The Tortilla Curtain

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF T. CORAGHESSAN BOYLE

Boyle was born to alcoholic parents in Westchester County. Growing up in the sixties, he had a rebellious adolescence, and his thrill-seeking behavior continued during his early college years at SUNY Potsdam, where he battled a heroin addiction. Boyle intended to study music in college but when he failed an audition he instead enrolled in English classes, including courses in creative writing. This ultimately inspired him to pursue his MFA at the Iowa Writers' Workshop, where he became friends with legendary short story writer Raymond Carver. Boyle also earned a PhD in nineteenth-century British literature from the University of Iowa. Since 1978, Boyle has taught literature and creative writing at the University of Southern California, where he is currently Distinguished Professor of English. Boyle lives near Santa Barbara with his wife, Karen, and their three children.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Tortilla Curtain was published only one year after the passage of California's controversial Proposition 187 (also known as the Save Our State initiative). This law, which was approved by nearly 59 percent of voters in a 1994 referendum, banned undocumented immigrants in California from accessing public services, including non-emergency healthcare and public education. Several lawsuits quickly followed, alleging that the law was unconstitutional, and ultimately a federal judge issued a permanent injunction against its enactment. Immigration remains a hot-button issue today, particularly in border states such as California, and the concerns that motivated people to vote for Proposition 187 are certainly reflected in the anti-immigration anxieties of Delaney Mossbacher and other characters in *The Tortilla Curtain*. At one point in the novel, Kyra Mossbacher cites "the riots" as the reason so many white couples were seeking real estate outside of LA proper. This is an allusion to the 1992 Los Angeles riots, which were sparked by the acquittal of four white police officers who were caught on tape brutally beating a black man named Rodney King. The riots began on April 29 and lasted through early May. More than sixty peopled died as a result of the rioting and over three thousand buildings in central and south Los Angeles were destroyed, resulting in $1 billion in damages to the city. The riots are just one indication of how high racial tensions were running in Los Angeles at the time Boyle wrote this novel.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

The novel's epigraph comes from John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, an iconic novel about the journey and struggles of the Joad family, migrants from Oklahoma to California during the Great Depression. Like Steinbeck's classic, *The Tortilla Curtain* explores themes of prejudice, perseverance, and the power of the American Dream. Cristina Henríquez's 2014 novel *The Book of Unknown Americans* follows a Mexican immigrant family's journey to the States to secure healthcare and an education for their daughter following a head injury she has sustained, and deals with many of the same themes. Boyle himself has written several other novels, including *When the Killing's Done*, that center on the complex environmental and social issues he touches upon in *The Tortilla Curtain*.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Tortilla Curtain
- **Where Written:** California
- **When Published:** 1995
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Contemporary fiction
- **Setting:** The private community of Arroyo Blanco Estates, in a suburb of Los Angeles; the nearby Topanga Canyon. Early 1990s.
- **Climax:** Topanga Creek floods and Delaney, Cándido, América, and Socorro are all swept away by the water
- **Point of View:** The novel is written in close third person, with the perspective shifting between the four protagonists: Delaney, Cándido, América, and Kyra.

EXTRA CREDIT

Nature Nut. In a *New York Times* interview he gave in 2015, Boyle described himself as "mad for nature writing." He said, "I want to get inside the head of every creature in the world, even ants." In *The Tortille Curtain*, Delaney is a nature writer.

Author or Rock Star? In 1993, along with singer-songwriter Patti Smith, Boyle gave a free performance in Central Park, which was attended by seven thousand people. Boyle has said that the term "reading" connotes boredom and "intellectual duty." "I want to give a show," he has said.

PLOT SUMMARY

Through shifting narrative perspective, *The Tortilla Curtain* traces the intersecting lives of two couples living in Los Angeles, California. The first couple, Delaney and Kyra Mossbacher, are well-to-do white Americans living in the

private community of Arroyo Blanco Estates; Delaney is a nature writer, Kyra a realtor. The second couple is Cándido and América Rincón, undocumented Mexican immigrants who are struggling to survive in a campsite at Topanga Canyon while they look for work in a new country. The novel restlessly bounces between the four protagonists' perspectives, exploring the ways in which hatred and anger begin to affect each of the main characters in turn.

The novel opens with Delaney hitting Cándido with his car while driving on **the canyon road**. Though Cándido is severely injured, he refuses Delaney's clumsy offer to drive him to a doctor, instead accepting the twenty dollars Delaney offers him and disappearing into the bushes. Waiting at the car dealership while his vehicle is inspected, Delaney calls his wife to inform her of the accident; he is careful to specify that the man he hit was "*Mex*ican." The next day, in Arroyo Blanco Estates, Delaney and Kyra's dog is mauled by a **coyote**. Delaney attends a community meeting to speak on the issue of the local coyote population, but finds his neighbors wrapped up in a contentious discussion about installing a gate at the entrance to the community. Jack Jardine, Jack Cherrystone, and Jim Shirley are all in favor of the gate, but Delaney is wary as he sees gated communities as being in conflict with his liberal values. Overwhelmed by his more vocal neighbors, however, he does not offer his opinion.

Over the course of the next several days, Delaney and Kyra both go about their normal lives: Delaney continues working on his nature column, "Pilgrim at Topanga Creek," and Kyra continues to devote countless hours to her work as a realtor, having recently become obsessed with one of her properties, the beautiful Da Ros home. While at the supermarket one day, Delaney has an encounter with Jack Jardine, who tries to convince him to support the gate. Delaney initially challenges Jack, calling him out for his racist views, but later, in the parking lot, seems to rethink his views when he spots Cándido, whom he instinctively thinks of as a "dark alien little man."

The next day, still unsettled by his second encounter with Cándido, Delaney goes for a hike in Topanga Canyon and comes upon a man wearing a backwards baseball cap (José Navidad). Delaney is furious that this man and his friend are camping in the canyon, and heads back to his car with the intention of calling the police. However, he finds that his car has been stolen. Back at the car dealership, he can think only of Cándido's face as he tries to imagine the person who stole his car.

Meanwhile, Cándido and América have been facing their own challenges in the canyon. Cándido managed to return to his campsite after the car accident and his pregnant wife, América, has been nursing him back to health. Much to Cándido's chagrin, she has also been trying to find work at the labor exchange, though she has been unsuccessful. In the meantime, the Rincóns' camp has been vandalized by Jack Jardine's son, Jack Jr.; still injured, Cándido was able only to look on. Eventually, América finds employment working for Jim Shirley—though not before she has a disturbing interaction with José Navidad at the labor exchange, where he flirts with her aggressively and threatens that she won't be a married woman for long. Returning from her first day of work in Shirley's car, América is mortified when Shirley places his hand in her lap. She refuses to tell Cándido about the incident, instead focusing on celebrating her earnings. The following morning, América and Cándido both visit the labor exchange; América is again hired by Shirley, while Cándido finds work with Al Lopez, whose team is responsible for replacing Delaney and Kyra's private fence (which they want heightened in order to prevent another coyote attack). That evening, América waits hours for Cándido to return to their meeting spot at the supermarket; when he does not, she heads into the canyon on her own. There, she is attacked by José Navidad and his unnamed friend. The two men brutally rape her on the canyon trail.

Part Two of the novel opens on Delaney, who has become increasingly resentful and angry following the theft of his car. After purchasing a new vehicle the same day his car is stolen from the canyon road, Delaney has lunch with Kyra, who leaves early to check on the Da Ros home. While making her rounds of the property, Kyra encounters José Navidad and his friend; frightened, she invents a lie about owning the house, claiming her husband and brother are inside. Meanwhile, Delaney, in the first throes of paranoia, has spent the afternoon camped out along the canyon road, waiting to see if someone will try to steal the new car he has just purchased.

Back in the canyon camp, Cándido can tell that something is wrong with his wife, but América refuses to tell him what it is. Since Navidad and his friend raped her, América has been experiencing terrible pain with urination (likely due to an STD). She refuses to share any of this with Cándido because she feels it will shame him. Despite América's attempts to protect him, Cándido still feels emasculated by his wife's assault and, one night, he beats her out of frustration.

The narration jumps ahead in time. The gate at Arroyo Blanco has long since been constructed, and Jack Jardine and company (including his sinister new friend, Dominick Flood, who is on house arrest) are now trying to convince Delaney that **a wall** should be built around the community, too. (Flood has already succeeded in having the labor exchange shut down.) One night, another coyote scales the fence surrounding the Mossbachers' yard and makes off with their surviving dog in its mouth. Devastated, Kyra zealously begins to advocate for the wall, despite Delaney's discomfort. Kyra only feels more frightened and angered when she finds that someone (presumably Navidad) has tagged the Da Ros house with the words "pinche puta" (fucking whore). Delaney also has another tense encounter with Navidad, whom he sees inside Arroyo Blanco

handing out fliers.

Meanwhile, with the labor exchange closed, Cándido and América have set their hopes on finding work in Canoga Park, an urban subsection of LA. Instead, Cándido is beaten and robbed of all their money and he and América must both resort to eating out of a dumpster. Humiliated and hopeless, América refuses to return to the canyon, but Cándido drags her there. She becomes even more depressed and stops speaking. It is now November and Cándido is desperate to save money for an apartment before the rainy season begins; luckily, he finds work for a man named Señor Willis. While shopping at the supermarket on Thanksgiving Day, Cándido has another stroke of luck: two boys give him a turkey. In the canyon, as América prepares the bird, Cándido builds a fire. When the winds shift, a spark leaps from the flames and sets the whole canyon ablaze.

Part Three begins with Delaney and Kyra at a Thanksgiving Day cocktail party at Dominick Flood's house. When news of the canyon fire reaches Arroyo Blanco, the residents, including the Mossbachers, flee to the hills. Here, Delaney again sees Navidad and his friend and tries to have them arrested, claiming they started the fire. When the Mossbachers return to their undamaged home (the fire has changed directions and ultimately been contained), Delaney discovers in a rage that Navidad and his companion have been released from police custody. In the chaos of the fire, Dominick Flood has also managed to escape his house arrest.

Cándido and América, meanwhile, have escaped the canyon fire but América goes into labor and must deliver her baby in a toolshed outside Arroyo Blanco's walls. Cándido builds a new shelter in the hills with materials he pilfers from Arroyo Blanco homes, and he moves his family there. América soon discovers that her new daughter, Socorro, is blind, and she becomes desperate either to find the baby a doctor or to give up this difficult life and return to Mexico.

Several days after the fire, Delaney and Kyra are out searching for their cat, who is missing, when Jack Jardine picks them up and shows them that the wall has been vandalized. Delaney becomes obsessed with learning who the culprit is, and begins conducting nightly stakeouts of the wall. He develops a photo of Cándido scaling the wall, and becomes obsessed with punishing him. One day, he spots Cándido on the canyon road and tries to have him arrested; when this fails, he determines to track Cándido down himself. By the time Delaney discovers, later that evening, that it is actually Jack Jr. who has spray-painted the wall, he has thoroughly convinced himself that it is actually Cándido who is at fault—for the graffiti and for the fire—and that he deserves to be destroyed. Practically crazed at this point, a gun-toting Delaney hunts down Cándido and América's shelter in the hills. Before anything can happen, however, a mudslide occurs and the canyon creek floods. In the flood, Socorro is drowned, though América and Cándido are fetched up alive on the roof of the post office. When Cándido sees Delaney drowning nearby, he reaches out a hand and takes hold of him.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Delaney Mossbacher – Delaney is Kyra's husband and the stepfather of Jordan. Delaney leads a very comfortable, upper-middle-class life in the private community of Arroyo Blanco Estates in a suburb of Los Angeles. Of the novel's four main characters, the narrative follows Delaney's perspective most closely. The changes he undergoes are also the most dramatic and carefully detailed of any character in the novel, as he transforms from a moderately liberal-minded person to a paranoid racist bent on defending his family and community from what he perceives to be the threat of various intruders, from coyotes to Mexican immigrants. A nature writer and New York native, Delaney spends much of his time writing about the flora and fauna of California. He is a self-described "liberal humanist," but from the very beginning of the novel Delaney clearly demonstrates his inherent racial prejudices, offering only twenty dollars to a gravely wounded Cándido after hitting him with his car. In the beginning of the novel, Delaney works hard to navigate this cognitive dissonance between his stated values and his instinctual fear of the other, and seems invested in challenging his own biases, but as the novel progresses he becomes more and more obsessed with destroying Cándido, whom he feels has ruined his life. As Delaney succumbs to bigotry and a victim mentality, he becomes a less sympathetic character and the narration more heavily ironizes his twisted perspective.

Kyra Menaker-Mossbacher – Kyra is Delaney's wife and the mother of Jordan. Kyra is a realtor and is wholly dedicated to her work. She loves the high she gets when she sells a house, and is acutely aware of any potential threats to the value of her properties—including those she perceives to be posed by the immigrants, whom she sees as a blight on her community, decreasing property values. Of the novel's four main characters, Kyra has the fewest sections dedicated to her perspective; as such, she is a less fully developed character than her counterparts. She is described as a driven, highly motivated person who is almost exclusively career-oriented. Her over-the-top concern of her own dogs, Sacheverell and Osbert, contrasts rather ridiculously with the callousness she shows toward other humans (specifically, the immigrants who come to the labor exchange in her suburb to look for work). Both of her dogs are eaten by coyotes, prompting her to obsess over the height of a fence around her yard that is meant to keep coyotes out; this fence thus becomes a direct parallel for the wall around Arroyo Blanco Estates, which is meant to protect the community from the vague threat they feel is posed by immigrants such as Cándido and América. Kyra exhibits many

of the same tendencies toward racism as her husband and the other members of her community.

Cándido Rincón – Cándido is América's husband and the father of Socorro. At 33 years of age, Cándido is extremely superstitious and considers himself a cursed man. After his failed first marriage to América's older sister, Resurrección, Cándido decides to permanently immigrate to the United States, where he has been seasonally working for almost a decade. Cándido is deeply frustrated and often expresses this frustration in anger and occasionally violence, especially toward América. Cándido believes himself to be a hapless person, and it often seems as if he is. His hopes of obtaining work are dashed when Delaney hits him with his car on **the canyon road** only a few weeks after Cándido and América have arrived in the States, rendering Cándido unable to work for much of the novel. Even when he experiences a moment of pure luck and is gifted with a Thanksgiving turkey, Cándido manages to accidentally set the canyon where he lives on fire. His frustration with the way he and his wife are treated in this country fills him with anger and strains their relationship, at one point leading him to physically abuse her. Despite his unluckiness and his temper, Cándido remains determined and hardworking throughout the novel, and in its final moments he demonstrates his compassionate nature when he rescues a drowning Delaney from the flooded river.

América Rincón – América is Cándido's wife, the mother of Socorro, and the sister of Resurrección. She is seventeen years old and four months pregnant at the start of the novel. América is incredibly resilient. Though she is close to her mother and extremely connected to her life and culture in Tepoztlán, América is emotionally devoted to Cándido and supports him in his effort to make a better life for his family and immigrates with him to the States despite being pregnant. América even tolerates Cándido's physical abuse of her because she understands that it comes from a place of "frustration" and "fear." Nevertheless, América does express frustration at Cándido's frequent ineptitude, and she stands up to him when he tries to forbid her from seeking work to support them when they need it most. After José Navidad and his friend rape her, América becomes depressed and fearful of leaving their secluded camp. Though she is fiercely strong, she is also an emotionally guarded character, rarely expressing her true feelings to her husband or others. Still, her rich inner life, her hopefulness, and her imperviousness to the hatred directed at her by others make her the emotional heart of the novel.

Socorro – Cándido and América's infant daughter, born in a toolshed just outside **the wall** surrounding the Arroyo Blanco Estates. Socorro's name means "help" in Spanish. Socorro is born blind, which América believes is the result of José Navidad having raped her. Socorro is lost and presumably drowned in a flood at the very end of the novel.

José Navidad – The villain of the novel, José and his unnamed companion (sometimes referred to as the Indian) rape América when they encounter her on a trail leading into the canyon. José's name is mentioned only once in the novel; other characters describe him as having light eyes and wearing a backwards baseball cap. José is perceived as sinister by nearly all the characters who encounter him, regardless of their race. White characters like Delaney refer to José with racial slurs such as "wetback," while Mexican characters like Cándido and América refer to him as "half-a-gringo," due to his light skin. José belongs neither to the white American community nor the Mexican community, and as such is felt to be all the more menacing by the book's characters. Thus, he is a highly symbolic character, representing the abstract notion of "the other" as something to be feared.

Resurrección – Cándido's first wife and América's older sister. After seven years of Cándido spending most of each year working in the United States, Resurrección leaves him for an alcoholic man named Teófilo Aguadulce. By the time Cándido returns home and learns that his wife has left him, Resurrección is living in another town and is six months pregnant with Teófilo's child. Ressurreccion's pregnancy is particularly galling to Cándido since she never became pregnant during the seven years he was married to her.

Jack Jardine – President of the Arroyo Blanco Estates Property Owners' Association, and Delaney and Kyra's neighbor. A lawyer by trade, Jack Jardine is also openly racist; it is he who uses the phrase "the tortilla curtain." Initially, Delaney finds Jack off-putting, not only due to his bigoted views, but also because of his manipulative, slightly sleazy personality. However, by the end of the novel, as Delaney descends further into his own state of bigoted paranoia, he comes to think of Jack Jardine as a friend.

Jack Jr. – Jack Jardine's eighteen-year-old son. Jack Jr. and his unnamed friend destroy América and Cándido's camp in the canyon and graffiti it with the words "Beaners Die." Jack Jr. also tells racist jokes, and is responsible for spray painting **the wall** surrounding Arroyo Blanco Estates, presumably to stoke tension between the community and the immigrants he knows will take the blame. Only Delaney knows that Jack Jr. is the one to have spray painted the wall, and he deliberately hides the evidence of this from his neighbors. Throughout the novel, América and Cándido operate under the belief that Jack Jr. is actually Delaney's son.

Jack Cherrystone – Secretary of Arroyo Blanco Estates Property Owners' Association. Jack Cherrystone is known for his loud voice, which he uses in his work narrating Hollywood movie trailers. Though not as blatantly bigoted as Jack Jardine, Jack Cherrystone actively supports building **the wall** around Arroyo Blanco and he condones Delaney's stakeout project when the wall is vandalized, allowing Delaney to use his darkroom to develop the photos.

Jim Shirley – A resident of Arroyo Blanco Estates and occasional employer of América Rincón. On the first day that América works for him, Shirley predatorily places his hand in her lap while driving her home; the narration is ambiguous about whether he further sexually harasses her. Shirley's harassment of América is heavily ironized later in the novel, when Shirley argues that one of the main reasons **the wall** should be erected around Arroyo Blanco Estates is to protect (white) women from sexual assault.

Dominick Flood – A client of Jack Jardine's, Flood is on house arrest in his home in Arroyo Blanco Estates due to his involvement in "unwise investments." Flood is instrumental in having the labor exchange shut down, and in advocating for the building of **the wall**. Towards the end of the novel, Flood woos Kit in order to plant his ankle bracelet on her so he can escape California. After his disappearance, his whereabouts remain unknown for the rest of the novel.

Kenny Grissom – A car salesman, visited twice by Delaney: first, after he hits Cándido with his car, and second, after his car is stolen. Kenny is goofy and focused almost exclusively on making sales. Like almost every other white character in the novel, Kenny is casually racist. When Delaney's car is stolen, Kenny tells him: "Don't get me wrong—I'm not blaming it all on the Mexicans. […] It's everybody—Salvadorians, I-ranians, Russians, Vietnamese."

Todd Sweet – A resident of Arroyo Blanco Estates. Delaney first sees Sweet at the community meeting to discuss the gate. Sweet is one of the only people who opposes the gate, saying: "It goes against my grain to live in a community that closes its streets to somebody just because they don't have as fancy a car as mine or as big a house." Later in the novel, Sweet campaigns against the building of **the wall**, and unsuccessfully tries to convince Delaney to work with him.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Jordan – Kyra's son and Delaney's stepson. At six years old, Jordan is fond of watching TV and playing video games.

Candelario Pérez – Headman of the labor exchange. Candelario is kind to América and Cándido, and advocates for them to secure work.

Mary – An alcoholic white woman whom América encounters at the labor exchange and with whom she works for one day at Jim Shirley's house.

Señor Willis – An old white man who employs Cándido in construction. Señor Willis speaks some Spanish and is most likely an alcoholic.

Al Lopez – A handyman who has worked for Kyra in the past, and who redoes the Mossbachers' fence after Sacheverell is killed. Lopez hires Cándido to work on the fence replacement.

Teófilo Aguadulce – The man for whom Cándido's first wife, Resurrección, leaves him. Cándido challenges Teófilo to a public fight, and Teófilo beats him easily.

Louise – Delaney's first wife. Little detail is given about Louise, but Delaney does reveal that he and Louise made the shared decision to terminate a pregnancy at some point in their marriage.

Hilario – A friend of Cándido's. Hilario and Cándido used to work together in Iowa but were separated in Oregon en route to California. Cándido visits Los Angeles for the first time thanks to Hilario, whose cousin gives Cándido a job gardening.

Lupe – Cándido's aunt. Lupe helped raise Cándido after his mother died and his father remarried.

Kit – Kyra's mother, who lives in San Francisco. She comes to visit, and is seduced by Dominick Flood, who takes advantage of Kit by planting his house arrest ankle bracelet on her so that he can escape California.

Mike Bender – Kyra's business partner.

Erna Jardine – Wife of Jack Jardine.

Selda Cherrystone – Wife of Jack Cherrystone.

Sacheverell and Osbert – The Mossbacher family dogs, originally belonging to Kyra. Both are Dandie Dinmont terriers, and both are killed by **coyotes** despite the fence that Kyra installs, and later heightens, to keep coyotes out of their yard.

Dame Edith – The Mossbachers' Siamese cat, originally belonging to Kyra. Dame Edith visits América and Cándido in the toolshed when América is in labor, and again in the hut that Cándido builds in the hills. América is particularly fond of Dame Edith, referring to her as a "saint" and her "midwife."

THEMES

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ANGER, HATRED, AND BIGOTRY

At the heart of *The Tortilla Curtain* is the psychological unraveling of Delaney Mossbacher. At the beginning of the novel, Delaney is a self-professed liberal who considers gated communities "intimidating and exclusionary, antidemocratic even" and challenges his neighbors on their racist views. However, this disguises a more deeply engrained bigotry which gradually emerges. In the opening pages of the novel, for instance, Delaney runs a man over with his car and then sends him off with nothing more than a twenty-dollar bill; the man, Cándido, is after all only "*Mex*ican." At first, Delaney makes good-faith

efforts to confront and correct his own biases, but by the end of the novel he has become paranoid and delusional, committed to his "crusade" against Cándido Rincón and the threat that he and his fellow "wetbacks" pose to Delaney's way of life. In chronicling the evolution of Delaney's character, Boyle builds the argument that the people who exhibit the most virulent forms of hatred tend to be society's most privileged and powerful people; meanwhile, the most disadvantaged members of society (such as Cándido), who are far more justified in their anger, frustration, and resentment, find ways of showing compassion and humanity toward others. While Delaney is the character through which Boyle explores this idea most fully, the three other protagonists of the novel also demonstrate the way in which anger becomes transmuted and externalized in the form of hatred and bigotry.

