# The Blue Hotel

## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF STEPHEN CRANE

Stephen Crane was born in Newark, New Jersey in 1871, the ninth child of Methodist parents. He began writing as early as age four, and by sixteen had published a number of articles. Despite his proficiency as an author, Crane had no interest in attending college; after a brief stint at Syracuse University, during which he was more active in his fraternity than in the classroom, he left school to pursue a career as a journalist. Crane published his first novel, *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*, in 1893. Only two years later, in 1895, Crane received national attention for his novel *The Red Badge of Courage*, which critics admired for its highly realistic portrayal of the American Civil War, despite the fact that Crane had never seen battle. After publishing *The Red Badge of Courage*, Crane accepted an assignment as a war correspondent in Cuba. On his passage to the island, his boat sank, and he was left for more than twenty-four hours floating in a dinghy in the open ocean. This incident inspired one of his most well-known stories, "The Open Boat." After the accident, Crane continued his work as a war correspondent with his partner, Cora Taylor. During this period, he and Taylor became friends with notable writers including H.G. Wells and Joseph Conrad. Despite his famous acquaintances, however, Crane suffered from health problems and financial strain for most of his adult life. He died of tuberculosis in a sanitorium in Germany in 1900 at only twenty-eight years old.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Crane thought and wrote often about war and death, and the sudden violence between characters in "The Blue Hotel" is likely influenced by his work as a war correspondent. Crane witnessed battles in both the Greco-Turkish War of 1897 (also known as the Thirty Days War) and the Spanish-American War, as well as the U.S. Marines' seizure of Guantanamo Bay. Crane also carried messages to commanders during the war and was later recognized for his material aid of the war effort. War, violence, isolation, and exclusion play a pivotal role in much of Crane's fiction, as they did in his journalistic coverage of these conflicts. The elements of violence and distrust in "The Blue Hotel" were also likely influenced by similar themes in Western literature of the time. Crane wrote about the American West when Western literature was just beginning to become popular on an international level. The dime novels that are referenced in "The Blue Hotel" became popular around the 1860s, about thirty-five years before Crane wrote his short story. In the 1890s, Wyoming, Utah, and Montana became states and crime tore through the new West. Dime novels primarily featured outlaws, settlers, mountain men, and bounty hunters, and were often based on real stories of celebrity criminals like Billy the Kid and Wild Bill Hickok. Though in Crane's time Westerns were more common in pulp magazines, some authors started writing full-length stories set in the Wild West around the time Crane wrote "The Blue Hotel." The most popular of these was Owen Wister's *The Virginian*, which was published only two years after Crane's death. Twenty years later, early Western films would give the Western genre worldwide attention.

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Crane's works, particularly his novels and short fiction, typically fall under the categories of American Realism and Naturalism. Because Crane was a journalist, he described much of his writing as a hybrid of fiction and journalistic observation. His first novel, *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* and his two best known collections of short stories, *The Open Boat and Other Stories* and *The Monster and Other Stories*, all deal with themes of fear, the conflict between idealism and reality, and social isolation or exclusion. Other acclaimed American Realists, whose work is written in a style similar to Crane's, include Jack London, John Steinbeck, and Edith Wharton. Crane's work is also often compared to famous Naturalist Theodore Dreiser, whose novels such as *Sister Carrie* and *An American Tragedy* feature characters who lack agency and a strong moral code, much like those in "The Blue Hotel." Some similar works in the Naturalist cannon include Jack London's *Call of the Wild* and his short story "The Law of Life," Ambrose Bierce's "An Occurence at Owl Creek Bridge," and the novels *The Octopus* and *McTeague* by Frank Norris.

### KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** "The Blue Hotel"
- **When Written:** 1898
- **Where Written:** Sussex, U.K.
- **When Published:** 1898
- **Literary Period:** Realism/Naturalism
- **Genre:** Short story, Realistic fiction, Naturalism
- **Setting:** Romper, Nebraska, around 1900
- **Climax:** The Gambler stabs and kills the Swede in the town saloon
- **Antagonist:** Though part of Crane's aim is to question the idea of a traditional antagonist as the sole guilty party in a story, the Swede is the most outwardly antagonistic character, and is targeted by the other characters as the villain.

- **Point of View:** Third person omniscient

### EXTRA CREDIT

**Romantic Scandal** Crane was known for his eccentric lifestyle and romantic endeavors, which came to a head during the trial of Dora Clark. Clark was tried for solicitation and prostitution, and Crane acted a character witness to support her innocence. Crane was openly ridiculed by the media for his association with this "woman in scarlet."

**Commodore Shipwreck** One of Crane's most frequently referenced stories, "The Open Boat," was written after he was shipwrecked during his passage on the SS *Commodore* on his way to an assignment in Havana, Cuba. After the ship sank, Crane and three other men fled in a dinghy and were stuck off the coast of Florida for a day and a half before trying to land at Daytona Beach. The dinghy flipped, and the men had to swim to shore; one man died in the struggle to swim against the current.

## PLOT SUMMARY

A **train** passes through Fort Romper, Nebraska, a small settlement on the edge of the lawless American West. The view through the train window is of the Palace Hotel, whose **blue** paint contrasts starkly with the lifeless green and brown landscape. Pat Scully, the hotel proprietor, waits in the cold to persuade a few unclaimed passengers to stay at his establishment for the evening. After brief introductions, the Cowboy, the Swede, and the Easterner follow Scully back to the hotel.

Inside the hotel, Scully urges his son Johnnie, who is playing **cards** with the old farmer, to bring the guests' suitcases upstairs. The men engage in small talk over dinner, during which each seems to be sizing the other up. The Swede is quiet and hesitant, while the Cowboy and the Easterner seem agreeable, if a bit wary. At dinner, the Swede makes a mocking, seemingly jovial comment about the dangers of the traveling in the West, which the others don't know how to interpret.

