

## *Summary*

Kino watched with the detachment of God while a dusty ant frantically tried to escape the sand trap .

Just before sunrise sometime around 1900, a Mexican-Indian pearl diver named Kino awakens to the sound of crowing roosters. He lives near the village of La Paz, on the Pacific coast of the Baja Peninsula. He watches the day dawning through the crack of the door to his house, which is made of brush—bundles of straw fastened together to form walls and a roof. He then looks to a makeshift cradle, a kind of box hanging from the roof of the hut, where his infant son, Coyotito, sleeps. Finally, still resting on the mat, Kino turns his gaze to the open eyes of his wife, Juana. She looks back at Kino as she always does in the early morning. Hearing the waves rolling up on the nearby beach, Kino closes his eyes again to listen to the sound of an old song in his head.

Juana rises to check on Coyotito and starts a fire. Kino also rises, wrapping himself in a blanket and sliding into his sandals. Outside, he regards the climbing sun and the hovering clouds as Juana prepares breakfast. In the company of a goat and a dog, Kino stares “with the detachment of God” at a group of industrious ants underfoot. Behind him, Kino hears Juana singing and nursing Coyotito. Her song is simple, and it moves Kino to contemplation.

As the rest of the neighborhood stirs, Kino goes back inside the house and finds Juana fixing her hair. As they eat their simple breakfast, there is no speech between them beyond a contented sigh from Kino. A ray of light shines on Coyotito’s hanging box, revealing a scorpion crawling down the rope toward the child. Terrified, Juana recites a charm and a prayer to protect Coyotito, while Kino moves forward to capture the scorpion.

Coyotito spots the scorpion on the rope, laughs, and reaches up to grab it. Just then, positioned in front of the hanging box, Kino freezes, slowly stretching out his hand toward the scorpion.

When Coyotito shakes the rope of the hanging box, the scorpion falls, lands on his shoulder, and stings him. Kino immediately seizes the creature and crushes it in his grasp, beating it to death on the floor for good measure. Kino's retribution does no good, though, and Coyotito screams with pain.

Juana grabs Coyotito at once and attempts to suck the venom out of his festering wound. The child's wailing summons several neighbors to Kino's doorstep, including Kino's brother, Juan Tomás, and Juan Tomás's wife, Apolonia. As Coyotito's cries diminish into moans, Juana asks Kino to summon the doctor. Such a request surprises the neighbors since the doctor has never visited the poor cluster of brush houses. (The doctor belongs to the social class of the Spanish colonists of the region, a class far above that of poor natives such as Kino and Juana.) When Kino expresses doubt that the doctor will come to Coyotito, Juana resolves to take Coyotito to the doctor. Kino and Juana set out for the center of town, their neighbors trailing behind them.

Near the center of town, more people follow, curious to see the outcome of a poor man's plea to a rich doctor. Arriving at the doctor's house, Kino knocks at the gate. He both fears and resents the doctor, a powerful man not of his own people. Presently, the gate opens to reveal one of Kino's own people, employed in the doctor's service. Kino explains the details of Coyotito's injury in his native tongue; the man ignores Kino's use of the native language and responds in Spanish. He tells Kino to wait while he goes to speak with the doctor.

Indoors, the doctor sits up in bed, surrounded by luxuries. He feasts on biscuits and hot chocolate and thinks nostalgically of Paris. When the servant interrupts the doctor's reverie to announce Kino's visit, the doctor bitterly demands to know if Kino has money to pay for the treatment. Kino gives the servant eight small pearls, but soon the servant returns to Kino with them, explaining that the doctor has been called out to attend to a serious case. With this dismissal, the procession breaks up, leaving Kino furious and ashamed. Standing in shock in front of the closed gate, Kino strikes out in anger, smashing his fist into the barrier and bloodying his knuckles.

## **Analysis**

As its short, simple sentences and heavily symbolic moral overtones make evident, *The Pearl* is based on the form of biblical parable, and the simple natural beauty of the opening scene recalls the beauty and innocence of the Garden of Eden before Adam and Eve's fall. Though the comparison is not made explicitly, it is nevertheless an apt one—like Adam and Eve, Kino and Juana make choices later in the story that cause them to lose their innocence and force them to leave their paradise for the hardships of the wider world. The cluster of brush houses by the sea where Kino and Juana live functions as a kind of paradise, in which man and woman live together in a state of nature. Steinbeck focuses on the family's rustic simplicity and on its reverence for a higher power. Steinbeck uses repetitious language, which evokes the Bible and other religious literature, to underscore the family's spirituality. This scriptural structure is especially evident in Steinbeck's frequent use of the word "and" to drive the narrative: "And a goat came near and sniffed at him"; "And the rhythm of the family song was the grinding stone"; "And he drank a little pulque and that was breakfast."