Delaney's anger is rooted in his perception of Mexican immigrants as disruptive to his way of life. As a nature writer, Delaney feels it is essential to be close to nature, but when his neighbors in the Arroyo Blanco Estates vote to erect first a gate and then **a wall** around the community, Delaney feels that his freedom of access to nature has been infringed upon. Gradually, he begins to feel that all the negative changes in his life—including the theft of his car and the emotional distance of his wife—have been precipitated by Mexicans. By comparison, the reasons that Cándido feels angry are much more basic: he suffers devastating injuries when hit by Delaney's car, making him unable to find work; his pregnant wife is raped when he is away from camp; he is robbed twice; his camp is destroyed in a fire; and, finally, his infant daughter is drowned. Boyle shows that, indeed, all of these tragedies, which are far beyond Cándido's control, make him angry and even hateful. Yet Cándido's anger is more contained: it tends to focus mostly on *el pelirrojo* (the redhead)—that is, Delaney—who injured him in the first place. Cándido does express resentment toward *gabachos* (white Americans), but given the way he has been treated while in the United States, even this seems more justified than Delaney's anger toward immigrants. The baselessness of white Americans' anger toward immigrants is highlighted when Cándido merely bumps into a white man in the grocery store parking lot and the man reacts by shouting: "You wetback motherfucker, watch where the fuck you're going or I swear I'll kick your sorry ass from here to Algodones and back."

Although Boyle illuminates the ways in which people in all walks of life misunderstand and resent people who are different, he most closely examines the bigotry of white people, arguing that the anger which animates this hatred is misdirected. Countless times throughout the novel Delaney pauses to recognize that his rage is ridiculous, reminding himself that he "[leads] the least stressful existence of anybody on earth besides maybe a handful of Tibetan lamas," and that "nothing" in his life has ever "gone wrong." Still, Delaney's hatred is based in resentment—resentment of the fact that, despite his powerful, privileged life, he is still vulnerable to disappointments and the occasional misfortune. This feeling of resentment demands a target or scapegoat. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the scene near the end of the novel when Delaney attempts to have José Navidad wrongfully arrested for starting the canyon fire. Boyle writes that Delaney "was anxious and irate and ready to lay the blame where it belonged." Thus, Boyle illustrates how white hatred is a result of anger being misdirected, foisted onto a group of people who are only looking to provide for themselves.

It is important to note that Boyle builds into his argument about hatred an awareness of gender. Delaney and Cándido are much more apt to externalize their hatred as violence than are Kyra and América, the novel's female protagonists. While Delaney physically attacks people and Cándido uses his frustrations as reason to beat his wife, the most Kyra does is to channel her anger over the death of her dogs into a campaign to build a wall in Arroyo Blanco (ostensibly to keep out **coyotes**). América's anger is even less externalized; in fact, she is constantly holding in her anger and her grief throughout the novel. Though Boyle never makes the link between maleness and anger explicit, the stark difference between how men and women characters express their anger supports the argument that the most privileged people in society tend to express their anger far more violently than less privileged people. In this way, Boyle is suggesting that being able to indulge in hatred is a kind of luxury—a paradox that further illustrates how misguided Delaney's anger really is.

Boyle's exploration of the evolution of hatred is complex and full of subtlety, but he is less subtle about the negative effects of hatred. Throughout the novel he shows that to hate someone is to reduce them to subhuman status; in one of the novel's most striking moments, Delaney refers to Cándido as his "quarry," or prey. By the same token, Boyle shows that allowing oneself to be consumed by hatred has an equally dehumanizing effect. By the end of the novel, as he prowls Topanga Canyon in pursuit of Cándido, Delaney is so full of hate he hardly seems human. Catching a whiff of the smell of "woodsmoke" in the air, he "touched the gun [...] where it lay tight against his groin, and let his nose guide him." Delaney has become practically an unthinking character, guided by the physical, animalistic sensations in his groin and nose. In this way, Boyle builds a powerful argument about how the most powerful people in society express the most violent forms of anger and hatred—with the ironic result that they become far lesser than the people toward whom they direct their hate.

THE NATURAL WORLD

As in *The Grapes of Wrath*, which is quoted as the epigraph of this novel, the natural landscape in *The Tortilla Curtain* acts as a character in its own right.

The four main characters all have their own unique relationships to the natural world. Delaney views nature as a source of inspiration and prides himself on being attuned to his surroundings. Kyra views the landscape from the perspective of a realtor, thinking in terms of how she can capitalize on its beauty. Cándido conceives of the physical attributes of Topanga Canyon as raw materials for building a better life. Finally, América feels both freed and imprisoned by the natural world that surrounds her. By so vividly evoking the setting of the novel and by documenting the vastly different relationships that each character has to this setting, Boyle shows how humans tend to imbue the natural world with their own emotions. However, the devastating natural disasters that occur at the end of the novel expose the fallacy of viewing nature as an emotional entity, either good or bad. Boyle depicts the natural world as ultimately impassive and oblivious to human desire or suffering.

Both Delaney and Kyra view the natural world in terms of their own personal (often economic) success. Delaney tends to sit inside his home while writing his nature column, using preserved flora and fauna, as well as literature, to conduct his research. While he does show evidence of enjoying the natural world when he is actually in it, such as when he admires the night sky, Delaney often uses his career as a nature writer and his relationship to nature merely as a way to make himself feel superior to others. In a similar way, Kyra is unable to enjoy a beautiful drive on her way to pick up her son without imagining her surroundings as "the anchor for a very select private community of high-end houses." Cándido's relationship to nature is slightly more sincere, though still ultimately self-centered. He views the natural world according to its ability to meet his needs. This can be seen when Cándido establishes a new campsite after his original one is destroyed by Jack Jr.; Cándido looks out on the "private beach" and imagines it not as "stone and leaf and grain of sand, but a sitting room with a big shaded lamp […], with sofas and chairs and a polished wooden floor that gleamed beneath a burden of wax." All three of these characters demonstrate the way people perceive nature through the lens of their own personal needs and desires.

However it is América, who lives face to face with the wilderness in Topanga Canyon for much of the novel, who clearly illustrates Boyle's argument that nature is a force that ultimately exists apart from and beyond human understanding. América's relationship to nature reveals how people project their own emotions onto the natural world, despite nature being indifferent to human experience. Before José Navidad rapes her, América thinks of her canyon campsite as a place of total safety; she loves "the way the night seemed to settle in by degrees down there, wrapping itself round her till she felt safe, hidden, protected from the prying eyes and sharp edges of the world." However, when Cándido forces América to stay in the canyon after she is raped, thinking she will be safer there, América "jump[s] at every sound" and imagines her surroundings as "a prison of trees." Nothing in the physical canyon itself has changed—yet América's perception of her surroundings has radically shifted due to the trauma she has endured there. One night, when she spots a mother **coyote**, América looks at the animal so long that she begins to "imagine herself inside those eyes looking out" and thinks that the coyote must "know that men were her enemies—men in uniform, men with their hats reversed, men with fat bloated hands and fat bloated necks, men with traps and guns and poisoned bait." These moments show how América's reactions to nature say more about her own inner life than they do about the natural world itself. Later, as she is gradually beginning to recover from her deep depression, América hears a female bird singing in the canyon for her mate and feels the "sun touch her face like the hand of God" and she begins to feel better. Given the fact that América has told no one about being raped, and that she longs increasingly for her mother as her pregnancy advances, it is likely that América feels genuinely connected to nature in these two moments because she is interacting with other female beings, whom she imagines are able to understand her suffering. Boyle thus furthers his argument that people use the natural world as a mirror for their minds and emotions.

Boyle's argument culminates in the natural disasters that close the novel. These disasters illustrate the fact that, while nature is not impervious to the effects of human activity, it is ultimately heedless of human emotion. Cándido seems finally to recognize this in the moment that his hillside hut is washed away in the flood: "The mountain was going somewhere, and he was going with it." While the characters of *The Tortilla Curtain*, like those in *The Grapes of Wrath*, have deeply emotional relationships with nature, Boyle reminds readers that these relationships are one-sided. Characters may "use" the natural world—to benefit themselves economically or to understand themselves emotionally—but all of these uses are mere projections. The natural world remains impassive in the face of both human joy and suffering.

FATE, LUCK, AND EGOTISM

Cándido and Delaney are both very concerned with their place in the cosmos. They fixate on what the world "owes" them and they conceive of their lives in sometimes mythical terms. Both men, and Cándido in particular, express the idea that there is a mysterious logic governing the way the world operates, even as they find themselves cursing this logic—or, as Cándido calls it, his *pinche* (damned or rotten) luck. América and Kyra, by contrast, do not evince this belief; they seem more cool-headed and clear-eyed about their lots in life. The ironic tone with which Boyle writes about his characters' belief in fate suggests that this belief is not only delusional—it is also an excuse people use to justify

their otherwise unjustifiable actions or inaction.

Boyle uses irony to highlight his characters' egotism and show that it is misguided to believe that one has any "special" relationship to the world. For example, as a nature writer, Delaney is convinced that "he [stands] apart from his fellow men and women, that he [sees] more deeply and [feels] more passionately—particularly about nature." Boyle's tone in this description is satirical, and the reality of Delaney's life bears out the notion that he is kidding himself in believing he is a "pilgrim" who is somehow superior to his fellow humans. In fact, although Delaney does publish the articles he writes, it is not clear that he has a wide audience; the only evidence of readership the novel suggests is Delaney's neighbors, who take offense at an article he writes about **coyotes**. Boyle even obliquely hints that Delaney might not actually have done all the hiking and adventuring that his written column suggests he has done; while this is never confirmed or refuted in the novel, Delaney's narration of his solo camping experiences in the foothills makes it seem like these trips could be entirely imagined.

Cándido's belief in his "special" place in the universe is similarly grandiose. Though Cándido has suffered far more in his life than Delaney has, Boyle nevertheless uses melodramatic language to show that Cándido is mentally exaggerating his suffering. Cándido insists that he has been "cursed ever since his mother died and his father brought that bitch Consuelo into the house and she gave the old man nine children he loved more than he'd ever loved his own firstborn son." Here Boyle's language shows that Cándido is not cursed so much as saddened by his father's abandonment. Thinking that he has been cursed is merely a way for Cándido to avoiding confronting his feelings of abandonment and worthlessness. Cándido uses his belief in his *pinche* luck as an excuse to indulge in a defeatist attitude. The shame he feels contributes to his decision to beat América. Delaney, too, lets his belief in his "pilgrim" identity fuel the hatred by which he is consumed by the end of the novel; in a fit of frustration over Arroyo Blanco's new **wall**, Delaney huffs at Kyra, "I need to be able to just walk out the door and be in the hills, in the wild—I don't know if you noticed, but it's what I do, it's how I make my living." Delaney ultimately blames the wall on Mexican immigrants like Cándido, and in turn comes to see Mexicans themselves as a challenge to his ability to manifest his "fate" as the "Pilgrim of Topanga Creek." Thus, Boyle shows that the belief in fate often keeps people from coming to terms with their feelings or taking responsibility for their behavior.

It is significant that the female characters of the novel, América and Kyra, do not express any opinion of their luck or their fated roles in the universe. The belief in fate, which Boyle has clearly denoted as delusional, is ascribed solely to the male characters. Boyle thus seems to be implying that men are particularly susceptible to egotism, and by extension the delusional belief in fate. In doing so, he suggests that women are more rational and less self-centered in their understanding of the greater meaning of their own lives. On a broader scale, by casting aspersions on his characters' belief in fate, Boyle is reinforcing the idea, which he presents elsewhere in the novel through the lens of other themes, that there is no inherent meaning or governing principle in the events that constitute a human being's life.

BELONGING AND THE AMERICAN DREAM

Through his exploration of the four protagonists' desires, Boyle presents a unique picture of the frequently invoked "American Dream." In Boyle's view, there is a depth to this dream that tends to go unacknowledged. On the surface, the "American Dream" is one of economic prosperity, social mobility, and overall self-sufficiency—goals all firmly rooted in an ideology of individualism. Both of the novel's main couples desire these aspects of the Dream for themselves. But Boyle shows that underneath these more practical desires, there exists a deeper desire to feel that one has found one's place within a community. In this way, *The Tortilla Curtain* shows that an oft-overlooked aspect of the American Dream is the dream of belonging.

As Cándido reflects on his home country of Mexico, he thinks that everybody there wanted, as he did, "a house, a yard, maybe a TV and a car too—nothing fancy, no palaces like the *gringos* built—just four walls and a roof. Was that so much to ask?" Cándido and América both hope for economic stability in the States, but América also articulates a more complex, emotional aspect of this dream. While in the neighborhood of Canoga Park, waiting alone for her husband, América reflects on how badly she "wanted to belong in one of those houses." She thinks of how the people who live in those houses "were home, in their own private space, safe from the world." On the one hand, the desire América expresses here is consistent with the more individualistic and materialistic aspects of the American Dream: she wants privacy, ownership, autonomy. But on a more nuanced level, América's desire to feel that she *belongs* speaks to her yearning to feel at home in the United States itself, to not feel like an outsider.

Boyle shows that even Delaney and Kyra, who have ostensibly achieved the Dream, given their affluent lifestyles, experience this deeper longer for a sense of belonging. At a neighborhood meeting that Delaney attends in order to speak about the death of his wife's dog Sacheverell, he realizes that he doesn't recognize many of the people in attendance. He experiences a "faint uneasy stirring of guilt" and tells himself "he should be more rigorous about attending these meetings […] he really should." The only character Delaney claims as a friend is Jack Jardine, whom he initially dislikes due to his openly racist views. These details speak to Delaney's loneliness and his unspoken

yearning to feel that he is actually part of a community, but they further suggest that perhaps his desire to feel a greater sense of belonging fuels the bigotry he increasingly exhibits over the course of the novel. Meanwhile, Kyra's attachment to the Da Ros house (a property she is attempting to sell) represents a similar need for belonging; Kyra feels more at home at the Da Ros house, it would seem, than anywhere in Arroyo Blanco, as evidenced by the fact that she finds herself daydreaming about never leaving the Da Ros house, "not ever again." Thus, even the characters who have already attained the superficial aspects of the American Dream hunger for this deeper aspect of it.

Boyle's depiction of the American Dream exposes the deeper drives and desires that animate what might otherwise seem to be a purely material striving. He suggests that beyond desiring "four walls and a roof" and economic self-sufficiency, Americans of all races and economic classes wish to feel that they belong in their communities, in their families, and in their country.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

While Delaney and Kyra fret over what they perceive to be the threat immigrants pose to their community (e.g., theft and dropping real estate prices) and Cándido is constantly aware of the possibility of deportation, the only threat that comes to fruition in the novel is that of violence against women. A group of men attempts to gang rape América near the border, Jim Shirley molests her in his car, José Navidad succeeds in raping her in the canyon, and her husband, Cándido, beats her. Even white women, whose race and socioeconomic status offer them some protection relative to América, worry about men committing violence against them. Of the many terrible events the characters fear, the only one to actually occur is men physically and sexually assaulting women. By highlighting violence against women in this way, Boyle is inherently making the argument that this type of violence is more than a threat to be feared—it is a daily reality that demands to be addressed.

Cándido worries constantly about América being harassed by men, both Americans and fellow Mexicans. Yet while Cándido is genuinely concerned for América herself, his worry is also strongly motivated by his understanding of his role as América's husband. Cándido believes he should be able to protect his wife from other men, and if he cannot, he will have brought shame upon himself (or, rather, América will have brought shame upon him). This shows that Cándido doesn't fully acknowledge the painful reality of violence committed against women, as he instead measures it in terms of its effect on him. Delaney matches Cándido in this lack of awareness. After the Da Ros home is graffitied (presumably by José Navidad and his unnamed friend) with the phrase "pinche puta" (fucking whore), Kyra asks Delaney to accompany her on her nightly visits to the property. Delaney resents this duty and questions how Kyra "could expect him to put a decent dinner together if he was up here every night looking for phantoms." Kyra is afraid of encountering José alone, having been intimidated and outnumbered when she first discovered him and his friend on the property. Despite the validity of her feelings, Delaney does not seem to understand or validate Kyra's fears; instead he acts as if she is being unreasonable and complains about chasing "phantoms."

Yet as Boyle shows, violence committed against women by men is far from intangible. América is a survivor of multiple attacks, and when José rapes her she not only suffers from PTSD and depression, but also contracts an STD, which causes her to give birth to a blind daughter. Boyle demonstrates that the only way in which violence against women is a "phantom" is that it continues to haunt women long after the violent act itself has been committed. Boyle is sensitive, too, to the intersection of gender and race in regard to this question. Delaney recalls a (presumably white) woman he once met in a birding class, who was attacked while solo hiking, by a group of men—"Mexicans," she thinks, "or maybe Armenians," a comment that not only reveals her ignorance but suggests that her fear of the men was heightened because they were not white. One of the men grabbed the woman as she tried to flee, and it is unclear whether the men committed further violence. From that point on, the woman stopped going on hikes alone. Beyond demonstrating that white women are justified in fearing men (even if their fear is colored by racial bias), this detail also shows that Boyle is attuned to the fact that white, affluent women are often able to insulate themselves from dangerous situations that nonwhite, economically disadvantaged women like América are not able to avoid. América does not have a home in the States and she does not always have Cándido by her side—and even when she does he is not always able to protect her, as on the night when she was almost gang raped when crossing the border. In this way Boyle is not only highlighting the urgency of the problem of violence against women, he is also emphasizing that violence is an even more pressing threat to women of color than to white women.

By singling out violence against women as the one human disaster that actually comes to fruition in the novel, Boyle shows that women have far more cause to fear men than men like Delaney and Cándido have to fear one another.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE WALL

The wall around Arroyo Blanco Estates is erected nearly two thirds of the way into the novel, and is a powerful symbol of the racist fear and resentment that

permeates the entire book. The wall is a particularly important symbol in regard to Delaney's character development. Delaney is initially opposed to the wall (and its precursor, the gate), though he is unwilling to publicly voice his opposition; by the end of the novel, he is spending countless hours in the rain and dark in order to discover who has defaced the wall. In this way, Delaney's shifting relationship to the physical wall serves as a metaphor for his evolving relationship to the discrimination and paranoia the wall represents—which, by the end of the novel, he has come wholly to embrace. The wall is also important in the way that it fails to evoke a deeper sense of community among the residents of Arroyo Blanco. In theory, the wall was meant to make these residents feel both physically safer and more emotionally invested in the safety and wellness of their neighbors. Yet, the wall succeeds only in making people like Delaney even more paranoid than before, showing that defining and shunning a group of "outsiders" does relatively little to make the "insiders" feel any more content with their lives. In a rare moment of insight, Delaney also realizes "what [the wall] keeps in" when he overhears a local boy making foul-mouthed, racist jokes; in this moment, he recognizes the wall as "poisonous." However, what Delaney fails to realize is that the wall itself is not a poison; rather, it is merely an externalization of the poisonous hatred that has been simmering amongst the residents of Arroyo Blanco all along.

THE CANYON ROAD

Many key plot points in the novel occur on or near the canyon road, most notably the car accident in which Delaney hits Cándido. However, the road is most important for the emotional impact it has on the characters. The road represents a place of hyper-visibility and extreme alienation. When Delaney hits Cándido with his car, he finds himself wondering: "How could no one have seen what happened? How could no one have stopped to help, bear witness, gape, jeer—anything? A hundred people must have passed by in the last five minutes and yet he might as well have been lost in the Great Painted Desert for all the good it did him." In this way, the canyon road is a paradox: despite the fact that one is hyper-visible on the road, one can also be invisible. Yet, this invisibility is not afforded to Cándido or América; it seems to be a privilege of being part of the racial and economic majority. Every time Cándido or América is on the road, they feel particularly vulnerable. América feels as though she is "alone on a terrible howling stage, caught there for everyone to see." This visibility is a threat to people like América and Cándido because if "any one of [the cars]" on the road can stop, anyone could potentially report América and Cándido and have them deported. Furthermore, the canyon road seems to be always roaring with traffic, and thus also represents physical danger, particularly to Cándido and América, whose only means of transportation is walking. Regardless of their race, all the characters in the novel find the canyon road overwhelming and isolating, despite (or perhaps because of) how busy it is. In this way, the road also comes to symbolize the frenetic pace of American culture, as well as people's insensitivity to the plights of their fellow humans. At the same time, the characters' shared dislike of the road suggests that the desire to belong and to be seen for the "right" reasons is a universal one.

COYOTES

Characters like Delaney and Kyra repeatedly cite the local coyote population around Arroyo Blanco as reason the community should be gated or walled. By the time the Mossbachers' second dog, Osbert, is killed by a coyote, it is clear that these animals have, consciously or unconsciously in the minds of the white characters, come to represent the ostensible threat posed by undocumented Mexican immigrants to the community. In his nature column, "Pilgrim at Topanga Creek," Delaney describes the coyotes as "cunning, versatile, hungry and unstoppable" and frets about the potential for the coyotes to "invade" human territory; this language mirrors the way Delaney thinks about the Mexican immigrant population that seems to be growing in the areas surrounding Arroyo Blanco. Furthermore, despite the fact that stories of humans being attacked by coyotes appear to be merely apocryphal (no one in Arroyo Blanco has actually been hurt, and the Mossbachers are the only people whose pets have been killed), Delaney devotes a significant portion of his column to discussing the threat that coyotes pose to people. This further suggests that Delaney is mentally conflating coyotes and Mexican immigrants, using the former as a veiled way to discuss and malign the latter. To humans themselves, however, coyotes pose a minimal threat. Despite the fact that Cándido and América are living in the canyon, only one coyote approaches their camp; seen only by América, this coyote is a mother and América feels intense empathy for her. Like the coyote, América feels that men are her enemy—men like Jim Shirley and José Navidad, who have both recently molested or raped her. América's encounter with the mother coyote suggests that, if coyotes and Mexican immigrants are at all alike, it is not for the reasons Delaney thinks; rather, it is because, in the world of white, suburban America, both coyotes and undocumented Mexican immigrants are outsiders, considered by those more privileged to be sub-human.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin Books edition of *The Tortilla Curtain* published in 1996.

Part 1, Chapter 3 Quotes

He thought of the development he'd grown up in, the fenceless expanse of lawns, the shared space, the deep lush marshy woods where he'd first discovered ferns, frogs, garter snakes, the whole shining envelope of creation. There was nothing like that anymore. Now there were fences. Now there were gates.

Related Characters: Delaney Mossbacher

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 41-2

Explanation and Analysis

Delaney has this thought at the community meeting he attends, where his neighbors are discussing the possibility of gating Arroyo Blanco Estates. This quotation reveals the logic that Delaney will increasingly invoke as the novel develops. Because he is a nature writer, Delaney does not want to be shut off from nature. Fixtures like a gate or a wall will shut him off. His neighbors insist gates and walls are necessary because immigrants pose a threat to the community. Delaney thus begins to blame immigrants—not only for "disrupting" his livelihood, but also for any other frustrations that he experiences with his life.

This passage is also important because it shows how nostalgia becomes linked with the American dream. Delaney longs to return to "the way things were," and he begins to blame Mexican immigrants, who are new to the country, for not being able to do this. Furthermore, as Delaney himself will fleetingly mentally acknowledge in his supermarket argument with Jack Jardine, "the whole shining envelope of creation" that Americans think of as theirs originally belonged to indigenous peoples of colors, rather than to white Americans.

Part 1, Chapter 4 Quotes

He sat up and railed [...] he told her his fears, outlined the wickedness of the *gabacho* world and the perfidy of his fellow *braceros* at the labor exchange, tried to work the kind of apprehension into her heart that would make her stay here with him, where it was safe, but she wouldn't listen. Or rather, she listened—"I'm afraid," she told him, "afraid of this place and the people in it, afraid to walk out on the street"—but it had no effect.

Related Characters: América Rincón, Cándido Rincón

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 49

Explanation and Analysis

This occurs on the second morning that América goes to the labor exchange to seek work. Cándido tries to dissuade her verbally, and then later threatens her with his fist, but América goes anyway. The context of this quotation makes it ironic. Cándido's primary reason for not wanting América to leave is that she might be subjected to sexual violence—so he threatens her with physical violence in order to convince her not to leave. Thus, Boyle suggests that the threat of violence is truly inescapable for women, particularly women of color. Finally, this quotation shows what a strong character América is: she is willing to put herself in a situation that deeply frightens her—and with good reason—in order to seek a better life for herself and her future child.