After dinner, Scully announces **a blizzard**. Johnnie, who drove away the old farmer with his hot-headedness, asks the Cowboy, the Swede, and the Easterner to join him in a game of cards. They agree, though the Swede is reluctant. The men play an intense game, which the Swede interrupts by suggesting that someone has been murdered in the front room of the hotel. Johnnie immediately becomes defensive, and the Swede tells the other men that he believes he will die in the hotel that night. The other men think the Swede is insane, and the conflict is only interrupted when Scully comes into the room and demands to know what's going on. The Swede becomes overwhelmed and fearful, and insists on leaving. He goes upstairs to pack his bags.

Scully meets the Swede upstairs. The Swede is immediately suspicious of Scully, who tries to have a conversation with him about his other children by showing him photos in the spare room. The two have a drink together, and the Swede suspects that Scully is trying to poison him. Meanwhile, the Cowboy, Johnnie, and the Easterner are downstairs speculating on the Swede's character. The Cowboy reveals that he believes the Swede is actually a Dutchman, based on his accent, and while the Easterner suggests that simple fear is the cause of the Swede's perplexing behavior. The Easterner suspects that dime novels the Swede read about the West have made him believe he is in horrible danger.

Scully and the Swede return downstairs, and the Swede decides to stay in the hotel after all. Scully admits to the men, when the Swede leaves the room, that the Swede is acting strangely, but he believes that the Swede is "okay now." The men continue their card game, which again becomes heated. In the middle of the game, the Swede suddenly accuses Johnnie of cheating. Johnnie finally loses his temper with the Swede, and a brawl starts over the card table.

The conflict escalates, leading the men to a more violent fight outside in the blizzard. Johnnie and the Swede square off, with the Easterner as a fearful and skeptical bystander and Scully and the Cowboy urging Johnnie on. The Swede wins the fight, and makes an arrogant, haughty exit from the hotel with his suitcase. Meanwhile, a crowd of women, consisting of the hotel staff and the hotel proprietess, rush to Johnnie's aid. Johnnie's mother shames Scully for allowing his son to get so badly hurt. The other guests, Scully and Johnnie are relieved that the Swede has left.

The Swede makes his way through town, catching sight of the train in the distance as he walks toward the saloon. Inside, he orders a drink from the barkeep, and demands the attention of the other patrons of the saloon, which includes the notorious Gambler. When the men refuse to drink with the Swede, the men get into a fight–during the brawl, the Gambler pulls out a knife and stabs the Swede, who dies on the floor of the bar.

The story ends sometime later, when the Easterner and the Cowboy meet up after the Swede's murder trial. The Easterner reveals that the Gambler was given a light sentence for the murder, and the Cowboy blames the Swede for his aggressive behavior, suggesting it lead to his early death. The Easterner disagrees, and tells the Cowboy that Johnnie did, in fact, cheat at cards, but that he was too afraid to say anything at the time. The Easterner then says that all the men are equally guilty for the death of the Swede, not only the Gambler who stuck him with a knife.

## CHARACTERS

### MAJOR CHARACTERS

**Pat Scully** – Pat Scully is the proprietor and owner of the Palace Hotel and the father of Johnnie Scully. He has been a resident of Romper, Nebraska for fourteen years, and is an avid and well-respected businessman; he meets his three guests—the Swede, the cowboy, and the Easterner—at the **train** station when they arrive and is described as being "boisterous[ly]" hospitable. Locals believe his business prowess to be reflected in his choice of flashy **blue** paint, which makes the Palace Hotel impossible to ignore. Though Scully is initially warm and welcoming to all his guests, he quickly becomes suspicious of the Swede when the latter begins acting strangely. Scully becomes particularly agitated and impatient when the Swede suggests that it is dangerous to stay at his hotel. Though it seems that Scully is peaceful and kind by nature, near the end of the story he urges his son Johnnie to fight the Swede. It is clear that Scully is confused and uncertain about his role in the violence that ensues when Johnnie's mother shames him for putting his own son at risk.

**The Swede** – The Swede is the most mysterious of all the hotel guests, and little is known about his background. In fact, the other characters speculate on whether he is a Swede at all; the cowboy suggests during a discussion with Scully, the Easterner, and Johnnie that the Swede's accent sounds more like a Dutchman's. The Swede arrives by **train** to Romper with the Easterner and the cowboy, and is described initially as "quick-eyed" and "shaky." Paranoid from the start, the Swede seems to constantly size up the other men. He becomes suddenly accusatory during a game of **cards,** during which he suggests someone has been murdered in the hotel's front room. Later, during a second game, he accuses Johnnie of cheating, causing a fight. The Swede's paranoia extends even to friendly Scully, whom he suspects is trying to poison him when the hotel proprietor offers him a drink of liquor. The Swede's bizarre, often aggressive behavior unsettles the other guests, and only becomes more dramatic as the story goes on. He is eventually thrown out of the hotel after beating Johnnie in a fight during the **blizzard**, and seems to have come to his wits end by the time he reaches the town saloon. There, his paranoia comes to fruition–he is stabbed by the gambler in a scuffle the Swede initiates, and his body is left on the floor of the bar. The Swede is treated as the antagonist for the majority of the story, though Crane reveals at the end that his role as the villain may not be as straight-forward as the other characters, and the reader, would like to believe.

**The Cowboy (Bill)** – Though in moments Scully refers to him as Bill, the cowboy is most often referred to by his moniker throughout the text. The cowboy arrives by **train** to Romper with the Swede and the Easterner. He is on his way to the Dakota state line and appears unassuming until the men take up a game of **cards**, at which point he begins to whack the board enthusiastically every time he lays down his hand. This disturbs the Easterner and the Swede but pleases the competitive Johnnie. The cowboy is relatively easy-going until the men get in a brawl after the Swede accuses Johnnie of cheating at cards; during the big fight outside in **the blizzard**, the cowboy surprises himself by urging Johnnie to murder the Swede. The cowboy, however, is unable to accept his own part in the escalation of violence between the Swede and the other hotel guests. At the end of the story, when the Easterner makes the argument that they are all guilty in part for the death of the Swede, the cowboy asks "Well, I didn't do anything, did I?"