Kino's knowledge of the world is not expansive, but his store of traditional songs and his contented, familiar manner of surveying his meager territory show that he is intimately acquainted with every aspect of the existence he knows. Kino frequently hears traditional songs in his head that express his mood or his sense of his environment—when he is content at home in this chapter, he hears the soothing rhythms of the Song of the Family, for instance, but when he is in trouble later in the novella he hears the alarming Song of Danger. Kino's inner soundtrack highlights *The Pearl*'s original conception as a film project—the audience would actually have heard these songs and experienced them as recurring motifs. It also points to the oral nature of Kino's culture, in which songs are passed down from generation to generation and assume such a position of psychological importance that they actually provide an internal context without which Kino is unable to interpret his own feelings.

Steinbeck seems to suggest that the imminent disruption of Kino's Eden, like the harmony that precedes it, is the work of a divine power. Like Kino, who observes the ants as though he were a detached God, the God watching over Kino—and indeed all humanity in the text—shows indifference to the cruel combination of successes and failures that people encounter. As Kino surveys the surroundings of his brush house, wild doves fly and ruffled roosters fight, symbolizing the way good and evil haphazardly commingle.

The scorpion that brings terror into Kino's household represents the work of a divine agent. In Christian literature, scorpions traditionally symbolize evil, and the streak of sunlight that falls on

the scorpion as it rests on the hanging box rope seems a heavenly spotlight, setting the drama in motion. With the Song of Evil drowning out the Song of Family, Kino must take control of his family's destiny after this unkind twist of fate.

Steinbeck's writing evinces contempt for the town doctor, who surrounds himself with the vulgar trappings of European "civilized living." To Steinbeck, the doctor's notion of civilization is utterly materialistic and devoid of the complex spirituality so integral to Kino and Juana's life. Nevertheless, the doctor's barbaric beliefs hold sway in this colonial context, and the divide between rich and poor seems racially and inflexibly defined.

The doctor's servant, as a native employed by a colonial, demonstrates the divide between the world of the doctor that of Kino and Juana. The servant is overly official and speaks Spanish when receiving Kino and Juana, underscoring the social differences between Kino and the doctor. He does, however, revert to their native language in a more sympathetic moment. While the servant possesses the capacity to move—linguistically and otherwise—between two disparate worlds, the colonial doctor possesses neither the linguistic ability nor the desire to do so. Though Kino desires to cross between the two worlds too, he is unable to do so. This powerlessness renders his indignation at the doctor's refusal to treat Coyotito irrelevant, since he has no productive means to express this indignation.

## Plot Analysis The pearl: chapter 2

### Chapter 2

### Summary

But the pearls were accidents, and the finding of one was luck, a little pat on the back by God or the gods or both.

On the shores of the estuary, a set of blue and white canoes sits in the sand. Crabs and lobsters poke out from their holes, and algae and sea horses drift aimlessly in the nearby currents. Dogs and pigs scavenge the shoreline for sea drift in the hazy morning. Amid this scene, Kino and Juana walk down the beach to Kino's canoe. They are going to search for pearls, desperately hoping to find a pearl of sufficient value to persuade the doctor to treat the poisoned Coyotito.

The canoe, an heirloom passed down to Kino from his paternal grandfather, is Kino's sole asset in the world. Kino lays his blanket in its bow. Juana rests Coyotito upon the blanket and places her shawl over him to protect him from the sun. She then wades into the water and collects some seaweed, which she applies gently to Coyotito's wound.

Kino and Juana slide the canoe into the water, Juana climbs in, and Kino pushes the boat away from shore. Once Kino boards, the two begin paddling out to sea in search of pearls. In a short time, they come upon other canoes, which have clustered around the nearest oyster bed. Kino makes a dive to collect oysters, while Juana stays in the canoe, praying for luck. He stays under water for over two minutes, gathering the largest shells, including one especially enormous oyster that has a "ghostly gleam."

Climbing back into the canoe, Kino is reluctant to examine the largest oyster first. After halfheartedly pawing at a smaller one, eagerness overcomes him, and Juana softly urges him to open the prize catch. Kino cuts the shell open to reveal the biggest pearl that either of them has ever seen. Nearly breathless, Juana shrieks in astonishment to find that Coyotito's wound has improved in the presence of the great pearl. Kino, overcome with emotion, tenses his entire body and lets out a resounding yell. Startled by this unexpected display, the other canoes quickly race toward Kino and Juana to uncover the source of the commotion.

Analysis

The Pearl:Plot analysis.

## Chapter 3

### Summary

My son will read and open the books . . . he will know and through him we will know. . . . This is what the pearl will do.

Word of Kino's discovery travels quickly. Even before Kino returns to his brush house, everyone in town knows that he has found "the Pearl of the World." Throughout town, people of every class—from the beggar to the businessman to the priest—dream of how Kino's pearl can help them. Like everyone else, the doctor who turned Kino away desires the pearl.