Part 1, Chapter 6 Quotes

His skin was light, so light he could almost have passed for one of them, but it was his eyes that gave him away, hard burnished unblinking eyes the color of calf's liver. He'd been damaged somehow, she could see that, damaged in the way of a man who has to scrape and grovel and kiss the hind end of some irrecusable yankee boss, and his eyes showed it, jabbing out at the world like two weapons. He was Mexican, all right.

Related Characters: José Navidad, América Rincón

Related Themes:

Page Number: 81

Explanation and Analysis

This is Navidad's first appearance in the novel, when América meets him at the labor exchange. It is important to note that Navidad is accepted neither by Mexicans nor white Americans; this liminal quality makes him seem more ominous, as he does not seem to belong to either world. In this way, his character represents the ultimate "other," belonging to no category and therefore feared equally by all.

This quotation also demonstrates how compassionate América is as a character. Even though she is immediately

put off by Navidad's demeanor, she demonstrates empathy by imagining all the Navidad has been through that has made him the way he is. No other character in the novel exhibits such unbounded empathy, making América arguably the heroine of the novel.

Part 1, Chapter 7 Quotes

"You heard Jack Cherrystone speak to the issue, and nobody's credentials can touch Jack's as far as being liberal is concerned, but this society isn't what it was—and it won't be until we get control of the borders."

The borders. Delaney took an involuntary step backwards, all those dark disordered faces rising up from the streetcorners and freeway onramps to mob his brain, all of them crying out their human wants through mouths full of rotten teeth. "That's racist, Jack, and you know it."

Related Characters: Jack Jardine, Delaney Mossbacher (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 101

Explanation and Analysis

This is the conversation held between Jack Jardine (the first speaker) and Delaney in the grocery store. Jardine is trying to convince Delaney that his neighbors' recent vote in favor of a gate for the community was the right decision. This is one of the few moments in the novel where Delaney actually voices a critique of something on the grounds that it is racist. The irony is that he does this while feeling his own mind fill with deeply anti-immigrant images. He thinks of "dark disordered faces" as a "mob" and seems to deride rather than respect their "human wants." This image depicts immigrants almost like insects, swarming and dark. Delaney is able to check this "involuntary" image for a moment and challenge Jack's argument, but the fact that this is the first picture Delaney conjures when he thinks about "the borders" says less about Jardine's considerable powers of persuasion than it does about the fact that Delaney himself harbors inherently racist views of immigrants. As this scene unfolds, Delaney begins visibly to give into these views and he ends the conversation by conceding to Jardine, saying, "I don't like the gate—I'll never like it—but I accept it." Of course, by the end of the novel Delaney will embrace not only the gate but the wall, making it his personal vendetta to find and punish the person who graffitied it. In essence, this grocery store scene is a miniature version of the journey Delaney will have completed by the end of the novel, in which he starts off trying to check his prejudice and finishes by exhibiting even more openly violent hatred than even Jack Jardine himself.

He felt anger and shame at the same time—the man was a bum, that was all, hassling somebody else now, and yet the look of him, the wordless plea in his eyes and the arm in a sling and the side of his face layered with scab like old paint brought Delaney's guilt back to the surface, a wound that refused to heal. His impulse was to intercede, to put an end to it, and yet in some perverse way he wanted to see this dark alien little man crushed and obliterated, out of his life forever.

Related Characters: Cándido Rincón, Delaney Mossbacher

Related Themes:

Page Number: 105

Explanation and Analysis

Delaney has just seen Cándido in the grocery store parking lot when this quotation occurs. The combination of anger and shame that Delaney experiences is important to note because, as the novel moves forward, the latter begins to fuel the former. Delaney knows that his anger is misdirected and out of proportion, but this will ultimately make him commit even more whole-heartedly to his anger. It is again significant that Delaney thinks of Cándido is such aggressive terms as "dark," "alien," and "little." All of these adjectives are pejorative, and they combine with Delaney's desire to see Cándido "crushed" to suggest that Delaney views Cándido as being akin to some kind of insect. Delaney will begin to think even more explicitly of Cándido as animal rather than human as the novel progresses.

A final significant aspect of this quotation is that Delaney thinks of Cándido's presence in his life as "a wound that refuse[s] to heal." Boyle deliberately layers this image with irony by placing it right after the description of Cándido's injured arm and scabbed face, suggesting that Cándido is the character with the right to feel wounded, thanks to Delaney running him over with his car. Yet Delaney's ego makes him convinced that he is the victim, and that his supposed psychological "wound" is more valid than Cándido's actual injuries. Delaney's conviction that he is the victim is made even more ludicrous by the fact that the "wound" he claims to possess is undefined; Delaney doesn't even have car damage to blame Cándido for, since Delaney's car was unharmed in the accident. If anything, Delaney is wounding himself by continuing to indulge in his toxic

mixture of anger, shame, and hatred.

Part 1, Chapter 8 Quotes

The water was black, the trees were black, the walls of the canyon black as some deep place inside a man or woman, beneath the skin and bones and all the rest. He felt strangely excited. The crickets chirred. The trees whispered.

Related Characters: Cándido Rincón

Related Themes:

Page Number: 125

Explanation and Analysis

This quotation occurs just before Cándido and América cross the canyon stream to their new campsite. Cándido has built a brand-new camp as a surprise to América. This quotation shows how Cándido is projecting his own emotions onto the world around him. He is hopeful for a new start—he and América have just bought groceries with the money América earned at Jim Shirley's. Early in the day, Cándido experienced his first inkling of a renewed sex drive following his accident. All this contributes to Cándido seeing his new campsite as a "deep place inside a man or woman"—alluring, comforting, and sexually charged. Cándido is directly linking the human and the natural worlds in this quotation.

A moment ago she'd been out there on the road, exposed and vulnerable—frightened, always frightened—and now she was safe. But the thought of that frightened her too: what kind of life was it when you felt safe in the bushes, crouching to piss in the dirt like a dog? Was that what she'd left Tepoztlán for?

Related Characters: América Rincón

Related Themes:

Page Number: 139

Explanation and Analysis

This quotation occurs just before América makes her way down the trail into the canyon, where Navidad ambushes, beats, and rapes her. The canyon road functions in this quotation as a symbol of profound vulnerability. América escapes from the threat posed by the canyon road, but the fact that Navidad rapes her shortly after this moment suggests that vulnerability is a constant state for women, given the pervasiveness of violence against women. América thinks herself "safe in the bushes," but this quotation and the surrounding context show that women are not safe anywhere. (This is a point that will be further emphasized when Cándido—the character ostensibly most concerned with protecting América—beats her later in the novel.)

This quotation is also important for what it says about the cost of the American dream. América has felt frightened since she began her journey to the States, when a gang of men at the border attacked and attempted to rape her. Here in the US, she feels more comfortable in the bushes than amongst other people, out on the canyon road. This quotation thus evokes the profound alienation that accompanies immigration, and shows that among the sacrifices immigrants make to pursue the American Dream is the sacrifice of a sense of not only economic but also physical safety.

There, in the quickening night, with his dirty fingers inside her as if they belonged there and the Indian waiting his turn, he stopped to put a stick of gum in his mouth and casually drop the wrapper on the exposed skin of her back, no more concerned than if he were sitting on a stool in a bar.

Related Characters: José Navidad, América Rincón

Related Themes:

Page Number: 141-2

Explanation and Analysis

This quotation occurs just before José Navidad rapes América. Navidad's brutal, casual attitude marks him out as the novel's clear antagonist. Furthermore, the language of this quotation clearly demonstrates the dehumanizing nature of sexual violence against women. Navidad wholly objectifies América—she becomes like a "stool in a bar," so much less than human that she is like a physical object. Additionally, América notes how José penetrates her with his fingers "as if they belonged there," showing that Navidad is exerting a proprietary power over América, as if he has an inherent claim to her body because he is a man and she is only a woman. This is reinforced by the fact that Navidad's friend is "waiting his turn" in the background, as if he too has an incontrovertible right to do whatever he wants to América. There is painful irony here, too, as the night is described as "quickening," a word that is often used to refer

to a particular stage in pregnancy. América is, of course, pregnant with Socorro when Navidad and his friend rape her. This moment is arguably the darkest and most devastating of the novel, and the fact that it does not actually describe the rape suggests that there is an ineffable horror inherent in sexual violence against women.

Part 2, Chapter 1 Quotes

❝ What he wanted to tell her was how angry he was, how he hadn't wanted a new car […] how he felt depressed, disheartened, as if his luck had turned back and he was sinking into an imperceptible hole that deepened centimeter by centimeter each hour of the day. There'd been a moment there, handing over the keys to the young Latino, when he felt a deep shameful stab of racist resentment—did they *all* have to be Mexican?—that went against everything he'd believed in all his life. He wanted to tell her about that, that above all else, but he couldn't.

Related Characters: Delaney Mossbacher

Related Themes:

Page Number: 149

Explanation and Analysis

Delaney and Kyra are having lunch when this quotation occurs. Delaney's feeling of "racist resentment" toward the parking assistant is noteworthy because it represents a shift in Delaney's attitude. Up to this point, Delaney has resented characters like Cándido and José Navidad—characters who exist outside the realm of his daily life, and in a markedly different socioeconomic sphere. Here, however, Delaney's anger and hatred is spilling over into the privileged world of his everyday existence. While he could pretend that he resented Cándido for the threat he caused to his car and that he resented José for the conservationist threat he posed to the canyon, Delaney cannot now escape the fact that he resents the Latino parking attendant because he is Latino, not because of any "threat" he poses. Another important thing to note is that Delaney initially identifies the parking attendant as Latino, but in the very same sentence he decides not only that the attendant is Mexican but that "they *all*" are Mexican. This suggests an increasingly compulsive quality to Delaney's bigoted thoughts.

This quotation is also noteworthy because of what it suggests about the gulf of misunderstanding between Delaney and Kyra. While it is never made explicit why Delaney feels "he can't" discuss his mental battle with Kyra, it seems likely that Delaney is paralyzed with shame over the racist quality of his thoughts. In the end, Delaney's inability to openly confront this shame will only lead to him descending further into the very thoughts he never wanted to reveal in the first place.

❝ Still, this congregation was disturbing. There had to be a limit, a boundary, a cap, or they'd be in Calabasas next and then Thousand Oaks and on and on up the coast till there was no real estate left. That's what she was thinking, not in any heartless or calculating way—everybody had a right to live—but in terms of simple business sense […].

Related Characters: Kyra Menaker-Mossbacher

Related Themes:

Page Number: 159

Explanation and Analysis

When this quotation appears, Kyra has just witnessed a group of day laborers gathered on a streetcorner, while she is running errands. Though Kyra insists that she is not being heartless or calculating, the perfunctory, even callous tone of her thoughts makes it clear that she is enacting these very qualities. This quotation is an example of Boyle's use of irony and satire in his narration, which occur frequently throughout the novel.

While this quotation highlights the way characters like Kyra and Delaney self-justify their prejudice, it also shows the subtle quality that bigotry can often have. Kyra does not use any racist terminology here, but by imagining the uncontainable spread of Mexican immigrants she invokes a racist trope of people of color having a voracious sexual appetite. While this kind of bigoted logic is subtle in a quotation like this one, only moments before Kyra explicitly described Mexican immigrants as being "prolific as rabbits." This quotation demonstrates how insidious bigotry is and how it colors a person's every thought, even when it is not overt.

Part 2, Chapter 2 Quotes

❝ His accident had been bad, nearly fatal, but *si Dios quiere* he would be whole again, or nearly whole, and he understood that a man who had crossed eight lanes of freeway was like the Lord who walked on the waters, and that no man could expect that kind of grace to descend on him more than once in a lifetime.

Related Characters: Cándido Rincón

Related Themes:

Page Number: 174

Explanation and Analysis

This quotation appears just after Cándido has been reflecting on his first time in the Los Angeles area. At that time, he narrowly escaped being hit and killed by a car, while two Mexican teenagers, who had escaped from Immigration Services by following Cándido's lead, were killed. This accident of course makes Cándido think of the accident from which he is still recovering (that is, when Delaney hit him with his car). This is one of the few moments in the novel in which Cándido seems to believe that he is blessed with good luck, rather than that he is cursed. However, just as Cándido's defeatist attitude about his bad luck reveals his selfishness as a character, this quotation illustrates how deeply linked Cándido's "good luck" is to his egotism. It is self-aggrandizing at best to compare oneself to God, but for someone of Cándido's faith such a comparison even borders on sacrilege. This quotation thus profoundly illustrates an important theme of the novel: that a belief in fate is often merely a cover for an inflated sense of self.

❝ She looked at that coyote so long and so hard that she began to hallucinate, to imagine herself inside those eyes looking out, to know that men were her enemies—men in uniform, men with their hats reversed, men with fat bloated hands and fat bloated necks, men with traps and guns and poisoned bait—and she saw the den full of pups and the hills shrunk to nothing under the hot quick quadrupedal gait. She never moved. Never blinked. But finally, no matter how hard she stared, she realized the animal was no longer there.

Related Characters: América Rincón

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 179

Explanation and Analysis

América has been deeply depressed since José Navidad raped her. This passage occurs one night after the rape when América is lying awake in the canyon and makes eye contact with a mother coyote. The natural world is depicted throughout the novel as indifferent to human experience, but here América seems to draw genuine strength from her intense emotional identification with the mother coyote, experiencing a sense of female solidarity with this coyote. América has given up her female community in order to pursue the American Dream; she has left her mother and sisters behind in Mexico, and thus has been cut off from the only people with whom she might have been able to discuss the horror of her rape. This quotation thus emphasizes how isolating sexual violence is, especially when a woman has no other women in whom to confide.

❝ Seventeen years old, and she was the one who'd found work when he couldn't, she was the one who'd had them sniffing after her like dogs, she was the one whose husband made her live in a hut of sticks and then called her a liar, a whore and worse. But as he lay there [...] he knew how it was going to be, how it had to be, knew he would follow her into that hut and slap his own pain out of her, and that was so sick and so bad he wanted nothing more in that moment than to die.

Related Characters: América Rincón, Cándido Rincón

Related Themes:

Page Number: 182

Explanation and Analysis

Cándido has recently learned that his job with Al Lopez is over, and has gotten drunk in response to the news. This quotation ends the chapter; thus, Cándido is never explicitly shown to have beaten América, but this quotation strongly implies that he does so. This quotation shows how profoundly Cándido is compounding the violence his wife has already survived: he has verbally assaulted and shamed her, and soon he will physically assault her as well. Cándido's actions illustrate the devastating pervasiveness of violence against women by showing that América has survived violence at the hands of a stranger only to suffer more violence at the hands of her husband. Furthermore, Cándido's insistence that this is "how it [has] to be" demonstrates a complete abdication of responsibility. This shows how Cándido's belief in fate often functions as a mere excuse for his actions.

Part 2, Chapter 3 Quotes

Kyra looked down at her plate as if uncertain how to go on. "Remember I told you about all those people gathering there on the streetcorners—day laborers?"

"Mexicans," Delaney said, and there was no hesitation anymore, no reluctance to identify people by their ethnicity, no overlay of liberal-humanist guilt. Mexicans, there were Mexicans everywhere.

Related Characters: Kyra Menaker-Mossbacher, Delaney Mossbacher (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 184

Explanation and Analysis

Delaney and Kyra are having dinner when this exchange occurs. Kyra is discussing her efforts to have Mexican day laborers banned from the streetcorner that she drove past earlier in the novel. This quotation illustrates how thoroughly Delaney has repudiated the "liberal humanist ideals" which he claimed as his own at the start of the novel. Of course, the narration itself has shown from the beginning of the novel that Delaney never *truly* embodied these beliefs, but Delaney's outright rejection of them here shows how drastically his psychology has evolved by this point in the novel. Still, Delaney seems to be mentally justifying himself by insisting that all he is doing is "identifying people by their ethnicity." It is obvious to the reader that Delaney is doing much more than this, as his use of the word "Mexicans" is laced with venom, and his belief that there are "Mexicans everywhere" is obvious hyperbole. Though he is drifting ever closer toward outright racism, at this point in the novel Delaney still feels at least some need to justify his thoughts and actions. This impulse will disappear as the ensuing chapters unfold and Delaney fully surrenders to bigotry and racialized violence.

But where were these people supposed to go? Back to Mexico? Delaney doubted it, knowing what he did about migratory animal species and how one population responded to being displaced by another. It made for war, for violence and killing, until one group had decimated the other and reestablished its claim to the prime hunting, breeding or grazing grounds. It was a sad fact, but true.

Related Characters: Delaney Mossbacher

Related Themes:

Page Number: 193

Explanation and Analysis

Delaney has just finished reflecting on the closure of the labor exchange when this quotation appears. This quotation is important because it shows how Delaney is continually moving closer toward a direct comparison of Mexicans to animals. The comparison here is tacit, and seems to have more to do with Delaney's egotism than his racism: he is flattering himself that he is a true intellectual, since he is using his "expertise" as a nature writer to elucidate the problem of Mexican immigration. Over the ensuing chapters, however, Delaney will actually come to see Mexican immigrants as an "invasive species." There is a sense of inevitability in his logic about migratory animal species, and he will use this as an excuse to do his part in "decimating" the Mexican immigrant population and "reestablishing his claim" to what he views as his people's territory.

Part 2, Chapter 4 Quotes

There was a long silence, and she knew they were both thinking about that inadmissible day and what she couldn't tell him and how he knew it in his heart and how it shamed him. If they lived together a hundred years she could never bring that up to him, never go further than she just had. Still, how could he argue with the fact of that? This was no safe haven, this was the wild woods.

Related Characters: Cándido Rincón, América Rincón

Related Themes:

Page Number: 204

Explanation and Analysis

This quotation occurs when América and Cándido are arguing about looking for work in Canoga Park. Cándido wants América to stay behind in the canyon every day while he works in the city, while América wants to live in the city with her husband. This quotation is important because it illustrates how the trauma of América's rape is compounded by her husband's inability to discuss it. América knows that Cándido has mentally linked her safety with his dignity as a man; not only does this prevent América from talking openly with her husband, but it also includes her in his shame. If the fact that América was raped is a source of shame to Cándido, then it is almost as if América herself has caused

that shame. Furthermore, the use of the word "inadmissible" is important here. América's trauma is not just unspeakable, it is inadmissible—unacceptable, even invalid. This powerfully demonstrates that Cándido's behavior is in itself a form of violence because it communicates to América that she not only has reason to feel ashamed, but also that she has cause to doubt the truth of her experience.

This quotation is additionally important because it shows how the natural world mirrors human emotions. Because América (and, to a much lesser extent, Cándido) are traumatized by her rape on the trail, the canyon no longer seems like a safe place. The irony here is that Navidad could have raped América anywhere; América was not subjected to violence because of the "wild woods," but because of a human man. Thus, this quotation again emphasizes how pervasive the problem of sexual violence against women is.

Part 2, Chapter 7 Quotes

❝ The baby moved inside her and her stomach dipped and fluttered. All she wanted was to belong in one of those houses, any of them, even for a night. The people who lived in those houses had beds to stretch out on, they had toilets that flushed and hot and cold running water, and most important of all, they were home, in their own private space, safe from the world.

Related Characters: América Rincón

Related Themes:

Page Number: 233

Explanation and Analysis

América has these thoughts as she is sitting in Canoga Park, waiting for Cándido to return from his negotiations with a man who has promised to secure housing for the Rincóns. América longs not to own one of the houses around her, but to "belong" in one of them, powerfully illustrating the novel's theme of the "secret" American Dream—a dream not of security or financial prosperity, but of belonging. América's desire for this emotional sense of fulfillment is, of course, tied up with more conventional aspects of the Dream, such as the economic stability that is represented by owning a house and the sense of autonomy that comes from owning private property. However, it is her longing to truly fit in that supersedes these practical concerns. Given how mistreated América and Cándido have been by white Americans and how unwelcome they have been made to feel, it is evident that the deep dream of belonging is incredibly difficult to attain.

❝ All she could see was the image of those animals at the border, the half-a-*gringo* and his evil eyes and filthy insinuating fingers, the fat white man with his fat white hands, and she withdrew into herself, dwelled there deep inside where nobody could touch her. "Hey, baby," they called when they saw her there trying to melt into the darkness, "hey, *ruca*, hey, sexy, *¿quieres joder conmigo?*"

Related Characters: Jim Shirley, José Navidad, América Rincón

Related Themes:

Page Number: 234

Explanation and Analysis

América has been waiting in Canoga Park for Cándido for several hours by the time this quotation occurs. This quotation powerfully illustrates the suffocating nature of sexual violence against women. The lengthy first sentence, filled with commas, suggests that this violence is never-ending. The second sentence affirms this, by showing that even when América tries to "melt into the darkness," she cannot escape the catcalls of men on the streets. Indeed, it is almost as if her attempt to make herself invisible actually attracts these men, making their shouts all the more predatory and menacing. Not only does this quotation show that women are vulnerable to violence in all aspects of their lives (at work, at home, outside in public), but it also illustrates the devastating variety of these different kinds of violence—from persistent, objectifying comments to rape.

Part 2, Chapter 8 Quotes

❝ The wall. Of course. He should have guessed. Ninety percent of the community was already walled in, tireless dark men out there applying stucco under conditions that would have killed anybody else, and now the last link was coming to Delaney, to his own dogless yard, hemming him in, obliterating his view—protecting him despite himself. And he'd done nothing to protest it, nothing at all.

Related Characters: Delaney Mossbacher

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 242

Explanation and Analysis

This quotation appears as Delaney is working at home on his column, while a team of Mexican workers undertakes construction of the final section of the wall which abuts the Mossbachers' yard. This quotation illustrates Delaney's early attitude toward the wall. To others and to himself, Delaney has argued that he opposes the wall because it is exclusionary. Here, however, it is clear that Delaney's antipathy toward the wall is entirely egotistical—he sees it as a threat to his work as a nature writer. He resents the wall because he views at as a check placed on his freedom of mobility. Ultimately, Delaney will connect this feeling of resentment directly to his notion of Mexican immigrants, implicitly blaming them as a group for the necessity of the wall.

It is important also to notice the language Delaney uses in his description of the Mexican laborers working on the wall. Yet again, Delaney refers to these men as "dark," a description that not only has pejorative overtones but also implies that there is something fundamentally sinister about these men, solely based on their skin color. Additionally, Delaney notes that the men are working "under conditions that would have killed anybody else." This small detail suggests that Delaney is beginning to think of Mexicans as less than human; if "anybody else" would have died working in such heat, then these men must not really be men. As the novel progresses, Delaney will sink further and further into descriptions of Mexican characters like Cándido as animals rather than people.

Part 3, Chapter 3 Quotes

❝ Delaney felt a thrill of triumph and hate—he couldn't suppress it—and then both cops were bending over the suspects to clamp the handcuffs round their wrists, and the tall Mexican, Delaney's special friend, was protesting his innocence in two languages. The son of a bitch. The jerk. The arsonist. It was all Delaney could do to keep from wading in and kicking him in the ribs.

Related Characters: Delaney Mossbacher (speaker), José Navidad

Related Themes:

Page Number: 288

Explanation and Analysis

This quotation appears when Delaney and the other residents of Arroyo Blanco are standing beyond a police barricade on a hillside as the canyon fire veers toward Arroyo Blanco. The cops have handcuffed Navidad and his friend because the two men made a sudden movement, as if to escape. Delaney's genuine pleasure in this moment shows how fully he has given himself over to bigotry. Formerly, Delaney would have felt almost immediate shame over his prejudice—even if he didn't react to that shame by changing his behavior. Now, however, Delaney revels in his hatred of Navidad.

Another interesting aspect of this quotation is the particular disgust Delaney feels when he hears Navidad switching back and forth between English and Spanish. This is noteworthy because Delaney has consistently thought of Spanish as a "dark" language throughout the novel. Here, it seems Delaney still harbors this dislike of Spanish—and the "dark" men who speak it—but it also seems possible that Delaney is experiencing a twinge of jealousy at the fact that Navidad is bilingual. He seems to consider this quality as evidence that Navidad is manipulative—but perhaps Delaney is upset because Navidad's ability to speak two languages indicates a level of intelligence that Delaney would rather not attribute to him. Delaney prides himself on being a writer and intellectual, and it is plausible that he sees Navidad as a kind of rival in this moment, which fuels his violent reaction toward him.

