All The King's Men

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF ROBERT PENN WARREN

An extremely important 20th-century literary figure in the United States, Robert Penn Warren was a poet, novelist, and critic, associated with various "schools" or movements throughout his life, including the "New Critics," the Southern Agrarians, and the Fugitives (the latter two being important in the development of Southern letters in the beginning of the 1900s). Born in Kentucky and educated, as an undergraduate, at Vanderbilt, Robert Penn Warren also studied at Yale and the University of California, Berkeley, and earned a Rhodes Scholarship to Oxford. Warren's most famous (and Pulitzer-Prize-winning) novel is *All the King's Men*—it has earned a place on numerous lists of the greatest American novels of the past century—and he won two Pulitzers for his poetry, making him the lone writer to do so in both genres. Warren was named the US Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry (to the Library of Congress) on two separate occasions (in the '40s and the '80s). Warren died in Vermont at the age of 84.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

All the King's Men takes place against the backdrop of Prohibition and the Great Depression in the American South, in the 1920 and 1930s—specifically in Louisiana, a state that was defined by the strictness of its racial segregation, and by the infusion of a certain amount of "French" culture in its upper classes, especially in those that controlled the government and the Democratic Party "machine." Willie Stark is based on the real-life Governor of Louisiana Huey Long, who was also considered a populist and occasionally-corrupt leader, and who also was assassinated in the capitol building. But Warren has also taken a good deal of license with Long's life, in particular using it as an occasion to tell the intertwined story of Jack Burden's own life—one that bears a strong autobiographical resemblance, in parts, to that of the author, although Robert Penn Warren himself was not a political "hand" but rather a writer and teacher.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

All the King's Men participates in a kind of writing that some have called "the great American novel," or an attempt to encapsulate the experience of "normal" Americans from across the country. The tools of this kind of novel were typically realist—depicting life as it was truly lived, by both important or influential characters and by the "common man"—and often attempted to make sense of the world before and after the Second World War, when the United States rapidly rose to global prominence. Both Hemingway and Steinbeck—great American male writers who attempted to document the experience of "ordinary people" in their own ways—wrote historically significant novels around this time: Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, and Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*. The former dealt, ironically, with an expatriate American living and fighting in Spain during the Spanish Civil War; the latter attempted to document the experience of "Okies" driving west from the Dust Bowl to find work in California. Norman Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead*, published in 1948, used realist techniques to depict what life was like for enlisted, or "ordinary," men in wartime. *All the King's Men* applies the principles of realistic description and family drama to a very particular time and place—1930s Louisiana—but nevertheless attempts to distinguish what is so compelling and particularly "American" about its main characters, Willie Stark and Jack Burden.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *All the King's Men*
- **When Written:** 1936-1946
- **Where Written:** Louisiana and New York
- **When Published:** 1946
- **Literary Period:** American post-war modernism
- **Genre:** Political novel; "Great American novel"; American modernism
- **Setting:** Louisiana in the 1920s and 1930s
- **Climax:** After attempting to blackmail Judge Irwin into supporting a political cause of Governor Stark's, Jack Burden finds out, from his mother, that Irwin has killed himself overnight, and that Irwin is his biological father.
- **Antagonist:** Tiny Duffy
- **Point of View:** first-person (told from the perspective of Jack Burden)

EXTRA CREDIT

An Oscar and a Box-Office Bomb. The novel has been adapted for the screen twice—once in 1949, with Broderick Crawford playing Willie Stark, and once in 2006, with Sean Penn in Willie's role. The former won the Academy Award for Best Picture, although the latter was panned by critics and shunned by audiences at the box office.

PLOT SUMMARY

The novel opens in 1933 as Jack Burden, the narrator and chief

of staff for Willie Stark, Governor of Louisiana, rides with Stark in a **black Cadillac** to Mason City, where Stark grew up. Also in the car are Stark's wife and son, Lucy and Tom, and Stark's Lt. Governor, a former political rival named Duffy. Stark stops in Mason City, then visits his father on a farm outside town. Journalists following in another car, along with Sadie Burke, Willie's secretary, ask for photo-ops at the farmhouse with Willie, Lucy, and Tom. Willie obliges. Sadie informs Willie outside, later, that Judge Irwin has endorsed one of Willie's political opponents for a Senate seat, and Willie announces later that night that he, Jack, and Sugar-Boy, Willie's driver, will be driving to talk to Irwin in Burden's Landing, which is several hours away and the town where Jack grew up. Willie attempts to convince Irwin to change his mind and endorse the candidate Willie prefers, but Irwin says no. While leaving, Willie tasks Jack with finding "dirt" on Irwin that he can use as blackmail to make Irwin comply with his (Willie's) political wishes.

Jack goes on to describe Willie's rise as a politician in Louisiana. Once a low-level County bureaucrat, Willie was defeated in an election after crusading for fairness and openness in a bidding process to build a schoolhouse. When the schoolhouse crumbles owing to shoddy workmanship, killing several children, Willie is recognized as a politician "for the people," and is tapped to run by the state's Democratic Party as a candidate for governor in 1926. Sadie Burke, who works for the Party machine, takes over Willie's campaign, and Jack covers it as a newspaper reporter for the Chronicle. One night, Jack is in the room on the campaign trail when Sadie admits to Willie that he is actually a "stooge" candidate, chosen by the Democratic Party to split the rural vote with MacMurfee, another rural politician, so that the Democrats favored politician will win. This news causes Willie to start drinking **alcohol** (he has, till now, abstained), and Willie goes onto the trail decrying Partying politics, saying he will support MacMurfee in 1926, and vowing to return in 1930 as a gubernatorial candidate himself. Willie makes good on this promise and is elected governor in 1930, then to another term in 1934. Willie later hires Jack when the newspaper fires him (for supporting Willie); Jack becomes Willie's political "jack of all trades."

Jack goes on to write about Willie's political career as governor, his hard-handed methods to keep opposition in line, and his fervent desire to help the people of Louisiana by improving schools, roads, and the tax code, and by building a free hospital for all to use. Some of the political "old guard" in the state, including Judge Irwin, Jack's mother, and Anne and Adam Stanton, Jack's friends from Burden's Landing, do not approve of Willie's methods, and hate that Jack works for him. But Jack supports Willie during a period when the state legislature attempts to impeach Willie for supposed "bribery"—Willie beats the charges by blackmailing state legislators, and Jack considers this a political victory for Willie and his policies.

Jack recalls his life as a graduate student at LSU, when he was working on a doctorate in history and writing about an ancestor of his named Cass Mastern, who died in the Civil War after being involved in a love affair that caused his friend Duncan Trice to kill himself, and his lover Annabelle Trice to flee Kentucky to Washington, D.C. Cass later died in the Civil War. Jack found he was unable to write his dissertation on Mastern, despite knowing the "facts" of Mastern's life, because Jack felt he could not properly represent the "truth" of these facts. Jack relates this journey of historical research to his newer task—that of trying to find "dirt" on Judge Irwin. Jack eventually succeeds in linking Irwin to a bribe Irwin accepted from the American Power company long ago, via communication with a woman named Lily Littlepaugh, whose brother Mortimer was fired so that Irwin could take his position at the American Power corporation.

Willie, in the meantime, wants Adam to run his free hospital, despite Adam's objection, and Willie uses this information about Irwin and Adam's father, Governor Stanton (who looked the other way while the bribe happened) to show Adam that all politicians, including the Stantons, must use backhanded tactics to get what they want. Adam begrudgingly accepts the job to head Willie's hospital. But Jack later learns that Anne, who once opposed Willie, has been having an affair with him—Jack confirms this with Anne and drives from Louisiana to California to clear his head.

Jack is so devastated by Anne's revelation of the affair because he, Jack, was once engaged to Anne back in Burden's Landing, though they drifted apart and Jack later married, and divorced, a woman named Lois. Jack returns to Baton Rouge after several days and admits to thinking that all life is nothing more, now, than a Great Twitch, a series of responses to stimuli, since Anne, the love of his life, has decided to take up with another man and leave Jack in the dust.

The novel approaches its end as Jack reveals that Tom, Wilie's only son, is injured severely in a football game; Tom is paralyzed from the neck down, and Willie is receiving political pressure from MacMurfee and the father of a woman named Sibyl to give up his Senate aspirations, since Sibyl reports she is having a child by Tom. Willie can't stand this blackmail and attempts to get Jack to convince Irwin to put pressure on MacMurfee, by using Irwin's "dirt" against him; but Irwin kills himself after meeting with Jack, and Jack's mother reveals that Irwin was secretly Jack's biological father.

This means Willie cannot use leverage with Irwin to force his hand and defeat his political enemies—he must instead accept Gummy Larson (a Democratic Party strongman) and Duffy's back-room deal for the hospital, which devastates Willie, who had wanted the creation of the hospital to be clean of any political graft. After Tom's injury, however, Willie reneges on his deal with Gummy and Duffy. Sadie, angry with Willie about his affair with Anne, convinces Duffy to tell Adam of the affair,

knowing that Adam will want to harm Willie, and this indeed comes to pass—Adam shoots and seriously injures Willie in the capitol before he himself is killed.

Willie dies several days later, and Jack reports that, after discovering that Sadie and Duffy were behind the crime, Jack moves back to Burden's Landing, since he has taken over Irwin's house, and he and Anne live there with the "Scholarly Attorney," the man whom Jack had thought was his father before the revelation that Irwin was his real father. Jack reports that he has written the story of Willie's life and his own, and now he must write the story of Cass Mastern in order to investigate fully the nature of time, regret, and the past on his own life. The novel ends.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Willie "The Boss" Stark – The novel's protagonist (along with Jack Burden, the narrator), Willie, over the course of *All the King's Men*, drags himself up from impoverished circumstances, initially eschews **alcohol**, earns a law degree, and, after holding small-town elected office, eventually becomes governor of the state of Louisiana. Willie, who made a name for himself as a young politician because of his opposition to government corruption, later becomes ensnarled in a series of backroom deals, which indirectly lead to the circumstances of his death, an assassination in the capitol building. Jack remarks numerous times in the novel that Willie's story is in some sense his own story—their friendship and work relationship has made their lives inseparable.

Jack Burden – The novel's narrator, Jack Burden comes from a wealthy and influential Louisiana family—he was born and raised in a town called Burden's Landing. Jack writes the account included in *All the King's Men* ostensibly in an attempt to tell the story of Willie Stark's rise and fall as governor of the state, but he finds himself telling more and more of his own life's story in an attempt to tell Willie's. Jack's two best friends, Anne and Adam Stanton, also take on important roles in Willie's story, as Anne becomes Willie's mistress (and, much later, Jack's wife), and Adam is spurred to kill Willie for his affair with Anne.

Tiny Duffy – Willie's lieutenant governor and a political operative of some importance in the state, Duffy was once a part of the Harrison Democratic machine in Louisiana, but realized, when Willie was elected, that he would have to switch his allegiances to Willie in order to survive politically. Tiny Duffy later orchestrates Willie's murder, indirectly, by informing Adam of Willie's affair with Anne.

Lucy Stark – Willie's long-suffering wife, Lucy has been with Willie since before the days of his fame, and though he has carried on many affairs during the time of their marriages, she remains with Willie until his death, though living apart from him. She even names her grandson Willie, after her late husband, because, as she she tells Jack, Willie "was a great man."

Sadie Burke – Willie's office secretary, Sadie Burke helped orchestrate Willie's rise to political prominence in the state. She has also been having an affair with Willie for some time, although Willie informs Sadie that he loves Anne, and that he is willing to leave his wife to be with her (which he was never willing to do for Sadie). Sadie later gets revenge on Willie by telling Duffy to inform Adam of Willie's affair with Anne, hoping that Adam will harm Willie.

Judge Irwin – A judge of great prominence in the state, and Jack's mentor from a young age in Burden's Landing, Irwin is representative of Louisiana's old political order, and he distrusts Willie. Willie orders Jack to dig up "dirt" on Irwin, which Jack does, then presenting this information to Irwin. Irwin later kills himself, and it is revealed that Irwin was having an affair with Jack's mother, and is Jack's biological father.

Adam Stanton – Jack's childhood friend, Adam is a gifted if somewhat anti-social doctor at the local hospital, well-known in the region for his medical prowess and morality. Willie wants Adam to run his free hospital, and though Adam is averse to working for Willie, because he thinks Willie is a corrupt politician, Jack convinces Adam to do so by exposing his father, former Governor Stanton's, own political corruption. Adam ends up assassinating Willie after finding out about Willie's affair with his sister, Anne.

Anne Stanton – Jack's childhood friend and ex-girlfriend, Anne is a philanthropist in the Baton Rouge area who starts up an affair with Willie—she claims that she loves him, though after Willie's death she repairs her relationship with Jack and eventually marries him, living with Jack and Jack's "father," the Scholarly Attorney, in Burden's Landing.

Theodore, or "The Young Executive" – Jack's mother's most recent husband, Theodore, the "Young Executive," is not much older than Jack himself, and Jack knows that his mother will be married to him for only so long—he is quiet and largely submissive to her wishes. Jack's mother later leaves the Young Executive and moves to Reno, leaving her house in Burden's Landing to Theodore by way of apology for abandoning him.

"The Scholarly Attorney" – This man, whom Jack believed to be his biological father, is revealed only to be his "stepfather" when Jack discovers Irwin's true relationship to his mother—the "Scholarly Attorney" (after learning of his wife's infidelities) has become a religious mystic in Baton Rouge, taking in the poor and lonely and providing shelter for them in his small apartment. Jack later takes in the Scholarly Attorney to live with him and Anne in Burden's Landing.

Gummy Larson – A political crony affiliated with Tiny Duffy, Gummy Larson wants the contract for Willie's free hospital—six

million dollars—so that he can "skim" some amount of money off the top for himself and for Duffy. Gummy briefly has the contract but discovers, near the end of the novel, that Willie has reneged on the deal.

Harrison and MacMurfee – Two bigwigs in the state Democratic Party, MacMurfee attempts to run for the Senate in Louisiana, after serving as governor before Willie (and falling to Willie in the 1930 election). Harrison, who was also governor in the state before Willie, also retains a great deal of influence in the state legislature. Although neither MacMurfee or Harrison is seen in the novel, they exert a great deal of power over Willie at various moments, and Duffy, who remains in thrall to Harrison throughout his time as Lieutenant Governor, might be seen as a continuation of Harrison's influence in the state.

Mortimer Littlepaugh – The head counsel for the American Power Company when Irwin was attorney general in Louisiana, Mortimer lost his job because American gave it to Irwin, as part of a bribe—Mortimer then attempted to inform Governor Stanton of this, but Stanton covered up his friend Irwin's behavior. Mortimer eventually killed himself so that his sister, Lily, could get his life insurance payout.

Lily Littlepaugh – Sister of Mortimer, Lily is found by Jack Burden in Memphis, and Jack convinces her to provide him a copy of the letter Mortimer wrote to Lily describing Irwin's malfeasance and Stanton's cover-up. Jack provides Lily with a small handout in order to convince her to speak, as she is living in poverty and near-squalor.

Cass Mastern – A distant ancestor of Jack's, Cass Mastern was a student at Transylvania College just before the Civil War, where he carried on an affair with his friend Duncan's wife Annabelle. Cass later found a life of religion and died in the Civil War. Jack intended to write his doctoral dissertation on Cass but could not. At the end of the novel, Jack is planning, finally, to finish this book on Cass's life.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Jack's Mother – A society lady in Burden's Landing, Jack's mother has been married several times, and she reveals, after Irwin's death, that she was having an affair with Irwin, the product of which was Jack—that the "Scholarly Attorney" was not Jack's biological father.

Sugar-Boy – Willie's driver, Sugar-Boy is largely responsible for piloting the **black Cadillac** at high speeds over the roads of Louisiana, with Jack and Willie in tow. He is a phenomenal driver, and deeply loyal to Willie.

Tom Stark – Willie's only son, Tom is a star football player for LSU who is injured and paralyzed during a botched football play. He later succumbs to his injuries in the hospital.

Sibyl – Tom's girlfriend for a brief period of time, Sibyl becomes pregnant and believes Tom to be the father—Sibyl later gives birth, after Tom's death, and Lucy Stark resolves to raise the child as her grandson, named Willie.

Mr. and Mrs. Patton – Another "old-guard" Burden's Landing family, the Pattons are friends with Judge Irwin and bristle at the idea that Willie, whom they perceive to be an interloper, is running the state.

Byram White – The state auditor while Willie is governor, Byram is caught by Willie attempting to make a bribe. Willie threatens to fire White but does not, thus keeping him "under his wing" and making sure that White no longer steps out of line.

Hugh Miller – State attorney general under Stark, Hugh Miller considers himself a "a man of principle," and resigns his posting on hearing that Willie will not fire Byram despite his attempts at securing a bribe.

Duncan Trice – Husband of Annabelle and friend of Cass's, Duncan kills himself upon learning that the two are having an affair, and leaves his marriage ring under his pillow as a sign of his knowledge that the affair is taking place.

Phebe – Annabelle's slave working in the Trice home, Phebe discovers the ring Duncan leaves under his pillow after killing himself—Annabelle, convinced Phebe knows about her affair, sells Phebe "downriver" to New Orleans. Cass attempts to find Phebe, but cannot, though he tracks her to nearby Paducah.

"George" – An indigent man taken in by the Scholarly Attorney, George is a former trapeze artist who now makes art out of bread he finds and chews into a kind of sculpture.

Mabel Carruthers – Irwin's second wife, Mabel grew up in moneyed circumstances but lost this wealth after years of heavy spending—she married Irwin for money, not knowing that Irwin married her for the same reason. This prompted Irwin to accept American Power's bribe.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

IDEALISM VS. PRAGMATISM

Early on in *All the King's Men*, Jack Burden describes himself, ironically, as an "Idealist"—he claims that, because he ignores the things he does not want to know about, he has committed himself to high-minded principles. In practice, however, Jack Burden is the chief of staff for Willie Stark, the powerful governor ("the Boss") of Louisiana. Burden is not an Idealist, but rather the opposite—a

hardheaded Pragmatist, who cares only about getting done what needs to be done. This tension between Idealism and Pragmatism is a central tension in the novel.

Some characters become disillusioned with their principles, and begin to act more in their own self-interest. Adam Stanton, originally terrified of ruining his "honor," agrees to head Willie Stark's large charity hospital as Director after he realizes that his own father, the former Governor Stanton, helped to cover up an instance of blackmail in which Judge Irwin participated. Anne Stanton initially tells Jack that Stark is a bad man—a political wheeler-and-dealer without principles—but later asks Stark for a good deal of money to start her own children's charity and has an affair with him. Judge Irwin claims he opposes Willie politically because he does not agrees with Stark's methods, which Irwin considers to be unscrupulous and "dangerous"; but Irwin has used just such methods in the past.

Other characters retain their moral positions, more or less, throughout the novel—but even these characters appear to be some mixture of Idealist and Pragmatist. Sadie, who claims that she "made" Stark politically, views politics and human relationships as a series of give-and-takes—but she has a soft spot for Stark himself, with whom she has been having a long-standing affair. Out of jealousy Sadie later tells Duffy, Willie's other close operative and competitor, to inform Adam of Anne's relationship with Willie—with full knowledge that this will cause Adam to snap and attack Willie. Lucy, on the other hand, appears to be an Idealist—always protecting Tom's interests, never divorcing Willie despite his long history of philandering—but she is practical as regards her husband, his political career, and their life together, though they have lived separately for many years. When Stark dies, Lucy names her grandson (Tom's son) Willie, claiming that Stark was a "great man."

Then, finally, there is Stark himself—a man who, in his early life, wishes to be a politician for all the right reasons, but who, over time, comes to regard his office as only a means to an end—a way of effecting change for the greater good. The only situation that causes Willie to tap once again into his youthful Idealism is the hospital that is to bear his name—the hospital he considers his crowning achievement as governor. Stark wants this hospital to be untouched by graft—and it is this desire that starts a long series of complicated events, culminating in Duffy's anger with Stark, Duffy's conversation with Adam, and, eventually, Stark's violent death.

champion, and when he is finally assassinated, it is not because he has offended some political operative—rather, he has angered a man who believes himself to live outside, or above, politics (Adam Stanton). Stark is a populist politician, meaning that his policies are intended for the good of the people, and that he can make recourse to these policies as a means of defeating his political enemies, whom he paints as corrupt bribe-takers and fat-cats.

Stark's achievements as a politician are undeniable in the state—the roads are improved, for one, and the hospital is to be built—but some citizens object to the means by which these changes are effected. Stark has little patience for the long-standing political institutions and networks in the state. But others, including members of Burden's own family and friend group in Burden's Landing (his mother; Judge Irwin; the Pattons) believe that Stark has upset the political balance in Louisiana, and that his methods will ultimately cause more harm than good.

Stark is buoyed by a number of political operatives, Jack foremost among them. Because of his background as a PhD student and a reporter, Jack is an information man—he hunts down "dirt" on political opponents of Willie's. It is Jack's biggest assignment to find dirt on Irwin, which Jack eventually does, although Jack runs this evidence by Irwin before making it public, thus causing Irwin to shoot himself. Sadie is the Boss's political "hammer"—she is crafty, intelligent, and ruthless, and saw in Willie from the beginning his political potential. But when Sadie realizes that Stark has betrayed her, romantically, for the last time, she jettisons these allegiances and uses her influence to have Stark killed.

Duffy, another part of the political machine in the state, who was once opposed to Stark, becomes Stark's Lieutenant Governor, and has a hand in Adam's killing of Stark as well. Duffy is mostly concerned with using political influence to fatten his own wallet, which he does quite ably over his career. In the end, Burden comes to realize that politics are not just reserved for elected office, but are rather inseparable from all human relationships—power and use of influence can cause friendships to crumble, and mutual interests can bring parties together who might seem to have nothing in common. If Jack becomes disgusted with politics by the end of the novel, he has really become disgusted with the ways in which humans beings use each other for their own gain—even if he knows that he, too, has used others throughout his life.

POLITICS, INFLUENCE, AND POWER

All the King's Men is a political novel—a novel about the nuts-and-bolts of how politics gets "done." For Stark and other characters, politics are inseparable from the use of influence and power to achieve one's ends. Those ends might be for the public good, or they might be only for the enrichment of the politician. Stark is the novel's political

PERSONAL HISTORY, MEMORY, AND TIME

Because Burden has known Willie for so long, and because his life has become so intertwined with his Boss's, the novel is also a poignant examination of the effects of time and memory on personal relationships. The novel is, in

many ways, a fictional "memoir" of Burden's own life and relationships. Burden wonders, frequently, what it means to remember, and comes back often to the memory of Anne, lying back in the water, watching a gull fly overhead. For Jack, this memory of Anne, apart from its romantic significance, is a marker of the young life he can never recapture.

Burden believes, or develops throughout the novel, a philosophy of "motion"—that events and people do not seem real in themselves, but only in relation to other events and people. Therefore one must continually talk to new people (and not become too close to others), and one must be "on the move," in a car, on the road or in a train, working constantly. Jack lives his life by avoiding life—by never sitting still, and therefore not allowing time and memory to catch up with him. There are others in the novel, however, who have a markedly different relationship to memory and time. Stark, for his part, never forgets a slight, and those who have helped him in the past also receive a "bonus" in the future for their help to him. This is why Willie rewards Slade with a liquor license, for supporting Willie when Willie refused to drink **alcohol** long ago.

The Scholarly Attorney leaves Jack's mother when he realizes Jack is not his biological son, and he spends much of his life hiding from reality, helping those on the street who need help, and otherwise refusing to acknowledge the passage of time or the presence of memory. Irwin, though he admits that he took a bribe long ago, does not initially remember the man whose position he took as a result of that bribe—Jack marvels that Irwin has so selectively chosen to manage his own "history" of his life, and Jack wonders, too, whether he has gone about selecting certain memories himself, and crafting a history based only on these memories. Anne and Adam, too, have selective memories of their youth, and want to believe, most strongly, that their father, the former Governor, was a good an honest man, as these are the memories they have of their father—indeed, these memories are the only "family" they have.