Ignorant of others' jealousy, Kino and Juana delight in their good fortune, inviting family and friends to share their joy in their newfound treasure. When Juan Tomás asks Kino what he will do with his wealth, Kino details his plans: a proper marriage in the church, new clothing for the family, a harpoon, and a rifle, among other things. Kino's new boldness amazes Juana, especially when he expresses his desire for Coyotito to be sent to school and educated. Kino himself is surprised somewhat by his own resolute statement, and all of the neighbors stare at the mighty pearl with a mixture of hope and fear at the enormous changes that lie ahead.

As dusk approaches, Juana revives the fire, and the neighbors overstay their welcome. Near dark, the priest comes to deliver a benediction. Once he has blessed the household, he asks to see the pearl. Dazzled, the priest implores Kino to remember the church in his new prosperity. Juana announces their intention to be married in the church, and the priest leaves them with a kind word. A sense of evil overcomes Kino in the wake of the priest's visit.

The neighbors disperse to their own suppers, and Juana begins to prepare a meal of baked beans. Kino huddles beneath a blanket in the cold night, keeping the pearl close to his body. Plagued with continued ill feeling, Kino meditates on the former security of his family, and on the menacing uncertainty into which their newfound fortune has cast them.

From the door of his brush house, Kino watches two men approach. The figures prove to be the doctor and his servant, who have come to examine Coyotito's wound. Kino brusquely dismisses the doctor's attentions, but when the doctor makes a sinister insinuation about the lingering potential for infection, Kino relents and allows him to enter. Juana is extremely suspicious of the doctor, but Kino reassures her. When the doctor examines Coyotito, he contends that he has found evidence of complications and produces a capsule of medication that he proceeds to administer. Claiming that the poison will strike within an hour and that the medicine may prove lifesaving, the doctor declares that he will return in an hour to check on Coyotito's progress.

As Juana stares at Coyotito with concern, Kino realizes that he has been careless in not guarding the pearl. Without delay, he wraps the pearl in a rag, digs a hole, and buries the pearl in a corner of the brush house, concealing the hiding place from view. As Kino eats his supper, a small black puppy lingers in the doorway and shakes its tail nervously. Afterward, Juana alerts Kino that Coyotito's condition is growing worse, and she sings soothingly in an effort to comfort the baby. When Coyotito becomes visibly ill, an evil feeling fills Kino once again.

The neighbors learn quickly of the doctor's visit and Coyotito's subsequent decline, and they reconvene at Kino's house to provide support. The doctor reappears, and a swiftly administered potion sets Coyotito to rest. The doctor innocuously asks when Kino might be able to pay him. Kino explains that once he has sold his most valuable pearl he will be able to pay.

Feigning ignorance about the pearl, the doctor offers to keep it in his safe, but Kino declines the offer, explaining that he intends to sell the pearl in the morning. The doctor expresses concern that the pearl might be stolen, and Kino inadvertently glances with fear at the corner where the pearl is buried. Later, when the doctor and neighbors depart and it is time to sleep, Kino paces about the house anxiously, listening vigilantly for threatening noises. In a fit of precaution, he digs up the pearl and reburies it beneath his sleeping mat. Finally, Kino, Juana, and Coyotito curl

up together on the mat and attempt to sleep peacefully.

At first, Kino dreams of Coyotito's future success, but the evil feeling returns and quickly overtakes him. He stirs restlessly, waking Juana. He wakes and hears an intruder in the house, cowering and scratching in the corner, clearly in search of the pearl. Grabbing his knife, Kino leaps into the corner and struggles with the intruder, stabbing at him wildly. After a violent scuffle, the intruder flees, leaving Kino bloodied as Juana calls out to him in terror. Regaining her senses, she swiftly prepares a salve for Kino's bruised forehead.

As she tends Kino's wounds, Juana rails against the pearl, calling it an evil plague upon them. Kino remains adamant about the pearl's virtue, insisting that it will be their road to salvation. Juana disagrees, declaring that it will destroy their entire family. As Kino hushes her, he notices a spot of blood on his knife, which he removes. With dawn approaching, he settles down to look at his pearl. In its luminescence, Kino sees his family's chance for the future, and smiles. Juana smiles with him, and they meet the day with hope.

**\*Analysis\***

Though *The Pearl's* narrative seems to suggest that greed is the first step to destruction, in this chapter Steinbeck focuses not on greed but on ambition—Kino's desire to use the wealth offered by the pearl to better his life and the life of his family. Steinbeck portrays this kind of benevolent desire for advancement as a trait unique to humanity, one that has made humankind superior to all animals. Kino's neighbors have trouble figuring whether Kino's ambition will bring him success or suffering. They too are intoxicated by the awe-inspiring prospect of Kino owning a rifle or Coyotito receiving an education, but these propositions are so far removed from their sense of what is possible that they react to them with a natural suspicion. The neighbors are only able to think about the pearl in terms of their preexisting narratives. Because they have an ancient legend about a great "Pearl That Might Be," they believe that that legend has come to fruition in Kino's pearl, which they dub the "Pearl of the World." They do not conceive of the pearl as simply a valuable lucky break for Kino; for them, the pearl has deep moral and spiritual significance. By relating the stories the neighbors trade, Steinbeck shows how the human mind turns real experience into parable through the act of storytelling.