Part 3, Chapter 4 Quotes

❝ He felt exultant, infused with a strength and joy that made a mockery of his poverty, his hurts and wants and even the holocaust that had leapt out of his poor cookfire in the depths of the canyon. He had a son, the first of his line, the new generation born on American soil, a son who would have all the *gabachos* had and more.

Related Characters: Cándido Rincón (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 297

Explanation and Analysis

At this point in the novel América has just given birth to Socorro, but Cándido has not yet realized that his child is a girl. (He will in the next few moments, when he helps to clean the baby off.) The magnitude of Cándido's joy evokes the immense power of the American dream. The hope Cándido feels when thinking of all that his child will have dwarfs all the adversity and misfortune that he has suffered in trying to pursue prosperity for himself and América. This quotation thus illustrates a key component of the American Dream: giving one's child a better life than his or her parents.

Another important aspect of this quotation is Cándido's excitement at having a son. Though he does not ultimately react negatively to the realization that Socorro is a girl, Cándido's joy at the birth of his child is nevertheless tied up in his hope of having a boy who will bear his name. This is yet another way that Cándido's obsession with manhood causes him to be narrow-minded and detracts from his experience. Socorro is, irrespective of her gender, a first-generation American. Cándido's fixation on having a boy thus limits his ability to celebrate Socorro, in the same way that his obsession with protecting and providing for América limits the depth of his connection to her.

Part 3, Chapter 6 Quotes

It was beyond irony, beyond questions of sin and culpability, beyond superstition: he couldn't live in his own country and he couldn't live in this one either. He was a failure, a fool, a hick who put his trust in a *coyote* or a *cholo* with a tattoo on his neck, a man who couldn't even roast a turkey without burning down half the country in the process.

Related Characters: Cándido Rincón

Related Themes:

Page Number: 322

Explanation and Analysis

This quotation occurs when Cándido returns to his former campsite in the canyon and finds that the money he buried was almost completely destroyed in the fire. For the first time, Cándido appears to reject the notion of fate that he has held dear throughout the novel. He grapples with the fact that he is merely a foolish man who has put his trust in the wrong people. Yet, the tone of the quotation shifts in the second half, as Cándido falls again into the exaggeration he has been prone to earlier in the novel. He seems unable to accept the fact that he is a regular man, and instead dramatizes the stakes of the fire, so that he can still feel that his actions have meaning in the grand scheme of the universe. Although he can't seem to give up his vision of himself as cosmically doomed, Cándido is sympathetic in this moment because the fire does not seem to have been the result of any mistakes on his part. For the first time, it seems reasonable for Cándido to think that he really does have terrible luck.

Part 3, Chapter 7 Quotes

He never gave a thought as to what he was going to do with the Mexican once he caught him—that didn't matter. None of it mattered. All that mattered was this, was finding him, rooting him out of his burrow and counting his teeth and his toes and the hairs on his head and noting it all down for the record.

Related Characters: Cándido Rincón, Delaney Mossbacher

Related Themes:

Page Number: 347

Explanation and Analysis

Delaney thinks this as he is crawling up the hillside through the mud, in search of the Rincóns' camp. This quotation strikingly demonstrates how Delaney's hatred of Mexican immigrants makes him imagine Cándido as subhuman. Delaney refers to Cándido's home as a burrow, as if Cándido were some kind of rodent, and he gleefully anticipates "counting his teeth and his toes and the hairs on his head" as if Cándido were an animal specimen that Delaney were preserving and taxonimizing as part of his collection. What makes this quotation so ironic is that Delaney himself has become animalistic in this scene, though he does not recognize it: he is scrabbling through the mud sniffing for the smell of a campfire and thrilled by the feeling he has in his groin of his gun in its holster pressing up against him. This is the secret power of hatred: its ability to render the person spewing it less than human. A final important aspect of this quotation is the fact that Delaney has no plan of action to implement upon finding Cándido. Not only has his hatred caused him to resemble an animal in his actions, but it has made his thought process animalistic as well, in causing Delaney to become so single-minded and aggressive.

Part 3, Chapter 8 Quotes

América was screaming and the baby was screaming and he could hear his own voice raised in a thin mournful drone, and that was nothing compared to the shrieks of the uprooted trees and the nightmarish roar of the boulders rolling along beneath them.

Related Characters: Socorro, América Rincón, Cándido Rincón

Related Themes:

Page Number: 353

Explanation and Analysis

This quotation occurs as Cándido, América, and Socorro are swept away by a flood. Cándido contrasts his family's screams with the screams of nature, to the effect that the Rincóns' screams seem barely audible. This quotation drives home the notion that nature, far from being sympathetic to the human world, is in fact wholly indifferent to human suffering. The characters in the novel may see themselves and their emotions reflected in the natural world, but this quotation shows that such reflection is an illusion. The power of nature here is epic, completely dwarfing the drama of the Rincóns' lives and demonstrating that the natural world operates on a scale almost beyond human comprehension.

❝ He was beyond cursing, beyond grieving, numbed right through to the core of him. All that, yes. But when he saw the white face surge up out of the black swirl of the current and the white hand grasping at the tiles, he reached down and took hold of it.

Related Characters: Delaney Mossbacher, Cándido Rincón

Related Themes:

Page Number: 355

Explanation and Analysis

This is the closing image of the novel. It is important to note that Boyle renders this image rather ambiguously. Cándido grabs hold of Delaney's hand, but Boyle ends the novel before describing what happens next. This means that the possibility, for example, of Cándido doing harm to Delaney after grabbing him is not entirely precluded. Perhaps Cándido instinctively reached out to Delaney, but then attacked him out of rage and grief after dragging him onto the roof of the post office. The most straightforward reading is that Cándido intends only to rescue—and not to harm—Delaney. However, the very fact that Boyle leaves room for "alternate endings" illustrates how complicated the act of forgiveness is. Cándido may be saving Delaney's life, but this does not mean that the harm Delaney has done to the Rincón family is simply erased.

Still, it is important to note that Cándido's choice to save Delaney is, at its core, an act of forgiveness. Cándido could have let Delaney drown, and the fact that he instead chose to reach out to him is a testament to his enduring humanity, despite the attempts of others to dehumanize him. The novel closes, then, on a mixed note of both devastation and hope. Despite the loss of his child, Cándido is able to recognize Delaney's humanity—which is more than Delaney has ever done for him.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

EPIGRAPH

"They ain't human. A human being wouldn't live like they do. A human being couldn't stand it to be so dirty and miserable."

The novel opens with this quotation from Chapter 18 of John Steinbeck's The Grapes of Wrath. *In the novel, the words are spoken about "Okies," or people from Oklahoma. The quotation speaks to the powerful way in which Delaney Mossbacher's resentment of Cándido Rincón will cause him to dehumanize Mexicans as an entire group.*

PART 1, CHAPTER 1

While driving on **the canyon road** on his way to the recycling center, Delaney Mossbacher hits Cándido Rincón with his car. Delaney searches the nearby bushes and discovers the severely injured Cándido, with whom he struggles to communicate, resorting to broken French in response to Cándido's Spanish. Cándido refuses Delaney's offer to take him to a doctor and instead asks for money. Delaney gives Cándido twenty dollars and watches as he hobbles away.

The opening scene of the novel is important in the way it evokes Delaney's inner conflict. On the one hand, Delaney successfully resists the instinct to flee the scene of the accident, and he makes a sincere—albeit clumsy—attempt to communicate with Cándido. These actions show that Delaney is not entirely without compassion for other human beings. On the other hand, Delaney's inner thoughts demonstrate from the outset that he is prone to selfishness and narrow-mindedness. He is primarily concerned with whether his car is okay and whether Cándido will attempt to sue him. Over the course of the novel, Delaney will continue to wrestle with this inner conflict.

At the recycling center, Delaney reflects on the accident. He concludes that Cándido must have refused medical care because he is undocumented ("illegal," as Delaney thinks it). He feels irritated and angry, wondering where "these men" all come from and why "they have to throw themselves under the wheels of his car." Later Delaney takes his car to Kenny Grissom's dealership, where he claims to have hit a dog. Privately, Delaney calls his wife, Kyra, and tells her he hit "a Mexican." Kyra immediately suggests Delaney inform Jack Jardine, the president of their neighborhood property owners' association, of the accident. Later in the call, when Kyra expresses her surprise at Delaney having paid the injured man off with only twenty dollars, Delaney responds, "I told you—he was *Mex*ican." He finds himself saying this "before the words [can] turn to ash in his mouth."

Delaney's continued frustration at the car dealership further demonstrates his self-centeredness. He is fixated on why this accident happened to him, *rather than on the fact that he severely injured a man and essentially fled the scene. Delaney's confession to Kyra that the man he hit was "*Mexican*" seems almost compulsive; he finds himself saying it "before the words [can] turn to ash in his mouth." This is the first moment in which Delaney clearly loses the battle between his good intentions (what he thinks of as his "liberal-humanist ideals") and his inner prejudice. This slippage will become even more exaggerated as the novel progresses and Delaney descends into bigotry and paranoia.*

PART 1, CHAPTER 2

The narration shifts to Cándido's perspective. He has collapsed on the path back into the bushes and is trying to remember what has happened to him, finally recalling that he was on his way back from the grocery store after leaving the labor exchange when Delaney hit him with his car. Half-lucid, he recalls being stuck in a garbage dump in Tijuana after failing to cross the US border with América.

Reflecting on his time in the dump at Tijuana, Cándido recalls the words of an old garbage picker he met there: "Life is poor here, but at least you have garbage." Though he is not fully in his right mind in this moment, Cándido seems to feel wistful about this memory. It is as though he wishes he had as strong a sense of belonging and purpose as the old garbage picker did, despite that man's abject conditions.

The narration shifts to América's perspective. She finds Cándido, her husband, unconscious at the bottom of the path. América has spent the day in Venice trying to find a sewing job and has walked all the way back to the canyon. Upon finding Cándido, she realizes that "she [is] in the worst trouble of her life."

This passage highlights América's determination to find a job despite the obstacles in her way. Throughout the novel, América will continue to demonstrate this kind of hopefulness and perseverance. However, as the plot of the novel will bear out, América is right to anticipate that her identity as a person of color and an immigrant will result in her facing deep prejudice from white Americans.

The narration returns to Cándido's perspective. Still only half conscious, Cándido watches América cooking something over a fire and recalls his childhood in Tepoztlán, Mexico, and his mother's death when he was six years old. Though América tries to convince him to go to a doctor, Cándido stalwartly refuses.

Details about Cándido's childhood are important to the way he now thinks about his place in the world. Cándido is a strong believer in luck, and his mother's early death seems to have contributed to his exaggerated sense of his doomed lot in life.

Two days pass during which Cándido is feverish and delusional. Finally back in his right mind, Cándido finds that he is concussed and has a shattered cheekbone. Even more problematic, he thinks, are his damaged arm and hip, which mean he will not be able to work. On the fourth morning after Cándido's accident (and about three weeks since Cándido and América first made camp in the canyon), América decides to leave camp and look for work at the labor exchange. Cándido perceives this as "a slap in the face," as if América were calling him "useless, impotent." He also privately worries that América will be surrounded by predatory men at the labor exchange. He recalls a young girl from the dump in Tijuana who, despite Cándido's efforts to protect her, was raped by several men. Cándido protests América's leaving, but she goes anyway, positing that someone might come to the exchange looking for a maid.

Cándido reacts with shame at América's decision to look for work. This is an important part of Cándido's character because it helps to explain how he imagines his role as a husband. Cándido believes that he should be the one to provide for his wife and child, and he feels emasculated by América's desire to work. Later in the novel, this sense of shame will strongly contribute to Cándido's decision to beat América. Another reason this passage is significant is because of Cándido's worry for his wife's safety. Cándido will often argue that América would be safer if she did not go out into the world. While América has certainly faced violence at the hands of unknown men (such as when a gang at the border attempted to rape her), she also faces violence at "home," since her own husband verbally and physically attacks her. This irony will only intensify over the course of the novel.

PART 1, CHAPTER 3

The narration returns to Delaney's perspective. Four days after hitting Cándido, Delaney is preparing breakfast for his stepson, Jordan. He will then take Jordan to school while his wife, Kyra, leaves for her real estate job. Delaney will return home and work on his monthly column, "Pilgrim at Topanga Creek," which he writes for a nature magazine. As Delaney goes about his morning routine, he hears intermittent yelping noises from his dogs, Sacheverell and Osbert, who are outside in the yard.

Delaney's nonchalance about the noises he hears from his backyard suggests that he is not as attuned to nature as he prides himself on being. He is instead absorbed in the mundane activities of his life, and this will ultimately lead to his wife's dog being attacked by a coyote. The fact that Delaney is oblivious to this threat before the violence actually occurs suggests that he has an inflated sense of self when it comes to his connectedness to nature. This will make some of Delaney's later claims in the novel seem preachy.

Kyra enters the kitchen and converses briefly with Delaney. The two then hear a prolonged scream from outside and run out to find a **coyote** dragging one of the dogs up and over the fence. Delaney pursues the coyote and Kyra tails him. As he searches the bushes for the dog, Delaney thinks with frustration about his neighbors' refusal to heed his warning not to feed the coyotes. Delaney thinks his neighbors are idiots since they are instead fixated on constructing a gate around the neighborhood "to keep out those very gangbangers, taggers and carjackers they'd come here to escape."

This passage is extremely significant to understanding Delaney's psychology. Delaney thinks of himself as more sophisticated than his neighbors—he views their concerns about human threats to neighborhood safety as almost primitive. Meanwhile, he thinks of himself as a sort of prophet, someone who is able to clearly discern the real threat to Arroyo Blanco Estates: the surrounding natural world. Over the course of the novel, as Delaney becomes caught up in the virulent bigotry of his neighbors, he will begin to use natural threats, such as coyotes, as a coded way to talk about human threats (mainly Mexican immigrants). In this way, Delaney will ironically attempt to preserve his status as a kind of intellectual even as he begins to express prejudice even more overtly than his neighbors.

That evening, Delaney attends a neighborhood meeting for the people living at Arroyo Blanco Estates. The meeting is a special session convened by Jack Jardine in order for the community to vote on "the gate issue." Though Delaney privately considers the gate "an absurdity," he has not spoken about it in public because he considers it "a fait accompli." Delaney is only present at this meeting because he intends to inform his neighbors about his dog's death that morning. He has Sacheverell's mangled leg in the pocket of his windbreaker. That morning, Kyra insisted Delaney "find the dog at all cost," though she does not yet know her husband was successful in finding these remains.

Delaney's attitude vis-à-vis the gate issue is important because it reveals that he is not as committed to his "liberal humanist ideals" as he claims he is. Delaney might tell himself that the gate is discriminatory and therefore absurd, but the fact that he is not willing to actually voice these opinions suggests that he is not as committed to his lofty democratic ideals as he would like to think he is. Furthermore, the fact that Delaney thinks of the installation of the gate as something he cannot influence (a fait accompli) is telling, as his feeling of powerlessness and lack of control later in the novel will powerfully fuel his turn to anti-immigrant hatred.

Delaney listens as various community members, including Jim Shirley and Jack Cherrystone, comment on the gate issue. He begins to worry, thinking: "Crime? Up here? Wasn't that what they'd come here to escape? [...] All of a sudden, the gate didn't sound like such a bad idea." When Delaney is finally called on to speak, he attempts to discuss the indigenous **coyote** population but Jack Jardine insists he speak to the gate question or yield the floor. Delaney panics and begins waving Sacheverell's leg over his head.

It is important to note how catching the paranoia of Delaney's neighbors is. While this suggests that bigotry is, at least on some level, contagious, it also further supports the notion that Delaney was primed to practice bigotry from the beginning of the novel. Finally, Delaney's hesitation in this passage suggests the major influence that his neighbors have on him; this seems directly related to Delaney's desire to meaningfully fit in and belong to his community.


Later that night, Delaney sits outside the community meeting as the vote is held, feeling foolish about his behavior. Jack Jr., Jack Jardine's son, approaches Delaney and begins chatting with him. Eventually, Jack Jr. asks about "the Mexican." Several nights ago, Delaney spoke to Jack Jardine about his car accident (per Kyra's request) and Delaney now recalls that Jack Jr. was present. Jack Jr. continues to question Delaney about where "the Mexican's" camp is located. Delaney finds this questioning odd but answers "almost reflexively—he had nothing to hide." Eventually he leaves, heading for home and making a mental note to put the dog's leg in the freezer when he gets there.

Delaney's conversation with Jack Jr. is important because it re-emphasizes Delaney's self-centeredness. The specificity of Jack Jr.'s questions make it clear to the reader that Jack Jr. is trying to determine the location of the Rincóns' camp in order to visit it. (He later does, vandalizing it along with an unnamed friend.) However, the only thing Delaney can think is that Jack Jr.'s line of questioning might have something to do with him; he answers the questions to prove that he, Delaney, has nothing to hide. Delaney's tendency to think first and foremost of himself will grow more pronounced as the novel unfolds.

PART 1, CHAPTER 4

The narration is now from Cándido's perspective. It is the day after América first went to the labor exchange to look for work. She did not find work the first day and now wants to try again. Cándido is furious and threatens América with his fist, but she leaves anyway. Cándido then begins to reminisce about his first wife, Resurrección, América's older sister.

That Cándido explicitly threatens América with physical violence is ironic, given that his professed reason for not wanting her to seek work is a concern for her safety. It speaks to how often male violence is motivated by a sense of embattled masculinity. Cándido will continue to find reason to obsess over his perceived emasculation as the novel progresses.


Cándido married Resurrección when he was twenty years old, just after his return to Tepoztlán from nine months of farm work in the States. In those months he made more money "than his father in his leather shop had made in a lifetime" and was consequently treated "like a god" in his hometown. For years Cándido continued to spend only winters in Tepoztlán, working for the rest of the year in the United States and leaving Resurrección at home for months on end. During these years, Cándido and Resurrección tried unsuccessfully to get pregnant, much to Cándido's frustration. After spending seven seasons away from Tepoztlán, Cándido returned home to his father-in-law's house to find his wife and her family absent. América, Resurrección's youngest sister and eleven years old at the time, was the only person present. She revealed to Cándido that her sister was six months pregnant and living in a different town with a new man, Teófilo Aguadulce.

Cándido's backstory helps to contextualize his belief in fate and his exaggerated sense of his importance in the world. Because Cándido was so long revered in his hometown, he bought into the perception of himself as a kind of god. The dissolution of Cándido's first marriage partially explains why Cándido is so worried about América's actions making him look and feel like "less than a man." Not only was Cándido unable to impregnate Resurrección, but she also left him and then got pregnant by another man. After being so revered by his community, Cándido experienced these events as a massive humiliation, and this sense of shame continues to permeate his relationship to América in the present-day of the novel.

Cándido travelled to Cuernavaca, where Resurrección was living, and publicly confronted Teófilo Aguadulce, who left Cándido "stunned and bleeding in the dirt." Feeling abandoned by his neighbors and friends, Cándido fell into alcoholism. He moved in with his aunt Lupe and began working as "a streetcorner firebreather who sacrificed all sensation in his lips, tongue and palate for a few *centavos* and a few *centavos* more." One day Cándido ran into sixteen-year-old América, who asked if he recognized her. Cándido replied, "You're América […] and I'm going to take you with me when I go North."

Cándido's work as a firebreather shows how hard-working and determined a character he is. The stakes are high in Cándido's second marriage, since he sees América as representing his second chance at a successful life. It is also significant that América shares a name with the United States, where Cándido is determined to rebuild his life.

Lying in the canyon, Cándido now begins to worry about América, who has not yet returned from the labor exchange. Still in intense pain from his injuries, Cándido doses in the heat and awakens extremely thirsty. Even though Cándido has gotten sick from drinking from the stream in the past (and harangues América about being sure to boil the water) he takes the risk of drinking directly from the canyon creek. He quickly experiences debilitating diarrhea, during which he begins to hear "*gabacho*-accented cries" in the canyon. Practically crippled at this point, Cándido does his best to hide amongst some rocks from whomever the voices belong to.

Cándido's decision to drink the stream water without boiling it, while perhaps partially attributable to his fever, also demonstrates his inflated ego. He has given América condescending lectures on the importance of boiling the water, yet he somehow seems to think that he might be immune to the effects of drinking directly from the stream. Cándido will, in fact, experience several strokes of purely bad luck later in the novel, but this moment is an example of his own hubris causing him harm.


The narration shifts back in time to América's perspective earlier in the day. Sitting in the shade at the labor exchange, América feels frustrated about the fact that Cándido treats her like a child. She thinks this treatment ironic given that she will give birth to her own child in five months' time. Earlier in the morning América had approached the headman of the labor exchange, Candelario Pérez, and asked if he had work for her. He compassionately replied that there is not much work for women and gestured to América to take a seat in the shade, where she now waits.

This passage is important to understanding América's character. Even though Cándido infantilizes her, América remains optimistic and focused on her own goals. She will continue to find hope throughout the novel, even as other characters resort to anger or despair.

América feels "bored" and "frightened" as she waits and watches men in trucks drive up to the exchange, seeking laborers. She wonders: "What, exactly, did they want? What were the rules?" América waits from dawn until eleven in the morning, when a white woman named Mary approaches her and claims that she, too, is looking for work. América finds Mary, who is obviously an alcoholic, repulsive. She thinks to herself: "Have I sunk to this, a good student and a good girl who always respected her parents and did as she was told, sitting here penniless in the dirt with a common drunk?" América excuses herself and goes to look for Candelario Pérez.

This passage powerfully illustrates the sacrifices required by immigrating to a new country. Though América was economically comfortable in Mexico, she is now penniless in the United States. América is still trying to navigate her new circumstances, as evidenced by her wondering about what the "rules" are—not only in the labor exchange, but also in this new country.

Unable to find Candelario Pérez, América soon learns that the labor exchange closes at noon and she must leave. She wanders along **the canyon road**, feeling unsettled by the way men stare as she passes. Their leering makes her recall the night she and Cándido attempted to cross the border from Mexico. The *coyote*—the man América and Cándido had paid to ferry them and half a dozen others across the border—abandoned them at the fence. At that moment they were jumped by a gang of Mexican men, who beat Cándido with a bat and attempted to rape América at knifepoint.

América's traumatic experience at the border clearly illustrates how real the threat of sexual violence is for women. The fact that Cándido was with América when the men attempted to rape her exposes the fallacy of Cándido's conviction that he can ultimately protect América. Women—particularly women of color, like América—are vulnerable to violence from men whether they are alone or with their male "protectors."

Before the men could rape América, however, a helicopter appeared overhead, frightening the men away. América, Cándido, and hundreds of others were rounded up by US border control agents and deposited in Tijuana. Lost in these dark memories, América heads off **the canyon road** onto a side street where she intends to raid a garden for fruit and vegetables, as she had the day before on her way back to camp from the exchange.

Later in the novel, América will experience an even more brutal trauma when José Navidad and his friend rape her. Another noteworthy aspect of this passage is the fact that América has resorted to stealing food; this shows that starting a new life with nothing in a foreign country sometimes requires amending one's moral judgments.

The narration jumps forward in time to Cándido's perspective. He is hiding in the canyon from two teenage boys. (The teenagers are described in terms that make it clear to the reader that one of them is Jack Jr.) Cándido watches as the boys trash his and América's camp and destroy their clothes. When the boys leave, Cándido emerges and finds graffiti on the canyon wall that says "Beaners Die."

The actions of Jack Jr. and his friend illustrate the fact that Cándido and América are seen as outsiders by many in white American society. Furthermore, the fact that Jack Jr. graffitis the canyon wall is an important plot point, as it will be revealed later in the novel that Jack Jr. is also responsible for graffiting the wall outside Arroyo Blanco Estates.