Burden ends the novel with a long meditation on the nature of time, that idea that time and memory are moving, always, that they are relative quantities rather than fixed absolutes, and that Burden's efforts to "beat" time, to fix his memories in place, and to find happiness in those memories is impossible. Instead, Burden realizes he will have no life that is not in the past, not in the future, but in the present—that "period" of time which has been most difficult for him to handle, his entire life.

THE SOUTH AND SOUTHERN CULTURE

All the King's Men is a great American novel, but it is also a novel set in a very particular place and time: the American South of the Great Depression, in Louisiana. As such, the novel has a great deal to say about the nature of life in that region in that time, and, more generally, on the nature of "Southernness," or the Southern experience.

One fact of Southern life is, and was, the inescapable quandary of race. Burden, in his research on his own family, uncovers a long and tawdry story framed in the lead-up to the Civil War, and involved the selling of an innocent slave "downriver". In Jack's own time, the only black characters mentioned in the novel are servants or poor denizens of the cities in which he travels. Jack himself is not a racist—or, more specifically, his form of racism is not distinguished from the general racism of his time (he is not notably more racist than others). But Jack, and even the most virtuous of the other characters in the novel, show attitudes toward black residents that are, at best, indifferent, and at worst imbued with a disregard for those residents' humanity. Other parts of Southern culture are represented in the novel, too. For one, football is an important component of the story-line, and an important part of life in the South—Tom, Stark's only son, is critically injured in a football game. This event indirectly prompts another series of events leading to Stark's assassination. Sexual mores in the region are another aspect of the story—although chastity before marriage was important in many parts of the country at this time, Jack's courtship of Anne, for example, is imbued with a special sexual rigidity. The difficulty of obtaining a divorce in Louisiana causes Lucy to stay with Stark, despite his repeated infidelities.

But Southernness is not just window-dressing in the novel—a way of "fleshing out" a character (and Willie himself is based on a real Louisiana politician, Huey Long). Southernness is part and parcel of Willie. The Boss rose up from nothing—he was a boy working on his father's small farm—to a position of great power, whizzing around the state in his **black Cadillac**. The nothingness from which he rose existed only in the South at that time—one of the poorest regions in the country—and so the heights he attained were noticeably greater in relation to this. Similarly, only in the South, by Penn Warren's rendering, could this kind of dictatorial leadership style, this brand of politicking, be not only possible but encouraged on all levels. Louisiana has long been infamous for the nature of its political graft, and Stark was one of the finest practitioners of what was, essentially, the local political style.

LOYALTY, FRIENDSHIP, AND BETRAYAL

The novel returns, again and again, to a theme which in some sense contains all of the above—that of loyalty, betrayal, and the possibility of both within a friendship. The novel is a study of Jack's relationship with Willie—two strong-headed, impulsive men, from very different social backgrounds, who have come together with common cause in a professional setting. But Willie and Jack are also friends—even if their friendship is framed in the relationship of a boss to his employee—and when Willie dies, Jack recognizes the extent to which a meaningful chapter of his life has ended. Jack's other great male friendship in the novel is with Adam, whom he considers to be a great man, too; a man

who, like Willie and unlike Jack, has made a success of himself in life. It is particularly crushing, then, for Jack that Adam should murder Willie—that one of his friends should murder another, and that Jack should somehow feel responsible, through a series of political maneuvers, for both friends' deaths.

Numerous other characters in the novel experiences crises of loyalty and disloyalty—in fact, nearly every major character does. Lucy knows that her husband, Willie, has been greatly disloyal to her, yet she remains loyal to him and to their son, and, later, to her son's possible child, whom she names Willie. Sadie, loyal to Willie for a great deal of the novel, finally snaps when she finds out that Willie has been personally and romantically disloyal to her—she then aids in his death. Duffy, who was not loyal to Willie but who benefited from their political relationship, was all-too-ready to turn on his boss when the time came. Anne, in small ways, was disloyal to Jack as he was disloyal to her—in fact, their romance was characterized by a back-and-forth of intimacy and then withdrawal, with Anne later falling in love with Willie, and Jack never really forgiving her for this, although, by the end of the novel, they find themselves together again, in a sort of truce, in Burden's Landing. And Irwin, always loyal to Jack, was himself not so loyal to his own friend, who he cuckolded (sleeping with Jack's mother, as Irwin is Jack's biological father), and two-timing another man out of a job Irwin wanted. But Irwin recognized his flaws and vowed to support Jack anyway, though it pained Irwin to see that Jack had thrown in his political sympathies with Willie.

In the end of the novel, Jack seems to realize that all the personal loyalties and disloyalties that have filled his memoir are inseparable from the people who have committed them; in addition, these people can never be fully loyal or disloyal, but can, rather, only be loyal relative to those around them—relative enough as the situation calls for it—and loyal to an ideal that, with luck, will bring good to others, rather than only good to themselves. Thus Jack does not resign all hope, in politics and life, at the end of the novel, but he has come through his experiences with a healthy distrust for any clean and uncomplicated narrative of human and of political relationships.

SYMBOLS

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

THE BLACK CADILLAC

The black Cadillac, driven by Sugar-Boy, symbolizes Willie's power and political authority in the state of Louisiana, particularly in the first sequence of the novel, when Willie flies in the Cadillac into Mason City and its environs, where he grew up in near-poverty as a boy. Throughout the text, Willie hops into his black Cadillac (always driven by Sugar-Boy, and always at great speed), to campaign across the state, to handle emergencies and crises—and to announce his presence to those merely standing on the street, watching. The Cadillac therefore embodies not only Willie's "arrival" on the political scene in Louisiana, but also the speed with which he wants his ideas to take shape—his impatience with political change in the state, and his desire to build roads, improve schools, reform the tax code, and most importantly, construct a free hospital for the citizens of Baton Rouge to use. It is notable, too, that Sugar-Boy, the driver, is one of the most trustworthy of Willie's associates; till the end, after Willie's death, Sugar-Boy wishes to defend his Boss and his Boss's legacy in Louisiana politics.

ALCOHOL ("LIKKER")

Throughout the novel, alcohol, whiskey, or "likker" as it is often styled by Robert Penn Warren, is an important symbol of character's control or lack thereof. Willie, as a young man, does not drink alcohol, as neither his father nor his young wife Lucy "approve" of the practice. Importantly, at a lunch meeting in Mason City where Jack meets Willie for the first time, Willie refuses beer and the bar-keep, Slade, respects this decision—Willie then rewards Slade, many years later, indicating that Willie has a long memory for those who support him. Later, however, Willie experiences a turning point, during his first, failed campaign for Governor, when Sadie accidentally reveals to Willie, in Jack's presence, that he's a "stooge" of the Democratic Party—Willie begins drinking, and finishes an enormous bottle of whiskey, getting so drunk he nearly misses his speech the next day. Willie then has a "hair of the dog" to combat his hangover and speak in Upton, where he inveighs against the Party's corruption and sows the seeds for his own political successes. Whiskey thus "loosens up" Willie in these years; later on, however, once he is in office, Willie is clearly more dependent on whiskey. Alcohol is a kind of universal lubricant for social interaction in the South—nearly every meeting begins with a suggestion to drink it, even during Prohibition. In this sense, too, alcohol signals that important political business in the novel is going to take place, and also, perhaps, the likely corruption that will come hand-in-hand with that business.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Harvest Books edition of *All the King's Men* published in 2006.

Chapter 1 Quotes

The beauty about Tiny is that nobody can trust him and you know it. You get somebody somebody can trust maybe, and you got to sit up nights worrying whether you are the somebody. You get Tiny, and you can get a night's sleep. All you got to do is keep the albumen scared out of his urine.

Related Characters: Willie "The Boss" Stark (speaker), Jack Burden, Tiny Duffy

Related Themes:

Page Number: 24

Explanation and Analysis

Willie Stark's philosophy of politics is at once simple and infinitely complex. On the one hand, he believes that, to manipulate people, you must flatter them, cajole them, be kind to them, give them things, tell them what they want to hear. But you must also strike the fear of God into them - you must cause them to believe that you are the powerful one, and that all they can do is listen.

With Duffy, Stark first approached cautiously. Then he realized Duffy (Tiny) was not a trustworthy man, nor a loyal man - that he would do whatever it took to remain viable in a political system prone to change, and to make more money for himself. When Stark noticed this, as in the quote, he was relieved - he saw that Tiny could be handled through a combination of kindness and the instilling of fear. This political philosophy Stark will put into practice throughout the novel, often to startlingly positive (or persuasive) effect.

We would come into Burden's Landing by the new boulevard by the bay. The air would smell salty, with maybe a taint of the fishy, sad, sweet smell of the tidelands to it, but fresh nevertheless. It would be nearly midnight then, and the lights would be off in the three blocks of down-town . . . .

Related Characters: Jack Burden (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 56

Explanation and Analysis

Burden's Landing is a town of real importance to Jack - as the name suggests, it is the "seat," historically, of his own family, which for a long time has wielded real clout in Louisiana politics. When Burden and Willie go back to Burden's Landing, they are more or less going back in time, to a place where politics is based on personal relationships.

Burden's view of Burden's Landing is a fundamentally romantic one. He sees it in its natural beauty, as a place of childhood and innocence. He sees it, too, as a place where he fell in love for the first time - and it is forever linked both to that love, which will be developed later in the novel, and to the ultimate frustration of it, which will cause Jack many years of heartache after the fact. For the novel to begin with this nighttime drive to Burden's Landing is to signal, here, that the Landing is perhaps the most important, the most emotionally rich and complex, of the novel's many locales.

Man is conceived in sin and born in corruption and he passeth from the stink of the didie to the stench of the shroud. There is always something.

Related Characters: Willie "The Boss" Stark (speaker), Jack Burden, Judge Irwin

Related Themes:

Page Number: 235

Explanation and Analysis

Willie has come down to Burden's Landing on a political mission - and in order to achieve what he desires, he must put pressure on Judge Irwin. Jack believes that Irwin cannot be pressured - Jack has known Irwin all his life, and he flinches at the thought of trading in on that relationship in order to push a political agenda.

But Willie has no such worry about the trip. Indeed, he relies on Jack's deep and sustained relationships with the political "old guard" of Louisiana. Without them, Willie would be just another upstart, a man trying, as best he can, to make his way in Southern politics without a name for himself. When Willie argues that dirt can be "dug up" on anyone, he means that all mean are fallible, that all have made mistakes in the past - and that these mistakes can, and should, be used for political leverage. This kind of politics is relatively new to Jack, even though he knows it's the way that Willie often plays the game.

Chapter 2 Quotes

About two years after [the schoolhouse] was built, it happened. There was a fire drill, and all the kids on the top floors started to use the fire escapes. . . . Because the little kids held up the traffic, the fire escape and the iron platform at the top got packet with kids. Well, some of the brickwork gave and the bolts and bars holding the contraption to the wall pulled loose and the whole thing fell away, spraying kids in all directions.

Related Characters: Jack Burden (speaker), Willie "The Boss" Stark

Related Themes:

Page Number: 97

Explanation and Analysis

Jack attempts to describe how, exactly, Willie came to power. Willie did so in part by pushing for a county bond to establish a new, higher quality schoolhouse. The corrupt county politicians agree to build the school, but bid cheaply, and the school eventually falls apart, killing many children inside. What's most striking about this moment, apart from its tragedy, is the means by which Willie uses that tragedy to further his own ends. He makes it plain that he has always opposed these cheap bricks, that he was on the side of the people even though the people didn't know he was on their side - that, in other words, he was, and always has been, a populist champion. This will become Willie's political identity, and he will develop it throughout the novel, even as he ascends to the role of governor in the state. Jack, for his part, recognizes both the sincerity of Willie's desire to help the people, and the way this desire also helps Willie professionally.

I don't know whether Willie meant to do it. But anyway, he did it. He didn't exactly shove Duffy off the platform. He just started Duffy doing a dance along the edge, a kind of delicate, feather-toed, bemused, slow-motion adagio accompanied by arms pinwheeling around a face which was like a surprised custard pie with a hole scooped in the middle of the meringue . . . .

Related Characters: Jack Burden (speaker), Willie "The Boss" Stark, Tiny Duffy

Related Themes:

Page Number: 139

Explanation and Analysis

What is more important than Willie's "shove" of Duffy from the platform stage is the political gumption that underlies it. Willie has realized that he is a "stooge" candidate for governor at this point in his career. He has been nominated by the Democratic machine in order to split the vote with another candidate - such that the will of the party bosses prevails. When Stark realizes this is the case, he becomes enraged, and, with great shrewdness, realizes there are only two things he can do. On the one hand, he could back down and meekly do what the party says. On the other, he could lash out, show that the party is trying to subvert the democratic process - and hope that the voters will respond positively to this kind of populist message. It is a rulebook that Willie will play by for his entire political career, and it will make him, for a time, into the most powerful man in the state.

Chapter 3 Quotes

The sky was darker now, with a purplish, greenish cast. The color of a turning grape. But it still looked high, with worlds of air under it. A gull crossed, very high, directly above me. Against the sky it was whiter even than the sail had been. It passed clear across all the sky I could see. I wondered if Anne had seen the gull.

Related Characters: Jack Burden (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 176

Explanation and Analysis

Burden's relationship to Burden's Landing is one of pure nostalgia. He associates that place with a freer, simpler time in his life - with a world where political influence and powerful families were one (even when that influence wasn't used for the good of the many). And, of course, he thinks of Anne when he thinks of his hometown - the "girl who got away," the woman with whom he thought he was going to spend his life.

Jack's connection to the southern, marine part of Louisiana is in contrast to Willie's connection to the northern, Arkansas-like portion of the state, which is far more rural, and less defined by families of long standing and great wealth. If Burden's Landing represents homecoming and power for Jack - power that he sometimes courts and sometimes dismisses - it represents for Willie a

concentration of power that is to be fought with and superseded if he is to maintain his influence.

> If the government of this state for quite a long time back had been doing anything for the folks in it, would Stark have been able to get out there with his bare hands and bust the boys? And would he be having to make so many short cuts to get something done to make up for the time lost all these years . . . ?

Related Characters: Jack Burden (speaker), Jack's Mother, Willie "The Boss" Stark, Judge Irwin, Mr. and Mrs. Patton

Related Themes:

Page Number: 187

Explanation and Analysis

Jack Burden defends Willie's actions as Governor to the Irwins and the Pattons, families that represent some of the oldest and most powerful interests in the state - the bulwarks of Burden's Landing and of southern Louisiana more broadly. Jack is caught between two worlds. On the one hand, he hints that he recognizes the crudeness of Willie's methods, his populism, and his attempts to woo voters by catering to their emotions rather than to their rational minds. But Jack also sees that Willie is invested in real change, and that he wants to make the state better. Those in power, like the Irwins and Pattons, who have been in power for a long time, do not necessarily want to change the status quo to help those less fortunate. Indeed, for them the status quo is what makes them powerful in the first place. And even as Jack dines with and socializes with these families, he sees how limited their worldview is.

> There's nothing in the constitution says that Byram B. White can commit a felony with impunity.

Related Characters: Hugh Miller (speaker), Byram White, Willie "The Boss" Stark

Related Themes:

Page Number: 205

Explanation and Analysis

Hugh Miller, the state attorney general of Louisiana, objects to Willie's massaging of a tricky situation involving White, who, in an official capacity, has been caught skimming money. Willie knows that there is nothing more important than having something to "hold over" another person - that is, a criminal or unethical act that can be used to blackmail someone and force them to follow Willie's orders.

In other words, Willie is excited when he catches White committing fraud, since this means he will now have leverage with White - White will be in his pocket instead of in someone else's. This is how Willie operates. And Hugh Miller, who vows he has sworn to uphold the law, will not stand for it. But Jack, interestingly, simply watches. He neither condones nor decries Willie's behavior - he merely takes it all in, and reports it to the reader.

Chapter 4 Quotes

> Jack Burden came into possession of the papers from the grandson of Gilbert Mastern. When the time came for him to select a subject for his dissertation for his Ph.D., his professor suggested that he edit the journal and letters of Cass Mastern, and write a biographical essay . . . .

Related Characters: Jack Burden (speaker), Cass Mastern

Related Themes:

Page Number: 244

Explanation and Analysis

Before Jack was a reporter and a political operative for Willie Stark, he was a graduate student. His willingness to dig down into the muck of historical records and official documents is one of his great strengths as a political employee later in life - and this is why, or at least part of why, Jack brings up Cass Mastern.

But Jack also seems to find something simply compelling about Cass as a human being. Through the veil of the past, Jack believes he shares some of Cass's star-crossed luck. Jack's ability to identify with those from the past - indeed, his desire to live in the past - is one of his notable characteristics, and is a clear contrast to Willie, for whom there is only forward motion, more planning, and future great accomplishment. Jack's involvement with the past is in no sense more pronounced, indeed, than when he speaks to Anne, with whom he is still in love, even though they are now friends.

But now and then Duncan Trice had to be out of town on business, and on those occasions Cass would be admitted, late at night, to the house . . . so he actually lay in the very bed belonging to Duncan Trice.

Related Characters: Jack Burden (speaker), Duncan Trice, Cass Mastern

Related Themes:

Page Number: 256

Explanation and Analysis

Duncan Trice took Cass "under his wing," and showed him how to behave as a Southern gentleman should. Jack discovers this in the letters, and sees, too, that Cass falls in love with Duncan's wife, Annabelle.

Here the patterning of the novel turns inward, as Jack realizes, although does not state explicitly, that Cass, the subject of his doctoral dissertation, falls in love with an "Anna" just as Jack falls in love with Anne. And it later is revealed that Anne has been having an affair with Willie Stark, meaning that Jack, like Cass, is the "other man."

Thus Penn Warren creates what is called a "mise en abyme," or a pattern of repeated narratives within the text. Jack looks into the past and finds, despite himself, his own predicament - although at the time of his research, he does not know that he will be working for Willie, nor that Anne will wind up having a romantic affair with him.

. . . the day came when Jack Burden sat down at the pine table and realized that he did not know Cass Mastern. He did not have to know Cass Mastern to get the degree; he only had to know the facts about Cass Mastern's world. But without knowing Cass Mastern, he could not put down the facts about Cass Mastern's world.

Related Characters: Jack Burden (speaker), Cass Mastern

Related Themes:

Page Number: 282

Explanation and Analysis

As in his descriptions of Burden's Landing, Jack is a romantic - for good and for ill. His sensibility allows him to fall quickly and deeply in love with ideas, with stories, with people. He takes a great deal of enjoyment in his graduate work, and throughout this chapter, he demonstrates to the reader just how skilled he is as a researcher, how willing he was to devote a chunk of his life to reaching back into the archives and describing the past.

But, as this passage indicates, he was not simply interested in describing the past - he wanted to find out the "truth" of Cass Mastern's story. And because he could not discover that truth - though he did not exactly know what the truth might mean - he abandoned the project, never getting his doctorate. This is the flip side of Jack's romanticism - it causes him to take up projects passionately, but it causes him to abandon them just as absolutely when he no longer cares for them or gives them up as impossible.

Chapter 5 Quotes

Then it was another day, and I set out to dig up the dead cat, to excavate the maggot from the cheese, to locate the canker in the rose, to find the deceased fly among the raisins in the rice pudding.

Related Characters: Jack Burden (speaker), Judge Irwin

Related Themes:

Page Number: 289

Explanation and Analysis

The novel has now looped back to its initial story - that of the meeting between Willie, Jack, and Judge Irwin, in the middle of the night in Burden's Landing. Willie needs Irwin to work with him, and Irwin is not inclined to do so; thus Willie asks Jack to find "dirt" on Irwin, as Jack describes in this passage, using an array of metaphors. This is, in part, Jack's theatrical and descriptive flourish - he was a doctoral student, after all, and has a literary turn of mind.

But it also shows the bind that Jack is in. On the one hand, he wants to help his boss - but on the other, he realizes he must subvert one of the deepest friendships he has, with a man who mentored him in his youth. Jack is being asked to choose, effectively, between his past and his present (and future) - and he sides with Willie.

For the physical world, though it exists and its existence cannot be denied without blasphemy, is never the cause, it is only result, only symptom, it is the clay under the thumb of the potter . . . .

Related Characters: "The Scholarly Attorney" (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 298

Explanation and Analysis

Jack's father (or step-father), the "Scholarly Attorney," is now something of a religious mystic, a man who lives in a small, dirty apartment, who takes men in off the street in acts of charity, and who appears not to have much by way of steady employment. In a sense, Jack is torn between the world of the Scholarly Attorney and that of the high social polish of Burden's Landing, where the Scholarly Attorney's behavior is considered scandalous.

Jack's life as a graduate student approached that of his father's in Jack's renunciation of the comforts he might have been able to enjoy in the Landing. But Jack also looks at his father skeptically, now, as a man who has given up on life, and who has decided to reject everything he once knew, for an existence that is both radically generous and more or less removed from the lives of "normal" working people.

I can do no more. I went as you know to the people who are against Governor Stanton in politics but they would not listen to me. . . . I will never be any good again. I will be a drag on you and not a help. What can I do, Sister?

Related Characters: Mortimer Littlepaugh (speaker), Lily Littlepaugh

Related Themes:

Page Number: 341

Explanation and Analysis

Mortimer Littlepaugh was the "chief counsel" for American Electric, a company that, in a complex deal, winds up involved in Irwin's graft decades before. Jack digs up the fact that Littlepaugh went to the governor of the state of Louisiana to argue that Judge Irwin, then a high-ranking and prominent public official, had arranged a sweetheart deal for himself to make a private fortune, using his public office.

Littlepaugh, disgusted that he could not expose the graft, and that the government would do nothing to stop Irwin's malfeasance, killed himself - and once Jack realizes this, he knows he has Irwin "nailed," that there is nothing the judge can do to stop Willie from using this information. This confirms what Willie said in the beginning of the novel, that all men commit bad deeds, and that only some men have to answer for them - unless those bad deeds are uncovered by crack researchers like Jack.

Chapter 6 Quotes

The Friend of Your Youth is the only friend you will ever have, for he does not really see you. He sees in his mind a face which does not exist any more . . . .

Related Characters: Jack Burden (speaker), Adam Stanton

Related Themes:

Page Number: 352

Explanation and Analysis

Jack and Adam, as Jack recounts, were good friends long ago - as close as brothers, especially considering the fact that Jack was in love with Anne Stanton, Adam's sister. Adam is a doctor who does not make much money, who thinks highly of his professional calling, and has vowed to do good for the region - and who believes that Jack's association with Willie is a tarnish on Jack's reputation.

Here, Jack argues that his friendship with Adam, though it is always present in their conversations, has vanished - that it is only the ghost of that friendship that is now apparent. Jack realizes that this feeling also characterizes his relationship with Anne, and that their previous intimacy is now only the faint outline of that intimacy. Jack wonders whether he and Adam can ever become close enough again to speak honestly with one another - if not as they did in the past, then at least in some approximation of it.

I told him . . . I told him that if he wanted to do any good—really do any good—here was the time. And the way. To see that the Medical Center was run right.

Related Characters: Anne Stanton (speaker), Adam Stanton

Related Themes:

Page Number: 369

Explanation and Analysis

Anne convinces her brother that, though he opposes working for Willie Stark, Stark is the man who stands between him and the job of his dreams: running a charity hospital that could benefit the residents of the entire state. Thus Adam, like Jack, finds himself in a bind, although Adam

has a harder time working for Willie, ultimately. Both Jack and Adam are idealists who must occasionally behave as pragmatists, and Anne does her part to convince Adam that he can live with himself after having "sold out" professionally to Willie.

Anne is an interesting figure in the novel. She is beloved by many, most notably by Jack. And yet she is most vivid not in her contemporary appearances, at the time the narrative is written, but in the past, as Jack describes spending time with her at the Landing. It is as if Anne becomes most alive when she is in a memory - not when she is standing before Jack in real life.

Chapter 7 Quotes

❝ I had had a puncture in the morning and so didn't hit Long Beach till about evening. I drank a milk shake, bought a bottle of bourbon, and went up to my room. I hadn't had a drop the whole trip. I hadn't wanted a drop. I hadn't wanted anything, except the hum of the motor and the lull of the car and I had had that.