For us, the neighbors' suspicion of Kino's good fortune seems justified, based on Steinbeck's tentative tone and on his remarks that the gods disregard men's plans and only allow men success if it comes by accident. Steinbeck asserts that when human agency actually does bring about success (through the exercise of a benevolent ambition like Kino's, for example), "the gods take their revenge on a man." In this way, Steinbeck completely negates the value system of the American dream. Hard work and openness to opportunity, the main components of the traditional American dream, are meaningless in a malevolent universe in which "the gods" conspire against every individual's desire to improve his or her lot in life.

Because his pearl is worth so much money, Kino believes it offers him a chance to realize his ambitious dreams and free himself from the shackles of colonialism. But what keeps Kino from fulfilling his ambitions is his lack of knowledge. Kino may be able to pay the doctor to heal his son, but he is ignorant as to whether he is making the right choice—perhaps the doctor is in fact poisoning his son. Kino is well aware of his predicament, and his desire for his son to obtain an education shows Kino's recognition that education provides the only possible escape from colonial oppression. But in his single-minded pursuit of success and wealth for his son, Kino abandons the nurturing aspects of his fatherly duty. Kino leaves Juana alone to care for the ailing Coyotito while he, Kino, focuses his attentions on finding a place to conceal the pearl.

As Kino shifts his focus to providing for his son in material rather than emotional ways, he makes a corresponding shift from peaceful coexistence in his village to violent, paranoid suspicion of his neighbors. Now that Kino has acquired wealth, he is obligated to defend that wealth from potential usurpers. Ultimately, this shift in preoccupation demonstrates that wealth has a dehumanizing effect on those who possess it, such as the doctor and Kino, and on those who desire it, such as the intruder who comes to steal the pearl. The intruder is described in vague, inhuman terms that portray him as an unidentifiable mass of clothing. Kino even refers to him as "the thing," as though he were a plague sent against Kino rather than another human being. At this point in the story, however, only Juana seems to recognize that the pearl is an evil instrument that will bring her family pain and heartache.

The pearl:Chapter 4 Plot Analysis

Summary

Word spreads throughout the town of La Paz that Kino will be selling his great pearl. The pearl buyers are especially excited, and the pearl fishers abandon their work for the day to witness the transaction. Over breakfast that morning, the brush-house neighborhood teems with speculation and opinion. Kino, Juana, and Coyotito wear their best clothes for the occasion, and Kino dons his hat with care, anxious to appear a serious, vigorous man of the world.

As Kino and Juana set out from their brush house, the neighbors fall in line behind them. Juan Tomás walks at the front with Kino and expresses his concern that Kino may be cheated, as Kino has no standard of true comparison to know what his pearl is worth. Kino acknowledges this problem but adds that they have no way of solving it. Juan Tomás tells Kino that another system of pearl-selling used to exist before Kino was born. Pearlers would give their pearls to agents for sale in the capital, but as a result of the rampant corruption of pearl agents who stole the pearls meant for sale, the old system is no longer in place. Kino points out that according to the church, such a system must fail, as it represents a vain effort on the part of the pearlers to exceed their station in life.

Kino and Juan Tomás walk on in silence into the city, drawing stares from assembled onlookers. As Kino, Juan Tomás, and the attending crowd approach, the pearl dealers scramble to put their offices in order, hiding their little pearls and preparing to make offers. The first dealer is a short, slick man who nervously rolls a coin back and forth in his hand. He explains after a careful examination that the pearl is worthless because of its abnormally large size. Declaring it more of a museum curiosity than a market commodity, the dealer makes an offhand bid of one thousand pesos.

Kino reacts angrily to this lowball offer and insists that the pearl is worth fifty times that much. The dealer firmly asserts that his is an accurate appraisal and invites Kino to seek out a second opinion. Kino's neighbors stir uneasily, wondering how Kino can reject such a large sum of money and wondering whether he is being foolish and headstrong by demanding more. Presently, three new dealers arrive to examine the pearl, and the initial dealer invites them to make independent appraisals.

The first two dealers reject the pearl as a mere oddity, and the third dealer makes a feeble offer of five hundred pesos. Upon hearing this news, Kino quickly removes the pearl from

consideration. As he does so, the initial dealer, unfazed by the lower bid, insists that his offer of one thousand pesos still stands. Protesting that he has been cheated, Kino announces a plan to sell his pearl in the capital city. His outburst raises the bid to fifteen hundred pesos, but Kino will have none of it. He fiercely pushes his way out of the crowd and starts the long walk home as Juana trails after him.

At supper, Kino's neighbors debate the day's events. Some suggest that the dealers' appraisals were fair, while others think that Kino is the victim of a scam. Some think he should have settled for the final offer of fifteen hundred pesos; others praise Kino's bravery for insisting on his own terms.