PART 1, CHAPTER 5

The narration shifts to Delaney's perspective. He is walking home from the community meeting, enjoying the evening air and the fact that there are no streetlights in Arroyo Blanco Estates. As he is walking, a car passes, playing loud music. It is not until "Delaney [is] inside, and the door locked behind him, that he [thinks] to be afraid"; at this point he recalls his pro-gate neighbors from the meeting and wonders who might have been in the car. Delaney is distracted from his worried musing when he sees the bedroom light on and realizes Kyra is waiting up for him to have sex, since she finds "the little tragedies of life"—like Sacheverell's death—arousing.

Delaney's strange, delayed concern about the driver of the car reflects the fact that his neighbors' insular, prejudiced views have begun to influence Delaney's own way of viewing the world. The fact that Delaney quickly shifts gears and begins thinking about being intimate with his wife suggests that he is still removed enough from the angry prejudices held by his neighbors that he is not in immediate danger of being consumed by them. This balance will begin gradually to shift as the plot of the novel progresses and Delaney begins to feel less and less in control of his life.

Delaney and Kyra begin to have sex. Mid-intercourse, Kyra asks Delaney to tell her once and for all whether he found Sacheverell's body earlier that morning. Delaney admits that he did and Kyra becomes angry, claiming that Delaney lied to her by not telling her the news. Kyra demands to know where the dog's body is and Delaney reveals that he has put Sacheverell's leg in the freezer. Kyra goes downstairs to look. Delaney holds out hope that he and Kyra might still have sex, but Kyra slams the freezer door and returns upstairs.

Delaney does not fully process how upset Kyra is about Sacheverell's death. Instead, he sees Kyra's loss through a selfish lens—he is focused on the fact that this tragedy will have aroused his wife. Furthermore, the fact that Kyra asks about her dog in the middle of having sex with Delaney suggests an unbridged distance between the couple: even in the midst of an intimate act, Delaney and Kyra are not on the same mental wavelength.

For the first time, the narration shifts to Kyra's perspective. It is the morning after Sacheverell's death and Kyra is feeling "worn and depleted" at work, even though she loves her job. She feels angry at "the grinning stupid potbellied clown who'd put up the fence" in her yard, since the **coyote** was able to mount it and kill the dog. She wonders, "Why stop at six feet? Why not eight? Ten?"

As the first of Kyra's sections, this passage is significant because it provides firsthand details about Kyra's personality. She is driven and work-oriented, yet her sense of devastation about her dog's death shows that she is also capable of emotional sensitivity.

Mid-morning, Kyra arrives at one of the houses she is showing. She finds that the front porch is flooded and her simmering anger rises. Kyra makes her round of the house; though she is feeling badly she reflects on the fact that her job as a realtor often makes her feel "like the queen of some fanciful country." Kyra sweeps the water from the porch just before one of her coworkers arrives, along with a couple who is interested in the house.

Kyra's sense of purpose while on the job is noteworthy. She not only derives a sense of agency from her work, but also genuine emotional satisfaction. Additionally, Kyra's no-nonsense attitude—which is demonstrated by the actions she takes to solve the problem of the flooded porch on her own—will affect the way she responds to circumstances later in the novel as well.

Time jumps ahead to that afternoon. Kyra has not sold any houses and she leaves work early with a headache. In her car she puts on a soundtrack of ocean waves and begins to feel better. Before driving home, she heads out to close up five properties that she locks every night and re-opens each morning. One of these properties is the Da Ros house, a property Kyra particularly loves but which isn't selling because the previous owner killed himself inside. Kyra takes her time wandering through the house, feeling depressed and "numb from the balls of her feet to the crown of her head." She thinks about going home to Delaney and Jordan but realizes that "she [doesn't] want to leave [the Da Ros house], not ever again."

Though Kyra is the least prominent of the novel's four protagonists, this section hints at a deep (albeit largely unexplored) loneliness in Kyra's character. Kyra thinks of the Da Ros property as "the sort of house she would have when she was forty and kissed Mike Bender goodbye and opened her own office." In this way, the Da Ros property represents a dream for Kyra not only of professional success but also of emotional fulfillment, as the only property she has listed that has ever "spoken" to her. Kyra's attachment to this house suggests that she feels discontented and out-of-place in her own home.

The narration shifts to Delaney's perspective. Having buried Sacheverell's remains earlier that day, Delaney is now working from home on the magazine column he writes, called "Pilgrim at Topanga Creek." Part of the column is excerpted, in which Delaney writes about having taken a solo night hike and camping on a hiking trail, "with nothing more elaborate between [him] and terra firma than an old army blanket and a foam pad." He writes: "I have a handful of raisins and a blanket: what more could I want? All the world knows I am content."

This passage—one of two excerpts of Delaney's column that appear in the novel—reveals Delaney's egotism. The language of this passage is grandiose almost to the point of exaggeration. The excerpt shows that Delaney is passionate about nature. He will later use this passion as an excuse for his actions toward Cándido Rincón and José Navidad, arguing that immigrants like them pose a threat to the natural landscape of California.

PART 1, CHAPTER 6

The narration shifts to América's perspective. She and Cándido have run out of food and América insists on going to the labor exchange for the fifth day in a row to look for work. She is angry and frustrated and accuses Cándido of doing nothing to help her. Cándido smacks her and says, "You're no better than your sister, no better than a whore." América feels that "those hard and filthy words [...] hurt more than the blow itself."

This is the first time in the novel that the reader sees Cándido commit violence against América. Cándido will repeat his insult of calling América a "whore" later in the novel, after José Navidad rapes her, underscoring the ways in which women are often blamed for things they can't control, or simply for trying to help.

Despite Cándido's violent protest, América heads to the labor exchange. There, a man with "hard burnished unblinking eyes the color of calf's liver" and wearing a backwards baseball cap gives her a cup of coffee. América accepts the coffee but finds the man unnerving. Later in the morning the man returns and tries to flirt with América, touching her face and calling her *linda* (pretty). América feels "miserable, guilty—she'd taken the coffee hadn't she?"

América feels indebted to Navidad because she made the choice of accepting his coffee. Boyle suggests here that a feeling of owing men something often motivates women to tolerate harassment and otherwise harmful behavior from them. This is a catch-twenty-two for América: once she has accepted the coffee, she feels she must accept Navidad's conversation and inappropriate comments. Though brief, this passage illustrates one of the many ways that societal norms of politeness work to trap women into dangerous situations.

The man introduces himself as José Navidad and asks América's name. When she refuses to give it, he continues to flirt with her—"come on, loosen up, baby," he says—and América stands to leave, saying, "I want you to know that I'm a married woman and it's not right to talk to me like that." As América turns to look for Candelario Pérez, whom she hopes will protect her from José, José grabs and holds onto her ankle. Before letting go he says, "Married woman [...] Maybe so [...] But not for long, pretty, not for long."

This ominous moment acts as foreshadowing of the terrible violence Navidad will later inflict on América. Indeed, as he is about to rape her, Navidad repeats his taunt about América being a "married woman." Navidad's cruel mocking of América's words, and his unprovoked aggression toward her, illustrate his villainy.

Two hours later, at nine in the morning, Candelario Pérez calls América over to a car driven by "a giant of a fat man," with whom Candelario is speaking English. (The man turns out to be Jim Shirley.) Mary runs over, too, and insists that she be hired instead of América—"She doesn't speak any English—what do you want with her?" Mary says. Candelario converses with the fat man and then says to América, "Six hours' work and he'll give you twenty-five dollars." América agrees and gets into the car, and so does Mary.

Mary's attempt to cut América out of a job shows how white Americans' prejudice against immigrants (particularly those of color) is often disguised as a practical concern. As the novel will later show, despite not speaking English, América has a much better work ethic than Mary. Thus, Mary's "rationale" is merely an appeal to anti-immigrant prejudice.

The narration shifts to Cándido's perspective. Though he is still in intense pain from his injuries, Cándido manages to move the camp upstream, hoping to avoid further attacks by Jack Jr. and his accomplice. Cándido moves his and América's belongings half a mile away, to a "private beach" on the far side of the stream. Cándido feels energized by the beautiful location and he sets to work building a lean-to as a surprise for América. When he is done, he naps, and awakens to find that América has not yet returned. Worried, he returns to the old campsite, thinking América might be waiting there. Unable to find her, Cándido makes an excruciating hike up the hill, where he comes suddenly upon a "tall pale man" carrying a bedroll (José Navidad) who asks him what the camping is like in the canyon. Cándido lies, saying he is leaving the canyon because it is so inhospitable. Cándido thinks, "if word got out, the whole labor exchange would be down there." Cándido and José exchange a few more tense words before José heads down into the canyon (ignoring Cándido's advice) and Cándido continues up the hill in search of América.

This is the first and only time Cándido meets Navidad. Cándido's immediate suspicion of him seems to spring not only from Navidad's threatening demeanor, but also from the fact that Navidad's skin is light enough for him to pass as a white person. This will become important later on, as Cándido will continually refer to Navidad as "half-a-gringo." The fact that Navidad is considered too Mexican by white characters like Delaney and not Mexican enough by fellow Mexicans like Cándido makes him symbolic of "the other," leading people to mistrust him. A final noteworthy aspect of this passage is the sense of hope and energy that Cándido draws from his new campsite. This suggests the power of the natural world to reinforce human emotions, a theme that is continually revisited throughout the book.


Cándido heads to the smaller of two local markets; he and América tend to buy their groceries here and he thinks this might be where she is waiting for him. He wonders if América has found work and is grocery shopping this very moment. The thought of food makes him feel weak and he bumps into someone in the parking lot, attracting attention and making Cándido wish his injured legs did not prevent him from running away.

This moment validates the constant feeling of vulnerability that both Cándido and América feel when on the canyon road or visiting the shops that line it. A white person may have been able to bump into this man without attracting so much attention—and certainly without eliciting such an angry, hateful response—but Cándido's "outsider" status means that he is under constant scrutiny and threat of attack.


The narration shifts to América's perspective. It is six o'clock in the evening and she is still at Jim Shirley's house, working. Though she is incredibly tired, América is heartened by the prospect of earning extra money for her extra hours of work. She has spent the day using corrosive to clean stone Buddhas before affixing "Jim Shirley Imports" stickers to them. Mary has been drinking and complaining, but América works hard until just after seven o'clock, when Jim Shirley comes downstairs and ushers América and Mary into his car.

Not only does this passage emphasize América's passionate, hardworking character, but it also sharply contrasts this dedication with Mary's laziness. Though neither América nor the reader will end up learning how much Mary is paid for her work, the fact that she is paid at all—when she barely worked half as diligently as América did—shows the privilege she gains from being white.

As Jim Shirley drives out of Arroyo Blanco Estates, where América has been working for the day, América notices the brand-new gate that has been erected in front of the neighborhood; she also sees the men who have been working on the gate and thinks she might recognize one of them from the labor exchange. Jim Shirley drops Mary off at her bungalow and América strains but is unable to see how much Shirley has paid her. Alone with América, Jim Shirley puts "his hand casually across her thigh;" though she wants to scream, América lets "it lie there like a dead thing, though it moved and insinuated itself." Shirley does not pay América for the two extra hours she worked.

América's decision not to resist Shirley's advances shows not only how committed she is to building a better life for her family, but also highlights the vast power differential between América and her white, male, English-speaking employer. It is difficult to believe that América could have resisted without endangering herself or her one tangible prospect for future employment.


PART 1, CHAPTER 7

The narration switches to Delaney's perspective. It is six o'clock in the evening and he is cooking dinner when he decides to run to the grocery store for pasta. Delaney takes Jordan with him but lets him wait in the car while he shops. While in the store (which, the reader knows, is the same store frequented by Cándido and América), Delaney runs into Jack Jardine. The two engage in a heated discussion about the newly-erected gate in Arroyo Blanco. Jack claims that "this society isn't what it was—and it won't be until we get control of the borders."

Jack's powers of persuasion will develop a stronger hold on Delaney as the novel progresses. Despite the fact that Delaney stands up to Jack in parts of this supermarket conversation, Jack's consistent appeals to fear clearly work to destabilize Delaney and make him question whether it is worth sticking to his "liberal- humanist ideals."

Delaney insists that Jack's logic is racist, but Jack continues to argue that immigrants "coming in through the Tortilla Curtain down there" are criminals and are costing the US too much money in social services. Delaney feels overwhelmed by Jack's ferocity and struggles to organize his thoughts but before he can respond Jack Jr. appears and he and his father move toward the cash registers, with Delaney following.

Though Delaney remains clear-headed and confident enough to call out Jack's logic as racist, he is unable to shake the appeal of this logic. This can be clearly seen in the mental images that overwhelm Delaney—of the "dark disordered faces" of immigrants. Delaney is struggling to hold onto the democratic, humanist beliefs he knows are just.

Before leaving the store, Delaney "concedes" to Jack that he accepts the gate because "none of us want urban crime up here—that'd be crazy." Outside in the parking lot, Delaney witnesses a man berating another man, calling him a "wetback motherfucker." Delaney recognizes Cándido, and desires "in some perverse way […] to see this dark alien little man crushed and obliterated, out of his life forever." The yelling man shoves Cándido into Delaney's car. Cándido mumbles an apology "in his own dark language," Delaney observes, and hurries away. Jack Jardine says to Delaney: "See what I mean?"

The fact that Delaney gives in to Jack shows how desperately Delaney wants to belong in his neighborhood of Arroyo Blanco. Delaney's powerfully negative reaction to seeing Cándido in the parking lot shows how rapidly he is beginning to give in to his fear of people who don't look like him. His desire to see Cándido "crushed" implies that he thinks of him almost like an insect rather than a person.


The narration switches to Kyra's perspective. She is showing the Da Ros house to a wealthy couple who is hoping to move out of LA proper—the husband has, on a previous occasion, confided in Kyra that there are too many "*people*" in the city. Kyra knows what the man means: "Brown people. Colored people. People in saris, *serapes* and kaffiyehs." After awhile the couple decides not to buy the Da Ros house.

This passage is noteworthy because it is one of the rare passages in which the characters acknowledge the racism and fear that undergird life in this suburban community. Despite this intellectual understanding, however, Kyra will prove unable to recognize or check these prejudices in her own actions and reactions.

The narration returns to Delaney's perspective. It is the morning after he saw Cándido in the grocery store parking lot and Delaney is still ruminating on the encounter. He wishes he had pointed Cándido out to Jack Jardine as the man whom he hit with his car, identifying Cándido as "a nuisance, a bum, a panhandler." Delaney thinks of himself as the victim, and considers his twenty dollars as having been extorted from him by "an emotional sleight of hand" on Cándido's part. Delaney feels too "unsettled" to work on his column so he decides to leave early for his afternoon hike.

This passage is the first clear moment in which Delaney has become paranoid. He is beginning to indulge in the racist fantasies of which he was only semi conscious at the beginning of the novel. These prejudices were present in Delaney from the moment he hit Cándido with his car and considered that Cándido might be part of a coordinated gang effort to rob him. Now, however, Delaney is fully allowing himself to identify as the "victim" and to dwell voluntarily in these prejudices.

Delaney decides to forgo his usual path through the main part of the canyon and instead hike along "the creekbed until he hit the smaller, unnamed canyon." It takes Delaney a while to find a parking spot on **the canyon road** due to traffic and construction, but eventually he finds a spot to leave his car and heads into the canyon. He immediately spots a pair of sleeping bags along the bank of the stream and feels "embarrassment, as if he'd broken into some stranger's bedroom and gone snooping through his drawers." Delaney does not consider himself a "vigilante," so he decides to "put miles between him[self] and this sordid little camp, this shithouse in the woods" and then call the sheriff's department when he gets home.

Delaney's reaction to seeing the sleeping bags is important because it shows how adept he is at willfully deceiving himself. Though he mentally insists that he is not a vigilante, his plan to call the police as soon as he gets home is entirely in keeping with someone who sees himself as a direct extension of the law. Furthermore, this is the first of many examples of Delaney using his interest in nature and conservation as an excuse for his anti-immigrant actions and beliefs. By viewing himself as a protector—either of nature or of other people—Delaney exhibits not only his prejudices but also his ever-growing egotism.

Delaney continues on his hike and soon hears voices. He thinks, "These were transients, bums, criminals, and there was no law here." He recalls a woman he met in a birding class when he first moved to California two years ago who told him that she once encountered "Mexicans, she thought," while solo hiking. The men grabbed her by the ankle when she tried to flee (though it is unclear if they committed any other violence against her) and from that day forward the woman had decided never to hike alone.

That the woman feels the need to specify the race of the men who attacked her implies that she might not have been as afraid of white men. Delaney seems to mobilize this memory as justification for his anger. Thus, his concern for women, while not exactly misplaced, is certainly inappropriately invoked.

Delaney discerns that the voices are speaking in Spanish and he begins to feel "angry, like a voyeur"—the hike, and his day, are "ruined," he thinks. Just then, a man in a backwards baseball cap (José Navidad) appears before Delaney. José says, "Hiking, huh? […] I'm hiking too. Me and my friend." At this, a second man appears, though he says nothing. Delaney is too angry to feel alarmed—all he can focus on is having the police "hustle" the men "right back to wherever they'd come from, slums, favelas, barrios, whatever they called them. They didn't belong here, that was for sure." Delaney leaves without saying anything, continuing along the streambed.

Delaney continues to demonstrate his arrogance when it comes to the natural world. The fact that encountering someone else (particularly someone who speaks Spanish instead of English) while on his hike ruins his experience shows that Delaney feels himself exclusively entitled to the California landscape. Additionally, this passage shows that Delaney has reached a point in his psychological evolution where his immediate response to people who don't look like or speak like him is to assume these people are breaking the law and to involve the authorities in order to have these people sent "back where they came from."

Rankled by the lack of "privacy" in the canyon, Delaney walks back uphill to **the canyon road** only to find that his car is missing. He questions the road crew about it, but none of the men speak English. Delaney treks up the busy canyon road to a pay phone, from which he calls the police. He then calls Kyra and tells her, "They stole my car." When Kyra asks who "they" is, Delaney "[tries] to picture the perpetrators" but all he can think of is "the bruised face and blunted eyes of his Mexican" (Cándido). Delaney ends the phone call by asking Kyra to call Jack Jardine.

The theft of Delaney's car marks the beginning of Delaney's downward spiral into racist paranoia. It is noteworthy that Delaney tells Kyra, "they stole my car," rather than "someone stole my car," as it illustrates the fact that Delaney has begun to think of Mexicans collectively, rather than as individual people.

PART 1, CHAPTER 8

The narration shifts to Cándido's perspective, and jumps backward in time. Cándido has just seen Delaney in the supermarket parking lot and he feels as though he is "being haunted by devils," including Delaney (the *pelirrojo*, as Cándido calls him) and Delaney's "awkward *pendejo* of a son who'd hiked all the way down into the canyon to violate a poor man's few pitiful possessions." (Cándido has mistaken Jack Jr. for Delaney's, rather than Jack Jardine's, son. He will continue to operate under this presumption for the remainder of the novel.) Cándido is currently hiding in the bushes at the edge of the parking lot, hoping América will walk out of the store.

This is one of the rare moments where Cándido's conviction that he is "cursed" appears justified, given the unwarranted and nearly continuous harassment he has been experiencing. It is noteworthy that Cándido has been made to feel so unwelcome in white American society that he is forced to hide in the bushes where he is physically out of sight. The fear of being looked at will continue to be important to Cándido's journey throughout the novel, as it powerfully invokes his feelings of being shunned and unwanted by white Americans.

América emerges from a car that pulls up to the grocery store (Jim Shirley's car). Cándido feels excited but also ashamed: "They would have money to eat, but he hadn't earned it. No: a seventeen-year-old village girl had earned it, and at what price? And what did that make him?" Cándido follows América into the market and finds her in the refrigerated section. He immediately notices that something is wrong when América will not meet his gaze; he sees in her eyes "the traces […] of some shame or sorrow that [scream] out at him in warning." América does not answer but instead presents Cándido with the money she earned, and the two embrace.

Cándido is sensitive enough to realize that something has happened to América, but his ideas of masculinity limit the compassion he is able to express for his wife. In Cándido's mind, it is his role as a man to provide for and protect his wife. The fear of learning that Shirley has harassed América (which would be an indication that Cándido somehow failed to protect her) prevents him from inquiring sincerely and compassionately about América's traumatic experience. This pattern of silence, shame, and anger will only become more destructive to Cándido's mental state and to his marriage after José Navidad rapes América.

After shopping together, Cándido and América hike down into the canyon. Cándido is still in pain from his healing injuries but he feels "buoyant and hopeful for the first time since the accident." Cándido leads América to their new campsite—they have to remove their clothes and swim across the stream to reach it—and the two then eat together, naked.

This is a rare peaceful, happy moment between Cándido and América. The serenity they feel at their new streamside camp illustrates the theme of the natural world reflecting and reinforcing humans' inner emotional states. Their nudity in nature as a man and woman is an allusion to the Garden of Eden.

The narration shifts to América's perspective. It is the next morning and she and Cándido are hiking up the canyon to the labor exchange. América feels hopeful that she and Cándido will both be able to find work and begin saving money for an apartment. However, at the labor exchange no one is willing to hire Cándido (presumably because of his injuries). América senses her husband's "silent fury" and tries her best to keep his spirits up by distracting him with talk. After several hours, Jim Shirley shows up and América gets into his car. Despite Candelario Pérez's efforts to convince Shirley to hire Cándido and two other men as well, Shirley leaves with América, as he wants only women to work for him.

América's efforts to buoy her husband's spirits illustrate not only how positive she is as a character, but also how much work she is expected to do. Not only must she find her own work (while pregnant) but she must also act as her husband's nurse (due to his injuries) and emotional caretaker, given how much he has personalized and internalized the "shame" of not being able to find work on his own. While América does not seem to resent the emotional burden of supporting her husband, it is another aspect of her marriage (on top of Cándido's verbal and physical abuse) that is damaging specifically to her.

América again works on cleaning the Buddhas, and soon realizes—thanks to the burning of her hands and nostrils—that Shirley has forgotten to give her gloves. América searches the bathroom but cannot find any gloves. She continues to work but her hands are being burned by the corrosive and she realizes she must summon the courage to ask Shirley for the gloves. She worries, not only because she can't speak English but also because Shirley might "[get] dirty with her"—she thinks, "Wasn't she asking for it by coming into his house all alone?" América works up the nerve to ask for the gloves, which Shirley brusquely fetches for her.

Like the moment when América felt she must converse with Navidad after accepting his coffee, América's fear that she is "asking for" Shirley to assault her by agreeing to work for him shows how society tends to blame women for any abuse that men commit against them. As a woman who does not speak English, América is less able to advocate for herself. This passage thus highlights several different ways that the American Dream is made less accessible to people who do not meet certain criteria.

América works hard all day, despite the fumes of the corrosive burning her throat. She is determined to earn more money and to show Shirley that she is "worth more than the kind of girl who would have lifted his hand from her lap and pressed it to her breasts." At the end of the day, Shirley drives América back down to the canyon; this time he does not put his hand in her lap. América does not see Cándido in the grocery store parking lot when Shirley drops her off, and she feels hopeful that her husband has gotten work. América waits an hour and then goes into the store to buy some food. When she comes outside again she continues waiting as the sun sets.

América feels the need to prove she is "worth more" than a woman who might have encouraged Shirley's advances. This shows how a society where men are systematically empowered and privileged pits women against one another and reinforces the idea that a woman must be either virtuous or promiscuous. That América has to worry about whether she might be harassed on her drive home from work again emphasizes the fact that the cost of attaining the American Dream is higher for those with less privilege to begin with.

Cándido does not show up, so América makes her way down the trail into the canyon. When she arrives at the camp she finds José Navidad and his unnamed friend waiting for her. José says, "*Buenas noches, señorita*?—or should I say *señora*?" América sprints away, back up the trail—she thinks if she makes it back to the road "they wouldn't touch her there, they couldn't." José catches América easily and pins her to the ground, beating her and then tearing off her clothes and penetrating her with his fingers. As he moves to unzip his pants and rape her, with his friend "waiting his turn" in the background, José whispers to América, "Married woman [...] You better call your husband."