**The Easterner (Mr. Blanc)** – The Easterner, referred to by Scully as Mr. Blanc, is a small, unassuming man. He arrives by **train** with the other hotel guests and is quiet and agreeable for the majority of the story. The Easterner is the one who suggests that the Swede's strange behavior might simply be due to fear, and seems to be a voice of reason throughout the story. During the brawl over the **card** table, for example, he asks quietly whether such violence is necessary over a game of **cards**. At the end of the story, the Easterner admits that his own fear stopped him from ending the conflict before the Swede's death–he knew that Johnnie had, in fact, cheated at cards yet said nothing to interfere with the fight that followed. He makes it clear that he believes that all the men are equally responsible for the death of the Swede, and that the Swede did not necessarily bring his death upon himself. The only character that shows marked growth over the course of the story, the Easterner seems to acknowledge his role as a bystander and admit his own guilt. Because he was arguably the least guilty of all the men, this admittance implicates the cowboy, Scully, and Johnnie as well.

**Johnnie Scully** – Johnnie is the hotel proprietor Scully's son, and an avid **card** player. After he and his friend the old farmer get into an argument about a game of cards, he challenges the Easterner, the cowboy, and the Swede to play instead. When the Swede later suggests someone has been murdered in the hotel, Johnnie comes to the hotel's defense and gets aggressive with the Swede. This begins the feud between the two men, which escalates when the Swede accuses Johnnie of cheating at cards. Johnnie becomes more and more hot-headed, and the Swede more brazen, until the two brawl over the card table, and then again in the **blizzard** outside the hotel. After losing the fight, Johnnie disappears into the back of the hotel to be nursed back to health by his mother–indicating that his hot-headedness is due in part to his immaturity.

**Johnnie's Mother** – Johnnie's mother remains nameless in the text, and only appears once, to scold her husband Scully and take care of her son Johnnie after he loses the fight with the Swede. She is significant nevertheless because she is the first character to question the progression of the conflict between the men–she openly denounces their violence, giving voice to the idea that the men are all guilty for allowing their disagreement to escalate.

**The Barkeeper (Henry)** – Henry, the barkeeper, serves the

Swede alcohol when he arrives in the saloon after leaving the Palace Hotel. When tensions rise between the Swede and the other saloon patrons, Henry is obviously on the side of his customers, including the gambler, but tries to calm everyone nonetheless. After the Gambler stabs the Swede, Henry leaves the Swede's body in the bar to find help "and company," indicating Henry's status as an insider in Romper, unlike the alienated Swede.

**The Gambler** – The gambler is a particularly strange character in the story–described as being duplicitous yet accepted by the other men in town because of his charming, gracious behavior and willingness to adapt to his place in the status quo. He is depicted both as a conman and a family man, and in the eyes of the townsfolk, his care for his family indicates his respectability despite his career as a swindler. The Swede gets angry at the gambler and his companions when they won't agree to drink with him and question the Swede's denunciation of Scully and the Palace Hotel. When the Swede then starts a brawl with the men, the gambler pulls out a knife and stabs the Swede in the gut. The gambler then leaves, asking the barkeeper Henry to send for the police. The Easterner later refers to the gambler as only "the apex of a human movement"–meaning that, while the gambler takes action in killing the Swede, he is in some ways more innocent then the men who drove the Swede to act so rashly in the first place.

### MINOR CHARACTERS

**The Old Farmer** – An acquaintance of Johnnie and Scully, he is introduced while playing **cards** in the hotel with Johnnie when the guests arrive. He gets into a series of arguments with Johnnie over the card game and leaves soon after dinner.

## 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.

### FATE, FREE WILL, AND MORAL RESPONSIBILITY

"The Blue Hotel" tells the story of an ill-fated night at a hotel in Romper, Nebraska, which ends in the death of one of the hotel's guests. Author Stephen Crane narrates a clear but complex set of events that precede the Swede's murder. Early in the story, upon his arrival at the Palace Hotel, the Swede predicts that he will die that night; this fear produces a distinctly irritable, antagonistic sense of paranoia that ruffles those around him and plays a large part in spurring his being stabbed later that evening at a saloon.

Though this appears to be a self-fulfilling prophecy, Crane is ambivalent about whether the Swede's death is truly fated—that is, whether his actions, and those of the men he encounters throughout the evening, were inevitable, or if they all could have made better choices that would have spared the Swede's life. Crane gives evidence for both interpretations of the story and ultimately leaves readers without an answer, suggesting that it's beyond a person's capacity to understand whether outcomes are fated or freely chosen.

Throughout most of the story, Crane steers readers towards a deterministic interpretation of its events (that is, one in which the outcome is destined to happen). He does this primarily by depicting the men's actions as shaped not by free will, but rather by their surroundings and instincts. Many of the character names, for instance, suggest that the men are more products of their backgrounds than they are individuals making conscious choices. The Easterner, the Swede, the farmer, the gambler, and the cowboy are all referred to by their place of origin or their social role, suggesting that each is defined by his environment and can only act in in accordance with the way that environment has shaped him.

Crane further suggests that the men are acting on instinct by frequently characterizing them in animalistic terms. After the Swede begins drinking, for example, his expression becomes a "wolfish glare." This glare accompanies his descent into violence; his tone becomes threatening and menacing and eventually leads to physical conflict with the hotel proprietor's son, Johnnie. In this moment, it seems the Swede can control his aggression no more than could a wolf. Later in the story, when men at the town saloon don't want to drink with the Swede to celebrate his victory in the fight at the Palace Hotel, the Swede's ire and pride lead him to "ruffle out his chest like a rooster." The Swede then "explode[s]" and "snarl[s]," escalating the confrontation with the gambler, who then kills him. By depicting humans as beholden to their animal instincts in key moments that lead to violence, Crane undercuts the sense that they're completely responsible for their choices.

If the story had ended with the Swede's death, then it might seem a straightforward tale of the unavoidable nature of destiny. However, Crane appends a final scene in which the Easterner suggests that the Swede's death was never fated, but rather the result of a series of poor choices—leaving all of the men at the hotel morally responsible for the Swede's murder and the gambler's imprisonment. When the cowboy idly speculates that, had the Swede not accused Johnnie of cheating at cards, he would still be alive, the Easterner takes this possibility—and its moral implications—seriously.

