

# **Water for Elephants Study Guide**

**Water for Elephants by Sara Gruen**

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



# Contents

<a href="#">Water for Elephants Study Guide.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">Contents.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">Plot Summary.....</a>	<a href="#">4</a>
<a href="#">Prologue.....</a>	<a href="#">6</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 1.....</a>	<a href="#">8</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 2.....</a>	<a href="#">10</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 3.....</a>	<a href="#">12</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 4.....</a>	<a href="#">14</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 5.....</a>	<a href="#">16</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 6.....</a>	<a href="#">17</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 7.....</a>	<a href="#">19</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 8.....</a>	<a href="#">20</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 9.....</a>	<a href="#">22</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 10.....</a>	<a href="#">24</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 11.....</a>	<a href="#">26</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 12.....</a>	<a href="#">28</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 13-14.....</a>	<a href="#">30</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 15.....</a>	<a href="#">32</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 16-17.....</a>	<a href="#">34</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 18.....</a>	<a href="#">36</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 19-20.....</a>	<a href="#">38</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 21.....</a>	<a href="#">40</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 22.....</a>	<a href="#">42</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 23-25.....</a>	<a href="#">44</a>
<a href="#">Characters.....</a>	<a href="#">46</a>



Objects/Places..... 51

Themes..... 53

Style..... 55

Quotes..... 58

Topics for Discussion..... 60



## Plot Summary

*Water for Elephants* is the touching story of Jacob Jankowski, a ninety-three-year-old man, who is reminded of his colorful past when a circus sets up next door to his assisted-living center. When Jacob overhears a man at the assisted-living center claim to have been a water boy for the elephants on a circus, Jacob knows the man is lying because Jacob himself once worked as a vet on a traveling circus. The lie causes Jacob to spend much of his time remembering his colorful past, wishing he could move back in time and return to those days of camaraderie and excitement. It is a story of coming of age, of facing the realities of death, and living despite it all. *Water for Elephants* is an adventure for readers of all ages.

Jacob Jankowski lives in an assisted-living facility. Jacob believes his predicament is in part due to the fact that his children are too busy with their own lives to take on the complication of caring for Jacob's needs. Jacob is an independent man and feels as though the moment he moved into the center, he ceased being treated as a human being. When Jacob gets into an argument with another patient over whether or not the other man was a water boy for elephants, it feels like the last straw. Jacob does not want to continue to live in this way and longs for the days of his youth.

Jacob recalls his final days at Cornell, where he studied veterinary medicine. The most important thing on Jacob's mind at the time was losing his virginity. That was until the moment the dean interrupted one of his classes to inform him of his parents' death in a car accident. Jacob returns home to bury his parents, only to learn that they had mortgaged their home to pay for his education and were unable to keep up the payments. Jacob has nothing left. Jacob returns to school but cannot concentrate on his final exams in light of all that has taken place, so he walks away.

Lost, both emotionally and physically, Jacob jumps aboard a passing train. The train turns out to be part of a traveling circus. Jacob befriends one of the circus workmen and occupies his day with odd jobs until given the chance to speak with the owner about a more permanent job. When the owner's head animal trainer learns that Jacob was just days from receiving his veterinary license, he insists that Jacob take a look at one of the horses. Jacob proves his skills through his diagnoses of the horse and is granted a job.

Jacob soon becomes friendly with the animal trainer, August, and his wife Marlena. Marlena is a beautiful young woman, who is a circus performer. Jacob finds Marlena enchanting, and he soon realizes that Marlena's marriage to August is unhappy. Jacob lets Marlena know how he feels about her in awkward moments alone, but Marlena is afraid of August. Jacob does not understand Marlena's fear until shortly after the circus adds an elephant to their collection of unusual animals, and Jacob witnesses August's darker side.

Rosie is a young elephant, who, according to her sellers, is too stupid to learn an act. August finds Rosie difficult to manage, often beating her in order to make her submit to his orders. Jacob finds this behavior disgusting but feels there is little he can do to



protect her. However, when August beats the elephant for stealing lemonade, Jacob is livid. Jacob goes to Rosie to offer her a favorite drink and finds a roustabout with her, speaking gently to her in Polish. What Jacob finds most amazing is that Rosie is obeying the man's Polish commands. Suddenly Jacob knows why the elephant has been so difficult to train.

With Jacob's help, August and Marlena design an elephant act that thrills the crowds. However, shortly after the first show, August accuses Marlena and Jacob of having an affair. A fight breaks out that leaves both Jacob and August injured. Marlena takes the opportunity to leave her husband, no longer able to cope with his odd behavior. Jacob learns at this point that August suffers from paranoid schizophrenia. Not only this, but the circus owner wants August and Marlena to get back together despite August's violent behavior, and the owner wants Jacob to facilitate their reconciliation.

Jacob goes to Marlena and begs her to run away with him. Marlena agrees; however, Jacob has obligations to other members of the circus and cannot leave for several more weeks. Jacob formulates a scheme with the circus boss to keep August away from Marlena under the guise of getting them back together. The plan works for a while until the circus boss begins to figure out Jacob has ulterior motives and formulates a plan of his own. Soon after, Jacob's friends are thrown from the train and killed. Jacob plans to leave that night with Marlena; however, before they can leave, there is a stampede in the big top that kills both the circus boss and August. Jacob and Marlena are free to live their lives uncomplicated. They join the Ringling Brother's Circus and live a happy life until Marlena's death.

Now Jacob is alone in the assisted-living center. His family has forgotten whose turn it was to visit him, and no one has come. Jacob decides he does not have to miss out on the circus that has set up their tent down the street just because his family is too busy. Jacob sneaks out of the center and walks to the circus. Once there, the ticket boy attempts to turn him away, but a kind manager appears and offers Jacob a wheelchair and a free seat. Jacob tells the man that he was once with the circus, and the man is so impressed by Jacob's story that he invites him back to his trailer after the show to learn more. Over drinks, Jacob tells his story for the first time, having held it in all those years for fear of exposing a secret he kept from Marlena. Feeling as though a burden has been lifted, Jacob is filled with new life. Jacob decides that night to run away with the circus once more and live his life like the man he is on the inside rather than the old man people see on the outside.



# Prologue

## Prologue Summary

*Water for Elephants* is the touching story of Jacob Jankowski, a ninety-three-year-old man, who is reminded of his colorful past when a circus sets up next door to his assisted-living center. When Jacob overhears a man at the assisted-living center confess to having been a water boy for the elephants in a circus, Jacob knows the man is lying because Jacob himself once worked as a vet on a traveling circus. The lie causes Jacob to spend much of his time remembering his colorful past, wishing he could move back in time and return to those days of camaraderie and excitement. It is a story of coming of age, of facing the realities of death, and living despite it all. *Water for Elephants* is an adventure for readers of all ages.

Jacob is eating lunch at the grease joint on the midway of the circus. Jacob can hear the music from the big top and knows by the sound exactly what is going on. Jacob also knows that Marlana's act is next. Jacob stands to leave, but Grady stops him. Grady reminds Jacob that if he is leaving the circus today, this may be his last chance to eat for some time. Jacob sits back down just seconds before the music in the big top stops and switches to "Stars and Stripes Forever." Grady's face loses all its color. Jacob asks what is happening and learns that "Stars and Stripes Forever" is a signal for disaster. Jacob, Grady and other circus employees nearby begin to run toward the big top. Someone tells Jacob that the animals have gotten loose. Jacob runs to the menagerie where the animals are housed. Inside Jacob sees the animals stampeding toward the big top. Jacob searches the tent for Marlana, who he knows should have been inside preparing for her act. Jacob finally spots her talking to another man. Then Jacob sees someone pick up a weapon and hit the other man on the back of the head. It is just a memory of an event that took place many years ago. Jacob has refused to tell anyone about it all those years for fear of hurting Marlana.

## Prologue Analysis

Jacob is having lunch on the midway of a circus and hears the music inside the big top change to a disaster signal. This establishes that Jacob is a member of the circus crew and that he has not been with the circus for long, since he did not know what the disaster signal was. Jacob rushes to the menagerie tent and finds a stampede beginning among the scared animals. Surrounded by this stampede, Jacob sees a woman he seems to care deeply about. However, this relief changes to horror as Jacob watches someone swing an iron stake at the man. This action is clearly a murder, and Jacob has been hiding the fact that he witnessed this murder for many years.

Jacob's character is defined with this short prologue, showing him as a man with great passion and deep loyalty. This prologue also begins to define the plot of the novel. Jacob is a man who once worked for a circus and is now quite elderly and refuses to



speak of his years with the circus due to a secret he feels he must keep to protect someone he loves. This prologue does not tell the reader who this woman is to Jacob or if they had a future together after this stampede. It also does not tell the reader what led up to this stampede or the aftermath of it, which suggests to the reader that the plot of the novel might include answers to these questions.



# Chapter 1

## Chapter 1 Summary

Jacob Jankowski cannot remember his age but thinks he is somewhere between ninety and ninety-three. Jacob lives in an assisted-living center because he broke his hip, and his family felt he needed help with his day-to-day living. Jacob is sitting in the hallway and sees a group of residents gathering at a window. Curious as to what they are looking at, Jacob climbs out of his wheelchair and uses his walker to join the residents at the window. Down a block from the center, a circus is setting up. Jacob is so overwhelmed by the sight that he has momentary chest pains that cause other residents to call for a nurse.

At dinner that night, Jacob is in a bad mood because he is unhappy with the mushy food the center often feeds the residents. Jacob is taken to his regular table where there are several elderly women and a retired lawyer, who recently came to live at the center. Jacob does not like the lawyer because he takes away some of the female attention from Jacob. The ladies and the lawyer are discussing the circus. Jacob finds the conversation silly until the lawyer claims to have carried water for elephants in a circus when he was young. Jacob calls the man a liar, saying there is no way he could have carried water for elephants. The lawyer argues, drawing the attention of the nurses. Jacob is taken out of the room for beginning the argument. Jacob is unhappy for being the one who is punished when it is the lawyer who is telling lies. Jacob knows that lawyer could not have carried water for the elephants but does not want to tell anyone how he knows, even the kind nurse. Jacob finds himself alone in his room, lamenting his old age and thinking of his wife, who died of cancer after sixty years of marriage.

## Chapter 1 Analysis

Jacob Jankowski is an elderly man, who is unhappy with his advanced age. Jacob is living in an assisted-living center that treats him like he is frail and child-like, rather than with the respect his advanced age should give him. This makes Jacob tense and angry. To add to this situation, Jacob has to share the attention of the elderly ladies at the center with a new patient, who is a lawyer, a profession Jacob does not respect. Jacob also does not like the food he is served and the fact that he cannot walk as freely as he once did due to his hip injury. All these insults to his independence leave Jacob a bitter man, who is deeply unhappy with his life. The brief mention of the death of his wife is also important to Jacob's character because it was a traumatic event in his life and appears to contribute to his unhappiness.

The sight of the circus setting up down the street excites Jacob for an unknown reason. Later, when the lawyer who Jacob dislikes claims to have been a water boy for the elephants on a show, Jacob insists that the man is lying but refuses to tell anyone how he knows this. These episodes combine to give the reader some idea of which direction





the story will go. Clearly Jacob has a connection to the circus that has given him knowledge of elephants, enough knowledge to know a young man could not carry water for the elephants. As the plot begins to develop, the reader will learn how Jacob has knowledge of these facts.



## Chapter 2

### Chapter 2 Summary

Many years before, Jacob is a student at Cornell University, studying veterinarian medicine in order to join his father's practice. At the moment, Jacob's biggest concern is losing his virginity to his fellow student, Catherine Hale. They are sitting in class together, but Jacob cannot concentrate on his studies with Catherine sitting so close. It is a stroke of luck that the dean of students has disturbed the class, so that Jacob can better concentrate on Catherine. However, when the dean calls Jacob out into the hall, Jacob quickly forgets about Catherine in fear that he has gotten caught doing something wrong. Jacob frantically tries to figure out what he could have done to warrant this meeting when the dean informs him that his parents were killed that morning in a car accident.

Jacob takes a train home to identify his parents' bodies. The police superintendent meets him at the station and escorts him to the morgue. Jacob is in shock afterward, only vaguely aware of what is happening around him. Jacob leaves the morgue and walks home. A short time later, the women from the church come and take care of him. The next few days pass in a fog for Jacob as he buries his parents. After the funeral, Jacob is called to the lawyer's office where he learns that his parents had taken out a mortgage on their home. Jacob's parents were unable to pay the mortgage due to the depression. Jacob is left with nothing.