For the first time in the novel, América sees the canyon road—where she is visible and therefore vulnerable—as a possible form of protection. This surprising detail makes the violence she endures all the more devastating.

PART 2, CHAPTER 1

The narration shifts to Delaney's perspective. His car having been stolen, Delaney is back at Kenny Grissom's dealership. Grissom tells Delaney that car theft "happens all the time," and Delaney thinks: "It happened all the time, but why did it have to happen to him?" He feels he has been "violated, taken, ripped off" and he is frustrated that no one seems to be taking his situation seriously. Even Jack Jardine has "used the occasion to deliver a sermon," telling Delaney: "We're under siege here—and there's going to be a backlash. People are fed up with it. [...] You're fed up with it too, admit it."

While this passage highlights Delaney's continuing victim mentality and growing prejudice, it also suggests a more sympathetic side to Delaney's character. It seems that all Delaney wants is to have his frustration and confusion validated; he wants to be listened to and affirmed. Fundamentally, this is part and parcel with a desire to belong to a supportive community. The fact that Delaney does not feel supported—even by his new friend, Jack Jardine—shows that shared bigotry is an insufficient basis for a feeling of community and friendship.

Delaney buys a new car from Kenny and heads to his lunch date with Kyra. When he arrives at the restaurant and has the valet park his car, Delaney realizes that he no longer knows his license plate. He feels he is "losing control." He heads inside and talks to Kyra about the approval they have recently gotten to raise the height of their fence, so their dogs will be better protected. Delaney wishes he could talk to Kyra about the "stab of racist resentment" he felt when he handed his keys to the Latino parking lot attendant moments earlier, but he feels he can't.

Delaney's involuntary resentment of the Latino parking attendant is noteworthy because it demonstrates that Delaney's prejudice is becoming stronger and more compulsive. Delaney is not yet past the point of no return, however; the fact that he can still consciously identify his resentment as racist suggests that he is not yet a lost cause.

Kyra and Delaney eat a quick lunch because Kyra needs to leave to close a house. In the parking lot, Kyra says she'd like to take a brief look at Delaney's car, but the couple is distracted by the sound of a dog barking. Delaney and Kyra realize that someone has left a dog locked in a car. Kyra becomes furious and demands that the parking lot attendant tell her who owns the car. The boy, however, does not speak English, which only frustrates Kyra further. Though Delaney tries to stop her, Kyra storms back into the restaurant and demands that the dog's owner identify himself. Delaney succeeds in ushering Kyra back outside.

The most noteworthy aspect of this passage is Kyra's "exasperation" with the parking attendant's limited English. Kyra is, of course, upset that the dog might suffer heat stroke, but she channels that anger toward the parking attendant instead of keeping it focused on the issue at hand. Delaney will illustrate this misdirection of anger in even more dramatic fashion later in the novel.

In the parking lot, Delaney comes to think of Kyra as "glorious in her outrage, a saint, a crusader." For a moment, he forgets about his own "growing sense of confusion and vulnerability." The dog's owner appears and Kyra angrily confronts him; the man responds, "Why don't you just fuck off, lady," and drives away. Delaney laments the fact that people are "so *nasty* all the time," and Kyra responds, "Urban life," with "a depth of bitterness" that catches Delaney off guard. Before he can respond, Kyra hurries off to her meeting.

Delaney's admiration of Kyra's "crusading" anger will inform his later feelings about his own "crusade" against Cándido Rincón. This passage is thus significant because it highlights Delaney's tendency to see anger as righteous and "glorious." Additionally, when Kyra deplores "urban life" she seems to be unconsciously adopting the same attitude demonstrated by the real estate couple she worked with, who wanted to move away from the city because it had too many "people." This demonstrates how blind people can be to their own prejudices and hypocrisy.

Leaving the restaurant, Delaney finds himself, once again, "in a rage." He decides to go for another hike in the hills, since "the day [is] shot anyway." Delaney parks his car and gets out to begin his hike but then realizes there is nothing "to stop them from getting this [car] too." Instead of going for a walk, Delaney hides himself in the bushes; he knows he is being "paranoiac," but he nevertheless resolves to "sit here through the afternoon, hidden in the bushes, sit here and watch."

This represents another important stage in Delaney's psychological evolution. At this point, he is still able to label his behavior paranoid or irrational, but he persists in the behavior regardless. This represents a step backward from how he began the novel, when he showed a greater ability to correct/check his behavior after recognizing it as prejudiced or unfair.

The narration switches to Kyra's perspective. She is going about her afternoon, stopping in at her office and driving around on other work related errands, when she notices a group of fifty men waiting on the sidewalk, hoping to secure work. She thinks: "There were too many of them here and that was the sort of thing that scared buyers away from the area." Kyra pulls into the larger grocery store on the street (not the one frequented by Cándido and América). Inside she unproductively questions the cashiers about the men outside.

In this passage, Kyra tries to rationalize the repulsion she feels when she sees the day laborers gathered on the streetcorner. She is most likely genuinely worried about property values falling, but she is also guilty of using her work as an excuse to justify her prejudice.

Back outside, Kyra crosses to the corner where the men are standing and looks around, conscious of the men's eyes on her. She feels "overwhelmed with anger and disgust and a kind of sinking despair." She thinks: "Somebody had to do something about these people—they were ubiquitous, prolific as rabbits, and they were death for business." As Kyra returns to her car one of the men asks her if she wants to hire him but she declines.

This passage further emphasizes that the root of Kyra's disgust at the sight of the streetcorner is racist resentment—just like Delaney's—rather than a concern about property values. This is most dramatically highlighted by the fact that Kyra derogatorily compares "these people" to rabbits, as if they were subhuman creatures whose primary motivation was the primal urge to procreate.

Kyra stops home at Arroyo Blanco to see how Al Lopez and his team are doing on the fence. At Al's suggestion, Kyra agrees to pay more for a wire mesh that will supposedly stop rattlesnakes from entering the yard. While chatting with Al, Kyra spots Cándido, one of the workers; from his limp and his swollen face she recognizes him as the man Delaney hit and she feels "a space open up inside her, a great sad empty space that made her feel as if she'd given birth to something weak and unformed."

It is difficult to interpret Kyra's feeling when she encounters Cándido of "a great sad empty space" inside her. She seems to feel compassion for the man whom her husband so brutally injured, but her feeling of birthing "something weak and unformed" suggests that this compassion is tentative at best.

Later in the day, Kyra heads to the Da Ros house to close it for the night. She notices a shopping cart along the side of the road and she drags it out of the ditch. Kyra makes her rounds of the house, musing about how the shopping cart could've gotten there. She thinks about the men Delaney told her he saw camping in the canyon and feels panicked that perhaps people are camping on the Da Ros property as well—"How could you explain something like that to a prospective buyer?" she thinks. Just then she notices movement on the lawn and spots two men: José Navidad and his friend. She walks over to confront them without "[thinking] to be afraid."

This passage shows yet again how white characters tend to use the word camping as a kind of euphemism. They seem unable to bring themselves to use an overtly derogatory word like "squatting" but they also demonstrate a fundamental inability to imagine the actual circumstances of someone like Navidad or the Rincóns. The reality for these characters is far from the kind of "camping" imagined by their white, wealthy counterparts. This passage thus illustrates the vast divide between people like Kyra and the Mexican immigrants she reviles.

Kyra accuses the men of trespassing, but José's demeanor quickly makes her nervous. When José questions whether Kyra owns the property, she lies and says that she owns it with her husband, and that he and her brother are inside the house making dinner. José insists that he and his friend are "just hike" and Kyra, on edge, replies that it is no problem. Before leaving, José says: "You have a nice day, huh? […] You and your husband. And your brother too."

Kyra's fear of Navidad seems to be instinctual. It is unclear whether Kyra's reaction is at all influenced by Navidad's skin color, since the reader is given to understand that Navidad is light-skinned enough to pass as a white person. Navidad's parting words makre clear that he doesn't believe that her husband and brother are actually inside the house.

PART 2, CHAPTER 2

The narration switches to Cándido's perspective, and backward in time to the day on which José Navidad raped América. It is the afternoon and Cándido is waiting alone in the labor exchange, América having left to work her second day at Jim Shirley's house. Al Lopez arrives at the exchange and hires Cándido to work on his team at Arroyo Blanco Estates. Cándido is not bothered by the gate that encloses the neighborhood. He "[doesn't] need a million dollars"—he only wants steady work.

The fact that Cándido is so unperturbed by the gate, while also knowing without question that it is intended to keep "people like him" out, shows how misguided the fears of Delaney and Jack Jardine are. Cándido, at this moment, is neither envious nor resentful of the white residents of Arroyo Blanco. He simply wants to support himself and his family.

At Arroyo Blanco, Cándido reflects on the first time he came to Topanga Canyon. He was working in Idaho but then made his way to Los Angeles, on the advice of his friend Hilario. The two men, along with a few others, drove from Idaho to California but their car broke down in Oregon. A police car showed up beside the broken down car and the men scattered, since they were undocumented. Afterward, Cándido was unable to find Hilario or the others. He barely survived the freezing night, and the next day he knocked at the door of a farmer's barn. The farmer took Cándido inside and clothed and fed him. He also called a Mexican woman who lived a few towns away so Cándido could speak to her in Spanish. The woman helped Cándido secure a bus ticket to Los Angeles.

This is a rare moment in the novel where a (presumably) white American shows compassion for a Mexican immigrant. The farmer here is remarkable not only for sheltering and feeding Cándido, but for his effort to make Cándido feel understood and unalone through his effort to connect him with another Spanish-speaking Mexican. This farmer seems to understand the importance of belonging, and he represents a rare positive example in the novel of a genuinely empathetic white American.

In the LA suburb of Canoga Park, Cándido began working as a gardener. Soon, however, Immigration raided his workplace and arrested Cándido along with countless other workers. Before he could be deported, Cándido made a run for the trees; two young men followed him in his escape. Pursued by Immigration agents, Cándido sprang out into traffic; the two young men followed him and were both killed. Traumatized by these deaths, Cándido spent seven days lying by the creek in Topanga Canyon, "turning the horror over in his mind." He then went home to Resurrección, his wife at the time.

The fact that Cándido survived this brush with death, while the two teenagers did not, contributes to his sense of being special (in this case, in a good way rather than in a cursed way). This passage is also important because it provides backstory that makes it clear how long Cándido has been striving to make a life for himself in the States.

Cándido works for Al Lopez until ten o'clock at night and then returns to his camp in the canyon. América's face looks like that "of a stranger" and Cándido notices the welts across her neck and back. Cándido demands to know whether "that *rico*" (Jim Shirley) did this to her. América tells Cándido that José and his friend "took [her] money." Cándido viciously questions América, repeatedly asking, "Is that all they took?" América replies in the affirmative.

By asking América what else José "took" from her, Cándido implicitly objectifies his wife. It is almost as though he means to ask whether Navidad took América's virtue. Asking whether Navidad took something from América minimizes the violation she has endured, and also seems to suggest that América somehow failed by allowing that ambiguous "something" to be taken. Yet again, Cándido's obsession with protecting his wife—and thereby protecting his own manhood—prevents him from exhibiting true compassion toward her.

The narration shifts to América's perspective. Since José Navidad raped her, América has been having burning and pain when she urinates. She wonders whether this is a normal part of pregnancy (she has just entered her fifth month), and she longs for her mother and older sisters, who would be able to give her advice. Cándido has barred América from going back to the labor exchange, so for days on end América waits at the campsite while Cándido is away. Weeks pass and América becomes depressed and apathetic, "so still and so empty she might have been comatose."

América is in pain when she urinates, suggesting that José Navidad gave her a sexually transmitted disease when he raped her. On a thematic level, this passage illustrates the pervasive, destructive effects of rape on female survivors, and highlights the importance of female community, as evidenced by América's longing for her mother and sisters.


One day América sees a female **coyote** close to the campsite. She looks into the animal's eyes and imagines herself "inside [...] looking out, [...] know[ing] that men were her enemies—men in uniform, men with their hats reversed, men with fat bloated hands and fat bloated necks, men with traps and guns and poisoned bait." After awhile the coyote disappears.

América draws real strength from her interaction with the female coyote. The fact that her hallucination allows her to conflate hunters who kill coyotes with men who sexually harass and assault women shows how devastating sexual violence is. It is equivalent to a kind of death.


The narration shifts to Cándido's perspective. It is evening and Cándido is sitting by the campfire, drunk. América is trying on some maternity clothes Cándido bought in Canoga Park, where he has been working for Al Lopez. Cándido has just learned that his job with Lopez is ending; he is to be replaced by a man who has "papers." Cándido is in a dark mood, worried about the fact that the dry season will end soon, around the same time that América's baby is due.

The impending threat of the rainy season is important on a plot level because it raises the stakes of Cándido and América finding permanent shelter. Another important aspect of this passage is the fact that Cándido's job has been transferred to someone who is not undocumented. Not being able to secure official documentation represents another obstacle to Cándido and América finding success in the States.


América shows off her new clothes to Cándido and he responds by accosting her with questions about what José Navidad "took" from her. Cándido suspects that América was raped and the knowledge makes him "[want] to hurt her, [want] to hurt himself, twisting the knowledge round and round his brain like a rotten tooth rotated in its socket." He knows América is lying to him about her assault to spare his feelings, but nevertheless he "[knows] how it [is] going to be, how it [has] to be, [knows] he [will] follow her into that hut and slap his own pain out of her." The scene closes before Cándido commits this violence but it is strongly implied that he beats América later that night.

Cándido reckons with the implicit knowledge of América's rape by deciding to beat her. This shows how even "good" men perpetuate violence against women, and reinforces the idea that Cándido has bought into the socially constructed notion that a woman is somehow at fault for the sexual assault she has survived.

PART 2, CHAPTER 3

The narration shifts to Delaney's perspective. It is a mid-August evening and Delaney is preparing dinner outside for his family. Delaney is feeling grateful for the fact that "life [has] settled back onto an easy even keel." Over dinner Kyra announces to Delaney that she has collaborated with her coworker, Mike Bender, to "[clean] up Shoup," the street corner where she saw men waiting for work. Delaney remains quiet, "trying to reconcile the theoretical and the actual." He thinks that "those people" have the constitutional right to gather at the exchange, but finds himself wondering: "Whose constitution—Mexico's? Did Mexico even have a constitution?" Kyra insists that she's "not proud of it or anything [...] but there's just so many of them, they've overwhelmed us."

Delaney appears to be dwelling a fair amount on the "threat" posed by immigrants. Meanwhile, Kyra has become more confident in and vocal about her own biases. Her notion that Mexicans are "overwhelming" Americans by their numbers is thinly-veiled racism: yet again, she diminishes people of color to their (allegedly voracious) sexual appetites and reproduction rates.

Kyra's announcement makes Delaney remember an evening he spent with Jack Jardine two nights prior. Jack Jardine took Delaney to the house of Dominick Flood, a legal client of Jack's who "got entangled in some unwise investments" and is now on house arrest for the next three years. Jim Shirley and Jack Cherrystone were also present at the get-together. Delaney soon realized that the point of the gathering was for the men to discuss building **a wall** around Arroyo Blanco Estates. The men had a long discussion during which Delaney's emotions vacillated wildly; at one point, he "looked through his reflection to the shadowy lawn out back, half-expecting to see criminals disguised as gardeners tiptoeing past [...]. Was nobody safe—anywhere, ever?" The evening ended with Dominick Flood announcing his intention to have the labor exchange shut down.

Delaney's dramatically shifting emotions indicate that he is still under the thumb of Jack Jardine. On a broader level, this passage is once again highlighting the contagious nature of prejudice, which is rooted in fear of the "other." Flood's decision to shut down the labor exchange is a bald-faced attempt to root out immigrants from the community, leaving them with no designated place to look for work.

The narration returns to the dinner scene, with Delaney reflecting on the fact that "Kyra had cleaned up the corner of Shoup and Ventura, and Dominick Flood had cleaned up the labor exchange." Delaney feels unsettled and slightly remorseful, wondering about where all the immigrants hoping to find work will go now, but he reassures himself by thinking: "Why dwell on the negative, the paranoiac, the wall-builders and excluders? He was part of it now, complicit by his very presence here, and he might as well enjoy it."

Delaney seems only to consider himself as a vigilante when it suits him. When it is more convenient to absolve himself of responsibility, he chooses this route. At this point, Delaney's concern for the people who will be out of work now that Flood has shut down the labor exchange seems merely a perfunctory performance of compassion.

Delaney suggests that he, Kyra, and Jordan go see a movie. The family is discussing the logistics of this when a **coyote** appears on the lawn and drags off Osbert, scaling the newly-heightened fence with ease. Delaney tries to follow the coyote over the fence but is unable to; by the time he runs around the house and out through the side gate, the coyote is gone.

Osbert's death is a crucial plot point because it will dramatically enhance both Delaney and Kyra's sense of powerlessness and directly contribute to the actions they take and the attitudes they adopt going forward.

PART 2, CHAPTER 4

The narration shifts to Cándido's perspective. He has found work intermittently and has managed to save three hundred and twenty dollars in a plastic jar buried at the campsite. He is hoping to triple this amount before his child (whom he hopes will be a son) is born. One morning, Cándido walks up the hill to the labor exchange and finds that it is gone; in its place is a sign that says, "All Persons Warned Against Trespass." Across the street at the post office, Cándido speaks to several other men about the closure, including Candelario Pérez. Pérez informs the men that the man who donated the land for the labor exchange has reclaimed it; Pérez also says that Immigration will be making sweeps in the area in the next two days.

Now that the one institution that has been of aid to him has closed, Cándido will have an even more difficult time finding work. The fact that the labor exchange is ostensibly the only "safety net" available to Cándido and América evokes how inhospitable the United States can be to immigrants at a structural level.

Cándido is furious, devastated by the fact that he is considered "a criminal for daring to [...] risk everything for the basic human necessities." He wanders the lot and when he spots a car with its windows rolled down he considers stealing, feeling that "the world owe[s] him something." Before he can do so, a white woman approaches him and gives him some money, which he "involuntarily" accepts. The woman's "touch annihilate[s]" Cándido and he feels that he has "never been more ashamed in his life."

Cándido's anger at being criminalized for wanting the basic necessities of life is depicted as justified anger, far different than Delaney's. Even though the woman who gives Cándido money appears to be an empathetic character, her pity toward Cándido makes him feel almost as terrible as her hatred would have. Cándido would much rather have the dignity of working to support himself than experience the shame of receiving charity he hasn't even solicited.

The narration shifts to América's perspective. Cándido has told her the news of the labor exchange being closed. Though she works to hide her emotions from her husband, América feels relieved. She is hopeful about the prospect of moving into the city; "Cándido had been stalling because he was afraid," she thinks, "[...] but now he could stall no longer."

América's persistent hopefulness makes her unique among the novel's four protagonists. The fact that she maintains hope for a better life—even after the trauma she has endured—shows how devoted she is to the dream of making a better future for herself and her child.

When América tells Cándido that she hopes to have an apartment in the city—or even a motel room—he insists that she will not be coming with him when he goes into Canoga Park to look for work. América insists that Cándido can't leave her behind in the canyon, in case José Navidad and his friend return. Cándido maintains that América will be safe as long as she doesn't go up onto the trail; he calls her by the patronizing nickname *Indita* when he says this, which América loathes. "I won't stay here," América shouts at him.

Cándido's insistence that América will be safe as long as she is not on the trail shows that he is oblivious to how insidious and far-reaching the threat of violence against women is. Cándido's conviction that América can and should stay all alone in the canyon while he works in the city shows that he doesn't understand her need for companionship and community, not to mention feelings of safety.


The next morning, América packs up the camp and she and Cándido walk for miles into the San Fernando Valley. América is "exhilarated, on fire with excitement" at the sight of the beautiful homes she sees. When the two arrive in Canoga Park, however, América's feelings shift—this neighborhood is more rundown, which makes América wary, but it is also populated by "people just like her all over" and this "makes her feel for the first time that she too could live here, that it could be done, that it had been done by thousands before her."

This passage shows the true power of community. Being surrounded by people who share her language and her culture immediately invests América with hope that her dreams can be made reality. This further underscores the callousness of Cándido's proposed plan to leave América in the canyon while he worked in the city.

América and Cándido eat in a restaurant, where América relishes the experience of washing herself at the bathroom sink. Afterwards they walk for hours, but they cannot find a place to stay or to work. While they are resting against a wall, they are approached by a man who offers Cándido a place to stay "just around the corner." América stays quiet—"this [is] between the two men," she thinks—and she obeys Cándido's direction to wait at the wall while he walks away with the man.

This passage evokes, yet again, the consequences of rigid gender roles. Because it is not América's place as a woman to enter the conversation Cándido has with this strange man, she stays silent. Ultimately, Cándido's naiveté in trusting this man leads to the Rincóns being robbed of most of their money.

PART 2, CHAPTER 5

This chapter is an excerpt of Delaney's column, "Pilgrim at Topanga Creek." In this column Delaney explores different approaches to managing the local **coyote** population. He writes, "Increasingly, this author has begun to feel that some sort of control must be applied if we continue to insist on encroaching on the coyote's territory [...] If we invade his territory, then why indeed should we be surprised when he invades ours?" He claims that he interviewed the parents of a six-month-old killed by a coyote in a nearby town, and recommends that his readers "Respect [the coyote] as the wild predator he is, keep [their] children and pets inside, leave no food source [...] where he can access it." Despite Delaney's suggestion to leave coyotes alone, as they are "only trying to survive," he ends his column on a dark image: "The coyotes keep coming, breeding up to fill in the gaps, moving in where the living is easy. They are cunning, versatile, hungry and unstoppable."

Delaney's column on coyotes centers on an extended metaphor in which coyotes stand in for Mexican immigrants. Though Delaney does not take an active stance in this column—he contemplates the pitfalls of "population control," and offers only the meek suggestion that people respect coyotes' wild nature—it is clear from his ultimately negative, dark imagery that he holds the same biased views against coyotes that he does against Mexican immigrants. Delany's language in this column is foreboding and implies an inevitable overthrow of white American society at the hands of coyotes (immigrants) who are rapidly "breeding."


PART 2, CHAPTER 6

The narration shifts to Kyra's perspective. It is seven o'clock in the evening and she is on her way to the Da Ros house, reflecting on the fruitless report she filed with the sheriff's department about José Navidad and his friend being on the property. In an hour Kyra will be canvassing Arroyo Blanco Estates about "**the wall** issue," along with Erna Jardine and Selda Cherrystone. Jack Jardine had called her two days after Osbert was killed by the **coyote** and convinced Kyra by saying, "I don't want to make this any more painful for you than it already is, but if [the coyotes] can't see the dog or cat or whatever, there'd be no reason for them to try scaling the wall, you follow me?" Kyra had agreed almost immediately, thinking that it was possible that "those hateful sneaking puppy-killing things" might even pose a threat to her son, Jordan.

The most important feature of this passage is the way it tracks the subtle shifts in Kyra's logic. While Kyra does not seem to be conflating coyotes and Mexican immigrants in the way Delaney did in his column, she is exaggerating. There is no evidence that coyotes would pose a threat to six-year-old Jordan. Nevertheless, Kyra is so distraught over the death of her second dog that she will accept any plausible reason as justification for building a wall. Later in the novel, Delaney will take this pattern of misdirecting frustration to the extreme.

After agreeing to join **the wall** committee, Kyra shared the news with Delaney. Delaney was furious, saying: "This isn't about **coyotes**, don't kid yourself. It's about Mexicans, it's about blacks. It's about exclusion, division, hate. You think Jack gives a damn about coyotes?" Delaney tried to prohibit Kyra from working on the committee but "she defied him" and set to work that night, sleeping in Jordan's room later instead of with Delaney.