Related Characters: Jack Burden (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 407

Explanation and Analysis

Jack describes these periods of his life - which are shocks, panic attacks, and instances of major depression all wrapped into one - as Great Sleeps. Anne's affair with Stark prompts another such Big Sleep, and the only thing that can assuage him is a trip to Los Angeles, to the water - a trip that, at the time Jack undertakes it, would require many days.

Jack feels he must see the entire sweep of the western United States to rid himself of the idea of Anne with another man. This, although he knows that Anne no longer loves him, and that their relationship will not work - that he and Anne exist together only in the past, not in the present or the future. Yet the idea of Anne with Willie is a betrayal - but of what, Jack is not quite sure. Nevertheless, it prompts him to seek solitude in a faraway place and solace in alcohol.

❝ Don't be silly . . . and don't call me Jackie-Bird.
But you *are* Jackie-bird . . . .
Don't you love me?
I love Jackie-Bird; poor Jackie-Bird.
God damn it, don't you love me?
Yes . . . I do.

Related Characters: Anne Stanton, Jack Burden (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 436

Explanation and Analysis

The revelation of Anne's affair with Willie prompts for Jack the memories of their relationship - of the times they shared primarily in Burden's Landing. Anne and Jack are in love with one another, yet their relationship carries within it a strain, perhaps the strain of expectations, since the two of them spent so much time together from a young age.

When Jack and Anne go to college, a separation begins that will wind up running through their relationship, and causing it to crumble. But Jack can point to no single event - other than the night in which they attempt to have sex, but do not have time before Anne's parents return - that signals their demise as a couple. Instead, they have grown apart just as they had grown up together. And it is this, the fact that their love did not last, that is harshest for Jack. It is this that prompts so much anxious revulsion at the idea of Anne and Willie together.

Chapter 8 Quotes

❝ I did fine until they started the burning. For taking out the chunks of brain they use an electric gadget which is nothing but a little metal rod . . . and there is some smoke and quite a lot of odor . . . .

Related Characters: Jack Burden (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 479

Explanation and Analysis

Burden, when he is back from his trip to California, meets with Adam and attempts to take up where he left off - serving Willie (Jack and Willie do not discuss Anne). Jack is shocked by Adam's use of a full lobotomy to help a schizophrenic man. Jack considers this procedure bizarre

and inhumane, despite Adam's genuine desire to help the patient. And afterward, Jack tells Adam to "baptize" the man, as he is born again after the surgery.

Thus Jack conflates the human mind, and the way it changes over time, with a religious idea, that of baptism and spiritual rebirth. Of course, Jack has just returned from his own "rebirth," although it is not clear how his life has changed after the trip to Los Angeles - only that he can never see Anne and Willie the same way again, after finding out about their affair.

> What would it cost? Well, MacMurfee was thinking he might run for Senator . . . so that was it.

Related Characters: Jack Burden (speaker), Harrison and MacMurfee

Related Themes:

Page Number: 499

Explanation and Analysis

The revelation of this quote causes Willie to activate his long-held plan of using his "dirt" on Judge Irwin. MacMurfee is in Irwin's pocket, and MacMurfee now thinks that, having learned that Willie's son has gotten a girl pregnant, he (MacMurfee) can use this as leverage to gain a senate seat in Louisiana, the same seat Willie has had his eye on for years.

Willie, of course, is not going to allow MacMurfee's plan to unfold, and he therefore relies on Jack to go to Burden's Landing and talk to Irwin. It is blackmail of a third party to defeat blackmail against himself, and Willie knows that it is entirely personal - that MacMurfee wants to use a detail from Willie's son's life to derail Willie's career. Thus Willie, who believes that all political battles are personal ones, has no problem sullying Irwin's reputation to keep MacMurfee from sullying his own.

Chapter 9 Quotes

> God damn it, so the bastard crawled out on me.
> I didn't say anything.
> I didn't tell you to scare him to death, I just told you to scare him.
> He wasn't scared.
> What the hell did he do it for then?

Related Characters: Willie "The Boss" Stark, Jack Burden (speaker), Judge Irwin

Related Themes:

Page Number: 535

Explanation and Analysis

Irwin's suicide, which mirrors Littlepaugh's suicide years before in the American Electric case, is a double blow for Jack. First, it is an indicator of what can go wrong when one person tries to utterly ruin another - that second person always has the horrible option of ending his or her life, thus stopping the power dynamic of blackmail. And, even more importantly, Irwin's act causes Jack's mother to reveal that Jack is really Irwin's son - that Jack was the child, out of a wedlock, of a romantic union between his own mother and Judge Irwin.

This latter piece of news is almost too much for Jack to bear. For not only does he learn that his own father, the Scholarly Attorney, is not his biological father - he learns that he has caused his biological father to kill himself, all for political gain for Willie Stark, not even for Jack Burden.

> Sugar-boy was leaning above him, weeping and sputtering, trying to speak. He finally managed to get out the words: "D-d-d-does it hur-hur-hur-hurt much, Boss--?"

Related Characters: Willie "The Boss" Stark, Sugar-Boy (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 598

Explanation and Analysis

Willie's lieutenants, those who have supported him his entire political life, who have believed in him since he was a young and unpolished man - they gather around him now, in the hospital he has built, hoping that he does not die of the gunshot wound he has suffered in the capital (the bullet fired by Adam). Willie's operatives (particularly Sugar-Boy) are loyal to him to the end, vowing that, if he does die, he will not die in vain, and that the state will long recognize Willie's achievements.

But Jack, seeing Willie suffer, has a more complex set of emotions. For Adam has killed Willie, in part, for sleeping with Anne - thus "ruining" Anne's reputation, as Adam sees it. Jack, of course, is devastated to know about Anne's

relationship with Willie, and the fact that Anne and Willie seem to be genuinely in love. Knowledge of the affair caused Jack to drive away to Los Angeles, and perhaps, too, to give up on romantic possibility altogether. This same revelation happened to drive Adam to murderous frenzy.

He died the next morning, just about day. There was a hell of a big funeral. The city was jam-packed with people, all kinds of people . . . people who had never been on pavement before.

Related Characters: Jack Burden (speaker), Willie "The Boss" Stark

Related Themes:

Page Number: 603

Explanation and Analysis

The people of Louisiana adore Willie. He was their champion all his life, a populist hero for the state, who made his career early on by defying large-scale political interests and the moneyed classes that ruled Louisiana. Willie dared to put the interests of the people first, and to use them to gain political power.

That, at least, is the public story. In private, however, and as the novel demonstrates, Willie was a populist as much for his own advancement as for the sake of the people's. He saw that he could do good by promising to be one of the people, not a special interest - yet he became so powerful that no one, he felt, could touch him. And Willie, by the end of his life, believed that any tactic was fair to pursue for political purposes - any kind of blackmail, any kind of illicit or behind-the-scenes leverage. It is this second part of his political life that the people on the sidewalks did not see, and Jack knows this.

Oh . . . and I killed Willie. I killed him.
Yes.
Oh God . . .

Related Characters: Sadie Burke, Jack Burden (speaker), Willie "The Boss" Stark

Related Themes:

Page Number: 618

Explanation and Analysis

Jack realizes that Sadie leaked the information to Adam that Willie and Anne were having an affair, because Sadie at least partially knew that Adam would be so enraged to hear it that he would do anything to stop Willie. Sadie did this because she loved Willie, after having served him loyally for years, and she couldn't bear the thought of Anne being with him. Duffy, Willie's operative, also participated in this leveraging of behind-the-scenes information, since Duffy, too, knew that he could destroy Willie this way - and Duffy had his eyes on bigger payoffs and greater office than he could achieve with Willie in power.

Thus Willie was undone by his own affair with Anne, but moreover undone by those who promised to be loyal to him. Sadie and Duffy used Willie's own tactics against him, and Sadie, at this point in the novel, is in a mental institution, having suffered a breakdown; she recognizes that she has suffered for Willie's murder, though perhaps not as much as Willie has.

. . . and soon we shall go out of the house and go into the convulsion of the world, out of history into history and the awful responsibility of Time.

Related Characters: Jack Burden (speaker), Anne Stanton

Related Themes:

Page Number: 661

Explanation and Analysis

For Jack, the events of the novel work on two planes. On one, they are the events of one man's political life, his rise and his fall, his idealism, his populism, and eventually a demise predicated on the kinds of hard-nosed techniques he himself used to attain and keep power. Jack sees Willie's life as a powerful example of how governing in America works, how "democracy" functions - how the power of a personality can make the power of a man.

But Jack also sees Willie's life as pointing to larger themes - the changes in Southern society that lead to new populist leaders, and that dismantle the old ways of doing things in the moneyed parts of the state. Willie is also connected to the idea that love can be wrapped up in power, and loyalty inherent in disloyalty - that perhaps there is no such thing as loyalty at all. Jack, ever the romantic and idealist, is deeply dismayed at what he has seen, and wonders what the remainder of his life will look like. Jack and Anne are now together, and as they take care of the Scholarly Attorney,

they try to knit together a life that has, over time, become complex and sad, a part of the long, complex, and often sad history of that part of the United States.

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.

CHAPTER 1

The novel begins in 1936, approaching Mason City, in a state presumed to be Louisiana. The narrator is in a large, black car with an enormous eight-cylinder engine, flying on a new road to Mason City from the outlying farmlands. The narrator, who speaks in the first-person (with the pronoun "I"), is not yet named, but he describes the pine-forest landscape of northern Louisiana as it whizzes past the car windows. The narrator indicates that he is sitting in the car with Sugar-Boy, the driver; the Boss (his boss); the Boss's wife and son; and Mr. Duffy. The narrator also indicates that this scene, in 1936, took place three years ago, meaning that the narrator is "speaking" from the "present," in 1939.

This scene serves already to introduce one of the primary preoccupations of the novel—that of "speed," or the rate at which one travels through space and time. Burden often remarks that Willie has risen from seeming obscurity in not a very long period of time—and Burden himself has transitioned between various careers in what feels, to him, the blink of an eye. As Burden continues describing Willie's life, he finds he cannot help reflecting on the nature of the changes that have happened to him in his boyhood and youth.

A second car, following the car in which the narrator sits, contains Sadie Burke (secretary to the Boss) and a pool of journalists who have been assigned to cover this particular trip. The narrator describes Sugar-Boy, the driver, who is a small Irishman with a terrible stutter; the Boss, who sits up-front next to Sugar-Boy, enjoys how quickly and nimbly Sugar-Boy drives the great **black Cadillac**.

Here the reader is immediately confronted by the size of the Boss's retinue, which includes his family, his advisers, his secretary, and those who wish to cover and report on his every move. The only character who seems to spend any time alone with the Boss is Jack.

After flying through the surrounding countryside, the two cars stop in front of a soda fountain, and the Boss (whose name is revealed to be Willie Stark) gets out to have a Coke, since it's an extremely hot day. A crowd quickly forms inside and outside the soda fountain, as the Boss is a local celebrity of some kind—probably a politician, from the hints the narrator has dropped about the Boss thus far.

The first indication of just how intense the Boss's celebrity is, especially in the region where he grew up. Throughout the novel, even as the Boss's political fortunes wane, he never loses very much support from "the common man"—in fact, they seem only to love him more, the more his enemies in the legislature speak out against him.

The Boss goes up to an old man the narrator terms Old Leather Face, and asks about him and his family. The old man replies that his son is in trouble with the law—on trial for murder, after getting into a fight. The Boss drinks his Coke, thanks the proprietor of the shop for giving it to him "on the house," and begins walking outside. Mr. Duffy asks the Boss whether he intends to give a speech in Mason City, which appears to be the Boss's home town. The Boss says he's not sure, and continues walking in a straight line from the soda fountain.

The Boss has learned the power of demurring—of pretending that he is not a public man capable of deliver a throttling speech. This is in great distinction to Jack's depiction of Willie earlier in his political career, when he reads his speeches from prepared note cards, and seems all too ready to speak whenever asked.

But the Boss walks up to the steps of the Mason City courthouse, and it appears he is going to make a speech, after all. Willie begins by saying he won't ask the crowd for their votes, and that asking them wouldn't do any good anyway, as Willie must contend with the politicians in the state's legislature. It here becomes apparent that Willie, the Boss, is the Governor of the state.

Willie breaks out one of his favorite slogans—the idea that he is working for the people, but that the legislature is only working to defeat him and his policies, without concern for the fates of the people in the state. This echoes the speeches of many politicians in America throughout its history.

A man shouts at Willie from the crowd, apparently making fun of him, but Willie has a quick retort for the man, and the remainder of the crowd seems sympathetic to Willie's fight against his opponents in the state congress. Willie ends his speech by saying he has come back to the Mason City-area to see his father, who lives on a farm nearby, and to shake hands with the "regular folks" who make his Governorship possible. The crowd cheers him.

Willie is not above making public-relations use of his father and his father's modest farm outside Mason City. Willie seems to want to visit his father for personal reasons, just to talk to him, but he also recognizes the powerful symbolism of going back to his small childhood home and having his picture taken there.

Willie, Lucy, his son, the narrator, and Mr. Duffy get back in the Cadillac, and Sugar-Boy begins nudging it through the streets, which are now choked with Willie's well-wishers. The narrator, in the car, then recalls how he first met Willie, then a young local elected official, in Mason City in 1922, fourteen years previous.

Sugar-Boy's driving, and his cursing at those who get in the way of the car, are a running joke throughout the novel. Sugar-Boy's loyalty to Willie is no joke, however—he is perhaps the character most loyal to Willie, even more so than Burden.

In this scene, in 1922, the narrator is seated at Slade's, an illegal bar where many politicians meet—with him is Slade, the proprietor, Duffy, who at this point was big in local Mason County politics (Mason City is the seat of Mason County); Alex Michel, the deputy sheriff in Mason County, and Willie Stark, then the County Treasurer for Mason County, who had come down to the city to try to get financing for a new schoolhouse.

One of the novel's first flashbacks, itself embedded in the "flashback" that starts the book. For Jack is writing at some point after Willie's death, and he writes of a moment during the heart of Willie's governorship—and then, in that memory, includes another memory of Willie's youth and young political career.

The narrator was, at that point, a reporter for the Chronicle, a local paper, and he was there to cover the conversation; Duffy was one of the Governor Joe Harrison's top men in that region—part of Harrison's Democratic machine in the state. Alex introduces Willie to Slade, the narrator, and Duffy, and makes fun of Willie, joking that he married a school-teacher—which Alex finds hilarious. Willie takes the joke in stride, though he appeared, at that time, to lack the powerful confidence and projection the narrator notices in the Willie of 1936.

Burden takes great pains to paint the nature of local politics at the time of Willie's rise—most of those in power were deeply distrustful of any "interlopers" or "farm-boys," people who wanted to break into political power but had none as of yet. Willie, in this scene, is quiet and polite, but Jack also notices the fire in his eyes—his commitment to a career in the political realm.

Willie finally introduces himself, formally, to the table, and we find out that the narrator's last name is Burden. Willie shakes Burden's hand. The narrative shifts back to the 1930s, when Burden is working as the chief of staff and right-hand man for Willie, and Burden asks the Boss, then, if he winked at Burden when he shook hands with him, back in 1922. Burden swears that Willie did wink, but Willie, who enjoys a good joke himself, strings Burden along, never admitting to whether or not he winked at him the moment they met, so long ago. It is revealed, too, that Duffy, once believing himself to be far more powerful than Willie, is now (in the 1930s) Willie's Lieutenant Governor, and that Willie has helped him to gain this position.

This shows Burden's skill in weaving narration together—scenes from ten or fifteen years ago blend with scenes from the near-present (close to the time of Jack's writing), blend with scenes from after Willie's death, which is discussed bluntly at the end of this first chapter. Willie for his part never wishes to reveal whether he and Jack had a "connection" from that day early on, but it is clear that Willie trusted Jack immediately, and Jack sensed that Willie was no ordinary politician.

Burden switches back to 1922. Burden recalls Willie being offered a beer by Duffy, and Willie declining this beer several times, implying that he does not drink and that his wife, Lucy, does not approve of drinking. Slade, the owner, replies to Duffy, who insists that Willie drink a beer, that Slade only sells beer to those that want it. Burden recalls how, once Prohibition was repealed nationally, Slade was rewarded by Willie, then governor, with lucrative **liquor** licenses and a profitable location for his new, legal bar. Burden believes this is a testament to Willie's memory and political favoritism, especially for those who have helped him in the past.

One of Willie's more notable traits, in his younger years, is his total abstinence from the drinking of alcohol. This was considered a rare trait at the time, in the South, and was often linked with a religious temperament, although in Willie, Lucy, and Willie's father it seems more a vestige of religion and an enactment of strict bodily discipline: it is harder to work in the fields if you're drunk or hung-over. Willie's "simplicity" early on is in many ways symbolized by his unwillingness to drink.

Burden goes on to recall the remainder of the four men's conversation, that day in 1922, when Alex convinces Duffy that Willie is not just some interloper, as Duffy had thought him to be, nor a country bumpkin, but a shrewd politician who was, in fact, county treasurer for Mason County. Burden reserves the remainder of the story of how Willie built his schoolhouse for later on in the narrative, but as he shifts back to the **black Cadillac**, in 1936, whirring past the schoolhouse Willie built, near Mason City, Burden seems to imply that Willie has got what he wanted—Duffy now serves him, as Lieutenant Governor, and all those who thought him a "hayseed" or yokel must now recognize that Willie is the chief political power in the state.

Jack again uses the power of his narrative "shifting" to show that, though Duffy was "in the driver's seat" of his relationship with Willie early on, when Willie was nothing more than a country boy with a law degree, now Duffy answers to Willie—Willie is in charge of the state and has figured out a way to make his former enemies his uneasy allies. It is this talent for forging consensus when there is none that enables Willie to cling to power for as long as he does—although Duffy will "get one over" on Willie eventually, in Willie's death at the capitol.

The Boss tells Burden, back in the car in 1936, that Burden should find a good lawyer, an "Abe Lincoln type," to represent the old leathery man's (named Malaciah) son in his trial for murder. Burden remarks that he has a great deal of his notes written down in black notebooks and locked in a safety deposit box, where enemies of Willie's cannot find them.

Burden's indication that there would be good reason for people to "get at" Willie's files—another strong hint that Willie has many enemies in local and state politics, enemies who would like nothing more than to gain access to all his inside information.

Duffy, in the car, nervously tells the Boss that Malaciah's son, as Duffy has heard it, knifed the son of an important political figure in that region, and that it would perhaps not be wise for Willie to pay for a lawyer to represent Malaciah's son. But Willie turns around in his seat and responds harshly to Duffy, saying that no one will be able to trace this lawyer to Willie's office, and that he, Willie, is loyal to Malaciah, who has been an old friend. This ends the conversation.

Here, Willie demonstrates to Duffy just who is "on top" politically, and who has to follow orders. Duffy believes it would not be politically expedient for Willie to have his "fingerprints" all over this case of Malaciah's boy, but Willie is more than capable of getting things done behind the scenes, as will become evident when Jack is his go-between during his impeachment.

The **black Cadillac** pulls up next to the house where Willie grew up, a farmhouse in rural Mason County. Burden remarks that Willie never really had the house repainted or renovated, not in any obvious ways, but that Willie did pay to have an electric pump installed for the plumbing in the bathroom—this improvement isn't "noticeable from the street," and therefore means that Willie will not be seen as corrupt, or using money to favor his own family.

An important distinction in the novel. Willie is more than willing to do what he can for his father—to improve that man's quality of life. But Willie does not want to do anything that would draw attention to his own wealth or power—that would only give more fodder for his critics to attack him. So he helps his father in inconspicuous ways.

Willie's father, an old farmer, skinny and wrinkled and taciturn, emerges from the house and welcomes, quietly, Willie, Lucy, Jack, and Duffy. After sitting in the parlor for a moment, the next car arrives, with Sadie and the reporters in tow, and a photographer asks to take some "candid" shots of Willie and Lucy in the house. Willie asks Burden to pick up Willie's father's old dog, who can barely move, so the dog is placed in the shot, making the photo look more "homey."

A comic moment—one of the novel's relatively few—in which Jack must do all he can to make things "right" for the photo-op. Willie will ask Jack, again and again, to help him publically and behind the scenes, and though Jack does not always agree with Willie, he is loyal to him, and willing to try what he can to make sure Willie gets his way in the world.

The photographer then takes some photos of Willie in his old bedroom, where he had studied for the law exam when he was a much younger man. Burden, whose first name has been revealed to be Jack, walks outside, through the farm, and down to a fence, where he looks out over the beautiful rural landscape. After some minutes, Burden hears footsteps, and Willie has come out to join Jack and to sip some of Jack's **liquor**, which he has in a flask in his pocket. Willie confesses that his father, like Lucy, is not much for drinking, even now, although Willie clearly is now a drinker.

Willie's study for the law exam has an important symbolic place in the novel. For Willie remarks later that the exam wasn't too difficult, and that he did better than many of those students who studied in fancy law schools, and had the money to pay the tuition to attend. Willie was, especially early in his career, a product of his own work ethic and ingenuity, and his success in that bedroom, studying law, is one more indication of this.

Sadie rushes out to join Burden and Willie out back, by the fence. She has something to tell Willie, but is so flustered she cannot get the words out, and Willie makes fun of her, gently, for not being able to speak; this makes Sadie even angrier, and less able to speak. Sadie finally tells Willie that Judge Irwin, an established political figure in Louisiana, has decided to side with Callahan, a politician who opposes Willie's policies. Willie calls Irwin a bastard under his breath.

Willie, even in this early scene, clearly enjoys poking fun at Sadie, and there is a strong suggestion of sexual tension between Sadie and the Boss—Jack, for his part, lets the two talk to one another, and it might be inferred, even here, that there are parts of Sadie's and Willie's interactions that Jack believes to be private and outside of his purview.

Burden leaves Sadie and Willie, who has taken this news poorly, and goes off to watch Sugar-Boy shooting, and cursing, at targets with a small gun at the back of Willie's father's property. Willie calls Jack inside for dinner, which is eaten with Willie's family at a long table, and Willie announces, after the meal, to his wife and his father that Jack, Sugar-Boy, and he will be taking a drive that night, to see about some business. Willie's father and Lucy seem quietly upset at this, but do not protest.

Sugar-Boy's shooting of the gun is an instance of foreshadowing—far later, when Willie is shot by Adam in the Capitol building, Sugar-Boy wonders if the Boss will be OK—and he seems shocked that a gun might be used for anything other than shooting at targets in the back of a farm-house. Sugar-Boy's sweetness, naiveté, and loyalty to Willie are on display throughout.

Burden, Willie, and Sugar-Boy get into the Cadillac, and the Boss announces that they will be traveling to Burden's Landing, over a hundred miles away, and the town in which Judge Irwin lives. Sugar-Boy drives in his characteristically speedy fashion, but they still arrive in Burden's Landing late at night. Jack warns Willie that he will not be able to scare Judge Irwin, who has been in Louisiana politics a long time. Willie says he doesn't want to scare Irwin; he just "wants to look at him."

Willie finds that he is most effective as a communicator and a cajoler when he is in the face of the person with whom he is speaking. Although he claims here not to want to intimidate Irwin—whose political courage he appears to respect—Willie nevertheless knows that his threats of blackmail and political ruin will be far more powerful when done seated at a table.

Willie reveals to the reader, by speaking to Jack, that Jack grew up in Burden's Landing, that the Burden name there is his family's name, and that Jack's friends, Adam and Anne Stanton, are also from Burden's Landing. Willie tells Jack to direct Sugar-Boy to the Irwin house, which Jack knows well—he has been mentored by Judge Irwin since he was a small boy.

An early indication of the influence Jack's family has in the region—and the influence his friends' family (the Stantons) has too. Jack seems not to take for granted his political heritage; he understands that the state is run in Baton Rouge and among the powerful families of the Landing.

The Boss tells Jack to go up to the door and knock for Judge Irwin, who is in bed at this late hour. Irwin answers the door, eventually, in his bedclothes, and is happy to see Jack; he welcomes Jack inside, asking if Jack is OK or in trouble, but at that moment the Boss pops his head out of the darkness and says that, no, Jack isn't in trouble, and that, in fact, the Boss and Jack would both like to talk to Irwin.