Jacob returns to school because he does not know what else to do. Jacob has missed the preparatory work for the final exams, but arrives just in time to sit the exams. Jacob attends his first exam but discovers that he cannot make sense of the writing on the paper. When Jacob looks around the room, he finds that all the other students no longer have faces. Jacob runs out of the classroom and walks without a destination in mind. Jacob walks until he has blisters on his feet and has lost his way. Beside a train track, Jacob finds a small stream where he can cool his sore feet. Jacob thinks over his options. When a train comes toward him, Jacob decides to jump the train hoping it will take him to a familiar place. Jacob jumps into a stock car. Inside Jacob finds four men, one of whom is not pleased with Jacob's appearance and threatens to throw him back off. Another man comes to Jacob's defense, forcing the other man to let Jacob go. The second man introduces himself as Camel. Camel tells Jacob that he has jumped a circus train and offers to help Jacob secure a job with the show the next morning.

### Chapter 2 Analysis

The novel has moved back in time to Jacob's young adulthood. Jacob goes from being a young man obsessed with losing his virginity to a man lost in a shroud of grief. To add to his grief, Jacob learns that his parents were on the verge of losing their house and their deaths will leave him without a home or financial security. However, it is not his

financial situation so much that leaves Jacob lost, as it is the sudden loss of his parents weeks before he would have joined his father in his practice. The reader learns from this information how close Jacob was to his parents, explaining the shock their loss has enveloped him in.

Back at school, Jacob is so deeply lost in grief that he cannot concentrate on the exams. When the reader learns that Jacob has jumped a circus train, it makes a connection with the first chapter in which Jacob suggested he once worked on a circus. Camel's offer to help Jacob secure a job only serves to deepen this connection and show the reader what direction the next few chapters are sure to take.



# Chapter 3

## Chapter 3 Summary

Jacob wakes in the morning as the train screeches to a halt. Camel takes Jacob to meet Crazy Joe, another member of the circus, who is in charge of the stock horses. Jacob is put to work mucking out the stable cars. After Jacob works for a few hours, his co-worker tells him the cookhouse is open, and they should go have breakfast. Jacob follows the young man to the chow line. Despite a ticket that Camel gave him, Jacob cannot satisfy the man in charge of the food line that he works for the circus until Camel comes to his rescue again. Camel leads Jacob to a table and tells him he needs to learn the speech patterns of the circus workers if he hopes to survive on the show. Camel then tells Jacob that they have to talk to the owner of the show to get Jacob on permanently, but they cannot talk to him until later in the day. Camel tells Jacob that he is going to set him up in another department until then because he seems too good for mucking out stalls.

The man Camel sets Jacob up with now is a sideshow talker named Cecil. Cecil puts Jacob to work with several other boys encouraging the customers toward the doors of the sideshow tents. While waiting for the show time to come, Jacob goes into the menagerie tent to see the animals. There are many exotic animals including several cats and a yak. However, Jacob cannot find an elephant. While looking, Jacob sees a woman who reminds him of Catherine Hale. Jacob finds himself staring at this woman for a long time. Only the slamming of a monkey cage can stop Jacob from staring at this beautiful woman.

Jacob works the crowd, encouraging people with body movement to walk toward the sideshow entrance. When almost everyone is inside, Jacob sees a customer approach Cecil; the customer is angry over the attractions inside the tent. Cecil promised something scandalous but the man only saw a pair of suspenders. The man attacks Cecil. Jacob moves in and pulls the man away from Cecil, manhandling him away from the sideshow tents until a pair of patches come up to take over. Cecil is so impressed with Jacob's handling of the situation that he allows him to be security at the cooch show that night. Jacob's job is to keep the peeping toms away from the sides of the tent and to keep the paying customers from touching the performer. However, Jacob becomes distracted when he sees his first naked woman. Jacob is glad nothing bad happens while he is distracted.

## Chapter 3 Analysis

Jacob is immediately given a job at the circus through his new friend Camel, which helps to keep Jacob's mind off the death of his parents. Jacob works hard at the unpleasant job of mucking out the horse cars, not complaining, giving the reader more insight into Jacob's character. This Jacob appears to be different from the older Jacob in



the fact that he is not as angry and does not seem to feel as though he deserves something. However, this younger Jacob has the same independent spirit as the older Jacob, as shown by his decision to run away from school and live his life without the direction that was expected of him, touching on the theme of independence and self-worth.

Jacob goes to have breakfast and discovers that he understands little of what the people around him are saying. The circus has a language all its own, and Jacob is advised to learn it before he speaks to anyone. This is because Jacob could easily offend the people around him if he were to misspeak. Jacob's predicament is a little rocky in light of this conversation, in part because his ignorance about the language puts his life in some danger from the more explosive members of the circus. Also the reader learns that Jacob does not have the security of a permanent job yet. This leaves Jacob's future up in the air. It also leaves the direction of the plot a little unclear.

Jacob later goes to work for a sideshow talker, encouraging the customers to see the sideshows. During this time, Jacob slips into the menagerie tent to see the animals and finds himself instead looking at a beautiful woman. Jacob is enchanted by this woman, suggesting he might see her again later in the novel. Jacob then helps the sideshow talker with an angry customer, proving his ability to handle himself and learning more about the circus traditions when the man is taken off his hands by patches, men whose job it is to make the customers happy. This leads to a job in security at the cooch show. More important, it affords Jacob the first opportunity to see a naked woman.



# Chapter 4

## Chapter 4 Summary

After Jacob is released from guard duty outside the cooch tent, he finds a quiet place to sit and rest. Camel joins him, offering him a bottle of jake, a ginger extract. Jacob refuses. Camel asks Jacob about himself, especially curious about why a boy of Jacob's clear intelligence would want to join the circus. Jacob does not tell Camel about his parents or his past, only revealing that at the moment he has nowhere to go or to call home. Camel sees Uncle Al, the owner of the show, making his way across the grounds then and rushes after the man to speak to him about Jacob, but Uncle Al brushes him off. Camel goes looking for someone else to help. When Camel returns, he is drunk but has with him a man who will help Jacob.

Jacob goes off with the man, Earl, and finds a place to sleep under a bunk with the other workers on the train. Jacob is sharing the space with another man, who is not happy about Jacob being there. Not long after Jacob goes to sleep, Earl returns and tells him now is his chance to talk to Uncle Al. Earl walks Jacob to a less crowded, more expensive car. Earl grabs Jacob by his shirt and shoves him through the door, pretending he found Jacob jumping the train. Uncle Al interrogates Jacob, asking him why this train and what he thought of the show. Jacob pretended that he thought the show was the best he had ever seen, even though he had yet to see it. However, even after these glowing lies, Uncle Al sees right through Jacob. Uncle Al thinks Jacob is a kid who had a fight with his parents and decided to join the circus to get back at them. Uncle Al orders Jacob thrown from the train. However, another man in the room, August, asks Jacob what he was studying in college. When Jacob tells him he was a few exams short of becoming a veterinarian, August suggests that Jacob be allowed to stay long enough to check one of the horses that August's wife thought might be sick. Uncle Al agrees.

August takes Jacob to another train car at the back of the train, where he makes him climb to the roof in order to enter. This stable car has several horses stuffed into one side. The other side was once an area for goats, but it had been refurbished into a small room. The room is occupied by a midget, who is part of the clown performers. The clown, Kinko, is not happy about having a roommate. Jacob is left to sleep on an old horse blanket that is wet and mildewed.

## Chapter 4 Analysis

Jacob is trying to find a place to rest when Camel finds him. Camel wants to know where Jacob has come from and wonders why he would want to join the circus. This emphasizes to the reader that Jacob is not the type of person who commonly seeks out the circus as a profession. However, Camel is still anxious to get Jacob a job, since it appears that he has nowhere else to go. Camel's attempts to talk to the boss do not go



as planned, though, and he is forced to find an alternative way of getting Jacob an interview with the owner of the show. This alternative turns out to be a member of the security team, who pretends he just found Jacob jumping the train. Uncle Al also sees in Jacob what Camel saw, a young man who has a bright future and does not need to join the circus as if it were a last resort. Uncle Al orders Jacob thrown from the train. However, another man in the room, August, learns that Jacob is a vet and insists that Jacob be allowed to stay in order to check on a sick horse.

Jacob now has a reason to stay with the circus, but he still does not know if he has a job, leaving his immediate future up in the air. Jacob is then taken to a stock car where he is to share a small living space with a clown performer, Kinko. Meeting Kinko not only introduces a new character, who appears to be an angry man, but it also introduces tension into the novel and increases the suggestion of danger that was suggested earlier when Jacob could not speak circus lingo.



# Chapter 5

## Chapter 5 Summary

Jacob wakes up in the assisted-living center and realizes he is an old man again. The nurse from the night before comes into the room and checks Jacob, including his temperature and blood pressure. When the nurse, whose name Jacob remembers is Rosemary, takes him out to the hallway, he asks to be parked in front of the window, so he can watch the activity at the circus. Many of the residents of the center can be seen going to the circus with their visiting relatives. Jacob finds himself wonder what the acts in the big top are like and if any of them can compare to Marlena's act.

At dinnertime, a nurse tries to take Jacob to his regular table, but he demands that he be placed at a different table, so that he does not have to listen to the lawyer's lies about taking water to elephants or the women's stories of the circus. Unfortunately, Jacob is still close enough to hear and learns that the lawyer received an upgrade on his circus ticket because of his past elephant duties. Jacob calls the nurse and complains about his food. Jacob does not like the mushy food they feed him and demands they bring him some real food. When the nurse refuses to get Jacob anything else, he pushes his plate off the table. The doctor comes to visit Jacob later that night. The doctor thinks that Jacob is depressed because of his wife's recent death and orders an antidepressant added to his daily medications. When the nurse brings the new pill, Jacob refuses to take it. The nurse threatens to call the doctor and have an injectable version prescribed when Jacob throws the pill across the room. Finally Jacob agrees to take the pill, feeling drugged when the medication takes effect.

## Chapter 5 Analysis

The reader returns to the present with the elderly Jacob. Jacob has been remembering, or perhaps dreaming, about his past and feels a shock upon returning to the reality of old age. Jacob watches the activities of the circus that has set up down the block and finds himself comparing what he sees now with what he knew about the Benini Brothers show. Jacob thinks about the big top and Marlena, a woman who performed with the horses. From the nostalgia with which Jacob remembers this time in his life, it is clear that it still means a great deal to him.

Later, Jacob has a fit of temper in the dining room when he overhears how the lawyer receives special treatment due to his lies about bringing water to the elephants. It is not clear if Jacob is simply jealous, or if there is some other emotion underlying his anger. The doctor seems to think Jacob is depressed over the loss of his wife and is expressing his sadness with anger. The idea of depression seems plausible, but the reader is aware of Jacob's past with the circus and must be aware that this past, which is clearly weighing heavily on Jacob, has a great deal to do with his anger as well. Jacob takes the antidepressant pill, but is unhappy about it and feels drugged.





# Chapter 6

## Chapter 6 Summary

When the train stops the next morning, Jacob meets with August in order to check the horse. Before the horse is brought out of the stable car, Marlana, August's wife and the beautiful woman Jacob saw in the menagerie the day before, appears. Marlana insists on bringing the ailing horse out herself, but has trouble coaxing the horse to walk. Before Jacob even moves close to the horse, he sees the problem. Jacob is unhappy because the horse's injury cannot be healed. Jacob breaks the news to Marlana and August as gently as he can. Jacob recommends keeping the horse stalled and taking him off his feed, although Jacob expresses his doubts that he can heal the horse. Uncle Al stops by and tells Jacob that Jacob has a job, but his continued employment depends on him healing this horse. Then Uncle Al announces that they are moving on, despite the fact that they were scheduled to stay at this location for several days. A rumor is circulating that a circus several days away has gone bankrupt, and Uncle Al wants to secure one of its performers before someone else does.

August is unhappy about this turn of events because a long journey will cause difficulties in securing enough food for the animals. August talks the cookhouse steward into giving him some of the food meant for the humans to use for the animals. August then has his men store gallons of raw meat with the camels and zebras for the trip. Later, August helps Jacob find some water with which to bathe. However, the water turns out to have been meant for Kinko, giving Kinko another reason to dislike Jacob. Not only this, but Kinko also catches Jacob looking through his collection of books and eight-pagers. The day's journey proves to be tense for Jacob and Kinko.

That night the train stops long enough to feed and care for the animals. Jacob makes the mistake of overriding an order that August gave his men. In retribution, August makes Jacob feed the cats. August suggests that Jacob feed one of the lions first. When Jacob attempts to pour the meat into the open cage, the lion grabs Jacob's arm with his mouth. Jacob is shocked when he discovers his arm is still attached. August laughs and points out that the lion has no teeth. However, Jacob is left with a nasty bruise. When Jacob runs into Marlana later at the stock car, Marlana is horrified by the sight of Jacob's arm. However, Marlana's biggest concern is her horse. Marlana insists on spending the night with the horse and Jacob reluctantly agrees. The next morning, Jacob finds that in thanks Marlana has left him a bedroll and an invitation to dinner.