Delaney's protestations about Kyra joining the wall committee are ironic given that the column he recently wrote was so clearly a metaphor about Mexicans. The passage is also significant because it illustrates the power of prejudice to divide—not only "outsiders" from "insiders," but also insiders from one another.

Kyra reflects on all of this as she enters the Da Ros property. She still feels unnerved being there, after her run-in with José Navidad. As she makes her rounds of the property, she is "bewildered at first, then outraged, and finally just plain frightened" to find graffiti on the side of the house that reads "Pinche Puta" (fucking whore).

While it is never definitively confirmed, it is likely that Navidad and his unnamed friend are responsible for this graffiti. Their choice of words disturbingly mirrors the insult that Cándido often hurls at América—that of being a whore. This detail reveals the pervasiveness of misogyny.

The narration shifts to Delaney's perspective. He is outside playing paddleball at the Arroyo Blanco Estates community center when he overhears Jack Jr. and another boy telling racist, misogynistic jokes about Mexican women. He realizes that Jordan will probably grow up to be like these boys. "That's what he'd tried to tell Kyra over this **wall** business," Delaney thinks. "It might keep *them* out, but look what it keeps in." Delaney finds himself wishing he'd never moved to California in the first place.

The jokes that Jack Jr. and his friend tell are explicit and incredibly demeaning to Mexican women. This is a rare moment in which Delaney is clear-sighted and perceptive about the infectious nature of racism: he recognizes that his stepson, Jordan, will adopt similarly bigoted views as he grows up in the community of Arroyo Blanco.

Feeling "depressed and out of sorts," Delaney heads home. He dreads being alone (Jordan is at his maternal grandmother's house and Kyra is out working). He reflects on his marriage to Kyra; Delaney desperately wants to have a baby but Kyra "[won't] hear of it." As Delaney is walking home, he runs into a man who introduces himself as Todd Sweet. Delaney recognizes the man as someone who spoke out against the gate at the community meeting, where Delaney waved around his dog's leg.

The detail about Delaney wanting to have a baby is important because it contextualizes the strain in his and Kyra's marriage that has been worsening ever since Sacheverell was killed by the coyote.

Sweet tells Delaney that he and his wife are trying to convince their neighbors to vote against **the wall** at the community meeting the following week. Delaney feels conflicted—he is morally opposed to the wall, but he knows his home life will continue to suffer if he takes a stand against Kyra. He is close to agreeing to help Sweet argue against the wall but then he spots the same music-blasting car he saw earlier in the neighborhood and he "hesitate[s]." Delaney tells Sweet he will call him and walks away.

Delaney exhibits reluctance about speaking out against the wall in the same way that he earlier hesitated to speak out about the gate. This time, he reasons that voicing his opinion would cause stress at home. Still, Delaney is finding excuses not to be in the awkward position of going against the grain in his community.

Continuing homeward, Delaney turns onto his street and sees a man in a backwards baseball cap (José Navidad) crossing Jack Cherrystone's lawn. Delaney recognizes the man as the "hiker" he encountered in the canyon, and he suddenly realizes this must be the same person Kyra saw on the Da Ros property. Delaney confronts José and tells him, "This is private property. You don't belong here."

Delaney's aggressiveness here contrasts with the backseat role he adopted when Kyra confronted the dog owner in the restaurant parking lot. Now, Delaney feels he is on his "home turf" and this energizes him to confront Navidad. This almost primal instinct to protect his "territory" will grow stronger in Delaney as he unravels in the upcoming chapters.

José insists that he is delivering "flies," but Delaney is now in a rage, insisting that he will call the police. "The man [is] a thief," he thinks, "a liar, the stinking occupant of a stinking sleeping bag in the state forest, a trespasser, a polluter, a Mexican." José holds up a stack of fliers to prove his point, and Delaney is "so devastated he [can't] speak." As José walks away, Delaney finds himself wondering "what [is] happening to him." When he looks down at the flier in his hand he realizes it is a message from Jack Jardine about **the wall**.

Delaney's language is noteworthy here. He mentally rattles off several charges against Navidad; the fact that he lists "Mexican" last suggests that this is the worst possible insult he could hurl. This illustrates how far Delaney has come in terms of voicing his bigotry. Still, Delaney is in control enough to realize that something terrible is "happening to him."

PART 2, CHAPTER 7

The narration shifts to América's perspective. She is still waiting at the wall for Cándido to return. For the first fifteen minutes, she enjoys observing her surroundings: "the city [is] like a movie playing before her eyes." However, the longer she waits the more anxious she becomes. After an hour and a half, América gets up to look for Cándido. The sun is setting, and América is devastated by the reality of her life. "She was a fool to have left [Mexico]," she thinks, "a fool to have listened to the stories."

For the first time, América's faith in the American Dream appears to waver. It dawns on her that this Dream is, at least in part, an illusion. This passage simultaneously illustrates both América's youthful naiveté and her perceptiveness.

Unable to find her husband, América returns to the wall. Night has fallen and men are beginning to walk the streets; América tries her best to "[withdraw] into herself [...] where nobody could touch her." At midnight, Cándido returns. He has been beaten and robbed of all his money. Thinking of "the woods, of the canyon, of that shitpile of sticks," América begins to wish she were dead.

América's feelings toward the canyon are significant because they show how her relationship to nature is a mirror of her inner emotions. Because of her traumatic experience in the canyon, she thinks of the place as a prison.


The narration shifts to Cándido's perspective. He is incredibly angry, and blames himself for having trusted the man who beat and robbed him. Cándido plans to find a gas station so he can wash the blood from his face in the restroom. Then, to his chagrin, he realizes he will have to dig through the garbage at a fast-food restaurant to find something for him and América to eat.

This passage demonstrates Cándido's grit, but also his persistent tendency to personalize his misfortune. He thinks he was robbed because he is cursed—when, really, if he'd been in a less desperate situation and able to think more clearly he probably would have realized the man who robbed him was a con artist.


The narration shifts to América's perspective. Though she is exhausted, América follows Cándido to the gas station and then to a KFC located off **the canyon road**. She feels "scared, angry, defeated, full of pity and hate." In the back of the restaurant, América is overwhelmed by rage when she realizes Cándido's plan is to dig through the trash. "Even at their lowest," she thinks, "even in Tijuana in the dump they'd been able to scrape together a few *centavos* to buy steamed corn and *caldo* from the street vendors." América refuses to eat from the garbage but Cándido tells her, "You're going to need it to keep up your strength."

This passage underscores the stark reality of the Rincóns' difficult life. América is horrified that here in the States she is forced to eat out of a garbage can, when this is something she never had to resort to in Mexico. América's passionate refusal to eat (though it is implied she eventually does) contrasts with Cándido's resigned determination to do whatever it takes to survive. While Cándido's approach may be more practical, América's commitment to preserving a sense of her dignity is another example of how she insists on maintaining her agency, humanity, and hope.

PART 2, CHAPTER 8

The narration shifts to Delaney's perspective. It is now November and Delaney finds himself missing the East and depressed by the "dismal reality" of autumn in Los Angeles (particularly the dust and the Santa Ana winds). He is at home working on research for a new column when the doorbell rings. A crew of men in hard hats has arrived and needs access to the Mossbachers' property to continue their work erecting **the wall**, which is already ninety percent finished. Delaney tries to continue writing while the men work but he has trouble concentrating and feels "as if he were under siege." He is frustrated by the fact that the wall, which will have no gates, means he will not have direct access to the hills surrounding Arroyo Blanco. "How [can] he work?" he thinks. He feels he is being "buried alive."

The way Delaney personalizes the building of the wall—as if he, specifically, were being targeted—parallels the way Cándido feels about his "pinche luck." Both men have the tendency of seeing themselves as the center of the action in their lives. The hyperbolic quality of Delaney's thoughts here—he compares his situation to being under siege or buried alive, as if someone were actually making an attempt on his life—highlights how self-absorbed Delaney is as a character.

That evening, Delaney accompanies Kyra to the Da Ros place to close it, as he has done every night since "the graffiti incident." In the car, Delaney fumes, complaining that he "can't walk out of [his] own yard. Kyra cheerfully shows Delaney a stepladder she bought for him and Delaney realizes that **the wall** will help keep his neighbors from hiking, too, meaning he will "have the hills to himself." He is "exhilarated" by the thought, but does not feel like revealing this to Kyra.

Delaney continues to demonstrate his egotism in his realization that the wall will effectively privatize his access to the natural landscape. This fuels Delaney's conception of himself as a "pilgrim," and will only increase his sense of entitlement as the novel moves forward.

On the way home, Delaney and Kyra stop at the supermarket to purchase food for Thanksgiving. Delaney's spirits begin to lift; he wonders, "How could he have let such a petty thing come between them?" He and Kyra kiss in the middle of the supermarket. Later, at the checkout, an employee informs Delaney and Kyra that their purchase, because it exceeds fifty dollars, entitles them to a free twelve-pound turkey. Though they already have an eighteen-pound turkey at home, Kyra accepts the free one.

This passage establishes the fact that the supermarket is giving away free turkeys to customers who purchase more than fifty dollars' worth of groceries. On a thematic level, this passage evokes the ideals of American suburban life: Delaney feels his marriage has been revitalized and he revels in being surrounded by the bounty of the supermarket. It also invokes the idea of the rich getting richer.

The narration shifts to Cándido's perspective. He and América are again living in the canyon. América has been catatonic for days, having had a breakdown when Cándido forced her to move back to the canyon. Cándido is worried about the upcoming rainy season and "[beginning] to think he hate[s]" his wife. The one piece of good news is that Cándido has found relatively consistent work for a man named Señor Willis. Though Cándido is worried about the future, he is hopeful that he and América are "on the upswing."

Continued references to the rainy season are important on a plot level because they foreshadow the flood that concludes the novel. Thematically this passage is noteworthy because it demonstrates that Cándido is unwilling to probe the trauma that América has gone through.

Cándido is on the way to the supermarket to purchase food for Thanksgiving, or "El Tenksgeevee." In the checkout line, two young men in front of Cándido are offered their free turkey, but instead deposit it in Cándido's arms; one of them says, "Happy Thanksgiving, dude." Cándido feels "dazed" by the gift but as he heads back into the canyon he begins to feel elated. América is pleased by the turkey, and as he works at building a fire, Cándido feels "as happy as he'd ever been." Then the wind "pluck[s] the fire out of its bed of coals and with a roar as loud as all the furnaces of hell set[s] it dancing in the treetops."

The fact that the fire starts as a result of Cándido's good fortune of being gifted a turkey is one of the rare moments in the novel where the idea that Cándido is cursed seems plausible. The fire is one of the most important plot developments in the novel, affecting both the Mossbachers and the Rincóns. On a thematic level, the power of the fire illustrates the disregard of the natural world for the suffering (or the joy) of humans.

PART 3, CHAPTER 1

The narration shifts to Delaney's perspective. It is Thanksgiving Day and Delaney and Kyra are dressing for a cocktail party at Dominick Flood's house. Kyra's mother, Kit, will also be attending. The party is huge and overwhelming; Delaney feels "lost and edgy and maybe even a bit guilty to be imbibing so early in the afternoon, even on a day dedicated to self-indulgence like this one." Jack Jardine approaches Delaney and chats with him about the angry response letters generated by Delaney's column on **coyotes**. Delaney reflects on the letters, which caught him by surprise. He feels his column was obviously not advocating for population controls of coyotes. "He was just elucidating the problem," he thinks, "opening up the issue to debate. Certainly it wasn't the coyotes that were to blame, it was us—hadn't he made that clear?"

Delaney's general sense of edginess and guiltiness seems to be setting him up for his spiral into unchecked paranoia at the end of the novel. Another important aspect of this passage is Delaney's genuine confusion over the response to his coyote article. Delaney seems to be unconscious of the vitriolic tone of his article, which, despite his equivocating, ultimately appeared to blame the coyotes. This obliviousness foreshadows the blindness with which Delaney will descend into overt racism in the coming chapters.

The conversation shifts to **the wall**, and Delaney continues to feel uncomfortable, though he doesn't say much. The party continues until suddenly a helicopter passes overhead and someone jumps onto a table and shouts, "Fire in the canyon!"

Yet again, Delaney's silence demonstrates how powerfully affected he is by a desire to fit in with his neighbors and not create waves in social settings.

The narration shifts to Kyra's perspective, and slightly backward in time. Kyra is enjoying herself at the party; she is particularly excited about seeing Dominick Flood's house. The man himself has also completely charmed Kyra's mother, Kit. Kyra hasn't told anyone, but she is considering buying another dog for Jordan's birthday. "That would start the healing," she thinks. Kyra is reveling in her happiness when someone announces that the canyon is on fire.

Kyra's plan to buy another dog illustrates how seductive the American dream is. Despite her recent passionate support for the wall, Kyra seems to have quickly dismissed the threat of coyotes attacking another of her pets. She has been swept up in the charming image of buying a dog for Jordan's birthday and restoring her family to the picture of domestic happiness.

The narration shifts to Delaney's perspective. Though he does not consider himself an "alarmist," Delaney rushes Kyra home to check on Jordan. He reflects on the previous autumn, when he and his neighbors almost had to evacuate their homes. He is agitated, wondering whether this fire is "a minor inconvenience that would add piquancy to the day" or a real threat. Back at home, Delaney and Kyra turn on the TV and watch coverage of the fire. Arroyo Blanco has not been told to evacuate but Delaney suggests that they "shut off the turkey" that is in their oven "just in case."

Delaney's continued tendency to label himself not *something (a vigilante, an alarmist) and then to act in perfect accordance with that very descriptor indicates a lack of self-awareness that is a central quality of Delaney's character. This passage is also striking because it shows that Delaney and is family have the luxury of viewing the fire as an exciting, if inconvenient, event. This contrasts sharply with the reality of Cándido and América, whose circumstances mean they must face this disaster head on, and not from a safe, removed distance.*

PART 3, CHAPTER 2

The narration shifts to América's perspective, and backward in time. She has not been speaking to Cándido, as she blames him for "everything from the stale air in the bus on the ride from Cuernavaca to Tijuana and the smell of the dump to this place, this vacancy of leaves and insects and hot naked air where men did dirty things to her and made her pee burn like fire." América is deeply depressed and desperately misses her mother. One day, however, she overhears a bird calling for its mate and "the gulf inside her [begins] to close." Today, Thanksgiving Day, América is finally ready to forgive Cándido—however, when the canyon catches fire, she finds herself wishing that she were "strong enough" to have given up on life "forever."

América is again communing with a female animal—in this case a female bird seeking her mate. América's experiences with female animals demonstrate how powerful female solidarity is. In the absence of her mother and sisters, América seeks connection with female animals, and draws strength from these connections. This passage is also important because it powerfully illustrates the lasting psychological impact of sexual violence.

The narration shifts to Cándido's perspective. In the face of the fire, Cándido feels "pure gut-clenching terror." The trail out of the canyon is engulfed in a "forty-foot curtain" of flames. Nevertheless, Cándido drags América along the stream, trying to escape the fire. The two manage to scramble up to **the canyon road**. They drink from a hose behind one of the supermarkets and América announces, "I won't get up. I'm tired. I feel sick." Cándido tries to drag América to her feet, shouting, "You want to die?" América responds: "Yes, I do."

This passage illustrates a kind of role reversal between Cándido and América. Throughout the novel, América has tended to play the role of motivator and keeper of the faith. Now, because América is so depressed and overwhelmed, Cándido must try to rally her to action. The only reason it seems he is able to do this is because the fire poses an immediate threat to him and his family, which seems to activate his powerful desire to serve as a protector.

Later that evening, Cándido and América are huddled in the bushes at the rim of the canyon; the fire has died down. América's water breaks and Cándido leaves her to try and find help of some kind. As he makes his way down the hill he feels like "a fool stumbling through an ever-expanding obstacle course." Eventually Cándido comes upon **the wall** surrounding Arroyo Blanco Estates. He discovers a tool shed near the wall and after drinking from a nearby hose he makes his way back up the hill to fetch América.

Cándido's sense of cosmic injustice appears for the first time to be partially justified. He was not overly careless in building his campfire, which makes the canyon fire truly seem like a stroke of terrible luck. Nevertheless, Cándido's self-centered approach distracts him from the fact that América is probably even more frightened and bewildered than he, given that she has just gone into labor with her first child.

The narration shifts to América's perspective. She is in labor in the shed, with Cándido doing his best to prepare for the birth. Though she desperately wants to "cry out for her mother, for Tepoztlán, for everything she'd left behind," América "[holds] it all in." While América is having contractions, she hears the sound of a Siamese cat (Dame Edith) entering the shed. América holds her hand out to the cat and says: "You're the one. You're the saint. You. You will be my midwife."

Dame Edith's mysteriously comforting presence again suggests the importance of female solidarity. This passage powerfully drives home all that América has left behind in order to seek a better life for her coming child.

PART 3, CHAPTER 3

The narration shifts to Delaney's perspective. Delaney, Kyra, and Jordan are gathered "behind [a] police barrier at the top of Topanga Canyon," along with their neighbors from Arroyo Blanco. Delaney and his family have packed many of their belongings into their car, but Kyra is still worried about the risk the fire poses to their home, and Delaney's attempts to make light of the situation do not go over well. Delaney feels incredibly frustrated, thinking: "She was throwing it all on his shoulders, making him the scapegoat, and he felt put-upon and misunderstood, felt angry, pissed off, rubbed raw." He finds himself wondering: "What more could they do to him?"

This passage shows how Delaney is completely displacing and misdirecting his anger. He seems to feel angry at Kyra, from whom he has been feeling increasingly emotionally distant, but he directs this anger at an ambiguous "they," whom he thinks must be responsible for making him feel so unhappy with his life. Furthermore, the fact that Delaney instantaneously and even gleefully casts himself as a "scapegoat" shows how completely self-absorbed he is, given the fact that he has been increasingly framing Mexican immigrants as a scapegoat throughout the novel.

As he is talking to and sharing some Scotch with Jack Cherrystone, Delaney notices José Navidad and his friend. He "[doesn't] try to correct himself, not now, not ever again" as he thinks, "Amazing how the scum comes to the surface." Jack insists that he and Delaney must alert the police to the men's presence, but when Delaney and Jack arrive the cops are already questioning Navidad and his friend. Delaney interjects, saying, "I want to report that I've seen this man [...] in the lower canyon, camping, camping right down there where the fire started." Delaney feels "excited now, beyond caring—somebody had to pay for this—and so what if he hadn't actually seen the man lying there drunk in his filthy sleeping bag, it was close enough, wasn't it?"

Delaney has, at this point, internalized his neighbors' racism. Delaney no longer needs Jardine's smooth powers of persuasion to be convinced to act and think in bigoted ways. He has fully absorbed and embraced this mindset at this point in the novel. This can clearly be seen in his willingness to accuse Navidad even though he admits to having no proof and, instead, only wanting "somebody" to "pay."

The officer maintains that he has the situation under control but Jack Cherrystone insists that "if arson was involved [he] damn well want[s] to know about it." At this point a crowd has gathered, and José and his friend startle when one of the officers says something to them in Spanish. This results in the officers tackling the men to the ground, and as José "protest[s] his innocence in two languages" Delaney feels so angry that "it [is] all [he can] do to keep from wading in and kicking him in the ribs."

From the beginning of the novel, Delaney's aversion to the Spanish language has appeared as a sort of euphemism for his aversion to Mexican people themselves. Here, Delaney seems disgusted by the idea of Spanish and English commingling. This is important because it shows how fragile Delaney's ego he is, and how quick he is to personalize outside events and details, as if somehow he were coming under personal attack.

Members of the crowd start yelling racial slurs at the men, and when Delaney makes eye contact with José, José spits at him. In response, Delaney jumps José and begins punching him. The officer and Jack Cherrystone break up the fight. When José screams, "I kill you, motherfucker," Delaney responds with "Fuck you!" Looking around at the crowd, Delaney sees people with "fists clenched, ready to go anywhere, do anything, seething with it, spoiling for it, a mob." When Jack offers him more Scotch, Delaney accepts.

This is a turning point in the novel, as it is the first time that Delaney has committed an act of violence. From here on out, Delaney will no longer attempt to exert any control over his racist thoughts or actions. It is also important to note that Delaney seems finally to have achieved a sense of belonging and community—as part of a hateful mob. This shows how far Delaney has fallen from the "liberal humanist ideals" he prided himself on holding at the beginning of the novel.

By ten o'clock the next morning the inhabitants of Arroyo Blanco are allowed to return to their homes; the winds have shifted and the fire has changed direction and ultimately been contained. Delaney is feeling "hungover and contrite," and he remembers going to an abortion clinic with his first wife, Louise. Protesters confronted Delaney and Louise, their "faces twisted with rage and hate till they were barely human." Delaney realizes that, after his behavior last night, "he was one of them now. He was the hater, he was the redneck, the racist, the abuser." However, even though he is now "sober [...] ashamed and repentant, he [can't] suppress a flare of outrage" when he thinks about the fact that José Navidad claimed to have been only "hiking" in the canyon.

Delaney is ashamed, but not genuinely remorseful. Indeed, he is still harboring a grudge against Navidad, whom he somehow perceives as a threat to his identity as a hiker and nature lover. Delaney's "logic" here is almost childish: either he alone is allowed to be a hiker, or no one is. This passage demonstrates a convergence of Delaney's egotism and his growing, now fully blown, racism.

Back at home, Delaney finds his house completely unscathed. As the family settles back in, Jordan searches frantically for the cat, Dame Edith, and Kyra begins making calls about her real estate properties. She gets word that the Da Ros place has gone up in flames. Kyra wants to drive over and look at the property herself, but Delaney convinces her that there is nothing for her to do since the road will likely be closed anyway.

The fact that the Mossbacher home has been completely unaffected by the canyon fire is crucial. It shows that Delaney's earlier thought—"what more could they do to him?"—is completely irrational. Not only is there no "they," nothing has actually happened *to Delaney or his family or property.*

At that moment, Kyra's mother, Kit, enters the room. In her hand she is holding Dominick Flood's ankle bracelet, which she has discovered in her purse. Delaney realizes that Flood charmed his mother-in-law for the sole purpose of using her to escape his house arrest; by sneaking his ankle bracelet into Kit's purse, Flood was able to leave the area, while his bracelet still showed him as being inside Arroyo Blanco Estates. As Kyra tries to comfort her mother, Jordan enters the room and announces that he has been unable to find Dame Edith.

Dominick Flood's escape, though not fully explained, exposes the fallacy of Delaney's sense of belonging amongst Jack Jardine and his friends. Flood was clearly using Delaney and his family for his own personal gain; it is clear to the reader that much the same could be said of Jardine, who has recruited Delaney as his friend primarily to have another anti-immigration advocate in the community.

PART 3, CHAPTER 4

The narration shifts to Cándido's perspective, and backward in time to the night of the fire. América is still in labor and is holding tight to Dame Edith for comfort. Cándido has realized that Arroyo Blanco Estates is on the other side of **the wall** (which had not yet been built when Cándido was working there with Al Lopez.) He is deeply upset by "the thought that if all these people had been evacuated, abandoning all their things, their fine rich houses and their lawns and gardens and all the rest, then it looked grim for him and América." Cándido sits by América's side and prays.

Since he last saw the wall, Cándido's perception of it has slightly shifted. Before, Cándido disregarded the wall, choosing instead to focus on working and earning money. Now, Cándido sees the wall as a representation of the disadvantage at which he and América find themselves. Without a house of their own, the Rincóns are far more vulnerable to the elements than the residents of Arroyo Blanco.

In the middle of the night, América gives birth. Cándido helps with the birth, including cutting the umbilical cord, and feels "exultant" at the fact that he now as "a son, the first of his line, the new generation born on American soil, a son who would have all the *gabachos* had and more." However, as América begins to breastfeed, Cándido realizes that the baby is actually a girl. América announces that she will name the baby Socorro.