Irwin is genuinely pleased to welcome Jack into his home; Jack appears to have a standing invitation to the Irwin house in the Landing. But Irwin is far less pleased to let the Boss in—the Boss represents, for Irwin, all that is wrong with current politics—its pushiness, its lack of gentlemanly charm.

The Boss and Irwin stare each other down for a long moment, and Jack wonders what he is doing there—he mutters to himself that both of them, his old mentor and his new boss, can "go to Hell." Finally, Willie asks Irwin if the rumors are true—if Irwin is in fact supporting Callahan for the Senate nomination, instead of a candidate, Masters, whom Willie backs. Irwin says that the "rumor" is in fact true, and that he has made up his mind in his decision.

Irwin here gives an indication of his unwillingness to "play ball" with the Boss, and his desire instead to do what he feels is right in the state of Louisiana. Irwin has spent a great deal of time as state attorney general (as is revealed later), and he believes this service entitles him to his own political opinions.

Irwin says he does not support Masters as a Senate candidate because Masters will do whatever Willie, governor of the state, wants. Willie says that he is not trying to scare Irwin at the moment—he doesn't believe Irwin can be scared—but he vows that, if Irwin thinks he has "dirt" (incriminating information) on Mastern, Willie and his team will certainly be able to dig up dirt on Callahan, Irwin's candidate. Willie then threatens that, perhaps, he could also dig up information on the Judge himself, and feed that information to Callahan, who might then repudiate the Judge's endorsement publically.

Willie likes to communicate exactly how he might ruin a political opponent (see Duffy or Byram White for other examples, later on), such that the threat of this ruin is enough—then Willie doesn't have to go to the actual trouble of destroying someone's reputation. In this sense, Jack's investigative prowess is more essential for Willie as a threat than as an actual weapon—until Irwin chooses to kill himself later based on Jack's information.

This latter piece of blackmail is too much for Irwin, who kicks Willie out of his house. Willie calls Jack to follow him, and the Judge and Jack have a terse exchange, wherein the Judge implies that Jack is merely the servant of the powerful Boss. Jack replies, curtly, to Irwin that he knows what he's doing, and that Irwin had better at least consider Willie's offers (and threats), if he doesn't want his reputation tarnished. Back in the car, on the way to the old man's farm again, Willie tells Jack to dig up dirt on Irwin that will stick.

Here a great deal about Jack and the Judge's relationship is implied. For a long time Jack was mentored by the Judge—Irwin looked after Jack in the Landing. But here Jack has found a more powerful boss, Willie, someone who has the reins of power in the state now, as compared to "in the past." Irwin seems to understand that Jack cannot serve two masters, and must choose to follow Willie here.

Willie then says, in a famous line, that "Man is conceived in sin and born in corruption and he passeth from the stink of the didie to the stench of the shroud," meaning that Jack will be able to find something on the Judge. Burden rounds out the chapter by saying, to the reader, that he did manage to find something on Irwin, that it did stick, and that the Judge, the Boss, and Adam Stanton are all dead at the moment—implying that this initial meeting between Willie, the Boss, and Burden is the novel's central political and personal conflict.

Willie is convinced that Jack will be able to find something on Irwin. Interestingly, Penn Warren chooses to reveal the fates of many of his characters at the end of this first chapter—in this way there is no suspense when the characters reach their demise, but there is suspense in the manner in which these deaths are interrelated—and it is Penn Warren's achievement that this suspense is maintained throughout.

CHAPTER 2

Burden begins this chapter by stating that, as of his writing (of, presumably, the account that forms the novel), it is 1939, and that his visit to Mason City and Willie's father's house occurred in 1936. Burden then goes on to describe the first time he visited Mason City, in 1922, on assignment as a reporter for the Chronicle newspaper.

Burden makes clear the nature of his shifting narrative: how he jumps forward or backward in time as much as ten or fifteen years, in order to flesh out his own life-story and that of Willie. These techniques of "chopping up" time are classified as "modernist" fictional techniques.

Burden hangs out at an outdoor meeting place in Mason City, in 1922, where a group of old men are talking. As part of his reporting, Burden asks the men if they know anything about Willie Stark's efforts to get a new bond issued for a schoolhouse in Mason County. The old men say they do know; that Willie has gotten "too big for his britches," and that the contract Willie favors would employ black laborers to, in the old men's words, "take away" jobs from the white men who need them. Burden thanks the men for their information and heads to the Mason City Courthouse.

Burden breaks down the nitty-gritty of Willie's involvement in local politics in his capacity as County Treasurer. It seems that one of Mason County's biggest concerns is providing jobs for white laborers—there was a widespread feeling, even seventy years after the formal end of slavery in the South, that African Americans would "take" white jobs and, because they were paid lower wages, workers would be more inclined to hire black laborers than their white counterparts.

Burden meets a sheriff and Dolph Pillsbury, chairman of the board of county commissioners in Mason County, who tells Burden that the County did not accept the lowest bid for the schoolhouse (made by a man named Jeffers), but rather accepted a higher bid (meaning the county would have to pay more money) made by a man named Moore. Pillsbury claims that Moore has the know-how to do the job right, but Burden suspects that some kind of favoritism has been used to award Moore and not Jeffers the bid. Both the sheriff and Pillsbury also imply that Willie is willing to give the job to black laborers over white ones.

Pillsbury and the sheriff are two examples of entrenched, inherently conservative interests in the state. They are primarily interested in furthering the status quo and in enriching themselves through "skimming," or the process of taking a certain amount of money, as a percentage of any government contract signed when they are in office. This process of skimming is extremely common in Louisiana, and generally officials look the other way when it takes place.

Burden visits Willie, whose office happens to be at the other end of a long hallway in the same Courthouse. Burden asks Willie what's happened with the bidding, and Willie, who remembers Burden from their previous encounter at Slade's bar, is willing to talk to him, to have his side of the story in the press. Willie tells Burden a story that Burden does not immediately reveal to the reader (presumably implying that the County Commissioners have a back-room deal with Moore over Jeffers), and Burden ends up at Willie and Lucy's house for dinner that night. Lucy also tells Burden that she has been fired as a schoolteacher, presumably as retribution against Willie's attacks on the powers that be in Mason County.

Willie's prodigious political memory will crop up numerous times in the novel—in particular, he tends to remember quite well those who cross him seriously and those who serve to help his cause. Thus Slade is amply rewarded for his small kindness to Willie, and this only reinforces Slade's willingness to help Willie in the future. Willie similarly develops a strong loyalty for Burden, since Burden was willing to listen to Willie long before Willie had any serious influence in state politics.

Burden then relates to the reader the story Willie told him long ago, in 1922, which, in essence, states that Moore was using cheap convict labor and cheap, poor-quality bricks to build the schoolhouse, and Willie supported the Jeffers bid because the materials were better and the labor more efficient—Willie didn't care that the laborers would be black, but Pillsbury used the racial issue as a cudgel against Willie in the local elections following the bidding, which Willie then lost (he therefore only served one term as County Treasurer).

Willie realizes that the complaint about black labor on the part of those in power in Mason County is a cover—in reality, the officials support the Moore bid because Moore is going to give a large bribe to those officials, and because he can construct a cheap but substantial-looking schoolhouse in a short period of time. Only Willie seems to sense that this could spell a political and social disaster in the future.

Willie tried to get his side of the story out, after losing the election, in other ways, by printing out leaflets and distributing them on street corners in Mason County. Burden moves ahead in time to describe what happens to Willie between 1922 and 1925. After losing his reelection bid as County Treasurer, on account of his opposition to Pillsbury's corrupt schoolhouse bidding process, Willie returned to his father's farm with Lucy, and set about as a door-to-door salesman. Willie also began studying for the law exam on his own, in his boyhood room, since he did not have enough money to attend law school properly.

An instance of Willie's immensely strong work ethic, even in the face of disappointment. In fact, disappointment seems to spur Willie on to an increased workload—because he was not reelected to his position as County Treasurer, he was able to devote himself more fully to the study of the law and pass the state bar exam (at that time, a degree from a law school was not required to become a lawyer). Willie's setbacks therefore become a part of his political rise.

Burden falls out of touch with Willie again for those three years between 1922 and 1925, when Willie works on his father's farm, sells products door-to-door, and studies for his exam. Then Burden reports that, in 1925, Willie had a stroke of good luck that derived from terrible circumstances. The poor-quality, rotten bricks used by Moore caused the schoolhouse to collapse during a fire drill, injuring a great many young students and even killing several.

Burden makes clear that, although Willie does not support the taking of bribes early on in his political career, he is still shrewd enough to recognize a political opportunity when he sees it, even if this opportunity comes in the form of the misfortune of others. Thus Willie seizes on the school collapse to "make hay" politically.

Because Willie had made a name for himself in the local papers in the intervening three years campaigning publically against corruption in government, this terrible event at the schoolhouse played exactly into his image as a man of the people, and as a prophet against government waste. Willie new he had his opportunity, and became, overnight, the most popular political figure in Mason City, capable of unseating any rival, in Burden's telling. Then Willie was tapped to run in the Democratic state primary for Governor, based on his appeal in the northern part of the state.

Willie understands that the "common people" of the state, who are voting in ever-increasing numbers and who are now more willing to subvert or ignore the Democratic Party machine, which has governed the state since the Civil War, desire a candidate who speaks "directly" to them—even if this speaking is a kind of political theater. Thus Willie comes along as a populist candidate at a time ripe for populism.

Willie is "placed" in this election by the powers that be in the state's Democratic Party because he is a rural candidate, and the "city" candidate, named Harrison, wants a "dummy" candidate to split the vote with his main rival, MacMurfee, who is also from the rural part of the state. But at this point in the election, Willie does not know what's happening to him, and therefore runs for Governor with great gusto, primarily on his record as an ethical candidate who supported the best bid to construct the schoolhouse properly.

Nevertheless, the Democratic Party machine remains a force to be reckoned with in the state, and Willie can only defeat the machine by getting a start working within his rules. He seems to understand that his campaign is in the thrall of the machine and a set of party "handlers," but he is genuinely surprised, later, to find out that he is a "stooge" of the party intended to split the rural vote.

Burden states that Willie, during this 1926 election, is a lawyer—and that he had passed the bar exam on his own between being booted out of the Country Treasurer's office, after losing his second election, and before the disaster at the poorly-built schoolhouse. In this interim period, along with continuing to sell products door-to-door, Willie made a name for himself as a small-town lawyer; Willie also remarked to Burden, later, that he expected the state's bar exam, to become a lawyer, to be much more difficult than it was—Willie said that, if he knew how easy it would be, he would have stopped studying for it years before.

Willie was successful as a lawyer because he worked indefatigably to find cases no one else would take up. Thus Willie built up a name for himself not only as a crusader against public waste and malfeasance, but as a "worker for the common man," a lawyer who understood the troubles of those that worked on the farms of the northern part of the state. Willie uses this practical knowledge to fuel his campaign, especially once he begins "speaking from the heart."

Now, in 1926, Burden is following Willie's campaign for Governor as a reporter for the Chronicle, and because he has known Willie for some time, and has been sympathetic to Willie's causes, Willie grants Burden a good deal of access to his campaign. Burden reports to the reader, however, that Willie was not yet aware that he was merely a pawn for the Democratic Party, and that his candidacy was a joke. Burden discusses hearing Willie rehearse his speech for Governor on the other side of a thin partition in a hotel room in a small Louisiana town—the speech, filled with boring statistics, is terrible, Burden says. Burden tries to tell Willie his speeches aren't exciting, but Willie won't listen to Burden's advice.

Willie, though, tries first to speak with a great deal of information about the manner by which the public has been defrauded by those in power. This information, though correct, is not "true"—it does not ring true in the ears of those who hear it, and it does nothing to rally their interest around Willie. Burden seems to understand, before Willie does, that Willie must seize the hearts of the public first, and their minds and votes will follow—Willie does not take this action until his "sap" campaign is revealed to him by Sadie.

One day during the campaign, Burden is at a coffee shop in a small town and is joined by Sadie Burke, who has recently moved from the Harrison machine to Willie's campaign. Burden tells Sadie he knows that she knows that Willie is only a split-the-vote candidate, and Sadie admits this is true. Sadie says that Willie is a sap for believing his candidacy is real, and Burden says he will meet up with the campaign again in Upton, a small community in the rural north of the state.

Sadie's loyalties are not exactly to the Democratic Party—since the state has no meaningful Republican Party (this did not emerge in the South until the 1960s). Sadie's loyalties are not yet to Willie, though she will eventually support his candidacy with great vigor. At the moment, Sadie is loyal primarily to the pursuit of power in the state.

In Upton, Willie walks into Burden's hotel room and admits, glumly, that his campaign is going poorly, although he is not sure why at this point. Willie speaks passionately about the reforms the state requires, including better roads and a new tax system, and while Burden is agreeing with him, although gently suggesting that Willie's campaign might be doomed, Sadie comes into the room, and believing that Burden has told Willie that his campaign is a lark and that Willie is a "sap," Sadie begins agreeing with them. Burden realizes that Sadie has jumped the gun—she has admitted that the campaign is a ploy to help Harrison—and this is a rare miscalculation on Sadie's part, since she is typically adept at reading what other people know.

Sadie makes a rare political miscalculation here, believing that Jack has told Willie about his "sap" campaign before he actually has. But Sadie is quick to realize, later, during Willie's first "honest" speech, delivered while drunk, that she could throw her support behind Willie and make her career in this way. Sadie is therefore greatly adept at "finding" the powerful candidates to whom she can latch on as a supporter and strategist—this is what keeps her alive in the cutthroat world of political advising in Louisiana.

Willie becomes extremely upset and asks Burden if it's true that he's been framed, and that his campaign is a joke. Burden sadly agrees, and Willie begins drinking wildly, with abandon, from a large bottle of **whiskey** in the hotel room. It is the first time Willie has consumed **alcohol** in his life. Sadie counsels him to watch himself, and Burden goes out for the night in Upton, returning to find that Willie is passed out in bed, and that Sadie has been looking after him. Willie has consumed the whole bottle of **whiskey**.

Willie's first night of drinking—in a manner that is characteristic of his style of going "all in," Willie does not have just a drink or two; instead, he has a whole bottle, and both Jack and Sadie seem to recognize what this implies about his ability, the next day, to give a stirring prepared speech in the hot Upton sun.

In a bit of a fugue, before narrating what happens next, Burden admits that he fell in love with Sadie a little bit that night, and that she turned him away—that he never had any relationship with Sadie, though he respected her and thought her to be a "tough cookie." The next morning, Burden tries to rouse Willie by giving him coffee, but Willie is so hung-over he can't stomach anything—but he must give a speech at a rally in Upton later that afternoon. Finally, with nothing else to try, Burden gives Willie a little more **whiskey**, then still more—the hair of the dog—and Willie makes his way to the fairgrounds to deliver his speech in Upton, presumably drunk again.

Burden does not every really come back to this suggestion that he once tried to initiate a romantic relationship with Sadie—at this point in the text, the idea of Burden and Sadie together is a bit of a red herring, since it will later be revealed by Jack that he has long been in love with Anne, and that Anne and Sadie are both having affairs with the Boss, who, for his part, is still married to Lucy and keeping up the public appearance of that marriage.

Willie, now freed from the belief that he needs to educate the people, gives a rousing speech in Upton, revealing that he has been a stooge, that Duffy (on stage at Upton and working for Harrison) has arranged for him, Willie, to split the MacMurfee vote, and that he is now resigning to campaign for MacMurfee. Burden remarks to Sadie (the two are in the crowd) that she is out of a job, and when Duffy, on-stage, attempts to contradict what Willie is saying about him, Willie nudges him away, and Duffy tumbles off the stage into the crowd, which is stunned by Willie's revelation. Burden takes the train back to the capital (presumed to be Baton Rouge), and Sadie and Duffy are left to pick up the pieces and to explain Willie's behavior to their boss Harrison.

Willie's speech here—in contrast to his prepared speeches, and a little like the speech he gives on the Mason County Courthouse steps in the very beginning of Chapter 1—is a rousing affair; it grabs everyone in Upton by their lapels and forces them to consider exactly what the Democratic Party machine is planning for them in Louisiana. What is perhaps most shocking to Willie is the idea that the machine is smart enough to take a popular candidate, like Willie, and use him for their own ends. Willie resents this, and vows to take his message directly to the people.

Willie spends the remainder of the campaign season stumping for MacMurfee, who wins the election, but Willie speaks so freely, and with such fire, that members of the Democratic Party loyal both to Harrison and to MacMurfee become afraid of him and hope to appease him. After the election, Willie goes back to Mason City, practices law, and uses this same fire and energy to win several large cases, which increase his fortune and allow him to run for Governor in 1930. Based on the goodwill Willie has built up in the state, Willie wins the 1930 election and begins consolidating his power.

Willie's success in private practice is, of course, at least partially attributable to his now-fiery speeches on behalf of MacMurfee—indeed, Willie has become just as famous in the state as those that govern in. This poises him for the 1930 election and for a powerful base of popular support, which is not so much dependent on the machine but rather on the voice of the people, with whom he has connected on the stump.

One instance of this consolidation of power is the fact that Duffy and Sadie, once working for Harrison, now choose to work for Willie as Governor. Duffy eventually becomes a bigwig in the Stark administration and then Lt. Governor, and Sadie becomes one of Willie's closest advisers. Meanwhile, Burden is kicked out of his job at the newspaper for supporting Stark in the 1930 election, over MacMurfee, who is the paper's official candidate. After being kicked out of the job, Burden spends several weeks doing nothing, as part of a "Great Sleep," or a period of major depression, which seems to crop up at various moments during his life.

An interesting part of Burden's personality is here revealed. His periods of "Great Sleep" would now be characterized as a mental condition, a sustained mental illness that seems to crop up in his life during periods of special stress or torment. But at the time, in the 1930s, these sorts of issues were not often openly discussed; for example, Sadie Burke is later hospitalized with something called "nervous exhaustion," which was another euphemism for a period of psychological trauma or difficulty.

Burden then reports on time he spends with two childhood friends in 1930, just after Willie's election and his being fired from the paper—Adam and Anne Stanton. Adam is a famous doctor in Louisiana, one of the most accomplished in the state, and Burden goes to his small apartment to talk with him and to listen to Adam play the piano. Burden also goes out to eat with Anne, with whom it is implied he has long ago had a romantic relationship that didn't pan out. He and Anne have a pleasant dinner, until Anne talks about Jack's father, whom Jack hasn't seen for some time, and who Anne describes as a crazy man, a religious mystic who lives in squalor and who needs Jack's help. But Burden dismisses his father out of hand, says he will not visit him, and Anne becomes angry with Jack.

A great deal of backstory is introduced in this section. The reader learns that Jack's father is a kind of religious mystic, and that Jack has very little to do with him; his mother, on the other hand, is a kind of vulgar materialist—someone who seems to care about money, and the men who can provide her with this money—more than anything else. But Jack still has a soft spot for his mother (he considers himself to be something of a "mother's boy"), perhaps because he feels, at this point, that his father abandoned the family for no reason when Jack was young.

They eventually make up at dinner, however, and part as friends, and in the next few days—again, in 1930—Jack is called by Sadie Burke, working for Governor Stark, saying that Stark would like to speak with Jack about a job, seeing he is out of work at the paper. Willie offers to pay Jack three hundred a month to work not for the state but for him, although he does not tell Burden exactly what he'll do—only that some "work will turn up," meaning that Jack is in charge, essentially, of maintaining Willie's political advantage in the state.

Willie makes Jack a fateful offer. Just as Willie helped Slade many years after Slade first did Willie a favor, so now does Willie help Jack after recognizing that Jack has been a supporter of his political ambitions for many years. Willie seems to know something about Jack that Jack doesn't even know—that Jack's skills as a researcher and a historian can be applied to political and electoral ends.

CHAPTER 3

Burden then shifts the narrative to a visit home to his mother, in Burden's Landing, in 1933, after he's been working for Willie for about three years. Burden says he always finds visits home to his mother to be fraught occasions—his mother has been married several times since Burden's father left the family and began living alone, as a kind of religious mystic in Baton Rouge, when Jack was 6. Burden does admit to himself, though, upon seeing his mother again, that she looks quite good for a fifty-five-year-old woman. Mrs. Burden has been married once again, this time to a young banker (named Theodore, and referred to by Jack as the Young Executive) not much older than Jack himself.

Jack's relationship with Theodore is barely developed later in the novel—perhaps Penn Warren felt that more of an immediate conflict would be generated between the two men who are close in age; but perhaps, too, Penn Warren simply wished to portray Theodore as he was: a rather ineffectual, quiet, and shy man, who is devoted to Mrs. Burden but who commands very little respect from those around him, even from his wife.

Theodore enters, and Burden is superficially polite though curt with him. As Jack speaks to his mother about his job with Willie—a job his mother does not approve of, since she considers Willie to be a classless populist, and not a member of the elite Louisiana society of which Jack is a part—Jack begins to go through, mentally, the list of his mother's husbands. First was the Scholarly Attorney, Jack's father, who, as before, has gone insane and who lives alone in a tiny apartment in Baton Rouge, as a religious mystic. Next was the Tycoon, nicknamed Daddy Ross, who died quickly and barely got to know Jack. Then Jack was in boarding school in Connecticut when his mother went to Europe and married an Italian Count, a supposed gentleman with an indeterminate amount of personal wealth. Mrs. Burden leaves the Count after it is revealed that he has been beating her—all while Jack is still in high school.

Jack seems to have cared less and less for each "father figure" as they paraded through his life. His mixture of emotions even in recounting these men is an interesting one: first, Jack feels his father truly did leave the family, and therefore forced his mother to go off looking for a substitute; second, Jack feels that his mother wished only to marry for money or for prestige, and cared little for finding a suitable father for Jack; and third, Jack never seemed to get to know these men, because they never stayed married to his mother long enough to develop a relationship with her only son.

Then came the Young Executive, a man who is nice, docile, barely out of his thirties, and in general a quiet companion for Jack's mother. Back in the present moment, Jack goes to sleep and wakes up the next day (during his visit), taking a walk outside over the Judge Irwin's house. On the walk over, passing through the houses of Burden's Landing, Jack is again reminded of his childhood memories: this time of a picnic he, Adam, and Anne had once when the three were teenagers.

An interesting note: although some of Jack's memories are prompted while driving, at great speed, across the Louisiana countryside, here the memories are prompted at a walking pace, perhaps mimicking the slow pace of life in Burden's Landing itself—both in the present moment and in Jack's memory of the period just during and after the First World War.

The picnic took place in 1915, just before Jack was to go off to the State University for college—and as the three ate, then swam, a storm began crawling across the sky, and seemed to threaten lightning. The three got out of the water and went ashore, but Jack was left with the memory of Anne's beautiful face, floating in the water as Anne lay on her back, and of a flock of white gulls passing overhead. Jack remembers this moment as the first time he considered Anne's beauty—he had previously only thought of Anne as the sister of his friend Adam.

An important scene in the novel. Jack's memories of Anne are inseparable from his nostalgic "filter" placed over them—in other words, Jack has a very hard time separating his feelings about the people of Burden's Landing from the feelings of youth, invincibility, joy, and happiness that are bound up in those images, those houses. Jack's return to the Landing is always also a return to these nostalgic thoughts.

Jack moves, still while walking to Irwin's house, from a memory of the picnic to a memory of his mother chastising him for not going to a prestigious college like Harvard or Princeton. Jack later recalls that, during the First World War, in which he could not serve because he had bad feet, Judge Irwin, still of draft-able age, had served and had achieved some distinction in battle, causing people in Burden's Landing to consider him a hero. Jack murmured to himself often during those immediate post-war years that the Judge was no hero, but Jack wonders, on his walk to Irwin's house in 1933, if he wasn't just jealous of the Judge's accomplishments, and of his stature in Burden's Landing.

Jack again notes that his mother seemed more interested in Jack getting a good-"seeming" education, at an Ivy League university, so that it would improve her own standing in the social circuits of Louisiana and of Europe, where she found one of her husbands (the Italian Count). Jack seems capable, here, of evaluating his relationship to the Judge with something of an objective viewpoint: he knows that the Judge has led a charmed life, and he knows, too, that he perhaps has not been so lucky in his younger years.