## Chapter 6 Analysis

Jacob takes a look at Marlana's horse and discovers almost immediately that the horse has an injury that is not curable. This situation upsets Jacob because he likes Marlana. Marlana is the same beautiful girl he saw in the menagerie tent the day before, and he finds her alluring. However, Jacob knows Marlana and August are married, so he knows



better than to express his appreciation for her. It is a tense situation that begins to illustrate the theme of love and morality. Jacob is quickly falling in love with Marlena in this chapter as suggested by his reaction every time he is near her and his desire to heal her horse, but morally he knows he cannot do anything about his affections, so he puts his energies into healing her horse and securing his own job.

Tensions begin to develop between Jacob and Kinko. Kinko clearly does not want to share his space with Jacob. However, Jacob has nowhere else to go. August does not help the situation when he gives Jacob permission to use Kinko's fresh water for bathing. Had Jacob known that the water belonged to Kinko, he would not have used it. However, only August was aware, and August clearly did not care about the tension he was causing by setting up this situation. August also puts Jacob in danger when he makes him feed the lion, causing Jacob to get his arm mauled. August shows a mean streak that should warn the reader that more of this type of behavior may appear later in the novel. Finally, Marlena leaves an invitation for Jacob to join her and August for dinner, suggesting to the reader a direction for the next chapter.



# Chapter 7

## Chapter 7 Summary

Jacob locates August and Marlena's stateroom and finds Marlena alone. August joins them a few minutes later and announces that he expects everyone to dress for dinner. On the bed August has laid out suits for himself and Jacob and a new dress for Marlena. Marlena is thrilled with her dress and quickly changes. The three of them enjoy a nice meal with wine, despite prohibition, and all become nicely drunk. Toward the end of the evening, Marlena and August begin to dance when August suddenly has what can only be described as a fit. Marlena quickly takes him to bed, where he passes out. Jacob asks about this behavior, but Marlena has nothing to say.

The next morning, Jacob makes his way back to his stock car intending to change before going to work. However, when Jacob enters the room he shares with Kinko, he finds Kinko in an embarrassing position and is forced to leave the car. Jacob goes to work in the suit. Jacob goes to the hay-eaters car to help gather meat for the cats. However the meat has spoiled in the heat, and Jacob becomes sick. After helping with the other animals, Jacob returns to the stock car where he finds Marlena visiting her horse. Marlena asks if the horse has a chance, and Jacob honestly tells her no. Marlena asks him to please not allow her horse to suffer. Jacob goes to August then and asks for a gun. Jacob knows he could lose his job if he puts the horse down, but he does not want to watch Marlena suffer any longer. August has the other horses moved before Jacob shoots the injured horse and then has his men take the horse off the car.

## Chapter 7 Analysis

Jacob has dinner with August and Marlena and finds that August is a colorful character, who likes to entertain. The dinner is enjoyable until August has what appears to be some sort of fit. This fit is the first clue to both Jacob and the reader that something is not quite right with August. Marlena is clearly shaken by August's quick change in mood and also appears relieved when August passes out on the bed. Jacob is concerned by this behavior but does not push Marlena when she refuses to answer his questions.

Later, Jacob returns to his room and finds Kinko in an embarrassing situation that causes yet more tension to surface in their relationship. The tension is important because it shows how deep Jacob's motivations to remain with the circus runs. Later, Jacob agrees to put down Marlena's horse despite the fact that Uncle Al told him he would be fired if he does not heal the horse. Jacob is caught in a difficult position and chooses to help Marlena. Jacob's choice touches again on the theme of love and morality. Not only does Jacob choose to help Marlena because of his growing feelings for her, but he knows that keeping the horse alive is only prolonging its pain. The moral thing to do is the choice Jacob makes, to put the horse down.



# Chapter 8

## Chapter 8 Summary

Jacob wakes in the assisted-living center. The nice nurse is with him again, and Jacob remembers her name is Rosemary, a fact that gives him some relief in knowing that he has not completely lost his mind. Rosemary goes to the window to open the blinds, and Jacob becomes angry. Jacob does not want the blinds opened without Rosemary asking him first. Rosemary is shocked by his outburst, but she does not argue.

Rosemary leaves the room and returns a moment later as though she has only just arrived. Rosemary then makes a big show of asking Jacob before doing anything for him. Jacob's family is due to visit that afternoon, so Rosemary helps him take a shower in order to get ready. Jacob is offended by the help that Rosemary feels obligated to provide, but accepts it as part of his imprisonment at the assisted-living center. Jacob had not wanted to come to the center, but his family insisted he could not live alone and none of them were willing to care for him themselves.

Jacob has a large family. Jacob and his wife had five children, each of whom had several children and those children have children of their own now. Each Sunday a different relative comes to visit Jacob, taking turns so that not one relative is forced to come more than once or twice a year. However, unless the visitor is one of Jacob's children, he usually does not know them. Jacob enjoys the visits anyway. After his shower, Rosemary brings Jacob his breakfast in bed, having added some cream that is not allowed on the general center diet. Jacob is pleased. However, when he catches sight of his hands and stops to look at his face, only to find an old man, Jacob loses his appetite.

## Chapter 8 Analysis

Rosemary comes to wake Jacob on Sunday morning and immediately offends him by opening his blinds without asking. Jacob feels as though his independence has been taken away from him since moving into the assisted-living center. Independence is clearly important to Jacob, illustrating the theme of independence, and his loss of that independence seems to be a large reason why Jacob is so angry all the time. This anger does not appear to be lessening, so the reader should be alert that Jacob's anger will prove to be a problem for him later in the novel.

Jacob thinks about his family as he prepares for a visit later that day. Jacob had five children with his wife, creating a large extended family. Jacob gets a visit every Sunday from family members, but his family is so large and extensive that he has trouble keeping track of who's who and how they are related to him. This fact worries Jacob somewhat because he does not like even the suggestion of having age-related memory problems. Jacob's age is a great concern to him. Not only does he worry about his memory, but toward the end of the chapter Jacob catches sight of himself in the mirror

and loses his appetite despite the treat that Rosemary has brought him. Jacob's unhappiness with his age shows the reader another side of his motivations for remembering his past. A part of Jacob longs to be young again.



# Chapter 9

## Chapter 9 Summary

The train arrives at its destination after another night of tense travel for Jacob. The circus has arrived at the site of the bankrupt show and is greeted by a couple officials from the city. August finds Jacob and invites him to breakfast in town, along with Marlena. Marlena is angry, and Jacob discovers that she is upset because August fed her dead horse to the cats when the cats' meat became spoiled. August is rude and unconcerned with Marlena's anger, showing Jacob yet another side to his character.

Back at the train, Uncle Al spends the day hiring abandoned workmen and performers from the bankrupt show. Uncle Al deals with the animals last, hoping the city will lower their price the longer the animals go without care. Jacob is unhappy about the situation because the tent in which the animals are housed is heating up in the noontime sun, and there is no water available to them. While Jacob waits, he has lunch with August and Marlena. August becomes annoyed with Marlena when she attempts to feed one of the displaced workers from the bankrupt show. Despite August's behavior, Marlena offers the man a sandwich and goes hungry herself. Jacob does not feel like eating either and decides to go to the stock car. There he finds Kinko caring for Queenie, his dog, who has a case of diarrhea. Jacob tells Kinko to get the dog some honey.

Later when Jacob seeks out August to ask about the other animals, he can hear August and Marlena arguing. While Jacob is attempting to distract them from their argument, Uncle Al approaches and excitedly tells August that he has finally secured an elephant. Uncle Al is ecstatic by the purchase because in his mind it is one more acquisition that puts him closer to making his show a rival for Ringling. However, when Jacob and August go to see the elephant, they learn from one of the trainers who worked with the bankrupt show that this elephant is stupid. The elephant does not follow commands and cannot be trained to perform an act.

## Chapter 9 Analysis

Upon arriving at the site of the bankrupt show, Jacob goes to dinner with August and Marlena as if they are good friends. However, August's behavior is disturbing because he is rude to the waitress. August is also cruel to Marlena. August had the horse that Marlena loved dearly fed it to the cats without any concern for Marlena's feelings. August's actions illustrate the opposite of the theme morality in that he shows little concern for anyone's feelings, including his wife's. August had to have known this action would upset Marlena and hiding the action from her might have been appropriate, but August clearly did not attempt to do this. August seems to be a caring person at times, but at others, such as in the situation with the horse, August seems insensitive at best and even cruel and inconsiderate. These differing personalities confuse Jacob and suggest to the reader that something is not quite right with August.



In contrast to August, Jacob proves his compassion when he becomes upset that he is not allowed to care for the animals left behind by the bankrupt circus. Jacob also shows his compassion when he advises Kinko on how to cure his dog's diarrhea despite the tension between them. Later, Jacob is caught in the middle when Marlena and August argue over Marlena's compassion for the displaced workers. Jacob goes out of his way to stop an argument between Marlena and August, which causes him to be present when Uncle Al announces the acquisition of the elephant. Uncle Al is thrilled because his desire is to take his show to the same level as Ringling, touching on the theme of greed as Uncle Al demonstrates his greedy nature when he acquires the elephant when there are so many people who need jobs. However, the elephant is said to be stupid, putting a possible wrench in Uncle Al's plans.



# Chapter 10

## Chapter 10 Summary

August rushes off to speak to Uncle Al. Jacob and Marlena are left alone with Rosie, the elephant. Somehow in their amusement of the situation, Marlena and Jacob end up dancing. Jacob has the urge to kiss Marlena, so he is relieved when she suggests they go back to her stateroom to wait for August. When August returns, he tells Marlena and Jacob that Uncle Al has bought a special car to carry the elephant, but no sleeping cars for the added performers he hired. This means that more than sixty men will be forced to sleep on the flat beds under wagons.

Jacob goes back to the stock car and finds that Kinko is throwing a party. Jacob finds a quiet corner and attempts to be inconspicuous, but Kinko's guests keep bringing him drinks. Pretty soon Jacob is very drunk. Barbara, the cooch girl, finds him and flirts with him. Before Jacob knows what is happening, Barbara takes Jacob back to her tent and attempts to entertain him with the help of a friend. However, Jacob has too much to drink and throws up on Barbara's friend.

The next day, Jacob wakes up in trunk in the clown tent. When Kinko lets him out, Jacob discovers that his face has been painted with clown makeup; he is naked, and someone has shaved his pubic area. Jacob washes his face and goes to his stock car. Jacob is so embarrassed that he wants to leave the circus. Kinko follows him and tells him to stop feeling sorry for himself. Kinko says that everyone has experienced some sort of embarrassment, and this is no reason to run away. However, Kinko does suggest that Jacob send some flowers to Barbara to make up for the fiasco. Jacob gets dressed and goes to work, where he finds August attempting to lead Rosie to the elephant car. However, Rosie is not listening to August and will only move if he jabs her with the bull hook. Finally Rosie catches sight of her car and runs to it without any more prodding.

## Chapter 10 Analysis

Uncle Al's greed, a theme of the novel, is illustrated at the beginning of this chapter when Uncle Al bought the elephant and an elephant car at the expense of sleeping quarters for the workingmen. Uncle Al seems to see the elevation as the show's salvation, since the elephants are a big attraction in Ringling Brother's circus and hence bring in much money. However, August cannot get the elephant to follow the simple command to board her elephant car.

Jacob joins a party that Kinko is throwing in their stock car. Jacob becomes drunk and goes off to lose his virginity with Barbara, the cooch girl, but is too drunk to perform. Barbara and her girlfriend exact revenge on Jacob by humiliating him, leaving him wishing he could run away. However, Kinko's attitude toward him has changed. Kinko is



instrumental in convincing Jacob to stay with the show. This change in attitude suggests that Kinko's relationship with Jacob is about to change as well.



# Chapter 11

## Chapter 11 Summary

Jacob spends the first few hours of the trip to Chicago thinking about his humiliation, about Marlena and about Rosie. Kinko interrupts his thoughts to ask about his past. Jacob assumes Kinko is being rude because of their history together. However, Kinko assures him he is being sincere and even offers to allow Jacob access to his books and asks Jacob to call him by his real name, which is Walter. When the train arrives in Chicago later that morning, Jacob tends to the animals. When all the work is done, Jacob slips off to go to a Catholic church to make his confession. While there, Jacob sees Marlena praying in a pew. Jacob slips away before she sees him.

Back at the menagerie tent Jacob is tending to Rosie when August approaches. August apologizes for being unkind over the past few days and asks Jacob to join him and Marlena on a trip into the city that night. Jacob agrees. The three of them dress in fancy clothes and go to a secret nightclub that serves alcohol. Jacob watches as Marlena and August dance. Later when August leaves the table to get more drinks, Marlena asks Jacob to dance. Jacob can feel August watching them and grows uncomfortable. However, before Jacob can end the dance, someone yells that the police are about to raid the club and everyone should leave. Marlena and Jacob are caught up in the rush for the doors and are separated from August. Marlena and Jacob run through the streets until they are safe from the police. When they stop to catch their breath, Marlena moans the loss of her stockings, which now sport holes in the toes. Jacob pulls her to him and kisses her. Marlena pulls away, ashamed by her response. Marlena runs away, leaving Jacob to find his own way back to the circus.