Although he, too, had seen Johnnie cheat, the Easterner didn't say anything in the moment. He later admits, "I refused to stand up and be a man. I let the Swede fight it out alone." The Easterner believes that, since the fight indirectly led to the Swede's death, and because the Easterner could have

prevented the fight by corroborating the Swede's accusation that Johnnie was cheating (thereby making the fight unnecessary), the Easterner bears some moral responsibility for what happened.

Furthermore, since all of the men seemed to be spoiling for a fight throughout the evening, the Easterner believes that they *all* bear responsibility for the death. The gambler—the man who actually killed the Swede—took all the legal blame, but the Easterner does not think this is fair. "Every sin is the result of a collaboration," he says, noting that the gambler was merely "the apex of a human movement"—the final collaborator in a death that could have been prevented had all of these men made different choices.

The Swede dies looking upon a sign above the saloon's till that reads, "This registers the amount of your purchase." Though the Swede has professed a belief in the inescapability of his death that night, and as such implicitly rejected responsibility for his actions, the sign could be interpreted as in keeping with the Easterner's commentary on free will and moral responsibility—that is, an acknowledgement that people's actions determine their fate, since the price they pay is a direct result of their choices. The story ends without taking a position on whether the Easterner is right, however. Instead, the cowboy asks the Easterner indignantly, "Well, I didn't do anything, did I?" This question provides no answers about the validity of fate versus free will, but it does suggest a human aversion to assuming moral responsibility.

## VULNERABILITY AND VIOLENCE

"The Blue Hotel" is set in Nebraska at the end of the nineteenth century, a time when the state represented the edges of the lawless American West. It was dangerous to travel west during this period, and as such the story's main characters, each of whom is traveling alone, often hide their true feelings in order to project a sense of strength upon the strangers they meet. This false bravado, however only leads to a greater sense of mistrust and unease among the hotel proprietor Scully and his guests, leading to conflict and eventually physical violence. The protagonists' need to disguise their fear demonstrates Crane's view that masking vulnerability only creates tension and violence, while openly discussing feelings of fear or uneasiness can build trust and camaraderie.

Throughout the story, Crane establishes that his characters often show one emotion in order to hide another. For example, when the passengers on the train pass through the West, they express "shame, pity, horror, in a laugh" at the sight of Scully's vibrant **blue** hotel against the stark Nebraska landscape, disguising their discomfort with the desolate environment through laughter and thereby avoiding being vulnerable with one another. The Swede, of course, is the character with the strongest tendency to disguise his emotions in the story. For example, at dinner with Scully and the other guests, the Swede says, "with a laugh and a wink," that "some of these Western communities were very dangerous; and after his statement he straightened his legs under the table, tilted his head, and laughed again, loudly." This moment at once evidences the Swede's fear of the West and his desire to disguise that fear behind laughter, projecting a false confidence that makes others confused and uncomfortable.

Likewise, when the Swede, the cowboy, the Easterner, and Johnnie are playing **cards**, the Swede laughingly asserts that someone has been murdered in the room where they sit. Johnnie, his unease already growing alongside the Swede's strange behavior, takes this comment as a threat. He begins speaking to the Swede aggressively, asking, "What in the hell are you talking about?" The Swede's attempt to mask his fear with laughter backfires by making the others so uncomfortable that things escalate into a brawl. Clearly, the Swede's tendency to hide his true emotions makes others mistrust him, a dynamic that easily spills into violence.

Beyond simply condemning the mistrust that false bravado breeds, Crane demonstrates the benefits of being open about fear. While the Swede hides his feelings and alienates himself, the remainder of the characters are more honest with one another, allowing them to bond. The cowboy and the Easterner, for example, are quick to express their uncertainty about the Swede to each other, as well as to their hosts. They speculate on the reasons for his strange behavior, and then bond over the revelation that his behavior stems largely from fear. By coming to this conclusion together, the men reassure each other that the Swede isn't as dangerous as they believe. They are able to comfort each other, and also to build trust through mutual understanding of the strange circumstances they find themselves in.

Similarly, Johnnie makes his discomfort about the Swede clear to the other characters. He tells his father to throw the man out into the snow and states many times that he finds the Swede's abrasive behavior disturbing. Sharing this fear makes the other characters sympathetic to Johnnie, while the Swede's brazen attempts to hide his fear does the opposite. Because of this, when Johnnie is accused of cheating at cards, the men immediately assume it is the Swede who is in the wrong and come to Johnnie's defense. By sharing his vulnerability and being more transparent with the other hotel guests, Johnnie has created a support network for himself—despite the fact that he actually *is* the one in the wrong. The Swede, on the other hand, remains alienated and alone because of his lack of openness about his feelings.

The bond that has formed between the cowboy, the Easterner, Scully and Johnnie is clearest when the Swede finally leaves the hotel, and the men are able to express their thoughts without worrying about how they will be perceived. The cowboy and Scully talk about what they would do to the Swede if they had

the opportunity, and rather than seeming threatening to each other, the men seem to understand each other's feelings. While earlier outbursts might have been interpreted similarly to the Swede's strange behavior, the men have obviously shared enough of their vulnerabilities to feel comfortable being honest about their thoughts on aggression.

Crane draws a clear line between a refusal to express vulnerability and eventual violence. The Swede's false bravado and inability to be honest about his fear with his companions leads the other characters to distrust him and, ultimately, to his violent death in the saloon, while the cowboy, the Easterner, Scully, and Johnnie—who are more open with each other about their fear of the Swede—build trust and eventually defend each other when suspicion escalates to physical violence.

## JUDGMENT AND DECEPTION

The characters in "The Blue Hotel" are all strangers to each other when they arrive on the train, and three of them—the cowboy, the Easterner, and the Swede—are new to the small town of Romper, Nebraska altogether. Repeatedly described as tense and suspicious of their companions, the characters rely primarily on surface appearances to size each other up. By offering little to no backstory for his protagonists, Crane creates an environment of fear and unease, as characters—and the reader—are unsure of who to trust. Such ignorance and shallow judgments, the story ultimately suggests, pave the way for deception.