Meanwhile, in his brush house, Kino has buried the pearl under his sleeping mat. He sits brooding, nervous about his upcoming journey to the faraway capital. Juana watches him while she nurses Coyotito and prepares supper. Juan Tomás then enters to try to warn Kino of the dangers involved in going to the capital, but Kino is adamant about selling his pearl to secure a better future for his son. Unable to convince Kino to heed his warning, Juan Tomás returns home.

That night Kino goes without supper. He sits awake to protect the pearl and continues to pore over the details of his problem. Juana keeps her own silent vigil, intending to support Kino with her company. Suddenly, Kino senses an evil presence. He rises, feeling for the knife under his shirt, and moves toward the doorway as Juana stifles a desire to restrain him. From the darkness, a man assaults Kino, and a struggle ensues. By the time Juana reaches the fray, the attacker has fled. Bloodied and cut and with his clothes torn, Kino lies sprawled on the ground, only half conscious.

Without delay, Juana helps Kino inside to care for his wounds. Kino admits that in the dark he was unable to tell who attacked him. After Juana washes out his last cut, she begs him in desperation to discard the evil pearl. But, more fiercely than ever, Kino insists that they must capitalize on their good fortune. He explains that in the morning they will set out in the canoe for the capital. Juana dutifully submits to her husband's plan, and they both go to sleep.

## \*Analysis\*

Like Chapter 3, Chapter 4 opens with a comment by the narrator about the town—“It is wonderful the way a little town keeps track of itself and of all its units.” Steinbeck goes on to portray the town as an all-powerful unit, full of men who work together to suppress the deviant elements in their midst. Steinbeck emphasizes that society shapes an individual’s fate as much as divinity or any other force. In the universe of *The Pearl*, the gods assert their influence on humans through chance and accident, but society asserts an equal influence through forces—such as greed and violence—that emanate from human drives. Both human will and the gods shape Kino’s fate in Steinbeck’s parable: an accident enables Kino to find the pearl, and greed and ambition lead to his downfall.

The narrator says that peace can be achieved in the town only if no one deviates from normal, expected behavior, implying that towns are almost like miniature authoritarian states. It is ironic that Steinbeck names the town in *The Pearl* La Paz, which means “peace” in Spanish. The town’s capitalist cartel wages constant war with all challengers, and by possessing a great pearl, Kino makes himself a target for the racket of pearl buyers that has evolved over time. Behind the scenes, one man determines how much the buyers should offer for each pearl, thereby profiting shamelessly while remaining out of the reach of accusation. An individual selling a pearl therefore has no alternative but to comply with this system or, despite the difficulty of doing so, try to circumvent it.

Kino’s comment to Juan Tomás that the old system of pearl selling was “against religion” highlights the way the Catholic church preserved existing social hierarchies and gross disparities in wealth by cautioning its followers about the relative unimportance and even danger of the material world. The narrator adds that the natives of Mexico have endured this position at the bottom of the social hierarchy, including its absolute and total exploitation of both financial and moral terms, for the four hundred years since the first Europeans arrived.

The thieflike pearl dealers Kino encounters lack names, character complexity, and emotion—they seem to lack humanity. A profit margin dictates their entire existence, and their livelihoods depend upon underhanded deals, as symbolized by the fact that the first dealer spends all his time secretly practicing a coin trick beneath his desk. When one neighbor asks if

the dealers conspired in advance regarding the price of the pearl, another neighbor responds, "If that is so, then all of us have been cheated all of our lives." It is almost as though such a possibility is too horrible to for the natives to face. Instead, everyone chooses to ignore the legitimacy of the suggestion, and most of the villagers ridicule Kino's defiance of the dealers.

While we sympathize with Kino's desire to break free from oppression (as Juan Tomás realizes, Kino's ambition pits him against an entire established structure of business, church, and empire), Kino's treatment of Juana lessens our sympathy for him somewhat. Juana finds herself subjected to Kino's whims just as he is subjected to the colonists' whims. She has no role in the business process, and Kino never consults her about the proper course of action with regard to the pearl. When Juana finally volunteers her intuition that the pearl is evil and will ruin them, Kino refuses to listen, assuring her with the simple declaration "I am a man." Juana has no recourse. Kino's refusal to acknowledge his wife's better judgment parallels the colonial suppression of the native's intuitive knowledge of "things of the spirit."

#### The pearl: plot analysis

As a late moon rises outside, nearby motion rouses Kino from his sleep. In the pale light, he is barely able to discern Juana, who moves toward the fireplace, quietly gathers the pearl, and sneaks out into the night. Kino stealthily follows her as she heads toward the shore. When she hears him in pursuit, Juana breaks into a run, but Kino apprehends her just as she is preparing to hurl the pearl into the water. Grabbing the pearl from her, he punches her in the face and kicks her in the side when she falls down. As Kino hovers over Juana, the waves break upon her crumpled body. He hisses menacingly above her, then turns in disgust and leaves her without a word.