Cándido has anticipated having a son throughout América's pregnancy, and though he is by no means devastated at the birth of his daughter, it is important to note the emphasis he placed on continuing "his line." Regardless of her gender, Socorro is still a first-generation American, but Cándido's fixation on having a son illustrates the importance he continually places on manhood.

The sun rises. Cándido has stayed awake the entire night, and is relieved that "the fire [has] spared them." He climbs over **the wall** to find food. From the house abutting the wall, Cándido takes vegetables and tools from the garden shed, vowing "to the Virgin of Guadalupe that he [will] pay back everything he appropriates[s]." He uses a bucket of dog food to climb back over the wall, and then drags the bucket with him. Leaving the food and materials by the wall, Cándido heads into the hills to scout out a new campsite.

Cándido's vow to compensate the people from whom he is stealing illustrates how important it is for him to maintain a sense of his own decency, despite his extreme circumstances. For all his tendency to revert to pessimism, Cándido works hard to preserve his dignity, refusing to allow his situation to strip him of his humanity.

"Five hundred yards up the dry wash that opened out on the development," Cándido finds a place to make a new camp. As he shuttles his materials from **the wall** up the hill, Cándido makes plans to return to the canyon in search of the money he left buried there. He finds a stack of wooden pallets by the shed and takes them up the hill to begin work on a shelter. "If the fates were going to deny him his apartment," he thinks, "well then, he would have a house, a house with a view."

Cándido's determination to build himself a "house with a view" is depicted as triumphant in its defiance. Despite all the obstacles in his way, Cándido is committed to achieving the Dream, even if he has to modify the appearance and terms of that Dream.

After several hours of building, Cándido returns to the maintenance shed to fetch América and Socorro. América insists that she wants to "go home to [her] mother" but Cándido manages to prod her up the hill. He then makes another trip over **the wall**, and takes dog bowls and a carpet from a dog house. He also takes a sheet of corrugated plastic from the roof of a small greenhouse. As he is dragging the plastic back over the wall, a woman's face appears in the window of her house. Cándido freezes, waiting for "the change to come over [her face], the look of astonishment, fear and hate," but the woman does not see him.

The fact that Cándido expects the woman in the window to react to him with fear and hatred powerfully illustrates how unwelcome he has been made to feel in the United States. Indeed, no one in the present-day of the novel has shown Cándido the kind of genuine compassion that he received from the farmer in Oregon once upon a time. Thus, this small detail drives home the pervasiveness of anti-immigrant sentiment in this Los Angeles community.

Cándido makes his way across several yards until he arrives in the Mossbachers' yard. There, he uses Delaney's stepladder to mount **the wall**. As he drags his materials up the hill, Cándido thinks "of Christ with his cross and his crown of thorns and wonder[s] who had it worse."

By mentally comparing himself to Christ, Cándido demonstrates his inflated sense of his own suffering and place in the world.

After completing the roof on his new shelter, Cándido sleeps. When he awakens he again thinks about retrieving his money from where it is buried in the canyon so that he can buy food for América, who will be breastfeeding from now on. As he is thinking this over he hears Dame Edith meowing and beckons her inside.

Despite Cándido's resourcefulness and persistence in securing food for his family, the fact remains that the Rincóns are in a dire situation, especially now that they have a baby. This moment thus serves to reemphasize how incredibly challenging it is to survive as an immigrant to the States.

PART 3, CHAPTER 5

The narration shifts to Kyra's perspective. It is two days after the fire and Kyra is driving to check on the Da Ros property. She finds the house burnt to the ground, with only the chimneys remaining. Kyra is furious and as she kicks through the ashen remains of the house she thinks: "It was the Mexicans who'd done this. Illegals. Goons with their hats turned backwards on their heads. Sneaking across the border, ruining the schools, gutting property values and freeloading on welfare, and as if that wasn't enough, now they were burning everybody else out too." Kyra reflects on the fact that the police held José Navidad and his friend but have since "let them go for lack of evidence." She thinks this is "a joke" and remains convinced that "they'd done it […] just as surely as if they'd piled up the brush, doused it with gasoline and set fire to the house itself."

Kyra's venomous reaction to the destruction of the Da Ros home suggests that she has become just as inundated with anti-immigrant prejudice as her husband. However, Kyra does not express her prejudice as violence, as Delaney did. Kyra's thinking nevertheless parallels Delaney's, as she can clearly be seen exaggerating and extrapolating in this moment. In much the same deluded way that Delaney considers hiking his "territory," Kyra views the Da Ros property as something to which she has exclusive rights, even though she does not own it.

The narration shifts to Delaney's perspective. He is just returning home with Jordan, having taken Kit to the airport. Kyra is home from the Da Ros place and tells Delaney about how angry she is that the police have released "the Mexicans […] who burned down [her] house." Delaney is also furious that José Navidad and his friend have been released. He is "frightened" by the level of hatred he feels, "afraid of what he might do or say, and there [is] still a part of him that [is] deeply ashamed of what had happened at the roadblock Thursday night."

Delaney's fear of himself is the last moment of self-awareness that he exhibits. From here on out, Delaney will completely surrender to his toxic, hateful thoughts and will no longer feel shame about his actions.

Delaney convinces Kyra that they should "try and forget" about the fire, and suggests that they take a walk before dinner to look for Dame Edith. While Delaney and Kyra are out walking, Jack Jardine drives by and tells them, "There's something I just discovered I thought you might want to take a look at." Delaney and Kyra get in Jack's car. As they drive, they discuss Dominick Flood. Jack insists that he is no longer Flood's attorney but that he has heard that Flood has left the country.

It is worth noticing how consistently casual Jack Jardine is in his tone. Jardine's chatty, relaxed expression of racism shows how normalized this kind of hatred is in the Los Angeles society of the novel.

Jack takes Delaney and Kyra to **the wall**, which has been tagged with spray-painted symbols. Jack describes the symbols as "the writing on the stelae outside the Mayan temples," and Kyra affirms that these symbols are "all over the Valley." "It's like their own code," she says. Delaney feels "choked" by hatred. "There was no escape," he thinks, "no refuge—they were everywhere and all he could do was shrug." Jack claims the graffiti is like animals marking their territory, to which Kyra responds: "Only this is our territory." Delaney finally speaks, saying: "I wouldn't be so sure." His words leave a "bitter, bitter" taste in his mouth.

Delaney's feeling of powerlessness mirrors Cándido's in a once sense; although Delaney is not as overtly concerned as Cándido with proving himself "a man," he nevertheless experiences a feeling of impotency as shown by his frustration at his default "shrug" reaction. This feeling will motivate Delaney to take the extreme course of action he pursues in the remaining chapters of the novel.

Time passes. It is now December and the rainy season has begun. Dame Edith and Dominick Flood are both still missing. Delaney has begun to stake out **the wall** every night with binoculars and a trip-wire camera. He is determined to catch "those sons of bitches who'd spray-painted the wall" and report them to Immigration for deportation. Jack Cherrystone has agreed to let Delaney use his darkroom, as he has in the past when Delaney has been tracking an opossum that had been raiding his garage. "Now," Delaney thinks, "he [will] try the technique on a different sort of fauna."

Delaney's stakeout shows how far he has descended into racist paranoia. At this point, Delaney sees himself as a protector, which further demonstrates how his egotism and his prejudice intersect. Another key aspect of this passage is Delaney's description of Mexican immigrants as "a different sort of fauna." This language intentionally reduces Mexicans to subhuman, animal status, thereby powerfully evoking the extent of Delaney's bigotry.

Delaney spends three hours a night for a full week staking out the wall. He feels this is "a crusade, a vendetta." The night of the season's second rainstorm Delaney does not stake out the wall, instead enjoying a date night with Kyra. In the morning he finds that his cameras have been tripped. He goes to the Cherrystones' to develop the photos. He feels as though "the whole community [were] depending on him—there might be ten thousand Mexicans camped out there in the chaparral waiting to set the canyon afire, but at least these two were going to get a one-way ticket to Tijuana." When the photos develop, Delaney looks at the face captured in them: it is "Mexican, but it [is not] the face he'd expected." It is Cándido's face, "a face come back to haunt [Delaney] from his dreams."

Delaney seeing Cándido's face on camera illustrates how easily Delaney swaps out José Navidad—up to this point, his primary graffiti suspect—for a different Mexican face. Though subtle, this is another piece of evidence that suggests how prejudiced Delaney's thinking is at this point: he seems no longer to think of Mexicans as individuals in their own right, but rather as interchangeable members of a homogenous group.

PART 3, CHAPTER 6

The narration shifts to Cándido's perspective, and backward in time. Three days after the fire, Cándido returns to the canyon and finds that his apartment fund money has been destroyed; all that remains is "four dollars and thirty-seven cents in coins fused in hard shapeless knot of plastic." Sitting in the canyon, devastated, Cándido considers leaving América and Socorro, thinking that, since the police will be looking for him, "the agent of all this destruction," his wife and daughter would be "better off without him."

Though the depth of his loss makes Cándido's despair here reasonable and sympathetic, Cándido nevertheless demonstrates selfishness in leaving América. He reasons that América will not be in danger because she is the mother of an American citizen, but this logic is naïve, and completely ignores how difficult it would be for América to support herself and a brand new baby if she were completely on her own.

Eventually, Cándido climbs up to **the canyon road** and busy groceries from the grocery store he usually doesn't visit—"where they wouldn't be so sure to recognize him." Back at the new shelter, América tells Cándido that she wants him to buy her a bus ticket home to Mexico. Cándido thinks: "He wouldn't let her go. Not if he had to kill her and the baby too and then cut his own worthless throat in the bargain." When América insists, Cándido dumps the "little bolus of plastic" in her lap "with a brutality that [makes] him hate himself," and says: "There's your bus fare."

This passage further illustrates Cándido's selfishness and his obsession with succeeding as a "man"—he would rather murder his wife and daughter than admit that he has failed to create a life for them in the States. This passage also demonstrates how insensitive Cándido is to the particularities of América's suffering; he tends to think that he and his wife are suffering to the same extent and in the exact same way.

The narration shifts to América's perspective. She has been living in the shack for several days, while Cándido goes out to look for work, waiting for hours outside the post office (since the labor exchange is long gone). América wishes she had someone to "show [Socorro] off to" but she can't help but wonder: "Who was going to admire her, Socorro, the North American beauty, born with nothing in the land of plenty?"

This passage shows how much pride América takes in being a mother. América's worries for her daughter's future are significant. They illustrate how perceptive América is to the obstacles that her daughter will face, despite her identity as an American citizen.

One day América tells Cándido that she would like to have Socorro baptized somewhere, and her birth registered. Cándido doesn't respond. When América then asks what Cándido did with Socorro's umbilical cord, he replies that he buried it along with the placenta. América is devastated by the news; she was hoping to make a pilgrimage to the town of Chalma and leave Socorro's umbilical cord on a tree there, as a prayer for a happy life. América has to "catch her breath to keep from sobbing with the hopelessness of it."

América is gutted by the fact that she will not be able to make a pilgrimage to Chalma on behalf of her daughter. This moment poignantly evokes all that América has given up in order to start anew in América. Not only has América left her family behind, but she has also sacrificed important cultural practices in order to secure the American definition of success for her family.

The next day, the rains begin and América feels caught between a desire to "get away, even if it [means] bundling up Socorro and walking all the way back to the border" and a persistent sense of hope that "there [is] peace here if only she could find it." Standing in the rain, América looks down at Socorro and notices that the baby's eyesight is unfocused. She waves a hand in front of the baby's face and Socorro does not respond. América realizes with horror that her daughter is blind.

Astoundingly, América is yet again able to find hope in a desperate situation, marking her out as uniquely heroic when compared to the other three protagonists of the novel. This passage is important on a plot level because Socorro's blindness is most likely a result of José Navidad transmitting an STD to América when he raped her. Socorro's condition is thus another devastating example of the profoundly damaging effects of sexual violence against women.

The narration shifts to Cándido's perspective. He and América have been eating cat meat for several days (though Cándido has told her the meat is rabbit). He has been unable to find work, even though he waits outside the post office for hours. One night América cryptically tells Cándido that Socorro needs to see a doctor. Though he feels frustrated by this, Cándido uses it as motivation as he stands outside the post office the following morning. While there, he realizes that "they would have been flooded out" if they had remained camped in the canyon, and the thought heartens him: "Maybe there [is] a Providence looking out for him after all," he thinks.

For the first time, Cándido seems to feel that the universe has looked out for him. However, the depiction of nature throughout the novel has made it clear that the natural world is inconsiderate of the plights of humans. This will become even more evident when, ironically, Cándido and América's new hillside camp is swept away in a flood that also kills Socorro. Cándido's optimism in this passage will thus take a bleak turn in the ensuing chapters of the novel.

A post office worker comes outside and tells Cándido he has to leave. Cándido asks if the man knows of work he can do "to feed [his] wife and baby" but the man "look[s] at him […] really look[s] at him" and says, in Spanish: "This isn't a good place for you to be." Cándido leaves and waits near the lumberyard, hoping of work. After several hours, he gives up and starts walking down **the canyon road**, "looking for cans to redeem." As he is walking, a car suddenly swerves onto the shoulder and Delaney jumps out with a look of "pure malice" on his face. Cándido freezes and Delaney shouts, "You stay right there!"

For perhaps the first time in the novel, Cándido feels seen by a white American in a way that is not menacing or hate-filled. The white postal worker speaks to him in Spanish and seems genuinely concerned for Cándido's wellbeing when he warns him about loitering near the post office. Though not an outright happy moment on the surface, Cándido's interaction with this man thus represents a rare moment in the novel in which a white American seems to express concern for Cándido.

PART 3, CHAPTER 7

The narration shifts to Delaney's perspective. He has just spotted Cándido on his way back from the plant nursery—"this Mexican, the man who'd invaded his life like some unshakable parasite, like a disease." Out of his car, Delaney dials 911 and says: "I want to report a crime in progress—or no, an apprehension of a suspect." Cándido hears this and darts out into traffic. A car swerves to avoid him and ends up hitting Delaney's car, pulled over on the shoulder. Delaney watches as Cándido jogs away up **the canyon road**.

While he does not directly equate Cándido with a parasite, Delaney's description of Cándido is incredibly dehumanizing, not to mention irrational given the fact that Delaney has, until very recently, been fixated on José Navidad—not Cándido. The fact that Delaney initially claims to be reporting a "crime in progress" only emphasizes how delusional he has become. Cándido may be undocumented, but Delaney has no way of definitively knowing this.

Delaney exchanges insurance information with the woman who swerved into his car. When a police officer shows up, Delaney says: "I'm trying to tell you, it was this Mexican—he's crazy, he throws himself in front of cars to try and collect on the insurance, he's the one." The officer replies: "Your vehicle was obstructing the road." After Delaney's car is towed, he begins walking up the road, following Cándido's footsteps in the mud.

The police officer's unemotional tone in the face of Delaney's frantic accusations further underscores how out of control Delaney's thoughts and actions have become by this point in the novel. He is determined to prove that Cándido is "the one" who has made his life feel so unfulfilling, no matter how irrational he may appear in the process.

The narration shifts to Kyra's perspective. She is driving through the rain to pick up Jordan at a friend's house. She has been feeling apathetic about her work lately; however, the beauty over the area she is driving through is lifting her spirits. While driving, she spots a "For Sale By Owner" sign and impulsively decides to stop and check out the house. Exhilarated by the house and its land, Kyra speculates that "this place [could] be the anchor for a very select private community of high-end houses, and that's where the money was, in developing—not selling." Kyra approaches the house to speak with the owner.

This passage highlights Kyra's goal-oriented nature. Though she was, very recently, furious about the destruction of the Da Ros house, Kyra is so driven that she has quickly left this loss behind and moved on to thinking of other careers. This passage is also significant because of what it says about Kyra's relationship to nature. Kyra does not enjoy the natural world for what it is; rather she views it through a selfish lens, as a means of advancing her career goals.

The narration shifts to Delaney's perspective. He is still walking up **the canyon road**, tracking Cándido—"his quarry." He is determined to "[track] this clumsy Mexican all the way to Hell and back" even "if it [takes] all night." It occurs to Delaney that Cándido may have been the one to set the fire and he thinks that "it would have been better for everyone concerned if [Cándido had] just crawled off into the bushes and died."

Delaney's language here is overtly racist. He has reduced Cándido to the status of a hunted animal (a "quarry"). Furthermore, where he earlier wanted to see Cándido out of his life, Delaney now explicitly wishes Cándido dead. He even seems to think that Cándido himself *would be better off dead. This passage clearly shows how far gone Delaney is in terms of his surrender to obsessive, racist hatred.*

Delaney makes his way home to pick up a flashlight. As he is walking through the rain toward the gate of Arroyo Blanco Estates, Jim Shirley pulls up in his car. The two chat briefly, and as Shirley pulls through the gate Delaney sees by the light of his headlights that **the wall** has been graffitied again. "This [is] it," he thinks, "the declaration of war, the knife thrown in the dirt." Delaney collects his camera from the guard's office near the gate, and sees that he has six exposed photos. He then jogs home to fetch his handgun, which Jack Jardine convinced him to purchase six months ago for "home protection."

This passage highlights how Delaney's hatred of Cándido has primed him to see everything as an attack; thus, he interprets the new graffiti on the wall as a personal challenge or "declaration of war." The extremity of this language, in addition to the fact that Delaney decides to use his gun for the first time ever, shows that Delaney has reached a turning point and is willing to be even more violent than he was at the police barricade, when he attacked José Navidad.

Having loaded the gun, Delaney assures himself that "he would never use the thing, never fire it, never—but he was going to draw it out of the holster in all its deadly flashing beauty and hold it there over that vandalizing alien black-eyed jack-in-the-box till the police came and put him away where he belonged." Delaney changes out of his wet clothes and heats up some food. He anticipates that Cándido will be easy to find in the rainy hills, because he will have to have a fire going for warmth. Delaney finds he is "trembling," not from walking in the rain but from "pure adrenaline."

Delaney's surge of adrenaline seems to have reduced him to an almost primal state, demonstrating how hate is almost as destructive to the person harboring it as to the person who is the target of it. Delaney is clearly on a power trip at this point, relishing the idea of terrifying Cándido merely for the sake of humiliating him.

Delaney lets himself into the Cherrystones' house to use their darkroom. He develops the six new photographs and finds that it is Jack Jr. who graffitied **the wall**, "the spray can plainly visible in his big white fist." The revelation "almost [stops] him. Almost." Delaney balls up the photos and throws them in the trash. "That Mexican was guilty," he tells himself, "sure he was, guilty of so much more than this."

Delaney's bigotry is out of control at this point. Despite the fact that he has evidence of Jack Jr.'s guilt, Delaney persists in believing Cándido is to blame, even exaggerating that blame to account for "so much more" than the graffiti on the wall. This passage dramatizes how far Delaney has fallen, given that he was recently completely appalled by Jack Jr.'s behavior in telling racist jokes, and is now destroying evidence in order to protect him.

On his hands and knees, Delaney scrambles up the muddy hills. He feels that "the universe [has been] reduced to the square foot of broken sky over his head and the mud beneath his hands. He [is] out in it, right in the thick of it, as near to the cold black working heart of the world as he could get." Delaney is determined to "[root] [Cándido] out of his burrow." He thinks, he "[has] been here before, been here a hundred times stalking a hundred different creatures—he [is] a pilgrim, after all." Delaney catches the scent of a fire, touches the gun "where it lay tight against his groin, and let[s] his nose guide him."

In this passage, Delaney perversely satisfies his goal of being a "pilgrim" who is wholly attuned to the natural world. However, the language of this passage suggests that it is Delaney's heart that is cold and black; Delaney, like the other characters of the novel, is merely seeing himself reflected in the natural world. Furthermore, this passage shows that Delaney's hatred has reduced him *to a subhuman state; he is crawling through the mud, being guided by his nose and the feeling in his groin.*

PART 3, CHAPTER 8

The narration shifts to América's perspective. Cándido has just arrived at the shelter and to América he looks as though he "just saw a ghost." Cándido explains that "that *gabacho*" tried to hit him with his car again. "He's like a madman," Cándido says. "If we were back at home, back in the village, they'd take him to the city in a straitjacket and lock him up in the asylum." América tells Cándido that she thinks Delaney is a racist. "Maybe he hates us because we're Mexican," she says. "How could anybody be that vicious?" Cándido asks.

In this passage América again shows evidence of her clear-sightedness and her maturity. She incisively describes Delaney's mental state—"he hates us because we're Mexican"—even though her husband cannot wrap his head around such hatred. Cándido's insistence that Delaney would be "locked up" back in Mexico emphasizes how irrational Delaney's behavior truly is when viewed from an outside perspective.

After eating dinner, América tells Cándido that something is wrong with Socorro's eyes. Cándido insists that América is "crazy." América feels "all the pain and worry and fear of the past few days, weeks, months" come "pouring out of her." She tells Cándido: "It was my pee, my pee burned, that's what did it, because of—[…] because of those men." Before Cándido can answer, Delaney's face appears at the door of the shelter and América is horrified to see that he holds a gun in his hand.

It is unclear whether América understands that Navidad gave her an infection; it seems plausible that she partly views Socorro's condition as punishment for the shame of having been raped. However, the fact that América explicitly connects her burning pee with Socorro's' blindness suggests that she is conscious of the fact that Navidad is ultimately to blame for both.

The narration shifts to Delaney's perspective, and slightly backward in time. He hears voices on the hill and is "outraged," thinking: "How many of them were there? […] This couldn't go on anymore, this destruction of the environment, this trashing of the hills and the creeks and the marshes and everyplace else; this was the end, the end of it." Delaney crashes through the entrance to Cándido and América's shelter, and before he can take any further action hears "a sound like the wildest surf pounding against the rugged shore." He is suddenly "lifted up from behind by some monstrous force." The hillside is flooding, and Delaney finds himself "drawn so much closer to that cold black working heart of the world than he'd ever dreamed possible."

It is almost laughable that Delaney thinks his behavior has anything to do with his desire to stop "the destruction of the environment." The narration's tone makes it clear that Delaney is willfully deluding himself in this regard. The flood is the cataclysmic event that closes the novel, the fact that Delaney is caught in it stems directly from his bigotry: if he had not gone out "hunting" Cándido, he would have been safe. This suggests that indulging in hatred can be truly devastating to a person, in addition to the victim of their hatred.

The narration shifts to Cándido's perspective. The mountain has "turned to pudding, to mush" and it is carrying Cándido and his family away with it. Cándido grabs tight to América and Socorro and holds on. As he is "pitched into he blackness of this new river that [is] rushing toward completion in the old river below," he curses his luck. He thinks: "All he wanted was work, and this was his fate […] a violated wife and a blind baby and crazy white man with a gun, and even that wasn't enough […] they all had to drown like rats in the bargain."

This passage shows that the Rincóns' suffering is dwarfed by the magnitude of nature's power, underscoring the novel's theme that the natural world is indifferent to the human world. Though it is understandable that Cándido would be bewildered by the terrible fate toward which it seems he and his family are hurtling, he nevertheless comes across as a less than sympathetic character, given how stubbornly selfish he is in his thinking.

Cándido is swept into the raging water of Topanga Creek, in the canyon, and he loses his grip on América. He is sucked under the water and is sure he is going to die. "Suddenly," however, "the water [spits] him up in his wife's arms." Cándido realizes that he and América have been fetched up by the water onto the roof of the post office. América is sobbing and Cándido realizes that Socorro is missing from her arms. He feels "beyond cursing, beyond grieving, numbed right through to the core him." Still, when he sees Delaney's face in the water "and the white hand grasping at the tiles" of the post office roof, Cándido reaches down and "[takes] hold" of Delaney's hand.

Socorro's death is the most devastating plot point of this passage. Her death also vaguely recalls Steinbeck's novel The Grapes of Wrath, *in which the Joads set Rose of Sharon's stillborn baby adrift in a water burial on a flooded river. The final image of the novel is also hugely important. In rescuing Delaney, Cándido becomes the best version of himself, and a far better person than Delaney.*

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