It turns out that Jack, back from his memories and now, again, in the present moment, has been walking to a dinner at Irwin's that night, a meal with his mother and a couple named the Pattons, who are also members of upper-class Louisiana society. At the dinner, Irwin is charming and sociable (he is a bachelor and twice a widower), and he accidentally shoots off at the table a small pellet from a model cannon he and Jack built long ago, startling Mrs. Patton. Irwin apologizes for his childishness and, after dinner, the group moves into the parlor to talk; the conversation quickly moves to politics.

This episode shows off the more playful side of Judge Irwin's personality, something that has not always been evident in the book, because Jack has spoken only of Irwin in his professional capacity as judge, or during that brief time when he (Jack) and Willie visited Irwin in the middle of the night. The reader gets the sense that Irwin has always wanted the best for Jack, even if he has not always been able to provide that for him—that Irwin, in a way, loves Jack like a son.

Another person, a young girl named Miss Dumonde, is also present, and it appears that the older people at the gathering have brought her there to fix her up with Jack—Dumonde speaks a little of hearing that Jack works for the Governor, and prompts Jack to talk about his work. Although Dumonde says immediately that she finds this job fascinating, the conversation quickly turns to Irwin's and Mr. Patton's reservations about Willie, whom they consider a classless populist and a dangerous revolutionary in office (this is three years before Jack's and Willie's visit to Irwin in the middle of the night, in 1936).

Nothing more is heard from Miss Dumonde in the novel, and one gets the sense that Jack simply has no time for women at all, and when he does, they have to be women who are somehow involved in Jack's all-consuming public life—his job as Willie's right-hand man. Although Anne has trouble getting along with Willie, at first, Anne is highly attuned to the politics of Louisiana, because her father was governor of the state and she is busy with her philanthropic causes.

Irwin attempts to calm everyone and to admit that Willie has made some advances in office, though he (Irwin) is worried that Willie wants too much reform for the state too quickly—but Jack speaks up and implicitly critiques the families of Burden's Landing, many of whom had been politically influential in previous generations, for being too conservative, for allowing inequality to languish in the state, and for refusing to acknowledge the kinds of changes that had to be made—new roads and buildings built, new services offered to rural communities. Jack says that Willie has provided these changes to the state. The night ends in a rather somber mood, with Jack and the elders in the room still simmering in anger over their political discussion.

Jack feels that Willie brings change to Louisiana, even if his methods are harsh—Jack understands that something is needed, some outside force, to shake up the status quo in the state. But the wealthy families of the Landing naturally do not feel that very much needs to change—all their desires are met, and they have all the political power they could crave. Incidentally, it is useful to note that, although the South is essentially a one-party region (the Democrats), that party can be divided into conservative (Landing) and progressive (Stark) factions.

The next day, Jack's mother is upset that Jack had spoken so sharply at the dinner last night, and she wonders why Jack doesn't settle down with a nice girl and get married. Jack doesn't listen to his mother's advice, and when his mother says that he will inherit her money, Jack claims not to care, and leaves Burden's Landing later that day, his vacation at home now over.

Burden's relationship to his mother's money has always been a fraught one. To a certain extent, Jack appears to blame his mother for marrying only for money after his father, the Scholarly Attorney, leaves the family. Jack also recognizes that much of his mother's wealth is inherited—that she has never had to work for this money, and this, too, seems to bother him.

On his drive back to Baton Rouge, Jack daydreams about the town in which his mother and father met, in rural Arkansas, where his father had visited to serve as a lawyer for an investigation at a timber company, and where his mother was the daughter of one of the company clerks. (All this, even though Jack never visited this town; he is constructing the story in his mind). Later, the Scholarly Attorney brought Jack's mother back to Louisiana and Jack was born a few years later.

Yet Jack also understands that his mother's circumstances, growing up, were those of extreme poverty and want. She has nevertheless adapted over the course of her lifetime to the luxuries of the Landing, and to the prerogatives of the state's governing families—Mrs. Burden feels that her name entitles her to be a part of the "ruling class" that lives in the Landing.

Jack arrives at Willie's office in the capital and finds out immediately that a man named Byram White, the State Auditor, has been caught by Willie skimming some money from state funds. This news has not reached the public and won't, but Willie is angered that a member of his administration has engaged in such obvious and simplistic graft—something that could expose Willie politically and would give his enemies fodder for prosecuting the Governor. Willie yells at Byram in his office and invites Jack to come in and sit as the yelling continues.

Often in the novel Jack appears to be ping-ponging from one crisis to another. Here, he returns from a difficult visit home to find that Willie's office is in total disarray. One might be tempted to blame Willie for this constant chaos—although he claims he hates bribery and malfeasance, it is all too common, in his administration, for subordinates to engage in exactly those activities.

Willie tells Byram to write, in front of him, a resignation letter and to sign it, but without a date—Willie says that he'll fill the date in if he needs to, and that he'll use the letter as leverage to keep Byram in line in the coming months. Byram is so afraid of Willie he cannot speak, and Willie reminds Byram that Byram only has anything at all because of Willie—he tells Byram not to get "too big for his britches." Byram leaves the office quietly.

A powerful scene, in which Willie demonstrates his ability to get exactly what he wants from those who answer to his authority. White, after his failed attempt at bribery, is now entirely in Willie's pocket, and Willie seems to like it this way. In fact, he almost encourages misbehavior in order to "have one over" on those below him.

Next a man named Hugh Miller, Willie's state attorney general, comes in. Miller is a friend of Willie's from long since, but he only agreed to serve in the administration, as he explains in the office to Willie and Jack, with the idea that he, Miller, would not be forced to do anything illegal in his professional capacity as attorney general. Although he appreciates that Willie has spoken to Byram about his attempt at defrauding the state, Miller says that Byram must be prosecuted, and that, in giving Byram a second chance, Willie is implicitly allowing this criminal to slide. Miller tenders his resignation on the spot, and Willie accepts it, ruefully.

The novel is continually introducing characters of various shades of "high" or "mixed" honor. Hugh Miller is a character, like Gov. Stanton or Adam Stanton, who appears to be entirely free of any taint or prejudice. But the novel seems to argue that even these characters have their vices. For Hugh Miller, that vice is the vanity to believe that he is somehow above all the corruption and petty horse-trading that goes on in the Stark administration.

After asking Jack whether he has done the right thing—protecting Byram and allowing Miller to resign—Jack admits that Willie has to run the government the way he knows how, and Willie, exasperated at this point by the sacrifices he has to make between getting things done and trying to respect the rule of law, tells Jack that, in the near future as governor, he is going to sponsor the construction of one of the largest free hospitals in the country, and that it will be paid for to serve the health interests of the common man. Jack listens to his boss talk about this hospital, then eventually leaves the office, noting that Willie seems genuinely worked up about the possibility of helping the state, and of having his name on the free hospital—a monument to his beneficence and power as Governor.

The first long monologue on the nature of the free hospital and its relationship to Willie's hopes and dreams as Governor. Willie understands that politics is a business from which few, if any, emerge unscathed, yet he wants to set aside at least part of his legacy in order to do just this—make it seem that not every decision, every deal he made was compromised morally. But Willie also seems to sense, fatally, that the hospital, too, will not escape the taint of bribery and corruption, and this is the great tragedy that will lead, indirectly, to his undoing and death.

Jack then recalls another episode in Willie's life, this time his personal life, during his time as Governor. About six or eight months after ascending to that office, Jack and Willie went on a trip to Chicago to meet with Democratic Party bosses there, and after a night on the town, Willie spent the evening and then the rest of the weekend with a young woman in an ice-dancing troupe, who had been introduced to him by a Democratic Party operative. Back in Baton Rouge, Jack was accosted by Sadie Burke, who was extremely angry to hear the news about Willie—Sadie reveals that she and Willie have been having an affair, that she loves Willie, and that she will do anything to keep him, although she hates the fact that he has slept with another woman.

Although this is, on the one hand, somewhat surprising, as we haven't heard that much from Sadie Burke for the last fifty or so pages, it was also strongly implied in the first scene, out back of Willie's father's farm, that Sadie and Willie had a special relationship of some kind—one that seemed to transcend professional boundaries. Perhaps what is surprising, here, is the extent to which Sadie has fallen in love with her boss, and her loyalty to him, even as she anticipates that he will continue to cheat on her.

Jack points out that Willie has really cheated on his wife, and that he is only secondarily cheating on Sadie, but this only makes Sadie angrier—she states that Willie will come back to her, and in Jack's continuing narration, he notes that this was true—Willie began carrying on affairs with all sorts of women in all sorts of places, during the first years of his Governorship (1930 to the present, which is, at this moment in the novel, 1933), but Sadie would always take him back after a period of protest and argument.

Of course, Jack knows that however much Sadie suffers, Lucy is suffering all the more, and has been with Willie since long before he was a political figure. Jack's relationship with Lucy is one of mutual respect and admiration, and Jack will make two separate trips to Lucy's home, where she lives with her sister, later in the novel, in order to talk about the future of the Stark family with her.

Jack then reveals that, after a long spate of Willie's infidelities, Lucy Stark finally decides to leave her husband, but she claims she is doing so because Willie refused to fire Byram White after White's attempt at graft. It turns out that White is being impeached by the state legislature, and this impeachment is followed up, quickly, by a new scandal—the proposed impeachment of Willie by his enemies in the state house and senate.

The reader never learns whether Lucy is in fact fed up with Stark—believing that Stark has been having an affair with Sadie along with many other women—or if Lucy is truly shocked by the idea that Willie would let White go, or give him a pass for bribery. Lucy is a classically skilled political spouse—stoic, shrewd, indomitable.

This period of impeachment, which lasts about two weeks, is described as a whirlwind by Burden. No one in the office seems the sleep the entire time; Willie travels the state in the **black Cadillac** and attempts to convince the public, through rousing speeches, that he has not failed them nor engaged in anything illegal, and that the legislature is to blame—that they have a vendetta against him and wish to topple him from power because of his reforms. Willie then spends the rest of his time speaking with members of the legislature, trying to persuade them that he "has the goods on them," and that if they vote to impeach him he will find a way to end their political careers. Many of the legislators start to believe that Willie can carry out this threat.

Willie is most at home when he is attempting to come to terms with one crisis or another—he rises very much to the drama of the occasion he finds himself in. Here, Willie gets a chance to make a case for the positive change his governorship has effected throughout the state of Louisiana. And he gets, once again, to feel the speed of the car as it flies over the pavements he helped build—in the car, whizzing from town to town, Willie feels as in control as he possibly can; as though the state can bend to his will.

Finally, on April 4th, 1933, a large group of citizens assemble outside the capitol building, where Willie is slated to give a speech later that evening. Burden observes the crowd from out a window in his office in the capitol. Burden recalls the events of the previous evening, when Willie had sent him (Burden) to meet with a man named Lowdan, the politician who is the leader of the MacMurfee faction in the state house, the faction that is bringing the impeachment orders against Willie.

An interesting scene, which serves to dramatize the divide between Willie's popular, crusading persona and the political muscle that keeps that persona in office. Although it will seem like a large-scale protest caused the legislature to withdraw its impeachment proceedings, in reality Willie is the one who blackmailed the legislature into letting up.

Burden presented, that previous night, a sheet of paper with signatures from a significant number of legislators who, after meeting with Willie, will swear that impeachment proceedings should not go forward, and that Willie is innocent of all wrongdoing. Lowdan calls Burden's bluff and begins phoning legislators on this list—when they say that these signatures are genuine, that they no longer wish to impeach, Lowdan screams at Burden that Willie has somehow blackmailed or threatened half the house. Burden quietly leaves, confident that this is the end of the impeachment scandal, and that there is nothing Lowdan can do to prove that Willie has threatened and cajoled the legislators.

The legislator Lowdan can barely believe the power Willie has in crafting the will of the legislature to suit his needs. Willie understands that democracy requires the consent of many people, but he feels he has this consent through the acclamation of those he governs—the "common man" who assembles outside the capitol building. Willie feels that this is his true constituency, not the people who sit in the legislature and plot to destroy him politically.

As Burden looks out at the crowd that next day, he thinks of conversations he has had with his father, complicated political and religious conversations about the nature of God and man, and Burden wonders to himself where Willie fits into this cosmic system—whether he can maintain the power he has, whether Willie himself is not more God than man, as far as state politics go. Jack also imagines the newspaper headlines, which will shout that the large crowd, gathered to support Willie, scared the legislators into dropping impeachment charges, even though Burden knows it was Willie himself who forced the charges to be dropped.

Jack recognizes here that Willie is, in a sense, the God of Louisiana—there can be nothing changed without his desire, and he is the man who, more than anyone else, has crafted the state in his image—in this way, the establishment of the free hospital is one more step to making sure that Willie's imprint on the state of Louisiana can never be forgotten. But Willie is also a "jealous" God, always sure to make clear that the people owe their reforms to him.

Jack then goes out and stands with Adam and Anne, who have joined him to see Willie speak—after the speech (which Jack does not describe) Jack leaves his friends and heads back to the governor's mansion, where he goes off in private to speak to Willie, as Duffy and other members of the administration celebrate the Governor's apparent victory over the legislature. Willie complains that Lucy does in fact want to leave him (though he believes she will not ultimately do so), and that she wants their son, Tom, who is becoming a star football player, to become a "sissy," someone who studies and does not participate in boyish hijinks. Willie resolves that his son will have all sorts of fun that he, Willie, could not have when he was bent over a law book, studying, working day and night to pull himself out of poverty. Willie wishes to give his son the childhood he, Willie, never had.

Willie's attitude toward his son (who is not so much a character in the story as an idea—he has very few speaking parts, and is mostly seen playing football) is one of benevolent, slap-on-the-back, boy-will-be-boys permissiveness. Willie never had fun as a child precisely so he could work hard, make a name for himself, and give to his son the childhood he never had. What Willie does not seem to realize—and he is so shrewd normally—is that Tom must be able to make his own way in the world; that Tom has to decide what is best for himself, rather than have his father decide for him. Tom's pamperedness is part of the reason for his devil-may-care attitude.

Burden then closes the chapter by stating that Lucy did wind up leaving Willie, more or less, but not entirely, not legally—she keeps up appearances until his reelection in 1934, and afterward she lives on a poultry farm with her sister but stays married with Willie, and performs thrice-yearly photo-ops with Tom and Willie, making it seem like the Governor's family is still intact and functional.

Another of Jack's radical shifts in time, indicating that he is writing at several years' remove from the events being depicted. In this sense Jack is the "God" of his narration as Willie is the God of local politics—Jack is capable of bending time to suit the needs of the story he is trying to tell.

CHAPTER 4

Burden begins the chapter by looping back to his initial conversation with Irwin, along with Willie, at Irwin's home in 1936. Burden states, again, that he did in fact manage to find "dirt" on Irwin, as Willie wanted, but Burden calls this his "second job of historical research," and he goes on to describe his first, which was his period of time as a doctoral student in history at the state university in Louisiana, before Burden became a reporter for the Chronicle. Burden says that, although this "first job" of historical research doesn't have directly to do with Willie, it has to do with his (Burden's) own story, and that Willie's and Burden's stories are, effectively, one story.

Burden's tenure as a graduate student was possibly informed by Penn Warren's own graduate studies, which were significant. Of course it is hard to say the extent to which Burden is an autobiographical character, but in this chapter, particularly, one gets the sense of a certain intimacy between the character portrayed and the life of the man portraying it. The solitary work of writing a dissertation is not far removed from the work of writing a novel.

Burden lived with two graduate students, one "drunk and unlucky and stupid," the other "drunk and lucky and smart," in a squalid apartment which horrified Burden's mother, when she visited briefly early in his graduate tenure. Burden was writing his dissertation on Cass Mastern, a distant family relation, whose letters he had been sent, by a long-unknown family member, in several bound folios. Burden also possessed a gold ring, once Mastern's as well, and a photograph of the man.

Cass Mastern becomes, in the telling of his story throughout this chapter, a foil for Burden—unlucky in love, torn between serving a man he adores (Duncan) and serving his own ideals—and therefore an interesting mirror effect is evident, for Penn Warren is writing a character like him, Burden, who is writing a character like him, Mastern.

The remainder of the chapter is Burden's account of this family story, which was to form the basis of his dissertation. Cass Mastern was one of two maternal uncles of Ellis Burden, the Scholarly Attorney, Jack's father. The other uncle—Cass's brother Gilbert—died in 1914, at the age of 94, and had amassed a huge fortune derived from railroad interests. This is the money that trickled down to Jack's mother, who still lives, at the time of Jack's writing of the novel's account, in the 1930s, in relative luxury in Burden's Landing.

Jack's family money is an interesting quandary in the text, for Jack is very rarely the beneficiary of this money—although his mother sends him funds from time to time—but Jack is able to take jobs paying very little because he knows he has a fallback in the Landing—a house that will be his one day, and his mother's sizeable inheritance. Thus Jack is willing to take on tasks without concern for money, because his monetary needs are taken care of.

The grandson of Gilbert Mastern, whom Jack did not know personally, had decided that, since Jack had an interest in history and was a graduate student, he might want to examine these letters and personal effects—thus Jack gained possession of them, and they sat on his work-table in his squalid apartment at the State University. (Although it is not stated explicitly by Burden in the novel, Burden's tenure in graduate school roughly spans the end of the nineteen-teens and the start of the 1920s).

Like Burden, Cass goes on to college because he loves reading—his brother Gilbert finds him lost in his books. And like Burden, Cass is a hopeless romantic, concerned with notions of love, time, and memory—and specifically, with how time and memory tend to wear away our loves, or change them, make them more difficult to see or to find in the present day.

The picture of Cass, an early and smudged photo, Jack finds haunting—it is Cass in his Confederate soldier's uniform, with his eyes "burning black" in his head. Jack begins to relate what Cass has in his journal: Cass wrote his journal as a young man at Transylvania College in Lexington, Kentucky, after a period of "darkness and trouble" he experienced in his early years at the college, and after he (Cass) "found God" and the solace that God can bring. Cass says, in the first pages of his journal, that he was born in rural north Georgia in conditions of poverty, and that now he has attained some material comfort in life.

Cass's turn toward religion is reminiscent of Jack's father's turn toward religion after he, the Scholarly Attorney, leaves the family when Jack is a young boy. Of course, Jack later finds out that the Scholarly Attorney is not his biological relative, and so Jack cannot say he "inherited" any trains from his father, nor that these trades are shared with Cass Mastern—but a family lineage between the three men is nevertheless drawn.

Cass's brother, Gilbert, fifteen years older than Cass, walked from north Georgia as a boy (leaving both Cass and their sister Lavinia there), and went first to Mississippi, on foot, to make his fortune. Over the course of the next dozen years, Gilbert slowly made money through a variety of business interests, and when Cass and Lavinia's parents died, Gilbert came back to Mississippi, building an estate he called Valhalla. There Gilbert served as a kind of surrogate father to Cass, and sent Lavinia away to a boarding school for girls in Atlanta.

Gilbert's successes, largely in the realm of business, are contrasted with Cass's desire not to be successful, but rather to live a life that is fulfilling. Jack is very much the same way—he seems to consider himself a failure, when compared to Willie, who is more or less entirely self-made. And yet Jack is very good at what he does—he is a gifted writer, researched, and political operative.

Gilbert taught Cass all the gentlemanly arts of riding and of managing a plantation for three years, but eventually, realizing that Cass wanted to be a scholar and was given to reading books, he paid to have Cass sent to Transylvania College, in Lexington, Kentucky, where he could study for a bachelor's degree, as had the family friend Jefferson Davis, who would go on to be President of the Confederacy.

Here the story begins to intertwine with the story of the South, a region founded on black slavery but founded also on a code of white male "honor" and "gentlemanliness," in which Gilbert hopes to initiate Cass as a young man.

But Burden discovers, again through Cass's journal, that Cass also learned to live a life of vice and dissipation at Transylvania, though he kept up with his studies. Cass became friends with a man named Duncan Trice, and fell in love with Mrs. Annabelle Trice, Duncan's wife. Over the course of Cass's first year in school, Duncan showed Cass the worlds of horse-gambling, drinking, and whore-house-frequenting that he (Duncan) was accustomed to, and Cass did these things eagerly. Cass also realized, at the end of that first year, that Annabelle shared his affections for her, though the pair did not know what to do, nor how to consummate their relationship.

Duncan opens up a world for Cass—shows him things Cass could only dream of on the farm in Mississippi. Just as Jack seems to view knowledge, and aging, as a path toward corruption—just as Willie tends to grow more corrupt, more OK with bribery as he gets older—Cass finds himself willing to test the boundaries of his moral code when he is away at college, perhaps to see what happens when he breaks society's rule. Cass then "returns" to a life of Christian propriety.

That summer after his first year, with Cass back at Valhalla to be with his brother, Cass received a note from Annabelle reading only "Oh, Cass," and on a return to Transylvania at the start of the next school year, he went to the Trice house, found Duncan not at home, and embraced Annabelle for the first time. Thus, Jack notes, began the second part of Cass's fall into dissipation, into "darkness and trouble."

Cass is careful, in his letter, not to blame Annabelle for "seducing" him, as Cass was in love with her, too, and was more than willing to participate in this extra-marital relationship behind his friend's back. In this way, Cass accepts responsibility for his actions.

The affair lasted all of Cass's second year, with Cass sneaking over to the Trice house when Duncan was away on business—sometimes the two even made love in the Trice's marital bed. Then, in Cass's third year, there is a note in the journal that Duncan Trice died of a gunshot wound in the chest in March of 1854, and that the cause of death had been an accidental discharge of a weapon. This marked the third stage of Cass's darkness. It is implied by Cass that Duncan's death was a suicide.

Although at first it seems to be implied in Cass's letter that Cass might have accidentally shot Duncan, it is then revealed that Duncan was alone in the house when the bullet was fired, thus it could have only been a suicide—and a suicide intended to send a message to his wife and her lover, that Duncan knew of the affair happening behind his back.

The night after Duncan's funeral, which was a public event in Lexington, drawing many prominent people, Cass went to visit Annabelle in a small back-house of the Trice plantation, and there, Annabelle, clearly upset, gave to Cass the ring Duncan once wore to celebrate his marriage to Annabelle. Annabelle told Cass that Duncan took the ring off his finger before shooting himself in his bedroom, and that Phebe, one of the black slaves in the manor house, found the ring and realized that Duncan was making a statement about the dissolution of his marriage.

An almost melodramatic tale which seems to elevate the nature of the Annabelle-Duncan-Cass story into a realm of fiction, of seeming fiction. But Jack operates on the assumption that what Cass says, and what Annabelle reports, are true. Here is the most an African American character is described in the novel—none of the servants in Jack's mother's house, nor Irwin's, are given so much descriptive space.

Annabelle was greatly upset to realize that Duncan was aware of Annabelle's affair (and that it was with Cass), and doubly upset that Phebe, one of the servants was aware too. Although Annabelle has no direct proof of any of this, she feels that the presence of the gold ring is enough to deduce these conclusions about Duncan's and Phebe's knowledge of the affair.

In addition, Phebe is included simply as a victim, an accidental one, too, as regards Cass's and Annabelle's affair. All Phebe did was indicate, in some slight way, that she knew Duncan's implication—and this has damning consequences for Phebe in the future.

Cass then discovered, several days after Duncan's funeral, that Annabelle had sold Phebe down the river at Paducah, where she would be taken into bondage in Louisiana and used as a forced sex worker—all because Annabelle could not bear the sight of "that look" in Phebe's eyes, which indicated, to Annabelle, that Phebe knew of the pair's adultery. Greatly upset that an innocent person had been harmed because of his own vice, Cass traveled down to Paducah and attempted to track down Phebe's bill-of-sale from a man named Mr. Simms, a slave-trader in that region, but after a gruff conversation with Simms, who implied that Cass merely wanted to sleep with Phebe himself, Cass punched Simms, got into a small tussle, and finally made his way back to Lexington without having found Phebe.