The cowboy, the Easterner, and the Swede are immediately judgmental and suspicious of one another upon arriving at the Palace Hotel. After washing up, they sit tensely "in the silence of experienced men who tread carefully amid new people," and respond to the local farmer's attempts at small talk with only "short but adequate sentences." For his part, the paranoid Swede does not respond at all, and is instead "making furtive estimates of each man in the room."

The fact that none of the three guests is properly named increases the air of mystery surrounding them and reflects that they are defined in each other's eyes by their outward appearance. That none of the men make much of an effort to share their backstories further suggests their mutual lack of trust and allows for ignorant speculation, and, ultimately, deception.

Indeed, the hotel guests make frequent presumptions and talk behind each other's backs. For example, after the Swede leaves the room, Johnnie says, "'That's the doddangedest Swede I ever see," to which the cowboy "scornfully" replies, "He ein't no Swede." Crane writes, "'Well, what is he then?' cried Johnnie. 'What is he then?'" This moment makes clear that the men need to latch onto something familiar in order to understand this man—that they require some sort of backstory from which they can then extrapolate the Swede's character. Of course, as the cowboy quickly asserts, the Swede is actually Dutch. In their efforts to peg the character of their new acquaintance, the other men have ironically misidentified the only identifier they have. This points to the futility of basing judgment entirely on surface-level perceptions.

The disconnect between shallow appearance and genuine character is particularly evident with the gambler, whom the townsfolk respect despite the fact that he is a violent conman. Crane writes that the gambler "was, in fact, a man so delicate in manner, when among people of fair class, and so judicious in his choice of victims, that in the strictly masculine part of the town's life he had come to be explicitly trusted and admired. People called him a thoroughbred." Crane's tone here is ironic, and it conveys the author's judgment of the people of Romper for trusting such a character based solely on his genteel outward mannerisms while ignoring his violent actions. By demonstrating the flawed logic by which the disreputable and ultimately murderous gambler is accepted by the town, Crane further underscores the danger of ignorant judgment.

By the end of the story, it's clear that such ignorance leads to both misinformation and potentially wrongful alienation of characters. When the Swede eventually accuses Johnnie of cheating at **cards**, for instance, the other characters are quick to jump to the latter's defense; rather than consider the evidence at hand, they simply assume the Swede is in the wrong based on their prior judgments of his paranoid behavior.

The Easterner reveals at the end of the story, however, that it *was* in fact Johnnie, and not the Swede, who was being deceitful; Johnnie really was cheating at cards. While the Swede has been perceived as a villain and Johnnie as relatively innocent for most of the story, Crane makes clear in the end the folly in relying on appearances and blurs the line between trust and deceit. By misleading the reader into trusting certain deceptive characters, Crane demonstrates how easily ignorant judgment can lead to alienation and violence.

In the tale's final moments, even as the Easterner asserts that Johnnie had deceived them all, and that all men are to blame for the Swede's death, the cowboy refuses to believe any of it; instead, he insists on Johnnie's innocence, the Swede's shameful behavior, and that his hands are clean of any wrongdoing. Not only are people quick to make shallow assumptions about those around then, the story thus suggests, but they are also loath to abandon their prejudices even when presented with clear evidence to the contrary.

## SYMBOLS

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

## CARDS

Cards signify both deception and fate in "The **Blue** Hotel." Cards first appear in the story when the Swede, the Cowboy, and the Easterner arrive at the Palace Hotel and see Johnnie and the farmer bickering over a game. Soon after, the guests themselves join in a game, during which the men all seem to be sizing each other up; in this way, the card game becomes a symbol of the elaborate deception that each man is trying to pass over on the others—the Easterner's attempt to feign innocent ignorance, Johnnie's false honesty, and the Swede's boasts at invulnerability are all deceptions that are built, and later crumble, during a game of cards.

Of course, a card game itself consists of both strategy and chance—in theory, all those who play are on equal footing, and a man's fate is partly luck and partly in his own hands. By playing cards, the men are effectively playing with fate. When the Swede, who is convinced that it is his fate to die in the blue hotel, accuses Johnnie of cheating at cards, he is not only accusing Johnnie of deceiving the other guests but also of manipulating fate to give himself the upper hand. The Swede's actions here notably lead to a violent brawl, implicitly beginning to fulfill the prophecy he believes about himself.

Whether this prophecy fulfillment is ultimately of his own doing or out of his hands is left ambiguous by the story, and is probably, like a game of cards, a combination of both fate and agency. Though in some ways the men have a say in the course of events, when **blizzard** winds blow in through the window and scatter the cards from the table, Crane is making a clear point that despite their best attempts, the men cannot control fate. Crane ultimately uses the cards as a metaphor for his idea that fate is both random and the result of actions and behaviors, and this contributes to his philosophy on the guilt he believes each character should carry over the death of the Swede.

## THE TRAIN

The hotel guests arrive by train to Romper, and the story begins by noting the perceptions of more sophisticated Eastern passengers gazing out the window of the train car—who look upon and judge the **blue** hotel. This immediately establishes the passengers' difference from the world of Romper and allows the train to symbolize a link to civilization and rationality.

Early on in the story, there is a threat of the train being held up by the **blizzard**—a delay that signifies both a literal and a figurative separation from society, safety, and the possibility of escape. Though at points Scully talks about the installation of an electric train in the near future, marking Fort Romper as a soon-to-be "met-ro-po-lis," the city's distinct separation from this symbol of civilized life is clear, particularly for the most alienated hotel guest, the Swede. The Swede repeatedly threatens to catch another train and leave Romper when he is feeling particularly threatened by the men in the hotel, indicating his desire to return to a more civilized world.

When the men walk outside toward the scene of the violent brawl between the Swede and Johnnie, the only building in sight is notably the train station, which is described as "low" and "incredibly distant." As the tension, violence, and sense of isolation in the story escalate, the train—and as such, the men's connection to the rules of society—seems to become harder to reach. In many ways, the Swede's belief that he is in a wild, lawless place is most starkly represented by the distance and inaccessibility of the train; the train becomes both the only literal escape for the Swede, and a symbol of what he believes he has left behind when he chooses to stay in Romper.