As Kino makes his way up the beach, a group of men assaults him. Kino struggles violently as they paw and prod at him. As Kino drives his knife into one of his attackers, the men knock the pearl from his grasp. Meanwhile, some distance away from the fight, Juana gets up on her knees and begins to make her way home. Climbing through the brush, she sees the pearl lying in the path. She picks it up and considers returning to the sea to discard the pearl once and for all.

At this moment, Juana spies two dark figures lying in the road and recognizes one of them as Kino. In the next instant, Juana realizes that Kino has killed the man slumped by his side. Juana drags the dead body into the brush and then helps Kino, who moans about losing his pearl. Juana silences him by showing him the pearl and explains that they must flee immediately because Kino has committed a horrible crime. Kino protests that he acted in self-defense, but Juana argues that his alibi won't matter at all to the authorities. Kino realizes that Juana is right, and they resolve to flee.

While Juana runs back to the brush house to grab Coyotito, Kino returns to the beach to ready his canoe for the escape. He finds that someone has punched a large hole in the boat's bottom. Filled with sorrow and rage, he quickly scrambles back to his brush house, moments before dawn. As he arrives in the vicinity of the neighborhood, he notices flames and realizes that his house is burning. As he runs toward the fire, Juana meets him with Coyotito in her arms. She confirms that their house has been burned down completely. As the neighbors rush to control the fire and to save their own houses, Kino, Juana, and Coyotito duck between the shadows and into Juan Tomás's house.

In the darkness inside Juan Tomás's house, Kino and Juana listen as the neighbors attempt to subdue the fire and speculate that Kino and Juana have been killed in the blaze. The couple can only listen as Juan Tomás's wife, Apolonia, wails in mourning for the loss of her relatives. When Apolonia returns to her house to change head shawls, Kino whispers to her, explaining that they are taking refuge. Kino instructs Apolonia to bring Juan Tomás to them and to keep their whereabouts a secret. She complies, and Juan Tomás arrives moments later, posting Apolonia at the door to keep watch while he talks with Kino.

Kino explains that he inadvertently killed a man after being attacked in the darkness. Juan Tomás blames this misfortune on the pearl and advises Kino to sell it without delay. Kino, however, is more focused on his losses, detailing the destruction of his canoe and his house. He implores Juan Tomás to hide them in his house for a night, until they can gather themselves and make a second attempt to flee. Juan Tomás hesitates to bring danger upon himself but ultimately agrees to shelter them and keep silent about their plans.

That afternoon, Kino and Juana crouch together in silence, listening to the neighbors discuss them among the ashes outside. Most of the neighbors assume that Kino and Juana are dead, but Juan Tomás suggests that perhaps the family has fled to the south to escape persecution. As he moves back and forth among the neighbors, he returns to his house from time to time, bringing bits and pieces of provisions that will help Kino and Juana on their journey.

That evening, Kino tells Juan Tomás his plan to travel to the cities of the north. Juan Tomás advises him to avoid the coast, as a search party will be on the lookout for him. When Juan Tomás asks if Kino still has the pearl, Kino responds that he does and that he intends to hold on to it. At dark, before the moon rises, Kino, Juana, and Coyotito exchange parting words with Juan Tomás and Apolonia, and head out into the night.

## Analysis

Once Kino beats Juana, he begins to lose everything as rapidly as he gained the Pearl of the World. Kino loses his self-respect as a husband by beating Juana, his integrity as a law-abiding citizen by killing his attacker, his birthright in the form of the destroyed canoe, and his home, burned to the ground by an arsonist. Furthermore, Kino's senses become "dulled by his emotion" in his determination to overcome adversity and gain what he feels to be rightfully his by selling the pearl. He has lost the capacity to feel guilt, so he doesn't regret striking his wife or killing another man. As Kino's ambition to improve his family's lot strengthens, his ability to see to his family's well-being weakens. He exposes his son to questionable medical treatment and abuses his wife, all to achieve the material success he wants for them.

Kino's attempts to safeguard the pearl predispose him to violence in defense of his property. In the heat of battle, he loses control and succumbs to his basest human instincts: he murders his assailant. Once he crosses the line from defender to aggressor, Kino suddenly finds himself with nothing to gain and everything to lose. After Kino kills a man, the thought of improving his family is lost—the only thing that remains is to save himself and his family. Kino associates himself with his pearl, remarking to Juan Tomás that whereas he once might have given the pearl away as a gift, his many troubles have grafted the pearl to him. Kino sees the pearl as both a burden and a promise, and refuses to give it up.

Amid Kino's monomania (obsessive focus on a single idea), Juana remains tethered to and trapped in an increasingly disastrous situation. Though she sees Kino as "half insane and half god," she cannot imagine living without a man. Because of her position as a wife in a traditional society, Juana is necessarily subservient to Kino. She must follow what he views as his larger ambitions, even though her good sense cautions against it as their situation becomes increasingly desperate. Unfortunately, although Juana's good sense demands that the pearl be thrown away.