Mr. Simms, here, resembles very nearly the cruel slave-trader and estate-manager Legree in Uncle Tom's Cabin, *a text which no incidentally takes places largely in Kentucky, with another plantation in Louisiana becoming the site of terrible cruelty for Tom. Jack, and Penn Warren, too, seem to be using this intertextual reference to "the Uncle Tom story" to underscore just how dramatically cruel Mr. Simms was—it was almost as though the Cass-Annabelle plot had turned to a kind of strange melodramatic fiction, without Cass's even trying.*

In Lexington, Cass realized that Annabelle had fled back to Washington, DC, where she was born and raised—at this, Cass fell into a delirious fever, and "hovered between life and death" in his lodgings at the College. He thought about killing himself, since Annabelle had abandoned him, but he did not because he feared retribution from God—Cass, in his fever, had undergone a kind of religious conversion, and now left Lexington to return to Mississippi and to work on the family plantation.

As above, Cass's religious conversion is a more mellow version of the conversion the Scholarly Attorney undergoes. Both seem to have "smoldering eyes," and both behave as though they have plumbed the darkest depths of the human soul. But Cass appears to retain his wits, whereas the Scholarly Attorney descends into a kind of religious madness.

Cass was granted another parcel of land from his brother Gilbert, and though he did not care to make money, Cass prospered anyway, making enough to pay back his brother for the land and, eventually, to free his slaves. Cass attempted to operate his plantation with the former slaves on a wage basis, but Gilbert warned him this would not be possible, since the slaves would simply want to be truly free and sent to the North—the experiment failed, the ex-slaves did not want to work for wages, and Cass eventually did send them up-river, and left his plantation altogether for Jackson, the state capital.

Here, Cass's ill luck is that he can have no ill luck—he wishes to live a life of Christian abnegation, making no money, and benefiting not at all from the slave labor of those African Americans employed on the estate. But Cass realizes his brother's business is so strong, so vibrant, that there is little he can do to ruin it. Thus ultimately he must find another line of work in which to "fail."

There, Cass began a career in the law, which continued until 1861 and the start of the Civil War. Cass took up an infantryman position, one of the lowest ranks possible (despite his status as a wealthy landowner), in the Mississippi branch of the Confederate Army; his brother took a top officer's post, because of Mastern family connections with Jefferson Davis, now President of the fledgling Confederate States of America. Although Cass vowed not to take any human life in battle, he survived against all odds through several major fights, eventually being wounded in Atlanta and dying of his wound in a hospital there in 1864. The journal ends with Mastern's death.

After his brief legal career—much like Jack's all-too-brief legal career as a law student—Cass enlists in another form of abnegation, refusing the officer's commission he could have taken and instead putting himself in harm's way. And once again, Cass cannot die quickly enough—he is miraculously spared during some of the most difficult and bloody fighting of the war, and ends up succumbing to his wound only because of terrible medical care in Atlanta, where there were unclean hospital and a shortage of doctors.

Such was the material Jack was to craft into a dissertation for his doctorate. But Jack realized that, despite knowing all the facts of Mastern's life, and of the impact this life had on others, and on the way in which this life was emblematic of many lives in the South at that time, that he could not take these facts and weave them into any account of the "truth" of that time. This philosophical frustration with the facts, and their refusal to equate to "the truth," caused Jack to abandon his project and to fall into a deep depression.

An important point. Jack here feels that, despite his best efforts, there is an enormous divide between the "truth" as he sees it and the collection of small details that people often think of as comprising the truth. Jack believes that, just as with historical research, the details or facts cannot encapsulate the truth of himself or of Willie—thus he uses his particular back-and-forth storytelling method throughout the novel.

This deep depression, similar to the "Big Sleep" Jack underwent just after being fired from the reporter job, and before being hired by Willie, ended finally when Jack was hired at the newspaper. His old landlady in the squalid apartment sent him his box of PhD materials, including the letters, the photo of Cass, and the ring, which have followed Jack from place to place, and which sit in his apartment in 1939, as he writes the account of his and Willie's life.

In fact, Jack's difficulty deciding what is fact and what is truth is so important to him that it prompts one of his periodic Great Sleeps—moments of major depression that appear to crop up every so often, during a major life change. Jack will have similar difficulty making sense of the "truth" of Irwin's bribery and of Willie's affair with Anne.

CHAPTER 5

Burden returns the narrative to what now appears its central event: the nighttime conversation with Irwin, in Burden's Landing, in 1936. That night, Burden and Willie drove back to Mason City in the **black Cadillac**, and before falling asleep in the wee hours of that morning, Willie told Jack he was raising Jack's salary in order to give Jack extra incentive to find dirt on Irwin. Jack repeated to Willie his assertion that, if any dirt existed on Irwin, it would be very, very difficult to find.

Now, finally, after three intervening chapters, we return to what is, in a sense, the central plot of the book—the attempt to discredit Irwin politically in order to further Willie's desires. Jack again states that he has a hard time believing Irwin could have done anything wrong, but he throws himself into the work regardless.

Jack leaves Mason City the next day and heads to a bar in Baton Rouge, where he drinks and asks himself why the Judge might do something illegal at any point in his life. Jack answers his own question: out of ambition, fear, love, or money. Jack slowly ticks off the possibilities—the Judge was always confident in his ambitions, he was afraid of no one, and had no documented affairs. Thus Burden decides to focus on the issue of money, and to see if Irwin had ever done anything untoward in order to acquire his wealth.

Jack uses his "nose for news" and his historical acumen here as a way of beginning. It is important to note that Jack stopped being a graduate student and a reporter because he was, in a sense, too good at his job—he researched Cass so thoroughly he thought he could know the whole man, and he was fired from the paper because he was too good at reporting Willie's successes.

Burden decides to go to his father, the Scholarly Attorney, in Baton Rouge in order to determine if his father can give him any information about Irwin's former financial dealings. Burden knows that, owing to his father's condition, it might be difficult to get any amount of true information out of the man. Burden goes to a bodega in a Latino neighborhood in Baton Rouge and waits for his father to enter—he sees his father after an hour or so has passed, and though his father does not initially recognize him, Burden convinces his father to take him (Burden) back to his father's apartment, to talk.

One of the harder-to-believe aspects of Jack's relationship with his father, the Scholarly Attorney, is the ease with which Jack manages to find the man, and the stability with which the Attorney appears to be insane. One has a hard time believing the Attorney can even care for himself, yet Burden describes his father as taking care of a "poor soul" himself—out of Christian charity.

On the walk up to the squalid apartment where his father lives, Burden hears his father reference a man named George—Burden asks who George is, and his father announces that George is an "unfortunate," a man his father has taken in. Burden's father takes bread to George for George's art projects, which involves George chewing the bread and plastering it onto a sculpture of an angel—Burden's father finds these sculptures to be deeply religious and artistically captivating, although Burden believes both men are truly insane.

George only crops up in this scene, but he's an intriguing character, one who could essentially star in a story of his own. One wonders the extent to which George is merely insane; it also is quite possible he is merely sickened with grief, in exactly the manner that the Scholarly Attorney grieves—although the reason for the Attorney's madness (Irwin's affair) is only revealed much later.

Burden's father says that George was once a trapeze artist whose wife died during their act, and that now George is mute, and he makes his religious art as a form of penance for his wife's untimely demise. Burden does not wish to stay too long, nor to talk about George, and so asks his father whether Irwin was ever broke in his younger life. His father seems taken aback by the gruffness of this question, and launches into a religious tirade about the "filth" and "foulness" of human desires. Burden recognizes that he has only upset his father, and so, after attempting to calm him, leaves without gaining any actualy information about Irwin.

Again, there is mention of human "filth," or the degradation of the human spirit. In this way both Jack's father and Willie—Jack's "father figure," along with Irwin—are concerned with "dirtying their hands" in the pursuit of earthly ends. Yet all these men have taken radically different paths—Irwin has retired to the quiet of his estate; Willie tries to build his hospital to atone for corruption; and the Attorney retreats from the world.

But on his way down the stairs, Burden realizes that his father became upset because he does, in all likelihood, know some piece of information about Irwin's past—and thus Jack believes that, if he keeps on digging, he will find dirt on the Judge. Jack then shifts the narration to a football game he is watching with the Boss—a game presumably at Louisiana State University, where the Boss's son Tom is a star quarterback.

Yet all Jack needed from his father was the simplest hint that Irwin had possibly engaged in something untoward at one time—and Jack's received more than enough information in that regard here. What Jack finds out later, however, is that Irwin wronged his father for totally non-political, but rather romantic, reasons.

Tom does extremely well in the game, and the Boss comes up to him, afterward, to congratulate him. The Boss is angry that Lucy still wishes to keep Tom from playing football, believing it is too dangerous, and Jack, though he is caught up in the excitement of the game, realizes he must drive to Burden's Landing that weekend to talk to Anne and Adam about Irwin's past—the three have decided to meet up and spend time together back in the Stanton's old home. Jack also reveals at this juncture that Adam and Anne's father used to be Governor of the state, long ago—thus the Stantons, like the Burdens and Irwins, represent the old political hierarchy of the state, par excellence.

Tom's football success is one of the few givens up till this point in the novel—Willie's political fortunes rise and fall, and his family moves closer together or farther apart based on Willie's behavior with other women, but Tom keeps playing in, and helping win, football games. Willie realizes all too late in the novel that he depends on his son far too much in this regard—that all he wants from Tom is for him to succeed on the field, come what may in Tom's personal life.

Before Adam is set to arrive at the Stanton home, Burden is there with Anne, and though they horse around and build a fire, before long Jack loses patience and asks Anne, flat-out, if Irwin was ever broke as a young man. Anne senses that Jack is asking this question for Willie's sake, and reiterates her position that Willie is a bad man, a politician who will stop at nothing to get what he wants—other people's reputations be damned. Anne also tells Jack that she has met with Willie to discuss plans for Willie to give Anne some funds for a children's home in Baton Rouge—a charitable project to which Anne has devoted a great deal of her time.

Anne is a shrewd political operator herself, although she has not chosen politics as her career of choice. She understands immediately what Jack is getting after, and she wants to put a stop to it. She also can't bear the thought that anyone in the Landing was engaged in a kind of back-room politicking she finds so abhorrent in the Stark administration. Anne also feels "used" by Jack, since she thought they were to spend a fine weekend together, the three of them, like in old times.

Adam then tramps in, bringing his characteristic good cheer, and he doesn't seem to sense that Anne and Jack have just had an argument. After welcoming Adam back to Burden's Landing, Jack asks his friend whether he recalls Irwin ever needing money as a young man—this, over Anne's objections. Adam answers that, as a matter of fact, he does remember his father, the Governor, having a conversation with Irwin, a fight even, about money a long time ago, in the nineteen-teens.

Adam, at this point, stands in stark contrast to Anne, in terms of his political sensibilities—he does not understand, at first, that Jack is attempting to dig up information on Irwin to use for political ends, and anyway Adam does not realize that Irwin's problems with money long ago could point to instances of Irwin's graft.

Adam asks Jack why Jack wants to know this about Irwin, and Jack replies, again over Anne's objection, that Willie wants to know. Adam seems also not to like Willie, thinking him to be an unscrupulous leader in the way Anne does, but Adam believes that it's not against the law to be broke, and does not see the further political implications of Irwin's long-ago financial past. The three spend the evening together, dancing, singing, and trying to have fun, although Anne seems residually mad at Jack—and the next day, Jack drives back to Baton Rouge.

Nevertheless, the three manages to recreate, at least in part, the fun times they had at the Landing as children. As the novel goes on, it becomes harder and harder for Adam to "cut loose" and forget the demands of his work, and Anne will continue to worry about him—worry that he is cutting himself off from society and from friends and family who support him.

At the capitol, Jack overhears a conversation between Duffy and Sadie, in which Duffy claims that the Boss wants to put six million dollars of taxpayer money into the new free hospital he has proposed building. Duffy tells Sadie that he has a friend, Gummy Larson, who can fix this up for the Governor—but Sadie knows that Gummy would include a kickback for Duffy, and that Duffy wants as much of that six million as he can get his hands on. While overhearing this conversation, Jack gets a phone call from Anne, who tells him that she knows how Irwin got his money—he married a wealthy woman. Anne implies that Irwin did not have to do anything illegal to get this money, and that Jack will not be able to tarnish Irwin's reputation for Willie's political gain. Anne hangs up the phone.

This becomes one of the primary sources of drama in the remainder of the novel—the attempts by Duffy to gain a favorable contract for the hospital, so that he and his friend Larson can benefit, and the attempts by Willie to prevent this corrupt contract in order to preserve the sanctity of his hospital project. Once Willie asks that Adam become Director of the hospital, then, Willie has thoroughly tied together all the dramatic threads of the text—which means that, along with Willie's relationship with Anne, all the "powder keg" is in place for the final dramatic event—Willie's assassination.

Jack sets about investigating to see if Anne's claims are true. He goes to La Salle County, where a big part of the Irwin landholdings are located, to see how Irwin financed the purchase of his property. It seems that the property went into foreclosure in 1914, and that Irwin had married Mabel Carruthers, his second wife, in 1913—but this to Jack proves nothing, since Irwin might have waited to ask his second wife for money to pay off his debts. Jack keeps digging.

Now Jack is deep in the kind of historical research that seemingly only he can do. He realizes that the Judge's back-room deals just before World War I might point to a potential bribe—interestingly, it was later, in the Great War, that the Judge made a name for himself as a great hero and defender of his country.

After Jack keeps digging for a while, however, he realizes that, although Mabel came from family money, she also spent a great deal of that family money before marrying Irwin—in fact, after meeting with an old family friend of Mabel's, Jack realizes that Mabel had married Irwin thinking Irwin had money—and thus Irwin could not have paid off his 1914 foreclosure with Mabel's money. Jack begins to realize that Irwin must have done something else to pay off that debt.

Furthermore, Jack senses that the Judge's weakness lies in his second marriage, to a woman who appeared very wealthy. Just as Mrs. Burden inherited a good deal of wealth and became an entrenched member of society in the Landing, so too does Irwin make a name and a fortune for himself and parlay that into political influence in this wealthy enclave, Jack's hometown.

Irwin, who was the state's attorney general in 1914, was given a job by the American Electric Power Company in 1915—a job that paid a great deal of money. Jack, upon further digging, realized that Irwin had also been given a certain amount of American Electric stock in 1914—and Jack set about finding out what Irwin had done to American Electric, in his capacity as attorney general, to cause the company to become so kindly disposed toward him.

Jack has struck the gold that will eventually show Irwin's involvement in a bribe. Typically speaking, one needs only to follow the most obvious trail of influence or money, and Jack has done just that—he has found a corporation who wanted something of the government, and a man, Irwin, who as Attorney General was in a position to help that company out.

But at this point, Jack reaches a dead end. He can't find a link between American Electric and Irwin—not, that is, until one day, when he is walking along, a name from his weeks and weeks of research and digging comes back to him—the name Mortimer Littlepaugh, the chief counsel for American Electric. Jack does some digging and realizes that Littlepaugh died in 1914 of accidental causes, apparently falling off a high railing of a hotel in which he was staying. Jack decides to visit with his sister, still alive, Lily Littlepaugh, to find out more about Mortimer's life.

Littlepaugh, on the other hand, is the characteristic "other man" in this arrangement—he has done nothing wrong, but has nevertheless been chewed up and spit out by a political deal that involves nothing about him. Mortimer is an example of the kinds of casualties that crop up when political back-room deals take place—there is a always a "little man," a "nobody," to take the fall.

Jack eventually finds Lily in a very small apartment in Memphis, TN, where she lives in squalor and seems to be some kind of card-reader or clairvoyant. Jack humors her and, in a clairvoyant session, tries to get Lily to talk about Mortimer, begging her to admit that Mortimer's death was not an accident, but that, instead, Mortimer had flung himself off the balcony of the hotel (if it had been an accident, Lily could not have received his life insurance policy from the insurance company).

Lily, not unlike the Scholarly Attorney, has come out of a period of real trauma in her life, following the death of her brother, by resorting to a kind of psycho-babble. Whereas the Attorney's is religious, Lily's is influenced by Tarot and by the reading of fortunes—yet she quickly "snaps to" when Jack mentions her brother's death.

Jack tells Lily there is nothing to worry about now—the insurance company will never know—and he pays her three hundred dollars for any information about Mortimer. This seems to jog Lily's memory, and she admits that Mortimer went to Governor Stanton about the "coal affair"—a sweetheart deal that Irwin had arranged between a coal company and the American Electric company, which Mortimer believed to be illegal, but which Irwin wanted to happen in order to ingratiate himself with American Electric and to make enough money to pay off his personal debts. Lily admits, also, that she has a suicide note written by Mortimer—she goes into a back room in her small apartment and finds it for Jack.

As it turns out, this is exactly the quid pro quo that Jack was looking for—and it was more or less hidden in plain sight. The Attorney General, Irwin, did very little to hide the fact that his office chose to help out a company, American Power, that ended up giving Irwin a job some time later. To an extent, Irwin seemed to benefit from the perception that he could do no wrong politically, that he could not be bribed, that he could not be corrupted. This was enough to ensure that his corruption would go unnoticed.

Mortimer, in the letter, repeats exactly what Lily claims—that Irwin allowed the sweetheart deal between the Southern Belle coal company and American Electric to go through, to American Electric's business advantage, as a quid-pro-quo that would give Irwin a job at American Electric and a bonus in stock compensation. Mortimer, who knew about this graft, attempted to go to Governor Stanton, but Stanton covered it up and denied any wrongdoing. Mortimer admits in the letter to killing himself and pretending it is an accident so that his sister may at least have some money on which to live.

Mortimer's suicide is one of several in the novel. Both Irwin and Adam also commit suicide, and do so in order to right wrongs they perceive in the world. In Irwin's case, he is attempting to atone for his sins of long ago; in Adam's, he is attempting to punish Willie for "sinning" with Anne. And in Mortimer's case, he is hoping merely to help his sister any way he can—in this case, by providing her with the insurance money she will receive after his death.

Burden says that he will take the letter, quickly, to have it "photostatted" (copied), so that he can use it for his advantage. Burden asks that Lily make a statement on the record, in front of a notary, and at a later date, verifying everything she has told Burden, and promises her more money if she does so. Burden then tells the reader that, as a historical researcher, he loves the truth, and he believes he has found a new piece of the truth regarding Irwin, who for so long has pretended to be a thoroughly upright citizen.

These Photostats are necessary to make sure that Lily's testimony would hold up in a court of law—not that it would be used in a court of law. Jack knows that it is merely the threat of such court action that is typically sufficient to make the incriminated parties (here, Irwin), confess and do what Willie wishes.

CHAPTER 6

Jack begins the chapter by recounting the seven months he spent on the Irwin case, from September till March 1936-1937. In that interim, a great deal happened around him, however, and he attempts to fill in those gaps. First, Tom was in a car wreck with a young woman, and Tom was probably intoxicated and driving when the wreck happened—both he and the woman required medical care and were ultimately OK, and although the girl's father was angry and threatened to make the issue public, Willie threatened the man right back, saying that, as a trucker, his goods must run on public roads—this, coupled with a small payoff, was enough to secure Tom's reputation, at least for a little while.

Tom makes his first of several "big mistakes" in the novel. Here, no one is hurt, but this mistake foreshadows other things that will befall Tom in the novel, based on his carelessness, his devil-may-care attitude, and his belief that his father and mother will sweep any of his problems under the rug. Willie here is confident enough to wield his power in order to keep the girl's father at bay—as will later be proved with Sibyl's father, however, Willie will have more trouble covering up for Tom in the future.

Jack reports, however, that Lucy felt, in the meantime, that her son was becoming an overconfident and arrogant young man, and Willie again defended Tom, saying that Tom's antics were doing little to distract from his dream of becoming a big-time college football player. Anne's project, meanwhile, attempting to gain state money for a Baton Rouge Children's Home, had succeeded, and she was undergoing the planning process, which required several meetings with Willie and his staff. And the Boss's plans for the free state hospital continued apace—the Boss traveled around to study major hospital plans in other American cities, and attempted also to resist the efforts of Duffy to have the hospital contract signed with Gummy Larson, the crooked businessman with whom Duffy, in all likelihood, had a "special" arrangement.

Very little of this Children's Home is described, and Jack does not seem to think, in the beginning, that Anne could in any way be "corrupted" by speaking with Willie. An interesting paradox is here revealed: Jack claims that Willie is not corrupt, though Anne does think he is; but as soon as Anne starts working with Willie, Anne comes to realize that Willie truly is bringing change to the state—her politics, in a sense, become more progressive. Later on, Jack will realize just how close Willie and Anne have become as they meet to talk about the Home.

Willie then has a conversation with Jack, one evening in the governor's mansion, after repelling yet another persuasive advance by Duffy to have the hospital built using a crooked Gummy Larson contract. Willie tells Jack that, for once, he wants the hospital built without political horse-trading—he wants the hospital to stand as an indicator of his beneficence, his goodwill toward the state, his ability to better the lives of the common man. And this means that the hospital has to be built legally, so that no illegal activity can be used later to vilify Willie or take away this signal achievement of his administration.

Willie elaborates on his desire that the free hospital be, in a sense, free of all taint of political scandal. Willie, as above, has several reasons for this: he hopes to make it seem that at least part of his political legacy involved no graft; he worries that graft could derail the project and its ability to do good; and he knows that the only political monuments that truly last are the ones constructed on a firm foundation, not on a series of bribes.

Jack tells Willie he understands this explanation, but also that, with six million dollars around, surely a bunch of "flies" will attempt to pick away what they can. Willie then tells Jack that he wants the absolute best doctor to run his hospital—and that that man is Adam Stanton, Jack's old friend and a committed opponent of the Stark administration. Jack says it will be next to impossible to convince Adam to lead this hospital for Willie, but Willie tasks Burden with exactly this—to persuade Adam.

Jack seems to understand all this, but also recognizes that six million dollars is a great deal of money (especially at this time), and that, as in politics everywhere, that amount of money will encourage people to take what they can. Only Willie cares about Willie's legacy—everyone else cares about enriching himself in the bidding process.

Jack goes to Adam's shabby apartment the next day in an attempt to win him over and to convince him to take the job as head of Willie's free hospital. Adam hears out Jack's proposal and denies flatly that he'll do anything for Willie. Jack says he figured this was the case, but Jack knows that Willie knows that Adam wants simply to do good for the community—to help as many people as possible, without concern for his own wealth or interests. Jack promises Adam that, at the free hospital, Adam can do the maximum amount of good for the health of the people of Louisiana.

Adam wants nothing to do with Willie—he senses, rightly, that the hospital will spell doom for him. But Adam also seems to understand that the hospital has been thrust upon him, and that an offer from Willie is essentially "an offer he can't refuse," not because it's lucrative, but because Willie will put pressure on him to gain the outcome he desires.

Burden attempts to continue to convince Adam to take the job, but to no avail—Adam says it would degrade himself and his work to do it for Willie's hospital. Burden says he is leaving soon for Memphis to speak to a medium, Miss Littlepaugh (this is just before his journey to talk with Lily), and then excuses himself, saying he will check back in with Adam when he returns.

Jack exposes the temporal workings of the narrative here: he has bent the story around Willie and his own research in order to foreground certain events in certain times, to increase the drama of the story. Jack cares less for temporal continuity and more for a continuous dramatic tension in the narrative.

After Memphis, Burden returns to Baton Rouge with a message from Anne that she wishes to meet with him and discuss something with him. They go for a long walk together that evening, and Anne eventually tells Burden that she has spoken with her brother about the free hospital job, and that she is urging him to take it, because she now comes to realize that working with Willie will bring the maximum good to the greatest number of people. Burden is shocked to hear Anne supporting Willie in this way, and wonders whether Anne has come around to Willie in the course of asking his administration for money for her Children's House charity.

Anne has now fully turned to supporting Willie and his project. Here Jack begins to sense that something else might be coming between Willie and Anne, perhaps a romance of some kind, but Jack also knows, or thinks he knows, that such a relationship would be impossible, that Willie would never be able to woo Anne successfully, that she finds him too distasteful a politician and a man.

Anne is convinced that Adam should take the job, too, because she feels that Adam has cut himself off from society with his overwork, and that only in doing this job will he regain some balance in his life—will he be a good brother to her again, and a good friend to Burden. Jack says he has evidence—from his "historical researches"—that will change Adam's worldview and perhaps convince him to work with Willie. Anne asks what this could be, and Burden replies by telling her of Irwin's accepted bribe, and of the fact that her own father, Governor Stanton, looked the other way and chose not to prosecute Irwin for the bribe. Anne is shocked by this information, and by its stain on the family name.