The next morning, Walter wakes Jacob and teases him about being out late the night before. Walter mistakenly thinks that Jacob is dating Barbara, but Jacob denies it. Together Walter and Jacob go to the cookhouse for breakfast. Jacob tries to sit by Walter, but the circus has certain etiquette about where people sit in the cookhouse, and Jacob's place is at a table with August and Marlena. Jacob reluctantly heads to his proper table, afraid that Marlena told August about their kiss. However, August appears to not know about the kiss. August does seem suspicious about something, though.

## Chapter 11 Analysis

Jacob is still filled with shame about his behavior with Barbara, giving the reader more insight into Jacob's basic character. Even though Jacob has been obsessed with losing his virginity in the past, it does not change the fact that he does not want to have sex with someone he does not care about and who does not care about him. Jacob's morality in this issue is best demonstrated when he goes to a Catholic church to confess. The parallel of Marlena's appearance at the same church links the two of them in character and shows the reader that Marlena has something to be repentant about or



to pray about, expressing the idea that Marlena is not completely happy in her life. The more the author exposes about these two characters, the more alike they appear, and the closer the reader gets to examine the love blooming between them. This love is again explored later in the chapter when Jacob kisses Marlena, revealing his feelings for her. Marlena runs away, which is exactly how a married woman should react, but not before she kisses him back for a moment. Marlena's response could represent a direction this relationship will take over the next few chapters. However, August's cool reaction to Jacob the next morning presents an obstacle to this growing love and hints at a possible conflict among the three characters.

Kinko asks Jacob to call him by his real name, Walter. Walter also offers to share his books with Jacob. The reader might recall an earlier chapter when Walter became angry when Jacob touched his books, so this offer of loaning his books expresses a warming to Jacob. Walter seems to better appreciate Jacob's presence now, perhaps because Jacob helped him with his dog's illness or perhaps because of the humiliation Jacob suffered after Walter's party. The motivations do not seem to be as important here as the actions. Walter is becoming Jacob's friend, taking the tension from their relationship. However, what might replace the tension remains to be seen.



# Chapter 12

## Chapter 12 Summary

Jacob attempts to avoid August the rest of the day. Jacob hears a rumor in the menagerie tent that he is not the only one avoiding August. Apparently Uncle Al wants Rosie to take part in the parade at the opening of the show that day, and August knows that Rosie is not ready, which has put August in a foul mood. When the parade begins to line up later that day, Rosie will not follow any of August's commands. Finally, as a compromise, Rosie is placed in a hippopotamus wagon for the parade.

After the parade, Rosie is easily the most popular animal in the menagerie. Uncle Al sees this and demands that Rosie be a part of the Grand Spec, the parade inside the big top at the beginning of the show. Again August argues, but Uncle Al insists. Marlena rides Rosie into the big top, and August walks beside her, urging her along with jabs from the bull hook. Rosie does not cooperate very well and backs up the parade. When Rosie sees the exit at the end of her turn through the big top, she runs for it causing Marlena to grab the top pole to keep from falling. Always mindful of the crowd, Marlena pretends as though all of this was intentional and performs an acrobatic dismount for the crowd. However, Marlena was not prepared and has injured her feet.

Jacob and August carry Marlena to Barbara's tent to see to her injuries. Jacob runs off to get ice and learns halfway there that Rosie has wandered into some woman's vegetable garden. Jacob changes direction to retrieve the errant elephant. When Jacob arrives, he cannot get Rosie to follow his orders. A patch arrives to placate the home owner, and another workman shows up with a bucket of gin and ginger ale. The man once worked with elephants and knows them to be suckers for alcohol. Sure enough, Rosie follows him all the way back to the menagerie for an occasional sip of gin.

Jacob returns to Barbara's tent and learns that August has moved Marlena to their stateroom. Jacob rushes off to check on Marlena and encounters August halfway across the midway. August is angry at Rosie for injuring Marlena and intends to beat her. Jacob attempts to talk him out of it, but there is no swaying August. Jacob hides out in the stock car for the rest of the night, afraid his hatred of August will come out if Jacob sees August again. Walter attempts to calm him and learns through their conversation that Rosie is not Jacob's only concern. Walter offers the only comfort he can, an eight-pager.

## Chapter 12 Analysis

Rosie's inability to follow commands is causing problems for August. First the elephant will not cooperate enough to join the parade. Later, Rosie causes Marlena to have to perform an acrobatic stunt where she injures her feet. August, who is already angry at Rosie for causing him difficulty, becomes incensed by Marlena's injuries. August beats



the animal, leaving Jacob filled with hatred and guilt for not having done anything to stop August. This situation illustrates again the positive and negative sides of love and morality. Jacob loves all animals and feels it is his moral duty to protect them. However, Jacob is unable to stand up to August to protect Rosie. This leaves Jacob filled with terrible guilt. August, on the other hand, has no sense of loyalty to the animals. Rosie has embarrassed him and injured his wife. August sees nothing wrong with beating the beast because to him it is nothing but a stupid animal. The reader might argue that August acts because of love for Marlena, but August's past actions where Marlena is concerned contradicts this assumption.

Walter has become Jacob's new confidant. Walter listens to Jacob's disgust over August's actions and figures out how Jacob feels about Marlena. Instead of teasing him or discouraging him, Walter attempts to console Jacob as well as warn him that a relationship with Marlena will never happen. Walter is quickly becoming a good friend to Jacob, and this is important to the development of the plot because it adds to Jacob's motivations as far as remaining with the circus. Jacob is a moral person, and this morality, a theme of the novel, suggests that Jacob will not leave a friend.



# Chapters 13-14

## Chapters 13-14 Summary

Elderly Jacob wakes in the assisted-living center, unaware he was even asleep. He is sitting in his wheelchair in the hallway and decides he wants to move to the window so he can look down on the circus. However, before he can climb to a standing position behind his walker, the nurse comes over and insists on pushing him in his chair. Jacob attempts to be nice by agreeing. Once settled by the window, though, Jacob wants his walker in case he decides to go for a walk later. The nurse refuses to bring it until Jacob makes such a fuss that Rosemary comes to see what is going on. Rosemary insists the nurse bring the walker to Jacob. Later Rosemary takes Jacob to the dining room for lunch. Jacob attempts to refuse to sit at his regular table because the retired lawyer is there. However, Rosemary insists and makes Jacob promise to be nice. Jacob makes the promise because Rosemary has been such an ally for him, but it is not easy to keep the promise.

Young Jacob is frustrated because Marlena has not appeared at the cookhouse in more than six days, apparently still healing from her bruised heels. At the end of another long day, Jacob retires to the stock car for some rest. Earl appears and insists that Jacob come see Camel. Earl tells Jacob that Camel has had trouble walking for several days and needs to see a doctor, but Jacob is the closest they have on the train. Jacob reluctantly agrees to go. Camel is in rough shape, paralyzed in his legs, his genitals, and partially in his arms. Jacob wants to stay with him, but the train is about to leave, and Earl insists he return to his own car. When Jacob settles in the room he shares with Walter, he tells Walter what he saw. Walter knows that Camel's affliction is not curable. Walter read in the newspaper that the jake Camel has been drinking must have been part of a tainted batch that was widely reported to cause similar symptoms to those Camel is suffering.

The next day is payday. Everyone lines up at the red ticket wagon. However, many of the workmen are walking away empty handed. Walter explains that sometimes Uncle Al refuses to pay the workmen until the end of the season due to low ticket sales. When Jacob gets to the front of the line, he learns that he, too, will not get paid. Jacob is upset because he had intended to pay for a doctor for Camel. Despite his lack of funds, Jacob goes to August to ask him to help arrange for a doctor. Marlena tells Jacob that a doctor is coming to see her, and she will have him find Jacob when he is done. The next morning, Jacob hears rumors that a few of the workmen were fired the night before because of financial problems that stem from the elephant's inability to become a part of the show. Jacob rushes off to check Camel, afraid he is one of the men thrown from the train, but discovers his friends hid him, and he is still safe.

Jacob pays Marlena's doctor with his father's pocket watch. The doctor takes a cursory look at Camel and agrees with Walter's assumption that it is jake paralysis. The doctor tells Jacob there is nothing to be done, since there is no cure. Afraid for Camel, Jacob



asks Walter if it will be okay to hide him in their room until they can find a place for him to go. Walter agrees. Jacob and Walter hide Camel behind a row of trunks during the day and allow him to sleep in the cot at night. The first night, Walter and Jacob think they are going to get caught when they hear someone climbing into their car. However, it proves to be Marlena, who has come to check on Jacob. Marlena thought that Jacob wanted the doctor for himself. Jacob explains the truth as best as he can without giving away Camel's secret. When that is cleared up, Marlena awkwardly begins to question Jacob about his feeling for her, but she is so ashamed by the discussion that she ends it without getting a clear answer.

## Chapters 13-14 Analysis

Elderly Jacob gets into an argument with one of the nurses at his assisted-living center when she refuses to bring him his walker. Rosemary comes to his aid, proving both to Jacob and the reader that Rosemary has become a true ally for Jacob. Jacob repays her friendship by behaving at lunch even when Rosemary forces him to sit at his regular table with the retired lawyer he dislikes so much. This budding relationship is important because Rosemary is giving Jacob back some of his independence, and with it a renewed feeling of self worth, touching on the themes of independence and self worth. Additionally, Rosemary's treatment of Jacob helps him release some of his anger.

Jacob is called to help Camel when Earl tells him that Camel has become ill. Jacob owes Camel for helping him get a job on the circus, so he immediately goes to his aid. When Jacob realizes that Camel needs a doctor, he does not hesitate to arrange for one, even though the only method of payment he has is a watch, one of the only things either of his parents left him. Jacob's actions once more illustrate his character for the reader, as well as touching on the theme of love and morality. However, the sacrifice does not help Camel, except to establish the fact that he will never recover from his paralysis. Jacob takes on the role of Camel's protector, however, taking him to his stock car and hiding him there so that he will not be redlighted. What Jacob is doing for Camel is dangerous and can get him and Walter thrown off the train as well, but Jacob takes the risk because it is the right thing to do.

Hints in earlier chapters that Uncle Al might have overextended himself when he bought Rosie are beginning to surface in this chapter. Uncle Al's greed, a theme of the novel, has caused a situation where the show cannot pay the workmen. Not only this, but rumors are swirling through the show that Rosie is to blame for the financial woes and that workmen are getting redlighted as a result. The threat of being redlighted, or thrown from the train, is real to Jacob, who takes steps to protect Camel from this practice. This action on Jacob's part hints to the reader that there might come a time when Camel's presence in Jacob's room might come back to cause him trouble or that perhaps Jacob's efforts to stop the redlighting will prove to be futile.



# Chapter 15

## Chapter 15 Summary

Camel is clearly in bad shape. Two days after he moves into Walter and Jacob's room, they discuss Camel's future. Jacob tells Walter that Camel has a son, but that they are estranged. However, the son is the only family Camel has, so Walter sets out to find him. Eventually Walter does find the man and gets him to agree to take custody of Camel when they reach Providence. Unfortunately they will not reach Providence for several more weeks.

In Terre Haute, Lovely Lucinda, the fat woman, dies. Uncle Al stages a huge funeral procession, paid mourners included. The procession brings in a huge crowd that night, increasing ticket sales. That same night Marlena returns to the big top with her horse show. Jacob sneaks off to watch the show and mesmerized by Marlena. The next morning, Marlena and August have returned to their regular places in the cookhouse. Jacob joins them and cannot keep himself from gushing about how incredible he thought Marlena's show was. August accuses him of lying, since Jacob swore that it was Marlena's show that made him want to work for the circus in the first place. Jacob admits he lied to Uncle Al that first night, standing up to August in a verbal match that causes everyone in the cookhouse to watch. August finds the whole thing funny and bursts into laughter at Jacob's outrage.

The loss of Lucinda leaves Uncle Al desperate to find a replacement. When there is no option in the trade magazines, Uncle Al approaches a woman in the crowd one night after a show. Unfortunately the woman turns out to be the wife of the police superintendent. The police run the show out of town giving them less than two hours to pack up. Moments before the train is due to pull out, Walter shows up. Walter cannot find Queenie. Jacob helps him look, but when the train's whistle blows to signal they are leaving, Jacob forces Walter back onto the train. Walter is devastated by the loss of his dog and refuses to speak to Jacob. When the train stops the next morning, Marlena shows up with the dog. Marlena saw the dog chasing the train as they began to move and made August grab Queenie. Walter is grateful for the return of his dog.