On a clear, windy night, Kino, Juana, and Coyotito begin their long march north, avoiding the sleeping town. Outside of town, they follow a road, carefully walking in a wheel rut to conceal their tracks. They walk all night and make camp in a roadside shelter at sunrise. After eating a small breakfast, Juana rests until midday. Kino spots a cluster of ants and lays down his foot as an obstacle. The ants climb over it, and he keeps his foot in place and watches them scale it.

When Juana rises, she asks Kino if he thinks they will be pursued. Juana then begins to doubt Kino's conviction that the pearl is worth far more than the dealers offered, but Kino points out that his attackers would not have tried to steal the pearl were it worth nothing. Kino stares at the pearl to read his future. He lies to Juana, telling her that he sees a rifle, a marriage in a church, and an education for Coyotito. In truth Kino sees a body bleeding on the ground, Juana making her way home through the night after being beaten, and Coyotito's face swollen as though he were sick.

The family retreats farther into the shade for another rest. While Kino sleeps soundly, Juana is restless. As she plays with Coyotito, Kino wakes from a dream and demands that they keep quiet. Creeping forward, he spots a trio of trackers pursuing their trail. Kino stiffens and attempts to be still and silent until the trackers have passed. He watches them grow nearer and prepares to spring on them with his knife if necessary. Juana also hears the approaching trackers and does her best to quiet Coyotito.

The trackers' horse grows excited as the trackers approach the shelter. For a moment, it appears that they are poised to apprehend Coyotito and Juana, but eventually they lose their lead on the trail and move on. Kino realizes that it is only a matter of time before they return,



and he runs quickly to Juana, telling her to gather up her things so that they can leave at once. Suddenly, Kino feels their cause to be hopeless and loses his will to flee, but Juana castigates him for giving up on his family. Finally, Kino suggests that they might be able to lose the trackers up in the mountains.

Kino and Juana collect their belongings and flee with Coyotito through the undergrowth, making no effort to conceal their tracks. As they climb the first rises, Kino realizes that the distance he is putting between his family and the trackers offers only a temporary fix to their problem. When Juana takes a rest with Coyotito, Kino proposes that she hide while he moves on ahead. Until the trackers have been diverted, she can take refuge in a nearby town. But, despite Kino's insistence, Juana refuses to split up, so the family moves on together.

As their ascent grows steeper, Kino attempts to vary and double back on their route to mislead the trackers. As the sun begins to set, Kino and Juana reach a nearby cleft and replenish their water supply at a pool and stream, where they drink to contentment, and Juana rinses Coyotito. From the lookout, Kino spies the trackers at a distance below, hurrying up the slope. Juana also realizes that they are still being pursued.

Kino deceives the trackers by creating a false trail up the cliff and descending again to take refuge with Juana and Coyotito in a nearby cave. Kino hopes that the trackers will climb past them, providing a chance for them to climb down the hill and out of range. Kino instructs Juana to keep Coyotito quiet, and they lie silently in the cave as twilight settles over the land.

By evening, the trackers arrive at the pool, where they make camp and eat. In the cave, Coyotito grows restless, and Juana quiets him. Kino notices that two of the men have settled in to sleep, while the third keeps watch. Kino realizes that if he can manage to stifle the lookout, he, Juana, and Coyotito will have a chance to escape. Juana fears for Kino's life, but Kino explains that they have no other choice. He instructs her to run to the nearest town should he be killed, and they part reluctantly.

Kino strips naked to avoid being seen by the watchman, and, after crouching at the cave entrance for a moment to survey his route, he springs forward. As Juana prays for him, Kino

slowly moves down the slope toward the pool. Twenty feet from the trackers, he crouches behind a palm tree to ponder his next move. His muscles cramp and tremble, but he knows he must act quickly before the moon rises. He unsheathes his knife and prepares to attack. Just as he is poised to spring, the moon appears, and he realizes that his opportunity has been lost. Waiting for a moment when the watchman's head is turned, Kino gets ready to take a much riskier approach.

Suddenly, Coyotito lets out a cry that wakes one of the sleeping trackers. At first, they wonder if it could possibly be the cry of a human, or whether it is simply the cry of a coyote. The watchman decides to silence the wailer by shooting in the direction of the cry. Unbeknownst to Kino, the bullet hits and kills Coyotito. As the watchman shoots, Kino springs upon the trackers, stabbing the watchman and seizing the rifle. Knocking one of the other men out with a fierce blow, he watches as the last man attempts to flee up the cliff. The man makes little progress before Kino stops him with a first shot, and then murders him execution-style with another shot between the eyes. In the terrible moment that ensues, Kino notices the silence of the surrounding animals, and finally hears the blood-curdling cry issuing from his wife, mourning the death of Coyotito.

