hasn't even got a car, leave alone no television?" Chap. 5, p. 72

"When are you going to be rich?" Chap. 5, p. 75

"You kidding? You're a good fella. That's all. You're a good fella." Chap. 7, p. 96

"Here's a grocery clerk without a bean worried about how bad it will be when he's rich. You act as though you could pick up a fortune any time you want to." Chap. 7, p. 113

"Failure is a state of mind. It's like one of those sand traps an ant lion digs. You keep sliding back. Takes one hell of a jump to get out of it. You've got to take that jump, Eth. Once you get out, you'll find success is a state of mind too." Chap. 11, p. 165

"It would take love or hatred to arouse you, and either one would take a slow and stately procedure." Chap. 12, p. 180

"It's like a man is made a certain way with a certain direction. If he changes that, something blows, he strips a gear, he gets sick. It's like - well, like a do-it-yourself police court. You have to pay for a violation. You're his down payment, kind of, so the light won't go out." Chap. 15, p. 226

"Yes, I'm worried. Does that reassure you? I wouldn't want you to repeat it, but the sky is falling and a piece of it fell on my tail." Chap. 18, p. 236



"I think I can guess, Stoney - is it Danny?" Chap. 19, p. 254

"I wonder if you do see! With your good intentions you've thrown the thing sky high. Sometimes I think a do-gooder is the most dangerous thing in the world." Chap. 20, p. 257

"There's a trick all right, Ethan. Those documents are without a flaw, dated, witnessed, clear. Maybe he hated you. Maybe his trick was the disintegration of a man." Chap. 20, p. 258

"I've got a couple of guest shots and then "What's My Line" and "Mystery Guest". Then there's a new quiz coming up called Teen Twisters. I might even get to M.C. that. So you see I won't have time." Chap. 21, p. 261

"Aren't you going to make a pass? Aren't you going to beat out your hatred with your hips on good old Margie?" Chap. 21, p. 266

"You're going to need a friend to talk to and I'm the only person in the world who fills the bill. A secret's a terribly lonesome thing, Ethan. And it won't cost you much, maybe only a small percentage." Chap. 21, p. 266

"I don't want to go away leaving you angry. Public relations is my line. We could work something out. Scholarship or like that - something dignified." Chap. 21, p. 272

"Don't you read the papers? Everybody right up to the top - just read the papers. You get to feeling holy, just read the papers. I bet you took some in your time, because they all do. I'm not going to take the rap for everybody. I don't care about anything. Except that stinking sneak." Chap. 21, p. 273

"Take me with you. You're not coming back." Chap. 21, p. 274

"My light is out. There's nothing blacker than a wick." Chap. 22, p. 275

"It's much darker when a light goes out than it would have been if it had never shone. The world is full of dark derelicts." Chap. 22, p. 275

"I had to get back - had to return the talisman to its new owner. Else another light might go out." Chap. 22, p. 275



Topics for Discussion

What roles do women play in Ethan's life? Compare how he views his Aunt Deborah, Mary, and Margie.

How does Ethan's experience in the military prepare him for the events covered in the story?

Why does the author title the book "The Winter of Our Discontent" when the setting is Spring and Summer?

What is the significance of the talisman to Ethan? To Ellen?

How are good people rewarded and bad people punished throughout the novel?

What role does the Hawley family home play in the plot? What does it represent to Ethan?

Who do you consider to be the pivotal characters in the novel besides Ethan? Why?