## BLUE

In "The Blue Hotel," the color blue is symbolic of temptation and lawlessness. The blue hotel, called the Palace but known primarily by its color, stands in stark contrast to the environment surrounding it because of its light blue paint. Foreigners gaze upon the hotel with "shame, pity, [and] horror," yet no **train** traveler can pass by the hotel "without looking at it." These details demonstrate the garishness of the hotel, which those from more urban, "civilized, destinations than Romper see as gaudy yet deeply intriguing. The hotel's eye-catching color suggests it as a place apart from the normal rules and regulations of society, a place where anything may happen. It is no wonder, then, that it is within the walls of the blue hotel that the Swede grows increasingly paranoid about his companions and begins to engage in odd behavior that ultimately spurs the group to violence.

Crane also uses the color blue to describe the **blizzard**. He writes, "Through the windows could be seen the snow turning blue in the shadow of dusk." The increasingly blue landscape, which mirrors the pale blue of the hotel, suggests that lack of self-control and inappropriate behaviors formerly present only inside the hotel are eventually pushed outside into the "blue" storm, creating a similarly volatile environment in the world beyond the building's walls. The hotel may appear to be a lawless place distinct from society, yet what happens inside the does not stay there.

## THE BLIZZARD

Crane uses the blizzard in "The **Blue** Hotel" to symbolize chaos and isolation. The increasingly harsh, unforgiving weather outside reflects the mounting violence between the Swede, the cowboy, the Easterner, and Johnnie inside the hotel. This is clearest when the blizzard

winds burst through the hotel door and scatter the **cards** across the room. While the cards are symbolic of the men's attempts to control their fate, the chaos of the blizzard winds prove that these attempts are futile. The blizzard is also used as a narrative tool to enhance the feeling of isolation and alienation that Crane creates. At one point in the story, just after a confusing run-in with the Swede, the cowboy states that he "hopes we don't git snowed in, because then we'll have to stand this here man being around with us all the time." The blizzard creates a sense of fear for the cowboy in this scene, and in this moment he demonstrates how the isolating effect of the blizzard forces the men to remain together despite their desire to escape.

## QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Dover Thrift Editions edition of *The Open Boat and Other Stories* published in 1993.

### Section 1 Quotes

The Palace hotel at Fort Romper was painted a light blue, a shade that is on the legs of a kind of heron, causing the bird to declare its position against any background. The Palace Hotel, then, was always screaming and howling in a way that made the dazzling winter landscape of Nebraska seem only a gray swampish hush. It stood alone on the prairie, and when the snow was falling the town two hundred yards away was not visible. But when the traveler alighted at the railway station he was obliged to pass the Palace Hotel before he could come upon the company of low clapboard houses which composed Fort Romper, and it was not to be thought that any traveler could pass the Palace Hotel without looking at it. [...] It is true that on clear days, when the great transcontinental expresses, long lines of swaying Pullmans, swept through Fort Romper, passengers were overcome at the sight, and the cult that knows the brown-reds and the subdivisions of the dark greens of the East expressed shame, pity, horror, in a laugh.

**Related Characters:** Pat Scully, The Swede

**Related Themes:**

**Related Symbols:**

**Page Number:** 89

**Explanation and Analysis**

At the beginning of the story, the narrator describes the ways in which the Palace Hotel attracts the gaze of all who pass by on the train. With its strange, garish blue color, the hotel stands starkly apart from both the dreary Nebraska landscape around it as well as the drabber, more "civilized" world from which the train passengers typically come (where, it's implied, such a shocking color would be in poor taste). Indeed, throughout the story, the train will also serve as a symbol of a link to society, a means of connecting the remote town of Fort Romper with the more developed outside world.

The connection of the hotel with a heron also reflects the story's frequent association of men with animals, suggesting that their behavior in and around the hotel is due more to base instincts than conscious choices. This marks the hotel as a somewhat lawless place, where strange and intriguing things may happen away from the strictly-imposed dictates of society.

Finally, this quote sets the precedent for laughter as a means of disguising discomfort—a tactic the paranoid Swede will frequently engage in, and which will make him appear unnervingly strange to his fellow guests.

Scully practically made them prisoners. He was so nimble and merry and kindly that each probably felt it would be the height of brutality to try to escape.

**Related Characters:** Pat Scully, The Swede, The Easterner (Mr. Blanc), The Cowboy (Bill)

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 89

**Explanation and Analysis**

As the proprietor of the Palace Hotel, Scully often waits by the train station to direct passengers to his lodging. Early in the story he persuades the cowboy, the Easterner, and the Swede to return with him to the hotel. That the men feel obliged to follow Scully makes his eagerness and hospitality seem more menacing than welcoming, and foreshadows the dark turn the evening will take. Social decorum dictates that they cannot refuse Scully, even if they feel—especially in the Swede's case—that they are being led to their doom. The notion of the hotel as a prison further reflects the story's preoccupation with deceptive appearances and fate; the hotel is not the safe haven Scully presents it as, and the men feel as though they cannot escape it.

Finally, with a laugh and a wink, he said that some of these Western communities were very dangerous; and after his statement he straightened his legs under the table, tilted his head, and laughed again, loudly. It was plain that the demonstration had no meaning to the others. They looked at him wondering and in silence.

**Related Characters:** The Swede, The Easterner (Mr. Blanc), The Cowboy (Bill), Johnnie Scully

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 90-91

**Explanation and Analysis**

While eating dinner with Scully and the other hotel guests, the Swede behaves strangely, asking perfunctory questions about farming while ignoring their answers. This moment makes clear the intense fear that the Swede already feels, and which he is attempting to disguise with nonchalance and laughter. In his desire to hide his vulnerability, however, the Swede only serves to alienate himself from the other guests, who are confused and unnerved by his behavior. The others will later theorize that the Swede has based his conception of "Western communities" off salacious dime novels, which depict the American West as a lawless, murderous place. Nothing about the hotel has suggested it to be as such, yet the Swede's paranoia is already getting the best of him.

## Section 2 Quotes

As the men trooped heavily back into the front room, the two little windows presented views of a turmoiling sea of snow. The huge arms of the wind were making attempts—mighty, circular, futile—to embrace the flakes as they sped. A gatepost like a still man with a blanched face stood aghast amid this profligate fury. In a hearty voice Scully announced the presence of a blizzard.