Anne does not want to hear what her father has done—even if he has only tacitly acknowledged the crime that Irwin himself perpetrated. But Anne also realizes the power this information will have over Adam, and recognizes that it will be good for Adam to be associated with Willie, to work for the free hospital, and to feel engaged in the community of Greater Baton Rouge. Thus Anne is "between a rock and a hard place"—she wants to help her brother, but to do so she must tarnish their father's legacy.

During the intense conversation between Anne and Jack, a policeman arrives and wonders what the commotion is—Jack talks back to the cop, who threatens to haul him off to jail—only at this point Jack mentions that he works for the Boss, and that the cop could get in a lot of trouble for messing with Burden and interrupting his business. The cop immediately frees Burden and gives Burden and Anne a ride part of the way home—but Anne is angry with Jack about his revelation, and now about Jack's willingness to use his political powers for his own gain in so petty a manner with the cop—and she asks the cop to drop Burden off early, so he can catch a trolley car home. Burden exits the car; the cop drives Anne home, and she remains angry with Burden.

Jack here throws around his political weight in a manner Anne finds distasteful—interestingly, this is one of the few times in the novel that Jack seems pointedly to enjoy being associated with such a bigwig in the state. Typically Jack is content to live and work in the shadows, receiving little to know public notoriety for his efforts. But here, perhaps, in a misguided effort to impress Anne, he does what he can to show the policeman who's boss.

Anne asks Burden a few days later to send her the Photostat of the letter Mortimer sent to his sister; Burden does so, and five days letter Anne reports back to him that Adam will take the job Willie's offering—that he is crushed by the idea that his own father, Governor Stanton, whom Adam had considered a man of unimpeachable virtue, would stoop so low as to allow someone in his administration to take a bribe. Apparently, as Jack figured, Adam's realization that all politics is essentially a dirty business enabled him to abandon his final sense of property and to decide to work for Willie.

Jack's a very able student of human psychology—perhaps it is this skill, above all else, that makes him a keen political operative, reporter, and student of history, which is, after all, merely the study of networks of human relationships. Jack knew that Adam would give up all pretenses of "fighting the good fight" and opposing Willie if he realized that his own father participated in dirty politics the way Willie does.

Anne asks Burden to promise to show these materials to Irwin before making them public—to give Irwin a chance to rebut the charges before Burden uses them to smear him. Burden agrees to do this. The next day, Burden goes with the Boss in the **black Cadillac** to talk with Adam. Willie gives Adam a long speech on what "the Good" means, since Adam believes he is joining the hospital team in order to do good—Willie tells Adam that "the Good" has always been decided by men in power, that it is always relative, and that often the Good only comes when men serve their own interests first. Adam says he will work with Willie but that he does not necessarily have to respect Willie's values. Willie leaves by subtly threatening Adam, saying that Adam will fall in line and do his best to help the hospital when he works there—and Willie and Burden then leave the small apartment.

Willie here reveals his political and moral philosophy in as much detail as he will provide in the novel. Willie's theory might be boiled down to a few particulars: that there is no such thing as absolute good or absolute evil; that instead these qualities are relative to the situation and to the people involved; and that the good is essentially a utilitarian construct—it is whatever provides the most happiness to the most people. Thus Willie is OK with traducing a few democratic boundaries here and there to make the hospital a success—and he hopes Adam will be OK with that, too, during his Directorship of the hospital.

Burden then has an extended daydream, soon after this meeting with Adam, in which he recalls Willie's energetic speech on the steps of the state capitol in 1936, during his impeachment crisis—Burden remembers how he asked Willie, later, after the speech, if he had meant what he said about trying to help the common man. Willie spluttered and said that of course he had meant it—that the hospital plan in particular is the crown jewel in his administration's attempts to better the condition of the poor in the state.

Willie, for a third time, avers that this hospital means more to him than anything else, and that he is willing to sacrifice more or less all his political ambitions in order to certify that his administration will be remembered in Louisiana for putting the good of the people first. Jack clearly recognizes, because Willie has said this so often, that Willie is serious about his desire to keep the hospital "pure."

Burden then realizes something that has been bothering him since the night Anne asked to speak with him, and when the cop nearly arrested him—Anne had come to Burden with the information that Willie wanted to hire Adam to run the hospital, and Burden had not first told Anne this news. That means Anne must have gotten it from somewhere other than Burden, and Burden wonders who that person might be.

But Jack's researcher mindset cannot be forgotten so quickly—he knows that Anne found out about Willie's desire to hire Adam before Jack spoke with her. This means that Anne has an earpiece into the workings of government that Jack didn't know about—and Jack begins to sense that Anne has special ties to the Governor, too.

Burden asks Adam a couple days later, when he is over at Adam's apartment attempting to patch over their friendship and to talk to Adam about the plans he is drawing up for the hospital, if Adam told Anne, before Burden did, that Willie had offered him the hospital job. Adam says that he did not, and Burden continues to wonder who did. Then, several days later, in the capitol office, Sadie comes bursting out of her own room screaming that Willie has "done it again," gone off with another woman, and that she knows nevertheless he will come back to her. Jack asks who this other woman could be, and Sadie seems surprised that Jack doesn't already know—it's Anne Stanton.

A major revelation in the novel, and one that will have dire consequences for everyone involved. Very little of Willie's relationship with Anne is actually described—their courtship occurs entirely "offstage," yet Anne seems heartily to believe that she love Willie, that Willie loves her, and that their relationship will endure after Willie moves on from Lucy and makes it clear he is willing to establish a new life with Anne. Jack, for his part, is completely flabbergasted.

Jack has no idea that Willie and Anne are having an affair, but now his gut-feeling makes sense—Willie told Anne himself that he was going to hire Adam to take this hospital job. This explains why Anne was so eager for Adam to accept in the first place—not only because she believes Willie to be a good-hearted politician, but because she is falling in love with Willie. In a rage and a daze, Burden leaps out of the office, walks down the steps and into town, and doesn't stop until he reaches Anne's apartment in Baton Rouge. When he gets there, he bangs on the door and she opens—realizing what Jack is there for, she merely nods, implying that it's true—she's having an affair with Willie.

Jack's love for Anne, and his inability to let go of the past, is never more foregrounded than in this moment, when he walks all the way to Anne's house without even seeming to decide to do so. For Jack, it is more important that Anne remain single so that he has at least some chance of ending up with her—he believes, here, that Anne's decision to begin an affair with Willie marks the absolute end of his relationship with Anne—but this, too, will turn out not to be true in the novel.

CHAPTER 7

Burden is so upset at the news that Anne is having an affair with Willie, he takes off from Baton Rouge in his car and drives, over the course of several days, to Long Beach, California, where he checks into a hotel room and has another of his "Great Sleeps." On the drive back from California—he never intended to leave Louisiana forever, but only wanted time and distance to clear his head—he replays in his mind memories of his courtship of Anne when he was a young man.

Jack's "Great Drive" is in many ways related to his "Great Sleep," although here he wants not the stasis that sleep can provide but the sense of speed and endless road that a long drive to California makes present for the driver. Here is the only time in the novel when Jack takes the wheel of a car, and for him it a dramatic trip through his own past and memories.

The summer after he turned 21, when Anne was 17, Burden returned home from the state university and lived in Burden's Landing for the summer—he began wooing Anne, although at first they palled around together as they always had—on friendly terms, swimming and playing tennis. Soon, however, Burden began taking Anne out in his little roadster, and one night, after sitting in the car with Anne for hours, but not "making his move," he dropped Anne off at her house, went home to lay in bed, and realized that he was in love with his friend of many years—and the sister of his best friend Adam.

Jack immediately goes back to his courtship of Anne—a relationship that has been hinted at in the text but has not been fully described until now. What Jack senses, in recounting this relationship with Anne, is that it is somehow the basis of everything, of his political career, his desires, his working for Willie in the first place. Jack knows that his love for Anne is at the root of his current unhappiness.

One day, after spending time together on a pier overlooking the bay, Burden and Anne kissed for the first time, and walked back to the Stanton house together holding hands. In the house was Adam, and Anne went upstairs, smiling, convinced that Adam had seen her holding Burden's hand—thus believing that Adam knew about their relationship. Adam doesn't acknowledge that Anne and Burden are dating at first, but he seems to give his tacit approval to the relationship, eventually, as the summer wears on.

Even at this point, so long ago, there is the intimation of a kind of friction between Adam and Anne. Jack started off, as a young man, being very close to Adam, but as Anne grew up, and he began dating her, he realized he was spending far more time with Anne than he was with Adam. To a certain extent, his relationship with Adam never fully recovered—there has been a small "distance" between the two men ever since.

Burden details the rest of the summer, which is a blur of events with Anne—the two become very close and physically intimate, although they do not fully consummate their love for one another. Jack recalls how Anne called him Jackie-Boy, and one night, when the two are talking about their future plans, Anne asks Jack what he intends to do for a living. Jack, who hasn't until this point thought seriously about how to make a life for himself, answers that he will probably study to be a lawyer—this job seems sufficient for Anne, who says she does not care about money, only that Jack does a job he loves.

Another source of Jack's frustration is his feeling that he has never found a suitable career, a calling, the way Adam has, as a doctor, Irwin has as judge, and Willie has as politician and political savior. Jack has instead had several careers: PhD student, reporter, political operative, an in each, he feels he is making up his expertise as he goes along. Being a lawyer was merely a convenient answer to Anne's question.

Jack recalls another moment spent with Anne, when they were at a swimming pool—Anne dove in the pool, deep down, and Jack met her near the bottom, locking his lips with hers in a slow kiss, as they gradually made their way to the surface. It was a moment of passionate romantic intensity, and after that, Jack and Anne did not see each other for two days—Jack wondered whether he had scared Anne with the feeling that he loved her so much, so passionately, and that he hoped to spend the rest of his life with her.

An intensely romantic, indeed cinematic scene. Jack's love for Anne is so intense, as is his desire to possess her, that he cannot stand the thought of her being underwater and away from him. Thus he dives in, ostensibly to "save" her, but his kiss serves only to keep her under longer, and to scare her with the vividness and intensity of his love for her.

But after those two days, as the summer is winding down, Anne and Jack did return to spending time together, and Jack recalls how, that second-to-last evening, they went into town to see a movie, and afterward got caught in his open-topped car in the rain. They drove back to the Burden house to get warm and drink coffee, and Anne and Jack wound up upstairs—Jack remembers that they each slowly undressed, and that Anne told Jack she was ready to be up there with him—ready to make love to him, to consummate their relationship. But in the moonlight of that evening, which Jack still remembers, at the time of his writing, with great vividness, he looked at Anne and said it would be better if they waited, if they postponed their lovemaking.

Another moment of great importance in the novel. Jack and Anne have never slept together, they have never consummated their love affair, and to a certain extent this colors his entire relationship with Anne, and his sense of her purity. The knowledge that Anne is sleeping with Willie serves to eliminate two of Jack's fictions at once: first, that Anne is capable of sleeping with anyone, and second, that Anne is capable of loving someone other than Jack.

And at that moment, Jack's mother, who had been out drinking, returned home and began making noise downstairs. Jack panicked and, creating a diversion, walked downstairs to greet his mother and her guests—Anne came down a few minutes later, and Jack's mother, drunk, never noticed that the two of them had probably been "fooling around" upstairs. Nevertheless, the night of balked lovemaking seemed to impact their relationship, and Anne left for boarding school in the northeast two days later. Jack went back to LSU, and they maintained a promise to get married.

A classic scene—that of the parents returning to find two young lovers canoodling, is here changed into a tragic affair, as Jack will never again feel so romantically close to Anne as he did that night, and he fears that perhaps he has missed his only chance to love Anne, to make their romance a perfect one. Little does Jack know, at this point, the great series of events that will transpire and ultimately bring the two of them together in marriage at the novel's end.

Jack next saw Anne on his winter break, for ten days, and he remembers that the time they spent together was fraught—not like the summer before. Then they saw each other next during the following summer, after which Jack started at law school at LSU and Anne decided to attend college in Virginia. Still they maintained a promise to get married, but after a difficult fall, when Anne was a college freshman and Jack a first-year law student, Jack saw Anne over break and, realizing that she kissed in a new way, figured out that Anne had had a lover in Maine, while on a trip a few months before.

Jack's answer in the spur of the moment, that he wanted to go to law school, becomes his reality—he actually attends for a year. This underscores the fact that small decisions in life, especially small decisions without very much basis in one's actual desires, can turn into major changes in one's life without one's trying, or even realizing it. Jack wonders how many of these small decisions have influenced the greater course of his life.

Jack was aghast at the knowledge that Anne had "cheated" on him, but Anne admitted that she no longer felt loved by Jack, that Jack did not seem happy in their long-distance relationship, and that she had merely tried out kissing this other man to see what it was like. They attempted to patch up their relationship, but it didn't seem to take, and eventually they drifted apart and agreed to go their separate ways. Jack left the law school after only one year, and decided to pursue graduate study in history at LSU.

This is an intimation of the next time that Anne "cheats on" Jack, when she begins her affair with Willie. Of course, at this point Jack and Anne are no longer dating—and have not been for many years—but Jack still desires to possess Anne, to be the only man to love her and continue to love her.

After dropping out of graduate school and taking a job at the Chronicle, Jack was briefly married to a woman named Lois, and he recounts their relationship here, in this continuation of his "daydream" while driving back from Long Beach to Louisiana. Lois often would tell friends of hers in Baton Rouge, whom Jack never liked, that she and Jack were "perfectly adjusted sexually." Lois was a "liberated" woman, and beautiful, but Jack realized quickly that they were not interested in the same things, and soon their relationship began to deteriorate.

Lois is in many ways the utter foil to Anne. She is not concerned with intellectual pursuits, she has no ties to the Burden's Landing political community, and she seems to have no interests at all other than decorating the apartment and making sure that Jack is committed to their marriage. Jack seems to understand, from the very beginning, that the marriage is doomed to fail.

Jack felt that Lois merely wished Jack to look the part of her husband—she only cared that he dressed well and had a nice apartment—and so, after several years, Jack stopped talking to Lois, stopped sleeping with her, and eventually let her altogether. Jack recalls, to end this section of daydream-narration, that Lois is probably sitting on a sofa somewhere, eating chocolates and thinking on her former beauty—Jack knows that he is bitter about Lois, that he has taken out his bitterness from Anne on her, and he apologizes to her, in his dream, for the pain he has caused her.

Interestingly, Jack spends a great deal of the novel thinking about a woman, Anne, to whom he was never married, and spends only a very small part of the novel thinking about Lois, the woman to whom he actually was married for several years. This indicates the nature of Jack's memory, and of memory generally—that it is a selective process, and that sometimes events one does not want to remember are simply forgotten, pushed aside.

Jack quickly wraps up his story of Anne—she graduated college, returned to Burden's Landing to care for her sick father, then when her father eventually died she inherited the Stanton house along with her brother Adam. She moved to Baton Rouge and began working on charitable projects, and Jack struck up a friendship with her again, based on their mutual histories—and Jack, after divorcing Lois, attempted to woo Anne again, but to no avail—she would not take him back.

It is important to note that there was never any moment that severed the relationship between Jack and Anne completely—that is, until Jack discovers Anne's affair with Willie. Then Jack seems to realize, many years after the fact, that it is actually highly unlikely he will ever rekindle his romance with Anne, barring something unforeseen.

Jack therefore recalls, on the bed in Long Beach, and in the long car ride back to Louisiana, the difficulties of his romantic life, and the manner in which time seems to mimic the endless rolling motion of the sea. He says that, because he never possessed Anne, though he loved her, he doesn't understand why he can be angry at Willie for having an affair with her. Though he also knows that his memories regarding his relationship with Anne in Burden's Landing are some of the most powerful memories he has—that they are an essential part of his life.

Jack is aware of the great amount of emotional weight he places on the events in his life that involved Anne—she is, in many ways, the living link between him and his past in Burden's Landing, and a time when the world lay before him. Jack knew Anne when life was simpler, when he hadn't made a series of bad decisions and career changes, when it was still possible for him to lie on the beach and wait for the sun to set.

CHAPTER 8

On his way back east, while he is having this long daydream in his mind (from the previous chapter), Burden also picks up a hitchhiker named "Don Jon," who has a twitch in his face that only Burden seems to notice. Burden drives Don Jon from "Californy" back to Arkansas, where he was born (Don Jon was a failed Okie, who wants to die in the homeland of his ancestors, in Arkansas). Burden then realizes that the man's twitch, involuntary, something that can' be controlled, is a symbol for his own life—the Great Twitch, the idea that life might not mean anything more than "the twitch" does—that both life and the twitch are involuntary responses to a cruel world.

Don Jon represents a little-talked-about feature of the "Okie migration" of people from the Dust Bowl of the central US to the fruit fields of California—some of those people actually came back to the places they were from, since they could not make a life for themselves out west. Jack, also returning from the west, senses a kind of kinship with Don Jon, although Jack's journey was only a couple days, whereas Jon's was many years long.

Burden drives straight to Willie's office and Willie asks where he's been for nearly a week—Jack says he simply took some time off, and although Willie seems to understand that Burden was upset about finding out about Willie's relationship with Anne, neither party mentions it, and Burden gets back to work in Willie's office, believing that his newfound philosophy of life as The Great Twitch will enable him to continue in his job and to work with Willie.

Willie and Jack never speak about Willie's relationship with Anne. At the end of the novel, when Willie says he never did anything to Adam, Adam certainly never saw things that way—instead, he considered Willie's affair with Anne to be a great affront to her and their family's honor.

Burden also spends some time with Adam, who is working day and night at his old hospital and who is also planning the building and opening of Willie's new free hospital. Adam says he has a patient who is a catatonic schizophrenic in need of a front lobotomy, and Burden asks to watch the surgery—Adam reluctantly agrees, and Burden has no trouble watching the man's skull opened, until Adam begins burning away the front brain-matter. This action Jack finds shocking, and afterward he remarks to Adam that Adam should have "baptized" the man, since he was effectively changing the man's mind, making him into a new person.

A small and bizarre section of the novel, one without a great deal of "follow-up" in the remainder of the text. Jack seems to believe that his theory of the Great Twitch—of life as a series of responses not to moral concerns but to physical stimuli—is an airtight theory, but as soon as he examines the great twitching mass of a human brain, and watches it burn, he realizes that perhaps this theory needs some tinkering, or that life might be more complicated that he first imagined on his strange road-trip out to California and back.

Burden then finds out that, several weeks later, Adam and Anne are visited at Adam's apartment in Baton Rouge by a man named Coffee, who, working for Gummy Larson, tries to convince Adam to work on Willie to throw the free hospital building contract to Larson's construction company. Adam is horrified by this instance of attempted bribery, and punches Coffee, kicking him out of his house. Anne calls Burden and asks for him to come over and talk to Adam, who is nearly hysterical after the altercation.

Adam's obsession with moral purity takes Willie's obsession with the hospital to a new level. Adam so believes that he must do good on this earth that he stops caring about those around him, most notably his sister, in an effort to devote all his time to helping the downtrodden and less fortunate. Adam does not realize the irony of hurting his family to help those he does not even know.

Burden attempts to calm Adam down, but to no avail. He leaves the apartment and talks to Anne, who insists that Adam wants to prosecute Coffee and Larson for attempted bribery of a public official (since Adam is now one, in his capacity as head of the free hospital). But Adam warns Anne that, if this happens, Adam will be asked to testify, and it will come out in court, when the defense interrogates Adam, that Anne is having an affair with Willie. At this insinuation, Anne goes pale and recognizes that Burden is right—there can be no trial.

Anne knows that, having begun an affair with Willie, she has opened herself up to a great deal of public notoriety and possible defamation of character. Anne has lived her life largely out of the spotlight of publicity, even though her father was governor of the state; but to carry on an affair with the state's biggest political figure has a great deal of risks, and this is one of them.

Jack asks Anne why she began sleeping with Willie, and she says that she loves him, that she will do anything for him, and that he cannot get a divorce yet because it would be difficult for his political career. But Anne seems convinced that, in the not-too-distant future, she and Willie will be together.

Anne says much the same thing that Sadie said to Jack long ago regarding Willie. What is less clear is whether Anne and Willie might actually have eloped—since Willie died before the affair could be made public.

Burden does eventually manage to convince Adam not to pursue charges against Coffee, on Willie's urging—no one wants Adam to find out that his sister is having an affair with Willie, and Willie is convinced that only Sugar-Boy, Burden, and Sadie know about the affair—Willie trusts these three, and does not anticipate any problems caused by his current mistress, Anne, just as no political problems have been caused by his other mistresses.

Sugar-Boy is an intriguing character in the novel—one who sees and hears all, but one whose trust Willie never doubts even for a moment throughout the entirety of the novel. In fact, even Jack, who is loyal to Willie to a fault, argues with Willie from time to time. But Sugar-Boy never asks questions—he merely drives the Boss, and very fast.

The next large political problem that arises, though, has nothing to do with Anne, but rather to do with Tom, now in his second year as a student at LSU. Burden and Willie find out that Tom has gotten a girl named Sibyl Frey pregnant, and that her father, Mr. Frey, is furious at Tom and Willie. MacMurfee, who has maintained his political opposition to Willie over the course of his Governorship, gets in touch with Frey, after hearing of this news, and together, MacMurfee and Frey attempt to blackmail Willie, saying that they will make news of Sibyl's child "disappear" if Willie promises not to run for Senate, and to support MacMurfee for Senate instead.

Another mistake of Tom's, and this time the consequences for Willie will be dire. Tom seems poised almost to ruin his father's political fortunes through his sheer carelessness. What is less clear, in this section, is the toll this pregnancy has on Sibyl, who is viewed primarily as a "fallen woman" in a culture that blames women more than men for premarital sexual relations. Tom, for his part, is mostly accused of "tomcatting around," a kind of boys-will-be-boys justification.

But the Boss feels he has this Senate post wrapped up, and he's not about to cede it to MacMurfee. The Boss also has heard that Tom might not be the only boy Sibyl has been sleeping with, which means that he might have some leverage to indicate that Tom is not in fact the biological father of the child. In the meantime, Burden meets with Lucy Stark, whom he feels, intuitively, needs his help at this difficult moment in the family (Lucy and Willie are still married, though Lucy has now lived apart from Willie for several years).

The first of Jack's two meetings with Lucy. Lucy for her part greatly appreciates Jack's coming to see her, since she knows that Jack is loyal to Willie, but she also knows that Jack realizes the difficult marital strain Willie has put to Lucy. Jack feels that Lucy is in many ways the core of the Stark family, and that, without her, Tom might be in even worse shape than he is now.

Jack breaks the news of Tom's situation to Lucy, in the small clapboard house where Lucy is living, outside Baton Rouge—Lucy has been informed of some of it already, but Jack adds that it is not clear whether Tom is the biological father. Lucy vows that, if the child is Jack's, she will love it as any grandmother should, and she thanks Jack for his kindness in agreeing to meet with her and to talk about Tom's predicament.

Lucy will eventually make good on this promise. She does not know whether the child is even actually biologically Jack's, but this doesn't matter: she views the child as the innocent party in all this, and she is true to her word, caring for the boy, named Willie, as the novel draws to a close.

But Willie, in the meantime, has figured out a strategy for dealing with MacMurfee and Frey—he realizes that Jack still has dirt on Irwin, dirt that they have till now waited to reveal—but since MacMurfee owes Irwin a great deal, if Irwin were to be forced to ask MacMurfee to withdraw his Senate bid, Willie and Tom might still escape bad press. Thus Willie dispatches Jack to go back to Burden's Landing to talk to Irwin, and to blackmail him into convincing MacMurfee to do just this.

A complicated maneuver, but one that proves the Boss's political acumen, and also his inability to back down, even when cornered. Another politician might have given up hope at this point and handed the free hospital bid to Gummy and Duffy, but Willie is convinced of his political omnipotence and hopes to get out of this situation without compromising his pet project.