In Hamilton, the lemonade intended to be sold to the customers is stolen. Uncle Al assumes one of the workingmen committed the crime and threatens to take the money from their pay if it happens again. It happens again in Dayton. Uncle Al makes all the workingmen pay him fifty cents for the loss. At the next stop one of the roustabouts hides near the mixing vat to catch the real thief. Shortly before the show is to begin that night, Jacob is with Marlena and August in Marlena's dressing tent discussing the possibility of buying a new horse for her act. Uncle Al interrupts with the news that Rosie is the lemonade thief. Marlena finds it amusing, but August becomes livid when Uncle Al tells him he will have to pay for all the missing lemonade. August rushes to the menagerie tent and beats the elephant again. Jacob attempts to stop him, but Marlena will not allow him to leave the tent, afraid for his safety.





## Chapter 15 Analysis

Walter proves his compassion when he finds Camel's son and arranges for him to take in Camel. Camel can no longer work in his condition, so living with his son is the best thing that can happen for him. However, they will have to wait until they reach the son, keeping Camel, Walter, and Jacob in danger until that time arrives. Shortly after, Lucinda, the fat woman, dies. Uncle Al uses Lucinda's death as a method to bring in large crowds, another demonstration of the theme of greed. However, the financial advantage lasts only a short time, and her loss proves to be a harsh drain on the show's finances. Uncle Al is desperate to find a new fat woman and makes the mistake of asking a civilian to fill the role. The woman is the wife of a police superintendent, and the show is forced out of town.

In the rush to get out of town, Walter misplaces Queenie. Walter is devastated at the loss of his dog because she is the only love he has in his life. Walter's loss illustrates the theme of love and morality when his grief becomes so overwhelming that he refuses to speak to Jacob or help with Camel. When Marlena returns the dog the next morning, it is symbolic of her relationship with Jacob. Jacob is the lost dog, a chance at love that Marlena thought had passed her by, and his appearance has given her a second chance at love. The only question for the reader at this point is whether or not Marlena will act on her feelings for Jacob.

Lemonade starts to go missing, and Uncle Al automatically blames the theft on the lowest rung of the totem pole, the workingmen. However, it turns out that Rosie is stealing the drink herself. Rosie's actions cause August to go into a rage and beat her a second time. Jacob, who was so full of regret for not stopping the first beating, wants to protect her this time. After Jacob's confrontation of August over his lie about Marlena's show, the reader knows Jacob can confront August. However, Marlena is afraid for Jacob's safety and refuses to allow him to confront August about Rosie, finally revealing her feelings for Jacob.



# Chapters 16-17

## Chapters 16-17 Summary

Elderly Jacob comes back to reality as Rosemary corrects him over his mistake with her name. Jacob has been talking to Rosemary about Rosie but does not recall doing it. Jacob is fearful that this is a sign that he is finally losing his mind. Jacob is afraid.

In the past, Marlena clings to Jacob and tells him how she came to marry August. Marlena was only seventeen and her parents had decided it was time for her to marry. However, Marlena did not want to marry any of the boring men her parents introduced her to. When the circus came to town and August was so charming, Marlena was swept away. Marlena begins to cry as she relates the story about marrying August, so she sends Jacob away before she does anything she might regret.

Everyone on the circus knows what August has done to Rosie, but they are all incapable of doing anything to stop it. Jacob rails against his own inaction to Walter. Walter gets some whiskey for them to drown their anger, but Jacob has learned his lesson about alcohol and does not wish to have any. However, Jacob remembers that Rosie likes alcohol and takes it to her. When he arrives in the menagerie tent, Jacob finds the same workman with Rosie who had coaxed her out of the garden with gin. The man is cleaning Rosie's wounds, speaking quiet Polish phrases to her that she is obeying. Jacob watches and realizes why Rosie has never responded to August's commands before. Rosie is not stupid; she just does not understand the English commands. Rosie speaks Polish.

Over the next ten days, Jacob helps August learn the Polish phrases he needs to know in order to teach Rosie to perform an act with Marlena. August is kind and charming to the animal causing her to act with affection toward him. This change of behavior puzzles Jacob, who finds himself also falling under August's spell again. In Meadville, August decides that Rosie is ready to perform. Before the show begins, August calls Jacob to Marlena's dressing tent. August is in a generous mood. August presents Marlena with a diamond necklace and Jacob with a gold pocket watch to celebrate their expected change in fortunes now that Rosie is a part of the show. In return, Marlena shows them both a headdress she made special for Rosie. A short time later, the act goes off smoothly. Afterward the crowd showers the center ring with coins, bringing a happy tear to Uncle Al's eye.

## Chapters 16-17 Analysis

Elderly Jacob tells Rosemary some of his story of the circus without being aware of it, causing him to question his sanity. The biggest fear of growing old that Jacob has is losing his mind, and he is afraid that this has happened. As a young man, however, his biggest fear was letting the people he loved down. Jacob is afraid he has done this a



second time as he sits by and allows August to beat Rosie. However, in the aftermath of the beating Jacob finally realizes why Rosie will not respond to August's commands. Rosie speaks Polish. This discovery makes it possible for August to train Rosie and create an act for Rosie and Marlena that could mean great financial gain for the circus.

August is so excited by the possibility of Rosie's success that he rewards Marlena and Jacob with expensive gifts. Marlena returns his generosity by showing him a headdress she made for Rosie herself. August acts funny when he first sees this gift but covers his odd reaction with a hug and a kiss. This reaction, however, should warn the reader that August is about to experience another of those strange behavior changes that he has exhibited in the past. August has been in a great mood the past ten days, winning back both Rosie and Jacob. However, the reader has seen August's violent tendencies and must be aware that this reprieve cannot last forever. Finally, the act goes off without a hitch, and as a reward the audience showers the big top in coins. Uncle Al stands in the middle of it with a happy tear in his eye, exhibiting the theme of greed in all its obvious glory.



# Chapter 18

## Chapter 18 Summary

When Marlena leads Rosie out of the big top, Jacob is waiting for them. Marlena asks Jacob to take Rosie to Marlena's tent, where she has a surprise waiting for him and August. Jacob has a couple workmen help him secure Rosie in the tent before he rushes off to change. When Jacob returns, he finds Marlena has changed into a nice dress and is putting the final touches on a fancy dinner. When August walks in, they both call surprise and open a bottle of champagne. August takes one look at the scene and immediately accuses Jacob and Marlena of being in the middle of a romantic tryst. The more Marlena denies this accusation, the angrier August becomes. When August pushes Marlena, Jacob cannot stand by anymore. Jacob attacks August and the two wrestle on the ground until a couple of workmen appear and separate them.

Jacob is taken from the tent, but he immediately attempts to return because he knows August will turn his anger on Marlena. However, the workmen hold him back. Earl goes into the dressing tent and the sounds of a fight stop. Jacob is advised to leave and does so reluctantly. Walter finds him in their room and attempts to clean him up, but Jacob is in such bad shape Walter gives up and makes him lie down. Walter spends the entire night with a knife in his hands, keeping watch for any trouble that might come their way. The next morning Marlena comes to the stock car to see how Jacob is. Marlena has a black eye. Marlena says she told August she was leaving him, and the black eye was his response. However, Marlena is intent on her decision and wants to find a hotel room that morning.

## Chapter 18 Analysis

Marlena attempts to throw a celebration dinner for August and Jacob after the successful first run of her new act with Rosie. However, August walks into the tent and finds Marlena and Jacob pouring champagne and assumes the worst. August has seemed suspicious of Jacob in the past but has never said anything that might lead the reader to expect this outburst. However, in the previous chapter August responded oddly to the headdress Marlena had made for Rosie, which was perhaps a forewarning of mood shift. That seems to have come true here. When August pushes Marlena, Jacob cannot remain calm anymore and attacks August. The two fight until workmen appear and separate them. Jacob is badly beaten but is still concerned about Marlena and reluctant to leave her. Jacob is clearly in love now, touching on the theme of love and morality, and he does not want Marlena to remain with August any longer. What that will mean to his future is not clear at this point, but clearly points to changes in the immediate future.

Walter plays the protector that night, standing guard in case any of August's friends should attempt retribution by coming to redlight Jacob. Walter has proven himself a



good friend to Jacob time and again; however, Jacob barely notices this. Jacob is obsessed with worry over Marlena. Finally Marlena appears, but she has a black eye. Jacob is outraged that August would hit her but is relieved to find out that Marlena has left her husband and intends for it to be a permanent separation. This action hints at a change in Marlena's circumstances in the near future.



# Chapters 19-20

## Chapters 19-20 Summary

Elderly Jacob learns it is time for his family to come. Jacob is excited because he is looking forward to going to the circus. Jacob changes his shirt and allows Rosemary to push him to the lobby, so he and his family can leave the moment they arrive. However, Jacob waits past the time the show is due to begin, and his family fails to show.

Rosemary calls family members and learns that Jacob's son was supposed to come that day but forgot and made other plans. Jacob is disappointed, so Rosemary tries to console him. However, when Jacob learns that Rosemary will be leaving the center for good after that day's shift, he is inconsolable. Jacob sits alone in the lobby mulling over his friendless future.

Young Jacob meets up with Marlena as she is starting into town in search of a hotel room. Jacob accompanies her. At the first hotel, they are refused a room because of their mutual injuries but have no problem at the second. Jacob leaves Marlena to get settled in her room and returns to his chores at the circus. While working, Jacob is called in to see Uncle Al. Uncle Al asks Jacob if there is any truth to August's claims that Jacob and Marlena were having an affair. Uncle Al seems relieved when Jacob denies an affair. Uncle Al tells Jacob that he cannot afford to lose either August or Marlena, so he wants Jacob to talk Marlena into returning to August. Jacob refuses because August hit her, and because Uncle Al has also revealed that August is a paranoid schizophrenic. However, Jacob changes his mind when Uncle Al announces that he knows Jacob has been hiding Camel and threatens that if Jacob does not talk to Marlena, Uncle Al will redlight both Camel and Walter.

While Jacob is grooming Rosie's nails some time later, August comes into the tent and apologizes to Jacob. Jacob refuses the apology and also refuses to tell August where Marlena is. However, August knows Marlena has gone to a hotel and swears to check every hotel in town. Out of fear of August finding her, Jacob rushes to Marlena's room. Jacob wants her to change hotels, but August has already been to the hotel, and the clerk told him Marlena was not there, so she feels safe. Jacob tells Marlena about his conversation with Uncle Al, especially about August's mental condition. Marlena reveals that she knew about this but did not find out until she was already married to August. Marlena begins to cry. When Jacob attempts to console her, Marlena begs him to stay. Jacob does, making love with Marlena for the first time.

## Chapters 19-20 Analysis

First Jacob, as an elderly man, has to deal with the possibility that he is losing some of his mental ability and now he discovers that he is an afterthought to his family. Jacob was looking forward to his family coming to visit him so they could go to the circus. However, Jacob's family has forgotten him, and he is left alone with Rosemary to grieve



his last chance to see a circus show. However, Jacob then learns that Rosemary is moving away. Rosemary is Jacob's last ally and losing her is devastating to him. If Jacob was not depressed before this as his doctor suspected he was, perhaps he is now. The reader is left in suspense to see what Jacob will do now.

Young Jacob is more concerned with Marlana than his own situation. Marlana has a black eye that August has given her and has made the decision to leave August. While this news should be a happy turn of events for Jacob, he is concerned for Marlana's safety. Jacob takes Marlana to a hotel and gets her a room where he hopes she will be safe. When Jacob returns to the circus, he is called to see Uncle Al. Uncle Al reveals that August is a paranoid schizophrenic, which explains why his moods have been so unpredictable throughout the novel. Uncle Al also announces that he cannot afford to lose both Marlana and August, so he wants Jacob to convince Marlana to return to August. Of course Jacob does not want to do this because he is in love with Marlana and wants her safe. However, Uncle Al reveals he knows about Jacob hiding Camel and threatens to redlight both Camel and Walter if Jacob does not do as Uncle Al asks. Camel and Walter have become good friends to Jacob; therefore, he does not want them injured or left without a home or income. Jacob agrees to help Uncle Al.

Jacob learns that August is searching for Marlana, so he goes to warn her. However, Marlana already knows about August's search because he has shown up at her hotel. Marlana tells Jacob how difficult her four-year marriage has been and explains why she has been frightened for his safety when around August. Now that she has left August, Marlana feels secure in telling Jacob how she feels about him and how unhappy she was with August. Marlana's revelations illustrate the theme of love and morality as she finally allows herself to feel her love for Jacob. The future for these two lovers is not clear in this chapter, however, due to Jacob's promise to encourage Marlana to return to August. This promise gives the reader a direction for the next chapter as the plot continues to develop.