Later the next day, toward sunset, Kino and Juana walk side by side into La Paz, with Juana carrying Coyotito's corpse in a sack slung over her shoulder. They walk dazedly through the city, with unmoving eyes, speaking to no one. Onlookers stare wordlessly, and even Juan Tomás can only raise a hand in greeting.

Kino and Juana march through the town, past the brush houses, all the way to the sea. At the edge of the water, Kino stops and pulls the pearl from his pocket. Holding it up to the light, he stares into it carefully, and a flood of evil memories washes over him. Kino holds the pearl out in front of him, and then flings it out into the ocean. Kino and Juana watch the pearl as it splashes the surface, and stare at the spot quietly as the sun sets.

Then the column [of ants] climbed over his instep and continued on its way, and Kino left..

Analysis

After their brush house is burned down and they are forced to flee their neighborhood, Kino and Juana find themselves in a struggle for survival in nature. Their state of nature ironically mimics that of the animals Kino observes contemplatively in Chapters 1 and 2. Exposed to the elements and the cries of coyotes, owls, and other animals, Kino thinks of himself as someone who has been taken over by some animal force. His peaceful, domestic life is a thing of the past.

As he does in Chapter 1, Kino here observes a cluster of ants. However, instead of watching “with the detachment of God” as he does before, Kino lays down his foot as an obstacle in the ants’ path. The difference between these two acts symbolizes the way Kino’s understanding of his relationship with nature has changed. Whereas earlier he is a detached observer, he now attempts to carve his own fate and rule in the natural world. But, as the ants reveal by easily finding their way around the obstacle Kino creates, Kino’s attempts to rule over nature or twist it to his own devices have little effect, and nature has its way with him anyway.

While Kino does attempt to control the natural world, he also looks to it to guide his behavior when he gazes into the pearl “to find his vision” of the future. In the pearl, Kino sees his family’s true fate, yet he mistakenly believes that denying what he sees and announcing an alternative vision will allow him to overcome his fate. Ultimately, Kino’s base actions nullify the noble intentions he expresses in his speech. Kino announces to Juana that he envisions a grand wedding, but what the pearl reflects to him is the reality that he beats his wife. Kino also announces to Juana that he envisions an education for Coyotito, but in the pearl he sees the reality of “Coyotito’s face, thick and feverish from the [doctor’s] medicine.”

Though she does not look into the pearl with Kino, Juana recognizes that Kino’s visions are illusions grounded on ambition and hope. Her suggestion that the pearl has no real worth implicitly criticizes Kino’s foolishness. Yet, when Kino considers giving up, Juana chastises him for his weakness. Her desire to continue suggests that her ambition is in fact just as fierce as Kino’s. Like him, she allows her dreams for her family to lead her to ignore the reality of her situation and to attempt to overcome her fate. Her initial wish to secure a great pearl brings only grief to her family.

Steinbeck explicitly compares Kino and Juana to animals being chased by hunters. Like animals,

the pair attempts to escape their pursuers by seeking out a higher elevation. What puts Kino and Juana in close proximity to the trackers is the need to be near water, a need common to all mammals. Furthermore, Kino finds himself forced to strip off his clothes, distinctive symbols of his humanity, in order to surprise his pursuers. In reverting to this animalistic strategy, Kino inadvertently transforms his own son into an animal, leading to Coyotito's death by an indiscriminate gunshot on the part of the trackers, who mistake the baby's cry for that of a coyote. Coyotito's name, which literally means "little coyote" in Spanish, foreshadows this transformation throughout the novella.

The narrator points out that in the animal world, water sources are both "places of life" and "places of death," because they offer a resource but also create competition between animals for the resource. This paradoxical status of the water pool parallels that of the pearl, which exerts both a positive and a destructive influence on Kino and Juana. Extrapolating further, the narrator's comment about the water source seems to apply to the entire material world—everyone both depends upon and competes for the material resources needed for survival.

Once the trackers are dead, Kino is free to continue to the city to sell his pearl, but Coyotito's death has stripped Kino of the motive for his struggle. Kino and Juana intended the pearl to facilitate the future they have dreamed of for their son, but the pearl's value is lost once Coyotito dies. The parable subtly evokes the story of Jesus, in that Kino, in attempting to play God by determining his own fate, sacrifices his son. Though an infant, Coyotito could be viewed as a martyr, since he dies for the sins of others. In this sense, Coyotito himself is the biblical "pearl of great price," the title Steinbeck originally planned to give his novella.

Critics are divided on the question of whether Kino's ultimate decision to rid himself of the pearl by throwing it back into the ocean represents a victory or a defeat. Some suggest that Kino's final act of material renunciation empowers him. The fact that the renunciation means that he will continue to live a life of poverty leads others to argue that Kino only adds to his tragedy in discarding the pearl. The narrator notes that as Kino and Juana reenter the town to dispose of the pearl, "the sun was behind them and their long shadows stalked ahead, and they seemed to carry two towers of darkness with them." This image symbolizes Kino and Juana's situation: their brightest days are behind them, and a dark patch of their own making lies ahead.

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