**Related Characters:** Pat Scully, The Swede, The Easterner (Mr. Blanc), The Cowboy (Bill)

**Related Themes:**

**Related Symbols:**

**Page Number:** 91

**Explanation and Analysis**

Having returned to the front room of the hotel after dinner, the men see that a blizzard has begun outside. This moment is significant because the blizzard symbolizes the mounting chaos that will soon overtake into the men's lives, and also further isolates the men from society. The storm adds to the sense of claustrophobia in the hotel; where earlier the men only felt like prisoners, now the cold and snow threaten to quite literally trap them inside.

The description of the gatepost as a "still man," meanwhile, represents the Swede, who will become the pale-faced and solitary figure in the blizzard during the final fight in the snow. The look of shock upon the gatepost's "face" further foreshadows the "supreme astonishment" the Swede will feel upon his eventual murder—that is, when he is confronted with the consequence of the rage and chaos he has sown.

The Swede backed rapidly toward a corner of the room. His hands were out protectingly in front of his chest, but he was making an obvious struggle to control his fright. "Gentlemen," he quavered, "I suppose I am going to be killed before I can leave this house. I suppose I am going to be killed before I can leave this house!" In his eyes was the dying-swan look. Through the windows could be seen the snow turning blue in the shadow of dusk. The wind tore at the house, and some loose thing beat regularly against the clapboards like a spirit tapping.

**Related Characters:** The Swede (speaker), Johnnie Scully, The Easterner (Mr. Blanc), The Cowboy (Bill), Pat Scully

**Related Themes:**

**Related Symbols:**

**Page Number:** 93

**Explanation and Analysis**

While playing cards with the other hotel guests and Johnnie, the Swede suggests that many men have been murdered inside the hotel. When Johnnie immediately becomes defensive, the Swede backs himself up into a corner, insisting that he knows he will die that night. This quote demonstrates the Swede's intense fear, as well as his belief that his fate is sealed—that he will die, and there is nothing he can do about it. Ironically, the Swede's paranoia will bring about exactly what he fears, as his behavior serves to alienate himself from and enrage those around him to the point that he is eventually murdered. Whether this means his death truly was fated, or that he was in control all along,

is left unsaid by the story. The wind outside the hotel, meanwhile, represents the building tension and chaos that is beginning to threaten the veneer of civility within. That the snow is turning blue—like the hotel itself—further emphasizes an environment of increasing lawlessness and danger.

## Section 3 Quotes

❝ The Swede laughed wildly. He grabbed the bottle, put it to his mouth; and as his lip curled absurdly around the opening and his throat worked, he kept his glance, burning with hatred, upon the old man's face.

**Related Characters:** Johnnie Scully, Pat Scully, The Swede

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 97

### Explanation and Analysis

In this scene, Scully offers the Swede a drink of his precious hidden whiskey while the two men are alone in upstairs. The Swede, still wild with paranoia, assumes that Scully is trying to poison him with the drink. That he then drinks it anyway is significant because it exemplifies the Swede's decision to resign himself to his fate—he accepts the bottle despite his suspicion that the whiskey will kill him. Of course, the bottle is not poison, and it is the Swede's own behavior—rather than Sully's offering—that eventually leads to his demise.

His laughter here again reflects his desire to mask his vulnerability, yet only serves to estrange him from Scully. Indeed, this moment reveals that the Swede has alienated himself not only from the other hotel guests, but also from the hotel proprietor, who has tried repeatedly to show him kindness and hospitality. Instead of accepting Scully as an ally, the Swede grimaces at him, too suspicious and fearful to allow Scully to come close to him. His refusal to be open leads to his increased isolation; eventually Scully will stop trying to defend the Swede and encourage johnnie to fight him.

## Section 4 Quotes

❝ "Well, what do you think makes him act that way?" asked the cowboy.

"Why, he's frightened." The Easterner knocked his pipe against a rim of the stove. "He's clear frightened out of his boots."

"What at?" cried Johnnie and the cowboy together. The Easterner reflected over his answer.
"What at?" cried the others again.

"Oh, I don't know, but it seems to me this man has been reading dime novels, and he thinks he's right out in the middle of it—the shootin' and stabbin' and all."

"But," said the cowboy, deeply scandalized, "this ain't Wyoming, ner none of them places. This is Nebrasker."

**Related Characters:** Johnnie Scully, The Easterner (Mr. Blanc), The Cowboy (Bill) (speaker), The Gambler, Pat Scully, The Swede

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 97

### Explanation and Analysis

While the Swede and Scully are upstairs, the other men discuss the Swede's strange behavior. The Easterner proves to be the most emotionally astute of the bunch when he says it's likely due to fear; this foreshadows the same thoughtfulness he will display at the end of the story upon declaring that all the men are at fault for the Swede's eventual death.

As was suggested by the Swede's earlier comment about the danger of the American West, the Swede fears he is in a lawless place apart from the society with which he is familiar, and his subsequent fear has put him on edge. Of course, this vision of Fort Romper is largely subjective. As someone ostensibly much more familiar with the actual West, the cowboy believes the Swede's fear to be ridiculous and unwarranted; to the cowboy, Nebraska is hardly the last frontier.

Nevertheless, Fort Romper does prove to be as dangerous as the Swede predicts—but only because the Swede does not abide by its rules. For instance, where the gambler is accepted by Romper society because, despite his crimes, he is a family man—and thus presents the outward appearance of civility—the Swede is openly antagonistic and insults a local. Thus the "danger" of the West is not necessarily inherent to the landscape itself, but rather due to the Swede's projection of his own fears onto that landscape.

## Section 5 Quotes

Of course the board had been overturned, and now the whole company of cards was scattered over the floor, where the boot of the men trampled the fat and painted kings and queens as they gazed with their silly eyes at the war that was waging above them.