# Chapter 21

## Chapter 21 Summary

The next morning Marlena insists on returning to the circus in time to perform her act. Jacob tries to talk her out of it, wishing they could run away together right then. However, Jacob is afraid to leave Walter and Camel without protection. They discuss the situation and decide to wait until they reach Providence to make their escape so that Camel will be cared for. Walter is not happy about this plan, however, because it leaves him alone. Jacob offers to take him with him when he runs away, but Walter is not happy about this idea, either. Later, Jacob is called to see Uncle Al. Jacob comes up with a scheme in which he convinces Uncle Al that Marlena needs distance from August in order to miss him. Jacob assures Uncle Al this scheme will be a sure way to get the couple back together. Uncle Al agrees and promises to do his best to keep August away from Marlena.

The next few weeks are quiet ones. Jacob and Marlena occasionally find quiet moments together; however, Uncle Al has kept his promise to keep August away. The train is raided in Poughkeepsie, ridding the show of all their illegal alcohol, much to Camel's dismay. On the next pay day, no one gets paid except for the bosses, increasing fears that the show is about to go bankrupt. Walter takes the lack of pay harder than Jacob because he knows when Jacob leaves the show, he will have to go as well and his ability to make a living is severely limited due to his height. At lunch that same day, Marlena whispers to Jacob that she believes she is pregnant. Moments later, Earl comes to take Jacob to Uncle Al. Uncle Al has grown impatient and decided to deal with the situation himself.

That night, August returns from wherever Uncle Al had been hiding him. Marlena is to perform her act with Rosie. Jacob becomes frightened when he hears this news and tries to talk Marlena out of it, but she is insistent. Jacob watches the act from under the bleachers, but is distracted by a roustabout who is looking up women's skirts. While escorting the man out of the big top, Jacob is nearly knocked over by a stampeding Rosie. August quickly follows, beating the elephant as he runs. Jacob tries to stop him, but he is pulled away by Blackie, a workman. Jacob sees Marlena and tries to run to her but is stopped when someone hits him over the head.

## Chapter 21 Analysis

Jacob and Marlena now know they want to be together, but they have to wait until Walter and Camel are safe. Jacob is not happy about the wait, but his sense of morality will not allow him to abandon his friends. In the meantime, Jacob convinces Uncle Al that he is trying to convince Marlena to return to August but that August needs to be kept away from her. Uncle Al agrees, which gives Jacob and Marlena several weeks of





freedom. During this time, they find few moments to be alone together, but their resolve never fails.

Walter is not happy about Jacob's decision to leave the show. Walter has few friends besides Jacob, Camel, and Queenie. Not only this, but as a midget, Walter has little choice in how he makes a living. Walter has only known the circus, but he has little hope of getting on with another show if he leaves Benzini Brothers. Walter does not want to go live with Jacob and Marlena, either, because he knows they have little money, and it will be difficult enough for them to begin a life together without the extra burden of another. Walter's future seems very dismal, but he continues to support Jacob's decision to be with Marlena, revealing his strength of character.

At the same time, Marlena reveals the possibility she is pregnant, and Uncle Al has become impatient with Jacob's scheme and decided to deal with things his way. August is brought back to the show, and Marlena is forced to do the elephant act. For some reason, the act goes wrong, and Rosie runs out of the big top with August following close behind, beating Rosie. Jacob attempts to rescue both Rosie and Marlena but is stopped by a blow to the head. Danger jumps off the page at the reader in this chapter, giving the impression that all of Jacob's plans are flying out the window. The reader is left in suspense as to whether Jacob and Marlena will be able to run away now, or if Marlena will be forced to remain with August.



# Chapter 22

## Chapter 22 Summary

Jacob has a bad concussion when he wakes in his room later that night. Walter is caring for him, deeply concerned by the injury. Jacob's only concern is Marlana, but neither Walter nor Camel know what happened to her. Jacob wants to go to Marlana, but Walter convinces him that the best thing to do now is to lay low until they reach Providence and are able to hand Camel over to his son. Jacob agrees. However, after everyone has gone to sleep, Jacob takes Walter's knife and sneaks out of the stable car. Jacob makes his way silently through the train to August's stateroom. Jacob finds August asleep and alone. Jacob wants to kill him but cannot bring himself to do so. Jacob leaves the knife on August's pillow and sneaks back out.

When Jacob returns to the stable car, he finds it empty. Jacob is filled with overwhelming guilt, afraid that by taking the knife he left Camel and Walter defenseless. As soon as the train stops the next morning, Jacob rushes to find Earl, convinced he was the one who redlighted his friends. Earl knows nothing about it, however. Earl does know that the men who redlighted Walter and Camel were most likely looking for Jacob under orders from Uncle Al. Earl advises Jacob to find Marlana and leave right away.

Jacob finds Marlana in the cookhouse a few hours later. Jacob quietly tells her that he is ready to go and wants her to be ready that night. Marlana insists on going back to the stateroom to get money she has hidden. Earl comes over to escort Jacob out. Jacob manages to tell Marlana not to go to the stateroom, that he will do it himself. Jacob spends most of the afternoon looking for the opportunity to go to the stateroom, but one never appears. That night, Jacob watches over Marlana as she prepares for the show. A friend of Camel's finds Jacob and insists on taking him to a grease joint for a meal. The friend knows that Jacob intends to run that night and wants him to go on a full stomach. Jacob is too distracted to eat. However, the friend has news that several of the men who were redlighted the night before have rejoined the circus. However, these men told the friend that Camel and Walter were both badly injured when thrown from the train and did not survive. In revenge, those who did survive intend to do something to bring Uncle Al down.

In the middle of their conversation, Jacob and the friend hear the music from the big top switch from the merry music of the various acts to Stars and Stripes Forever. The friend tells Jacob this is a signal of disaster. Everyone within earshot runs toward the big top. Jacob goes to the menagerie tent where Marlana is. The animals have gotten loose and stampeding. Jacob sees Marlana in the far corner of the tent. Rosie stands beside Marlana, and August is there, yelling at Marlana. As Jacob watches, Rosie pulls her iron steak from the ground, lifts it with her trunk, and slams it on the back of August's head. August falls to the ground and is trampled by the stampeding animals.



## Chapter 22 Analysis

Jacob has a serious head injury, but his only concern is Marlena. Once more, Jacob's overwhelming concern for Marlena highlights the theme of love and morality. Jacob not only loves Marlena, but he is also deeply concerned about her safety. Jacob decides to save Marlena from August. Jacob makes his way to August's stateroom with a knife, clearly intending to kill him. However, Jacob's moral fiber makes this task impossible and instead leaves the knife as a warning. When Jacob returns to his own car, he finds that his friends have been redlighted. Jacob is devastated, aware that he did not protect his friends as he had intended to and that he had left them unprotected by taking Walter's knife. Now Jacob is more determined than ever to run away with Marlena.

Jacob receives help from an unexpected place. Earl becomes his ally, attempting to help him covertly as Jacob plans his escape. However, before Jacob can complete his plans, word comes that Walter and Camel are dead. Not only this, but the men also redlighted the night before have returned with revenge on their minds. Even as Jacob is hearing this news, a disaster warning comes from the big top. Jacob rushes to the menagerie tent where he last saw Marlena. Marlena is there, pinned in by the stampeding animals. August is with her, yelling at her about something, and Rosie is standing beside them. While Jacob watches, Rosie picks up her iron steak and kills August with it. Even though Jacob had wanted to kill August himself, he is shocked by this sight. In the prologue, the reader read this same scene, assuming it was Marlena who committed the murder. Now the reader knows it is Rosie that Jacob has been protecting all these years.



# Chapters 23-25

## Chapters 23-25 Summary

Uncle Al disappears in the aftermath of the stampede, later to be found dead from strangulation, leaving the show to the mercy of the local city officials. Over the next couple days, different circus's come to pick over the animals, performers, and tents. Jacob is concerned about his ability to financially care for Marlena and their baby, so he goes into town and calls the dean of students at Cornell to find out if he can sit his exams. The dean welcomes him back. Jacob rushes back to the circus to tell Marlena. When he arrives, Jacob sees the local sheriff showing Rosie to a potential buyer. Jacob runs over and insists that Rosie is not for sale. Jacob claims that Rosie is his elephant, and he was only allowing the show to use her. The Polish workman backs up Jacob's story. The Polish man also tells the potential new owner that Rosie is stupid. The sheriff decides to allow Jacob to keep the elephant. Marlena becomes involved in a similar scene with her horses a few minutes later. Soon, Jacob and Marlena find themselves unemployed and the owners of an elephant, eleven horses, a monkey, and a small dog. Marlena decides their only option is to contact Ringling and offer their services to them.

Elderly Jacob is still sitting in the lobby, thinking about Marlena. They had a good marriage that lasted more than sixty years. They stayed with the circus for seven years before Jacob took a job at the Chicago zoo, where they lived happily with their animals and five children. Now those children are too busy with their own lives to visit their father at his assisted-living center. Jacob decides he does not need his children. Jacob decides to go to the circus on his own. Jacob climbs up behind his walker and slowly makes his way to the big top. When he arrives, the young man at the ticket booth attempts to stop Jacob from entering because he did not buy a ticket. A kindly manager comes to Jacob's rescue. When Jacob reveals that he was a member of the Benzini Brothers circus at the time of the stampede, the manager is enthralled and invites Jacob back to his trailer after the show to tell him all about it.

For the first time in seventy years, Jacob tells the story of his time with Benzini Brothers. The manager, Charlie, is fascinated with Jacob's story. When a police officer comes to the door looking for Jacob, Charlie lies to the man and tells him that Jacob is his infirm father. The cop believes him and leaves. Afterward Charlie asks Jacob if he is sure he wants to leave the home to join the circus again. Jacob assures him that he would like nothing better. After all, the circus is home to Jacob.

## Chapters 23-25 Analysis

In the aftermath of the stampede, Jacob decides to finish his education in order to have a good career by which to take care of Marlena. Upon arriving back at the train to tell Marlena his good news, Jacob rescues Rosie from potential new owners at the same time that Marlena rescues her horses from the same fate. Now Jacob and Marlena are



the new owners of an elephant, eleven horses, Bobo the chimp, and Walter's Queenie. If Jacob was desperate for a way to provide for his family before, his troubles have now doubled. However, Marlena comes up with an answer, arranging for them to join Uncle Al's rival, Ringling Brothers. Marlena's choice is the final illustration of the theme greed, showing the reader what happens when a man's greed crowds everything else in his life. Uncle Al's best performer and his Cornell-trained veterinarian are leaving for his rivals. However, Uncle Al's death, most likely at the hands of men he redlighted, keeps him from suffering this final indignity.

Jacob is now an old man, left abandoned at an assisted-living center. Jacob decides that he does not need anyone and goes to the circus on his own. Once there, Jacob finds someone with whom he can finally share his and Marlena's story and telling Rosie's story for the first time. This act gives Jacob some redemption, bringing him full circle in his life as though he has returned home after a long absence. Jacob decides to run away with the circus a final time. Jacob's choice is his final act of independence, illustrating the theme of independence and self worth for a final time. Jacob has lost nothing in his old age. In fact, Jacob has regained the youth and adventure he knew as a young man, ending the novel on a positive note.



# Characters

## Jacob Jankowski

When the book opens, Jacob Jankowski is an angry old man who has been living in an assisted-living center for a short time due to a broken hip. Jacob has found little joy in living at this center because he feels as though he is treated like a child. Jacob is strongly independent and does not like having all his decisions made for him. The only joy Jacob gets inside the center is the attentions of the elderly women, who see Jacob as a rarity since there are not many men in the center who still have their faculties. However, even this joy is taken from Jacob when a retired male lawyer moves into the center and dines at Jacob's table. The final straw is when this lawyer claims to the women's delight that he once worked for the circus bringing water to the elephants. Jacob knows this is not possible and calls the man a liar, only to find himself punished for his temper.

Jacob knows that the lawyer could not have been a water boy for the elephants because Jacob himself once worked for a circus. The sight of a circus setting up down the street and the lawyer's lies cause Jacob remember his time with the circus. When Jacob's parents died, he ran away and joined the circus. During his time with the circus, Jacob met a handful of colorful people, including Marlana, a woman with whom he fell deeply in love. Jacob became the vet for the circus, caring for the menagerie of animals. One of these animals was an elephant, Rosie, who would become an important part of Jacob's life.

Jacob became friendly with Marlana's husband, August, in order to remain close to her. However, Jacob soon learned that August was schizophrenic, which caused him to become angry and violent at unexpected times. Jacob put up with this behavior for Marlana's sake, but when August hit Marlana, Jacob refused to sit by and do nothing. However, not only was he forced to do nothing; Jacob was placed in a position to encourage Marlana to remain married to August. Jacob was in love with Marlana and plotted to run away with her. However, before he could do anything, August was killed by Rosie. Back in the present, Jacob is an afterthought to his family and depressed by the death of his wife, Marlana. Jacob decides to go to the circus on his own and meets a caring circus manager who is interested in Jacob's story. Jacob tells his story for the first time, feeling as though a burden has been lifted. Jacob then runs off with the circus for a second time.