Burden travels to Burden's Landing and stays the night at his mother's house, where she urges him not to press Irwin about political business, as he is not feeling well and has become more enfeebled, now, in his old age. But Jack says the business he has with Irwin can't wait, and he walks over to Irwin's house to speak with him.

Regardless of what happens in his life, and regardless of how he feels about his mother, Jack always knows he has a place in her house in Burden's Landing—and Jack himself knows he cannot escape his ties to that place, and to the families who live there.

Irwin welcomes Jack inside and believes that Jack has come to pay him a friendly visit—but quickly Jack begins talking about MacMurfee, and Irwin realizes that Jack has come to "play ball." Irwin says that he has heard rumors about MacMurfee's aspirations for the Senate, and about also about Tom's "involvement" with Sibyl—but Irwin says he cannot use his influence at the moment to convince MacMurfee not to run. Jack asks Irwin to reconsider this position (without making reference to Littlepaugh), but Irwin says his mind is made up—he won't ask anything of MacMurfee.

Although Irwin wants to believe that Jack would only come to him with good news, or with a desire to sit and talk of the old times, Irwin is too accomplished a political hand to think this is actually the case. Instead, Irwin is prepared to play ball and not to be intimidated, just as he was not intimidated by Willie early in the novel, when Jack and Willie came to visit in the dead of night.

Jack then realizes that he has to use his blackmail in order to get Irwin to pressure MacMurfee. He brings up Littlepaugh, and at first Irwin seems genuinely not to remember the man's name, but soon he recognizes that Jack is going to blackmail him based on the Littlepaugh affair, and it all comes sweeping back to Irwin—he remembers his lone illegal activity in his life. But Irwin seems at peace with his behavior—and says that these charges will not "stick" in a court of law. Irwin says he will not change his position with regard to MacMurfee, and that he will not be intimidated by Jack or by Willie.

Irwin's crime is so far in the past that he has trouble even remembering it—another example of the flexibility of the human memory, its ability simply to pass over information that does not fit with one's prevailing opinion of one's self. Irwin then goes into full political attack mode, arguing that Jack's research could not sway a jury in a court of law—although the evidence seems fairly ironclad to Jack.

Before Jack leaves, he asks Irwin to think it over overnight—but Irwin says, again, that his mind is made up, that Jack and Willie can't pressure him, and that he hopes to see Jack soon under friendly terms. Irwin seems strangely calm and at peace, and as Jack leaves, he says to himself that he intends to beg Irwin, the next day, to consider his reputation and do what Willie asks.

Jack's continual asking of Irwin to "think over" his proposal (which is not much of a proposal at all, since it is blackmail) seems to point to the idea that Jack senses this is the end of the line for the two—a Rubicon that, once Jack crosses it, means their friendship is forever changed.

Jack goes to bed and wakes up the next morning to his mother's screams—she claims that Jack's "father" has killed himself, and Jack is confused—he realizes, after several minutes, that Mrs. Burden is referring to Irwin, who has shot himself through the heart with a .38 in the night. Mrs. Burden believes that Jack has somehow pressured his "father" via blackmail into killing himself—in this she has intuited the affair more or less correctly—but Jack realizes, after Mrs. Burden collapses in hysterics and a doctor is called in, that his mother is right—Irwin is his biological father—his mother had been having an affair with Irwin at the time of Jack's conception and birth.

An enormous revelation in the novel—perhaps the novel's biggest, Yet Jack realizes that Irwin always wanted to mentor Jack, and always felt at least partially responsible for Jack's professional growth and maturation into a man. What is less clear is how Jack feels about all this—whether he is relieved to know that the Scholarly Attorney is not his father, and that this hero of Burden's Landing is—but now is gone, dead by his own hand.

Jack is, for the moment, shocked at this, but he soon realizes that this explains a good deal about his life's history—that Irwin wanted to be his mentor from a young age, that Jack's father went insane and abandoned the family, choosing instead to live in squalor in Baton Rouge. Jack attends the Judge's funeral—his suicide has been chalked up, publically, to his ailing health, and his desire not to live in a weakened state—and he realizes, with a good deal of psychic and philosophical emptiness, that his work for Willie truly has wrought a kind of violence in his life he could have never predicted. The chapter ends.

The first of several funerals that will crop up in quick succession in the remainder of the text. Although Jack is in some sense the hero of the novel, and its narrator, Willie is the tragic hero, and he will die. And as in all tragedies, a series of deaths tend to surround the death of that tragic hero—Irwin, Tom, and Adam, all of whom die, whether accidentally or on purpose, of "unnatural" causes.

CHAPTER 9

Burden recounts just how strange the events of the past week have been—he finds that he is emotionally affected by Irwin's death and by the news that Irwin was his biological father, but he knows, also, that he has a job to do for Willie, and before long he reports back to the Boss that the Boss will now need to find a new angle in order to pressure MacMurfee into giving up his Senate bid. After thinking on it for about a week, Willie decides that he knows what to do—he will in fact, against his best wishes, give the building contract for the free hospital, for six million dollars, to Gummy Larson, who can use political leverage to get MacMurfee to withdraw his Senate bid in favor of Willie's. This quid pro quo violates Willie's desire that the free hospital be free of scandal and bribery, but it allows Willie to retain his shot at the Senate.

Willie is forced into a position he never wished to contemplate. He seems less concerned with the idea that the Judge killed himself, perhaps considering this the cost of playing hardball and doing business in the dirty game of politics. But Jack is too dazed to know what to do, and asks for a respite from the sorts of political machinations have throttled the Stark administration. As will be seen soon, however, Willie is unable to let his dream go without a fight, and when he loses the hope he has placed in his son, he is more willing to go back on his promise and save his other "baby," the hospital.

Meanwhile, after Irwin's death, Jack has asked that his portfolio of assignments for Willie be limited to issues of policy, rather than of "politicking" or influence-trading. Willie places Jack in charge of developing a tax bill that will redistribute income in the state and help the poor—Jack spends weeks in the library researching how the bill might work, and one day, after a particularly long stint of research, he heads to the governor's mansion to present his recommendations to Willie. But Jack finds that Gummy Larson and Tiny Duffy are already there—and Willie appears drunk and upset, while Duffy and Gummy are acting triumphant.

Jack goes back to his bread-and-butter, which is the act of researching, of placing together careful policy plans and avoiding the kind of dangerous human contact that hurts people's feeling and, in the case of the judge, ruins lives. Jack understands, too, that by continuing to work for Willie, he will never be very far from influence peddling and all the other dirty sides of politics—the parts that Anne and Adam didn't want anything to do with, back in the day.

Jack realizes that Duffy and Gummy have achieved what they've always wanted—the lucrative contract to the free hospital, which Willie considered his untarnished political dream—a project that came not through bribery or influence-trading but through Willie's earnest desire to help the people. Willie drunkenly raves in front of Burden, Duffy, and Gummy, all of whom are mostly silent—Willie then orders Duffy and Gummy away, saying he'll do business with them, but he won't respect them or like them. Jack tries to comfort Willie, but Willie vows to "crush" his political opponents using all the powers of his office.

Willie's drunkenness in this scene is a truly pathetic spectacle, in the Greek sense of pathos, or the total identification on the part of the reader or audience with the plight of the afflicted. Willie has placed his hopes and dreams into the hospital, yet his desire of total political control of Louisiana, and his wish to eliminate the problems created by his son, forces him to go back on one of the few principles that is absolutely important to him.

But another terrible event occurs which throws off Jack's and Willie's plans, and which Jack acknowledges to be the event that bring about, through its consequences and ramifications, Willie's downfall. At a football game where Tom has been put in—the hopes of the LSU squad lie firmly on Tom's shoulders—Tom takes an especially hard hit and is knocked out cold. When Tom does not get up, the stadium realizes he has been seriously hurt, and he is carted off to the locker room. Jack, who has been sitting with Willie, worries about Tom's condition, as does Willie himself, but Willie also wants to present an image of confidence, and so waits until the end of the game to meet Tom at the hospital where Adam works (not the free hospital but the "old" hospital).

One of the last of the great dramatic events in the novel, with Willie's murder being the final. Tom's violent demise, which then takes place slowly over the course of many weeks in the hospital, is perhaps a mythic encapsulation of the way he lived his life—quickly, without very much concern for those around him, and with essentially a kind of reckless abandon. Willie's desire to wait for part of the game to check on his son indicates his desire simply to make the problem go away—but this is a problem he cannot fix.

Lucy joins Willie at the hospital—she has been living apart from Willie, still, but recognizes that this moment that the family ought to be together, and she is desperately worried about Tom's condition. Adam, who has been attending to Tom himself, comes out to the waiting room to report to Willie, Lucy, and Jack that Tom's spinal cord has been partially crushed, meaning there is a very real chance he might not even survive his accident—and that, if he does, he will be paralyzed for life from the next down. Willie is devastated by this news, and Lucy, too. Willie begins placing all his hope in a Dr. Burnham, being flown in from the east coast, a respected neurosurgeon who is Tom's best chance at recovery, via emergency surgery.

Tom, as it turns out, has been paralyzed in brutal fashion, and Willie now desires that the doctors move with a kind of swiftness and assuredness Willie himself practices when making decisions in the capitol. The problem, of course, is that medicine cannot be solved by bribery or by back-room dealing—if Tom is to survive, it will be because of luck and the surgeon's skill. And these are the best surgeons in the region, meaning that, for Tom, his good luck simply ran out—his charmed lifestyle could not last forever, considering his reckless behavior and courting of danger.

While Tom is undergoing this emergency procedure, Jack talks with Sadie in the hospital—who is largely unmoved by Tom's state, since she feels that Tom was placing himself in harms way by playing such a dangerous sport—and with Anne on the phone. Anne is truly devastated by Tom's condition, not the least because she is worried about how this news will affect Willie. Jack, Willie, and Lucy wait in the waiting room until Drs. Burnham and Stanton emerge, with the news that there was nothing that could be done in emergency surgery—Tom's life has been spared, for now, although his condition is still perilous, but the spinal cord was crushed and could not be repaired, and he will be paralyzed.

Anne cares a great deal for Willie, and seems to recognize, here, that Willie will never be the same again after this colossal injury to Tom. But Anne notably does not try to get in touch with Willie, understanding that this is a moment for Willie to be with Lucy—instead, Anne resorts to the only person she knows to talk to, Jack, who, despite his anger at Anne's and Willie's affair, nevertheless continues to be Anne's friend and confidant.

Willie is led away by Lucy, who tells him he needs to rest, having been awake for more than 24 hours. The next Monday, in the office, Willie is bombarded with flowers and notes of sympathy from politicians and big-wigs from around the state, but he is inconsolable over Tom—whom he essentially considers to have died, despite Tom's lingering state between life and death. Now that Willie seems freed from all concern, since he has lost the great hope he had in his son's future, he calls Tiny Duffy in and tells him that he will no longer allow the free hospital to do business with Gummy Larson—Willie is rescinding his deal with Gummy and Duffy. Duffy sputters that Willie can't take this back, but Willie says he does not care, and sends Duffy away.

Willie no longer feels he has anything to live for, nor anything to lose, and so he goes back on his promise to Duffy and Gummy. If he were to lose the hospital, too, to a back-room deal, he would have effectively given up all his hopes and dreams in the course of one week—and that is too much even for the hardened political warrior Willie to bear. Willie still has some idealism in him. Willie vows to carry on without Gummy and Duffy, even if it ruins his political career—and as will be seen, it ruins more than that.

The next day, Jack receives a frantic call from Anne, who says that Adam visited her the night before and called her a series of terrible names, implying that she was a slut and a whore for carrying on a relationship with Willie—and that this relationship is the reason Adam was chosen to run the hospital. Adam seemed incensed, almost crazed, at the idea that Anne's "sordidness" caused him to be roped into working for a politician he never liked and supported. Anne asks Jack to find Adam and to talk sense into him, and Jack begins going from bar to bar in the city, asking after Adam, attempting to snag him and calm him down.

Jack once again does Anne a favor, because he cares for her and cares for his friend. Jack also seems to recognize the severity of Adam's anti-social disorder—he has essentially become deranged, having heard that Willie and Anne are having an affair, because he feels, now, that Willie has tainted his family forever, has ruined the possibility that the Stantons emerge from Louisiana politics without the scent of "fallenness" and corruption.

Jack is unable to find Adam, however, and returns to the capitol to meet with Willie and determine what the Governor will do, now that the free hospital will no longer be handled by Gummy and Duffy. Jack presumes that there will be political fallout from Willie's decision to eschew the deal with these political rivals, and so attempts to figure out a plan with Willie from how to manage this possible crisis in government. Jack finds Willie in the Capitol and walks upstairs with him—Willie says he wants to talk to Jack.

If Jack had been able to intercept Adam somewhere in Baton Rouge, perhaps Adam would have never shot Willie and shot himself, and perhaps the whole matter of Willie and Anne, of Jack and Adam, could have been sorted out without violence. But such is the nature of drama and tragedy—here Penn Warren seems to state that violence is inevitable, that it can only be pushed back, never thwarted entirely.

But in the hallway, as Jack turns away for a moment and turns back, he sees Adam, looking haggard and dirty, talking to Willie. Before Jack can realize what is happening, Adam shoots Willie several times in the chest—and then Adam is shot by Sugar Boy. Jack, stunned, runs with Sugar Boy towards the bodies of Willie and Adam—Adam, having been shot in the head, is dead, but Willie seems to be clinging to life, although he has been seriously wounded by Adam's shots.

The climactic scene of the novel. Although it seems to play out in slow motion, the entire episode could not have taken more than a few seconds, yet right afterward, looking down at the Boss, Jack realizes that the life he knew is over, that Adam is dead, the Boss is dying, and the world he had, of life in the Landing and life in the Capitol, is shattered.

Jack then reports that Willie was taken to the hospital, the same one in which Tom also lies—he is tended to by another surgeon named Simmons, who manages to remove the slugs from Willie's chest, but after several days of recovery, Willie takes a turn for the worse, and his wounds become infected. Jack goes in to speak with Willie, who is severely weakened by the gunshot trauma. Willie, clearly very upset, tells Jack that he never meant to harm Adam, and that he "never did anything to him." Willie says that things could have been different, implying that, if Tom hadn't been injured, none of this might have taken place—he tells Jack that Jack "has to believe" things could have been better if Willie were to live. Jack says he'll "see the Boss around soon," and leaves the room after sitting with him for a moment. The next morning, Willie dies in his hospital bed, of his wounds.

Willie's death, like Tom's eventual death, does not take place in a single moment, the moment of impact, but is rather drawn out over an excruciating series of days. This makes it even more difficult for Jack to bear the thought of Willie's suffering, and Willie, for his part, wishes to make some sense of the assassination—why Adam needed to do it. As before, Willie does not admit to himself and to Jack that it is because of Anne, and her "honor," that the shooting took place—and Jack has a hard time dealing with the raw emotions of the moment, so he says very little to the Boss.

Jack ends the chapter by saying the Boss's funeral was later that week, and was attended by an enormous part of the population of the state—Jack contrasts the funeral the very small, private affair held for Adam in Burden's Landing. He notes that, at the Boss's interment, there were so many "regular citizens" present they were toppling tombstones, and had to be removed only through the encouragement of police.

Much like Huey Long's assassination and funeral in Louisiana in the 1930s, the Boss's funeral is an occasion for nearly all the state to mourn one of its great leaders, and to pay respects to a man who always wished, at least publically, to put their interests first.

CHAPTER 10

Jack returns to Burden's Landing, and to his mother's house—she is on vacation with Theodore, and so Jack has the house to himself. He begins thinking, after the commotion regarding Willie's murder has died down somewhat, who could have been responsible for informing Adam of Anne's affair with Willie. Jack senses that this information was perhaps deliberately relayed to Adam, in order to incite him to confront Willie.

Just as Jack figured out, before that Anne must have heard about Willie's offer to Adam from someone—and that turned out to be Willie—Jack intuits here that someone with a vested interest might have tipped Adam off in order to have Adam "punish" the Boss. Jack sets out to find who this informant might be.

Jack tracks down Sadie Burke, who has checked into a sanatorium for her nerves in the wake of Willie's death—she has nearly had a mental breakdown. Jack goes to the sanatorium to ask if Sadie has any knowledge of who the person was who called Adam and told him of Willie's and Anne's affair. After some moments of anger—Sadie seems intensely annoyed at Jack's question—she admits that Duffy was the one who called Adam, and, further flummoxing Jack, that she, Sadie, was the one who told Duffy to call. Jack is flabbergasted, and in his dismay can only repeat—you killed them, you killed Willie and Adam. Sadie admits to moral responsibility for this act, saying that she has received her punishment in some sense now, in her partial mental breakdown. She says that she knew she would have to tell someone that she is responsible, in part, for inciting the shooting.

Sadie Burke thus plays into the trope of the "scorned woman," which dates back in the English literary tradition hundreds of years. Because she could not "have" the Boss, she did not want for anyone to have him—and she knew, too, that by informing Duffy, who also had an interest in getting rid of the Boss (because he no longer supported the Larson bid for the hospital), she could ruin the Boss's career and make herself feel better after having exacted revenge on him. But Sadie's existence, now, in the asylum indicates that she has gone too far, and has overestimated her own desire for revenge against Willie.

Sadie tells Jack that she wanted Willie killed, or at least punished, because she knew that Willie loved Anne and was prepared to run way with her. Duffy had his own reasons for wanting Willie out of office—because Duffy was Lt. Governor, he would ascend to the position of Governor after Willie's death, and would be able to control the awarding of contracts for the hospital—thus enriching himself via his business dealings with Gummy Larson. And because Adam would have committed the shooting, it would be very difficult to trace the impetus for the shooting back to Sadie and Duffy. It was a "perfect" crime.

The elegance of this "solution" to Sadie's jealousy and to Duffy's desire for increased political power is so striking, Jack almost seems to marvel at it, until he realizes that it also resulted in the death of his boss. Such is the nature of dirty politics and the trading of influence—because the Boss acted as though he was invincible, this only incited other to try to bring him down, and eventually he was murdered on the urging of those he thought were closest to him.

Jack meets with Sadie, again, at the sanatorium, and she provides a signed affidavit of her conversation with Duffy and his intention to incite Adam to confront Willie. But in a later letter to Jack, sent by Sadie after the visit, she tells Jack that Jack ought to let the issue drop—he has no legal recourse against Duffy (Duffy merely informed Adam of an affair—it was Adam who committed the crime, and Adam is dead); and, politically, all Jack could do would be prevent Duffy from getting re-elected at the end of his emergency gubernatorial term. Sadie believes this is simply not worth the trouble of "pinning" Duffy for the crime.

Only adding to the crime's elegance is the fact that nothing can be traced back to Duffy or to Sadie—and even if it were, one could only show that they had told Adam about an affair, which is perhaps rude but not a crime. Adam is the one who fired the shots, and Adam is the one a court would slap with full responsibly for the killing. Sadie and Duffy are protected by the law, if not by their consciences.

Burden now begins wrapping up the narrative of his and Willie's lives—he realizes that Sadie is right, that it is not worth publicizing the true nature of Willie demise, and of those who informed on him to bring about that death, since Duffy will probably be buffeted by Louisiana's political winds anyway, and Sadie is a shell of her former self, wracked already by guilt over what she has incited. Jack sees Sugar-Boy, Willie's old driver, around the Capitol's library one day, and nearly tells Sugar-Boy who truly is responsible for Willie's death—hoping Sugar-Boy will take out revenge on Duffy—but Jack decides, at the last second, not to do so, and lets Sugar-Boy walk away. Thus Jack essentially lays to bed any possibility of pursuing vengeance against Duffy.

If Jack were to continue this revenge cycle, as he probably figures, he is not sure where it would end. Sugar-Boy is so loyal to Jack and to Willie that he might go about trying to kill those responsible, but what would be the value in making that happen—it would not bring back Willie or Adam, it would not solve any problems for Jack, it would not make life easier or restore the past that Jack has so desperately longed for throughout the novel. Instead, Jack chooses to stop the violence here, and to walk away from politics altogether.

Jack also learns, via the newspaper, that Tom Stark has died of the injuries he sustained during his injury on the football field—Jack goes to visit Lucy Stark at her farm-home, where she lives with her sister, and finds there the child that Lucy believes Tom fathered with Sibyl. Lucy understands that it is not definitive Tom was the father of the child, but Lucy doesn't care—she wishes to raise the boy as her own, and she believes it is the right thing to do for the memory of Tom as well as Willie. Lucy tells Jack that she named the child Willie because Willie Stark "was a great man," even though she had her differences, great and small, with her husband. Jack acknowledges that Willie was a great man, to Lucy, before leaving the farmhouse.

A book-end to the previous scene in which Jack has visited Lucy—here, he sees that the child has been born, and that Lucy, despite everything that has happened in the novel, is still loyal to her husband, whom she believes to have effected great change in the state, even if that change came at a very high cost. Tom's death marks the end, too, of the male line of the Stark family—except for young Willie, who might be understood to continue this line should he ever choose to go into politics in the future—with the name of Willie Stark.

Jack decides to return to Burden's Landing, leaving behind Baton Rouge for a time. He has inherited Irwin's property—Irwin left most of his estate to Jack after his death—and because Jack also stands to inherit his mother's considerable holdings after her death, he is more or less established in Burden's Landing for life, and need not work again. When he arrives at his mother's house, he finds out that his mother is leaving Theodore, whom she says she could not love anymore—she says to Jack, cryptically, that she believed Jack would understand that she could no longer live with Theodore. In a small surprise, however, Jack's mother says she is going on an extended trip to Reno, and that she is allowing Theodore to take over the Burden house, instead of Jack, since Theodore loves living there, and Mrs. Burden feels guilty for leaving him behind and divorcing him without explanation. Jack is somewhat confused but chalks this up to his mother's erratic behavior—he intends to live in the Irwin house anyway.

Jack's mother, too has decided to make a change, and Jack seems to understand implicitly why, even if he begins to feel for Theodore at this point in the novel. Just as Jack has been somewhat passive, at various points in his life, as regards major life decisions, so too has Theodore essentially been a screen on which Mrs. Burden could project her desires. Now that she is leaving him, he has only the old Burden house to live in—Jack's mother does not need those memories any more, and she flees to a place where she is able to start her life afresh. Jack for his part seems now to be the more fully-grown and mature adult, the one who is entrusted with preserving the family legacy in the Landing.

The narration then skips ahead, from 1939 into an undetermined future. Jack reveals that he has reconciled with Anne, who has also moved back to the Landing—they have begun a courtship again, and have married, after Anne's urging that Jack abandon his bitterness and attempt to reconstruct a life for himself, a life he can enjoy and be proud of. Anne also asks Jack to take in the old man, the Scholarly Attorney, Jack always considered his father, and the three of them live together in the Irwin house in the Landing, since it appears Jack's mother has moved permanently to Reno, leaving Louisiana behind.

Here, though it is only glanced at quickly, Burden reveals that he and Anne did end up together, though hardly under romantic circumstances, and instead in a situation that might best be described as the only one left—that they might live with the Attorney in Irwin's house, surrounded by the ghosts of those they have known and loved. This is the place Jack chooses for the finishing of his dissertation—a tragic and somewhat deflating end.

Jack's plan for his life, then, is as follows: he is to use the Irwin money, which he attempted to give to Lily Littlepaugh, only to find out she is dead—to write his book on Cass Mastern, which he fully intends to finish. At that point, he and Anne will sell the Irwin property and move away from the Landing and its painful memories. Anne has re-committed herself to the life of running the Children's Home in Baton Rouge, and Jack believes that, only by making financial and spiritual amends in the Landing—and by taking in the Scholarly Attorney and caring for him—can be begin a new life of which he is proud. Jack ends the novel understanding that his cannot avoid his history, the story of his and Willie's life, but he can only hope to make the rest of his life a story worth living and telling.

But perhaps this is a part of the novel, too, and a part of Jack's plan—the idea that the past cannot be avoided, it cannot be changed, and if it is hard to embrace, then one must go about writing a new past, founding a new family with those one has near. This is what gives Jack the energy to forgive Anne, and she to forgive Jack—this is what brings the Attorney back to live with them—and this finally is what causes Jack to want to write his book on Cass, to finish his account of Willie and his own life, then to sell the Irwin estate and begin anew somewhere else.

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