## Marlana

Marlana is the beautiful, young wife of the menagerie manager at the "Benzini Brothers Most Spectacular Show on Earth." Marlana has a talent with horses and performs a horse act with the circus. It is one of these horses that bring Jacob into Marlana's life. Marlana's favorite horse has been limping, and Jacob is retained to find out what is



wrong with the horse. Unfortunately Jacob is unable to heal the horse and is forced to put it down. However, this situation gives Jacob a permanent job with the circus and brings him and Marlena into a friendship that eventually blossoms into romance.

Marlena was only seventeen when her parents decided she must marry, introducing her to a long succession of suitable men. Marlena did not like any of the men her parents wanted her to marry. Marlena went to the circus and met August. August was exciting, and Marlena decided to run off with him rather than be stuck in an unhappy marriage in Boston. It was not until three weeks after the marriage that Marlena learned August was unstable. Marlena attempted to return home, but her parents had disowned her.

Jacob learns of the nightmare that Marlena has been living with for four years and wants to rescue her. One night, August accuses the two of them of having an affair and hits Marlena. Jacob helps Marlena find a hotel room in town, and Marlena decides to leave August, but Uncle Al, the owner of the circus, does not want this to happen. Uncle Al blackmails Jacob into encouraging Marlena to remain with August. Jacob comes up with a scheme that will keep August away from Marlena and buy time until Jacob and Marlena can run away together. However, Uncle Al loses his patience shortly before time is up and attempts to have Jacob thrown from the train. Jacob escapes his fate. The next day, several men who were thrown off the train return to the circus and cause a stampede that results in the deaths of both August and Uncle Al.

## August

August is the manager of the menagerie of animals. August learns that Jacob went to veterinarian school and talks Uncle Al into allowing Jacob to join the circus. August is married to Marlena, the woman that Jacob falls in love with at first sight. Jacob and August become friends right away, having dinner together and learning a great deal from each other. However, Jacob quickly learns that August has a strange sense of humor and that his moods can quickly turn dark and violent.

As Jacob's friendship with August deepens, so does his affection for Marlena. August sees the way Jacob looks at Marlena and becomes jealous. One night during what should have been a celebration; August accuses Marlena and Jacob of having an affair. A fight breaks out between Jacob and August, ending only when other members of the circus break it up. Jacob later learns that Marlena told August she intended to leave him and he hit Marlena in anger. The next day, Jacob escorts Marlena to a hotel in town. Upon his return to the show, Jacob is called to see Uncle Al. Uncle Al threatens to throw some of Jacob's friends from the moving train if he does not encourage Marlena to return to August despite revealing that he knows August suffers from paranoid schizophrenia. Jacob agrees, hatching a scheme to keep August away from Marlena while they bide their time to run off together. However, Uncle Al figures out what Jacob is up to and throws his friends from the train anyway. August takes Marlena back. However, a few days later, August is killed during a stampede in the menagerie tent.



## Walter 'Kinko'

Kinko is a clown with whom Jacob is told to bunk. Kinko has been sleeping in one of the stable cars with Marlena's horses so that he could be alone. However, now Jacob moves in with him and Kinko feels crowded. Kinko is cruel to Jacob at first, refusing to give him his cot or to share any of his belongings. However, when Jacob tells Kinko how to fix his dog's diarrhea, Kinko softens and attempts to be more friendly toward Jacob, including allowing Jacob call him by his real name, Walter.

Walter was sold to the circus by his mother because he is a dwarf and could not help with the farm work. Walter took this badly and has a chip on his shoulder. However, Walter has a big heart. When Jacob learns that Camel has become paralyzed, Walter does not hesitate to have Jacob bring Camel to their car and hide him. Walter helps take care of Camel every day, even bringing him good liquor, so that he won't drink the extract that caused his paralysis in the first place. Walter proves to be a good friend to Jacob, who plans to take Walter with him when Jacob and Marlena run away.

## Camel

Camel is an old man who works on the circus. Camel is an alcoholic and has become so frail that the only job he can do on the show now is ticket seller. Camel is worried about his future, sure that he will eventually be thrown off the train in order to make room for a younger man who can do more work. However, Camel is a kind man, who goes out of his way to help Jacob when he first joins the circus. Camel arranges for Jacob to work first with the horses and then with the sideshow talker until he can arrange a meeting between Jacob and Uncle Al.

When Camel becomes ill, his friends go to Jacob for help because they cannot afford a doctor. Although Jacob knows what has caused Camel's problems, he arranges for a doctor to come take a look at him anyway. The doctor's news is not good. Camel is permanently paralyzed because he has been drinking an extract that has a poisonous additive in it to discourage people from drinking it as a substitute for liquor, which is illegal because of prohibition. Jacob decides to take Camel under his care and hide him until Jacob and Walter can find somewhere for Camel to go. However, before they reach a destination for Camel, Camel and Walter are thrown from the train and killed.

## Uncle Al

Uncle Al is the owner of the "Benzini Brothers Most Spectacular Show on Earth." Uncle Al bought the circus when the previous owners went bankrupt, and he has routinely bought up other circuses that have gone under in order to add to his collection of exhibits and acts. Uncle Al aspires to create a circus that can rival, or perhaps surpass, Ringling Brothers. This is what causes Uncle Al to buy Rosie. Uncle Al wants an elephant because Ringling Brothers has several.





Uncle Al runs the circus with an iron fist, often throwing workers off the train when he cannot afford to pay them, while providing the performers with anything they want in order to draw in more crowds. Uncle Al's only motivation is improving his show to make more money. When Marlena and August break up, Uncle Al does his best to get them back together because he cannot afford to lose either one. Uncle Al knows that if Marlena divorces August, she will most likely leave the show. This leads Uncle Al to make threats against Jacob because he appears to be the only person to whom Marlena will listen. Uncle Al fulfills his threats when Jacob does not provide results as quickly as Uncle Al desires. The consequences of Uncle Al's wonton disregard for the life of his workers ultimately leads to Uncle Al's death by strangulation.

## Rosie

Rosie is the elephant Uncle Al buys from a bankrupt circus. August and Jacob are told that Rosie is too stupid to learn an act. Due to this stupidity and Rosie's attempts to steal the lemonade from one of the vendors, August beats Rosie severely on several occasions. However, Jacob discovers that Rosie is not stupid; she simply does not understand English commands. Rosie only responds to Polish commands. With this knowledge, Jacob helps August create an act with Rosie and Marlena. Rosie proves to be a very intelligent elephant, who performs a delightful act for the crowds. Rosie is an important character in this novel because it is Rosie, not Marlena, who kills August at the end of the novel, perhaps in retribution for the beatings August inflicted upon her or perhaps because August was threatening Marlena. No matter her motivations, Jacob refuses to speak of his days with the circus because he is protecting Rosie and her memory. Jacob does not want anyone to think Rosie was a murderer.

## Queenie

Queenie is Walter's dog. Queenie is a mean little dog when Jacob first meets her, but fiercely loyal to her owner. Walter loves his dog more than anything and goes out of his way to care for her. Walter tells Jacob that Queenie is all he has in the world. When Queenie disappears as the train is leaving one day, Walter is devastated and angry with Jacob for forcing him to board the train. The dog is later found by Marlena and August, chasing the train as it pulls out of town. August saves the dog and receives a bite for his actions. Later, when Walter is thrown from the train, Jacob finds Queenie cowering behind a stack of trunks. Out of respect for Walter, Jacob keeps Queenie when he leaves the circus. Queenie is important to the story because she is the reason Walter and Jacob become friends and also because she represents one of the themes of the novel, love and morality. Queenie shows the reader that despite his anger at the world, Walter is still capable of love. August, too, seems also capable of morality despite his mental illness when he saves Queenie at his wife's request.



## Earl

Earl is the head of security for the circus. Earl is the one who helps Jacob get a job on the train by taking him to Uncle Al and pretending he has just caught him jumping the train. Later, Earl helps Camel when he becomes ill by insisting that Jacob come and look at him. Earl is good friends with Camel and deeply concerned for his welfare even though he knows that eventually Camel will be thrown from the train due to his inability to work. Earl does his best to help protect the secret of Camel's whereabouts. However, Uncle Al finds out anyway. Out of gratefulness for Jacob helping Camel, Earl helps Jacob in his scheme to keep August and Marlena apart until they can run off together.

## Rosemary

Rosemary is a nurse at the assisted-living center where Jacob leaves as an elderly man. Rosemary is a kind woman, who understands Jacob's frustrations at being treated as though he is child. Rosemary brings Jacob fruit salad and treats him with the respect he craves rather than pushing him around like an invalid. Rosemary quickly becomes Jacob's only friend at the assisted-living center. However, Rosemary is moving to live closer to her mother-in-law and will no longer work at the center. Jacob is saddened by this news, aware that Rosemary's desertion will leave him without an ally. This information helps Jacob make the decision to go to the circus on his own and to later make the decision to run off with the circus for the second time in his life.



## Objects/Places

### Apples and Corn on the Cob

Jacob is so tired of the diet the workers at the assisted-living center feed him that he fantasizes about eating apples and corn on the cob. Jacob so craves real food that he imagines that he would prefer corn on the cob over making love to a woman.

### Walker

Jacob has a walker that he is encouraged to use in order to improve his mobility after breaking his hip. Jacob gets into an argument with one of the nurses when she refuses to bring his walker to him.

### Train

The circus used trains to travel from one venue to the next during Jacob's years with the circus. Later the circus would travel in a caravan of trailers.

### Bull Hook

August uses a bull hook, a vicious stick with a hook on the end, to force Rosie to do what he tells her to do.

### Gold Watch

The only thing Jacob inherits from his parents is his father's gold pocket watch. Jacob uses the watch to pay a doctor to check Camel.

### Jake

Jake is a slang word for Jamaican ginger extract. Camel drinks jake instead of alcohol. An additive in the jake paralyzes Camel, which endangers his ability to remain with the show.

### Rubes

Rube is the name the circus people use to refer to the townsfolk who attend their circus.



## **Patches**

Patches is a group of men who work for the circus. A patch's job is to soothe angry customers so they forget their anger and go home happy.

## **Rosie's Headdress**

Marlena made Rosie a pink headdress to match Marlene's costume for their act. August ruins the headdress when he accuses Marlena and Jacob of having an affair.

## **Redlighted**

Being redlighted from a circus train is to be thrown off the train within sight of the red lights that signals a nearby town.

## **Red Ticket Car**

The red ticket car is a train car where the money was kept and from which the workers collected their pay, when there was pay.

## **Big Top**

A big top is the large tent used to give the circus performance. During Jacob's day, the big top was white, but in later years it began to sport strips.

## **Iron Steak**

Rosie pulls out the iron steak securing her to the menagerie tent and uses it to kill August.

## **Benzini Brothers Most Spectacular Show on Earth**

The Benzini Brothers Most Spectacular Show on Earth is the circus that Jacob unintentionally joins when he jumps a train to escape his grief over his parents' deaths.

## **Ringling Brothers**

Ringling Brothers is the name of a circus that Uncle Al aspired to better. After the stampede, Jacob and Marlena would join Ringling Brothers and remain with them for seven years.



# Themes

## Independence and Self Worth

One of the most important themes of the plot that follows the elderly Jacob is independence and self worth. Jacob is in his nineties and beginning to feel the approach of death. However, this sense of mortality does not mean that Jacob no longer wishes to be treated like an adult. Jacob feels as though the nurses at the assisted-living center where he lives no longer look at him as a man with his own opinions. Jacob becomes angry when the nurses open his window blinds without asking or refuse him a diet other than mush, or when one particular nurse refuses to encourage Jacob use his walker. Jacob resents being treated like a child.

When Jacob has an outburst of anger over these things, his doctor assumes it is depression manifesting itself as anger. Jacob is then put on antidepressants that leave him drugged and unable to remember conversations. This further frustrates Jacob and further infringes on his independence and lowers his sense of self worth because he feels he is no longer in control of his senses. All these episodes create a state of mind that have Jacob living more and more in the past, wishing he were the young man who ran away from reality to join the circus and found the love of his life. With a circus opening up down the street, Jacob's wish becomes so intense that he finds the strength and independence to attend the show on his own. He runs away once more, proving his independence and self worth to himself, if to no one else.

## Love and Morality

The most important theme of the younger Jacob's story is love and morality. Jacob begins his adventure because his parents, whom he loved dearly, are killed in a car accident. Jacob's entire future is thrown into doubt when this takes place, since he had intended to join his father's veterinarian practice upon graduation. Jacob loses the desire to finish his degree, so he takes a walk that leads him to a circus train. Jacob joins the circus and finds himself too busy to reflect on his parents. Then Jacob meets Marlana, the beautiful woman who reminds Jacob of his first love, a girl from Cornell. Marlana is married to the man who is Jacob's boss in the circus, but Jacob quickly discovers the marriage is rocky.

Jacob woos Marlana from her abusive husband. The love between Marlana and Jacob is a strong case for the theme of love. However, there are other love stories in this novel. Marlana has a strong relationship with her animals, especially the horses with which she performs her act in the big top. At the end of the novel when the circus goes under, Marlana fights to keep all eleven horses despite the fact that she and Jacob have no place to keep them. Jacob, too, fights for an animal. Jacob convinces the sheriff and the owner of another circus that Rosie the elephant is his private property. Jacob has no place to keep Rosie or a way to feed her. Jacob wanted to save and protect Rosie from



abuse. Finally, Walter's relationship with Queenie is a clear example of how love affects the characters in the novel. Walter was sold to the circus by his own mother several years before and lost everything he knew and loved. The only friend Walter now has is Queenie. When Queenie is lost at one point in the novel, Walter dissolves into grief, not unlike Jacob's reaction to his parents' death. Queenie is returned to Walter, who is ecstatic proving to the reader how important this tiny animal is to the clown.

The theme of morality figures in this novel several times. The first is when Camel puts himself out on a limb to help Jacob secure a job with the circus. To return the favor, Jacob gives his watch to a doctor to get medical care for Camel. Jacob then hides Camel in his stable car to protect him from being redlighted. These actions put Jacob in a dangerous position when Uncle Al reveals that he knows where Camel is and that Uncle Al will have Camel redlighted if Jacob does not help him. Uncle Al's threat gives the reader an example of the other side of morality even as Jacob puts his own happiness at risk in order to help Camel.

## Greed

Greed is a driving force for several of the characters in this novel, Uncle Al in particular. Uncle Al bought the Benzini Brothers circus with the idea that he could make it bigger and better than Ringling Brothers. Uncle Al continuously buys up bankrupt circuses in order to add acts to his show, which will help him become as good as Ringling Brothers. This leads Uncle Al to buy Rosie without being aware that Rosie does not understand English commands and will thus not be trainable. Uncle Al's decision to buy Rosie makes him unable to pay the circus workers. If not for Jacob discovering Rosie's language barrier, the entire show might have gone under within months of Jacob joining the circus.

Uncle Al is motivated through his greed to interfere with Marlana and August's relationship in order to keep two performers who bring in lots of money for the show. August is important to the show because he trains the animals that bring in the majority of the money. Therefore Uncle Al keeps August on the show, even though he knows that August suffers from paranoid schizophrenia and is often violent toward the animals and the employees who work under him. Marlana, too, is important to the show because she performs with the animals, which also brings in much money. Should Marlana divorce August, she would most likely leave the show in order to avoid the tension that would result. Uncle Al does not want this, so, due to his greed, Uncle Al threatens Jacob into helping him convince Marlana not to divorce August. Jacob has already confessed his love to Marlana, however. Jacob is in a quandary, stuck between protecting the either love of his life or the two men who have been his good friends since joining the circus. Jacob comes up with a compromise to be able to protect all three, but Uncle Al sees through Jacob's ruse and redlights his friends anyway, killing them both. However, other men that Uncle Al also redlighted to save money return to the show and kill him. Therefore, Uncle Al dies due to his own greed.

# Style

## Point of View

The point of view of this novel is first person. The main character, Jacob, is also the main narrator and the entire novel is seen through his eyes. Although the novel shifts in time, Jacob is the narrator both as a young man and an elderly man. During the periods in which Jacob is an elderly man, much of the narration is seen through Jacob's thoughts and emotions, with some dialogue between Jacob and the nurses around him. When Jacob is younger, there is more action in the narration, symbolizing the differences in physical worlds of these two settings, while still showing a great deal of Jacob's inner thoughts and emotions. These inner thoughts and emotions tend to remain the same no matter Jacob's age, showing the reader that Jacob is essentially the same man, whether an invalid in an assisted-living center or a young man living with a circus.

This point of view is powerful in that it drifts between time periods but still has the impact of emotion that a novel of this type requires. In fact, the first person narration creates a stronger emotion than might be available to the reader if the author had chosen another narration style, such as third person. The main character of this novel, Jacob, is a driving force in the narration, and this point of view brings that home to the reader from the first sentence. It is a novel about adventure and love, but it is also a novel about an elderly man, who is not willing to hide away in a nursing home and die. This is presented to the reader through the first-person narration and creates a powerful impact.

## Setting

The novel begins in an assisted-living center somewhere in the United States. The author never describes the center in great detail, nor does she tell the reader the location. This shows the reader that the center is not important to the setting of the novel. However, what is important about this center is the emotions with which the narrator regards it. To Jacob, this center is a death sentence, a place where he is expected to surrender his independence and wait for death. Jacob does not want this. Jacob does not feel as though he is ready to die and is not ready to give up his independence or identity. It is Jacob's resentment toward this center that makes it an important setting in the novel.

The other setting in the novel is the circus. The circus does not have a permanent home so no towns or cities are ever described in detail. However, the circus is a city in itself. The author describes the big top in full detail, as well as the many vendor stands and sideshows. The circus and its many tents are the most important setting in the younger Jacob's narration, creating a world of angry, lost people, who have somehow found one another and made a life together. There is a sense of family and camaraderie in this



setting that is missing in the assisted-living center where the older Jacob lives. This gives the novel a feeling of a different time, of a different world, one that Jacob loved and desires to rejoin as an older man. This makes the circus setting almost a character in the novel, adding richness to the plot that would be sorely missed if the writer had handled the setting in any other way.

## Language and Meaning

The language of the novel is clear, precise English. The passages are clear and easy to read. The only slang included in the novel are words used at the circus that refer to the customers or the performers with titles not used in common speech, but is common for the circus workers who employ it. This easy flow between common speech and the speech of the circus workers makes the slang appear to be normal language and is not difficult for the reader to understand in the context in which a word is used.

Jacob is Polish and therefore uses Polish phrases from time to time. Later, Jacob learns that Rosie the elephant is trained to respond to commands in Polish. This makes Polish important to the plot development. However, the author does not use it so often that it becomes jarring. Neither does the author use it in such a way that the reader feels as though they have to get a Polish dictionary to figure out what is being said. Most of the Polish phrases are either self explanatory or do not need to be understood.

The language and its meaning in this novel works because it is simple enough for the youngest readers to understand, and the foreign and slang phrases are used in such a way that complete understanding of their meaning is not necessary to comprehend the plot. This simple language adds to the flow of the narration and helps create an overall work that is entertaining and has a strong emotional impact.

## Structure

The novel is written in twenty-five chapters and includes a short prologue. The prologue serves to build suspense by introducing a murder, which was committed by someone Jacob, the narrator, cares about. The prologue also sets up an air of mystery as Jacob confesses that he has not spoken about his time in the circus for many years because he had witnessed this murder. The reader is therefore alerted that they will be the first to hear this story, giving the appearance of privilege that sets the mood for the rest of the novel. With the first chapter, the reader is introduced to an elderly man, who is deeply unhappy with his current circumstances, creating a situation in which his past takes on a sense of romance that again adds to the mood of the novel. By the time the story of Jacob's time in the circus begins, there is such a buildup of suspense that the reader is anxious to drink in every word of the following chapters.

The novel has two major story lines. The first is the story about Jacob the elderly man who lives in an assisted-living center fighting to maintain a semblance of independence. Jacob is haunted by an adventurous past, the memories of which sneak up on him when he sees a circus down the street from his center. The more Jacob remembers this





past, the more argumentative he becomes toward those who want to infringe on his sense of independence. The other major story line is Jacob's past. Jacob once ran away from reality and joined the circus. During his first few months with the circus, Jacob fell in love and became embroiled in a dramatic love triangle that leaves several men dead. These two story lines intertwine as the elderly Jacob recalls his past with a vividness that at times frightens him as he begins to question his sanity.



## Quotes

"I don't talk much about those days. Never did. I don't know why—I worked on circuses for nearly seven years, and if that isn't fodder for conversation, I don't know what is.

Actually, I do know why: I never trusted myself. I was afraid I would let it slip. I knew how important it was to keep her secret, and keep it I did—for the rest of her life, and then beyond.

In seventy years, I've never told a blessed soul." Prologue, pg. 4

"Catherine is one of only four women in the class of '31 and her cruelty knows no bounds. I've lost track of all the times I've thought *Oh God, oh God, she's finally going to let me*, only to be hit in the face with *Dear God, she wants me to stop NOW?*"

Chapter 2, pg. 15

"I'm glad nothing requires my intervention, because I'm trying hard to maintain my composure. This is the first time I've ever seen a woman naked and I don't think I'll ever be the same." Chapter 3, pg. 47

"My face. I push the porridge aside and open my vanity mirror. I should know better by now, but somehow I still expect to see myself. Instead, I find an Appalachian apple doll, withered and spotty, with dewlaps and bags and long floppy ears." Chapter 8, pg. 111

"I blink rapidly, trying to get my bearings—that skinny nurse with the horse face has dropped a tray of food at the end of the hall, and it's woken me up. I wasn't aware of dozing, but that's how it goes these days. I seem to slip in and out of time and space. Either I'm finally going senile, or else it's my mind's way of coping with being entirely unchallenged in the present." Chapter 13, pg. 173

"Camel spends his days hidden behind the trunks, lying on blankets that Walter and I arrange to cushion his ruined body from the floor. His paralysis is so bad I'm not sure he could crawl out even if he wanted to, but he's so terrified of being caught that he doesn't try." Chapter 15, pg. 197

"'Jacob,' she whispers into my shirt. She clings to me as tightly as if I were keeping her from being sucked into a vortex." Chapter 15, pg. 215

"I close my eyes and reach for the far corners of my mind. They're no longer clearly defined. My brain is like a universe whose gases get thinner and thinner at the edges. But it doesn't dissolve into nothingness. I can sense something out there, just beyond my gasp, hovering, waiting—and God help me if I'm not skidding toward it again, mouth wide open." Chapter 16, pg. 219

"While August is off doing God knows what to Rosie, Marlena and I crouch on the grass in her dressing tent, clinging to each other like spider monkeys. I say almost nothing,



just hold her head to my chest as her history spills out in a rushed whisper." Chapter 17, pg. 221

"In Poughkeepsie, We are raided, and for once the social strata are bridged: working men, performers, and bosses alike weep and snizzle as all that scotch, all that wine, all that fine Canadian whiskey, all that beer, all that gin, and even moonshine is poured onto the gravel by straight-armed, sour-faced men. It winnows through the stones as we watch, bubbling into the undeserving earth." Chapter 21, pg. 281

"I weave on my knees trying to figure out who and what and where but now the ground comes screaming toward me. I'm powerless to stop it so I brace myself, but in the end it isn't necessary because the blackness swallows me before it hits." Chapter 21, pg. 289

"The relief is instant and palpable. All these years it's been pent up inside me. I thought I'd feel guilty, like I betrayed her, but what I feel—particularly in light of Charlie's sympathetic nodding—is more like absolution. Redemption, even." Chapter 25, pg. 326

"It's like Charlie told the cop. For this old man, this *is* home." Chapter 25, pg. 331



## Topics for Discussion

Why is Jacob so unhappy in the assisted-living center? Is Jacob really angry with the nurses and the other residents at the center? Is Jacob depressed as the doctor suggests? Or does Jacob's unhappiness go deeper than these simple suggestions?

Why does Jacob believe the lawyer is lying about once carrying water for the elephants? Why does Jacob not explain why he does not believe the lawyer? Why does Jacob not tell anyone about his time with the circus?

Why does Jacob run away when his parents die? Where does Jacob intend to go? Why does Jacob jump onto the train? What does he hope to find there?

Discuss August. Who is August? Why does August have such strange mood shifts? Are any of August's mood shifts justified by the behaviors of those around him? Why does August become obsessed with the idea that Jacob and Marlena are having an affair? Is this belief justified?

Discuss Uncle Al. What are Uncle Al's main motivations? Why is Uncle Al unfriendly to Jacob on their initial meeting? Why does Uncle Al later agree to hire Jacob? Later in the novel, why does Uncle Al blackmail Jacob into getting Marlena and August back together? Why is saving this relationship important to Uncle Al? Why does Jacob agree to help?

Discuss Marlena. Why did Marlena marry August? Why did she not leave him when she learned about his mental instability? Why does Marlena not leave August? Does Marlena turn to Jacob out of a need to get away from August or is Marlena truly in love with Jacob? How can the reader tell the difference?

Discuss Walter and Camel. Why does Jacob befriend these men? Why does Jacob attempt to help them? What does Jacob get in return for helping these men? Why does Jacob feel guilty when these men are redlighted? Why does he not go back to find them? Was Jacob a good friend to these men?