**Related Characters:** The Cowboy (Bill), The Easterner (Mr. Blanc), The Swede, Johnnie Scully, Pat Scully

**Related Themes:**

**Related Symbols:**

**Page Number:** 101

**Explanation and Analysis**

After the Swede accuses Johnnie of cheating, the men erupt into a brawl that notably knocks the cards off the table. Throughout the story cards have served as symbols of fate and deception, and by playing card games, it follows, the men had been both toying with fate and attempting to deceive one another. The scattering of the cards represents the removal of whatever deceptive air of civility had been hanging over the guests, as the tension they've been attempting to keep at bay finally comes to a head and the men's mistrust and anger is left out in the open. That the cards are no longer in any semblance of order further underscores the chaos that has infiltrated the world of the hotel. Crane's specific reference to kings and queens here further suggests that the men have discarded civilization and reason in this moment of irrational violence.

## Section 6 Quotes

No snow was falling, but great whirls and clouds of flakes, swept up from the ground by the frantic winds, were streaming southward with the speed of bullets. The covered land was blue with the sheen of an unearthly satin, and there was no other hue save where, at the low, black railway station—which seemed incredibly distant—one light gleamed like a tiny jewel.

**Related Characters:** Johnnie Scully, The Cowboy (Bill), The Easterner (Mr. Blanc), The Swede, Pat Scully

**Related Themes:**

**Related Symbols:**

**Page Number:** 103

**Explanation and Analysis**

Johnnie and the Swede, followed by the other men, have moved their brawl outside of the hotel and into the cold. The inhospitable environment adds to the scene's sense of malevolence, while the fact that the landscape is described as "blue" connects it to the blue of the hotel—suggesting that the capacity for vice and lawlessness has spilled out from the hotel's walls and into the world beyond. The distance of the train station, meanwhile, underscores how intensely isolated all of the men are. The train has been a symbol throughout the story of connection to society, and as such its "incredible" distance here highlights how removed from civilized rationality these men have become in this moment of violence chaos.

## Section 8 Quotes

He was, in fact, a man so delicate in manner, when among people of fair class, and so judicious in his choice of victims, that in the strictly masculine part of the town's life he had come to be explicitly trusted and admired. People called him a thoroughbred. [...] Besides, it was popular that this gambler had a real wife and two real children in a neat cottage in a suburb, where he led an exemplary home life; and when any one even suggested a discrepancy in his character, the crowd immediately vociferated descriptions of this virtuous family circle.

**Related Characters:** The Swede, The Gambler

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 110

**Explanation and Analysis**

Following the fight with Johnnie, the Swede makes his way to a local saloon and begins to boast about his victory. Sitting nearby is the gambler, a strange character who is admired throughout Fort Romper despite his criminal profession. Crane's tone is deeply mocking of the townsfolk here, as he suggests that they value the appearance of civility far more than actual civility itself. Being a family man who is discrete about his crimes, it seems, outweighs the crimes themselves.

As a character, the gambler reflects the story's broader theme that shallow, surface-level judgments can be deeply misleading. The town's reception of the gambler also contrasts sharply with that of the Swede, who, unlike the gambler, is at once an outsider in Romper and distastefully

upfront about his fights, anger, and frustration. As a result, others side with the gambler even after he kills the Swede, believing the former to, essentially, be the better man despite being a murderer.

❝ There was a great tumult, and then was seen a long blade in the hand of the gambler. It shot forward, and a human body, this citadel of virtue, wisdom, power, was pierced as easily as if it had been a melon. The Swede fell with a cry of supreme astonishment.

**Related Characters:** The Easterner (Mr. Blanc), The Swede, The Gambler

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 111-112

**Explanation and Analysis**

The Swede, offended that no one else in the bar will have a drink with him, angrily provokes the gambler before grabbing the man's throat. In response, the gambler, who only a moment before had calmly told the Swede to mind his own business, stabs him to death. The swiftness of this death is shocking, especially to the Swede himself—despite his earlier proclamation that he would die that night. The specific language Crane uses here, however, suggests the moment is not the gambler's fault: in using passive voice to describe the knife shooting forward, the author takes agency—and, it follows, guilt—away from the gambler. Instead, the gambler is merely a conduit through which a foretold action comes to fruition (which is, essentially, what the Easterner will later argue).

❝ The corpse of the Swede, alone in the saloon, had its eyes fixed upon a

dreadful legend that dwelt atop of the cash-machine: "This registers the

amount of your purchase."

**Related Characters:** The Gambler, The Swede

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 112

**Explanation and Analysis**

After the Swede has been killed, all of the patrons—including the gambler—leave the saloon, leaving the dead man's body on the floor. This underscores that the Swede is alienated even in death. That alienation, not incidentally, is largely what led to the Swede's murder in the first place, as he isolated himself from and antagonized those around him throughout the story. That his eyes are fixed on the cash register further implies that his death may not have been destined, but instead has been the result of his own actions and choices—that is, his "purchases."

## Section 9 Quotes

❝ "Fun or not," said the Easterner, "Johnnie was cheating. I saw him. I know it. I saw him. And I refused to stand up and be a man. I let the Swede fight it out alone. And you—you were simply puffing around the place and wanting to fight. And then old Scully himself! We are all in it! This poor gambler isn't even a noun. He is kind of an adverb. Every sin is the result of a collaboration. We, five of us, have collaborated in the murder of this Swede. [...] that fool of an unfortunate gambler came merely as a culmination, the apex of a human movement, and gets all the punishment."

The cowboy, injured and rebellious, cried out blindly into this fog of mysterious theory: "Well, I didn't do anythin', did I?"

**Related Characters:** The Cowboy (Bill), The Easterner (Mr. Blanc) (speaker), Pat Scully, The Gambler, The Swede, Johnnie Scully

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 113

**Explanation and Analysis**

A few months after the Swede's death, both the Easterner and the cowboy, for different reasons, lament the gambler being sent to prison. While the cowboy thinks the Swede brought his death entirely upon himself, the Easterner insists that they are all at fault for what happened. He then goes on to explain how each man played a part in the series of events that led to the Swede's death—by alienating him and encouraging his animosity—and insists that any of them could have stepped in before the situation got so out of hand. The gambler, in this estimation, was simply acting on momentum already set in place by the other men—and, as such, is not to blame for the murder.

Of course, the Easterner can only say this in hindsight; the fact that his is a "fog of mysterious theory" suggests the inability of human beings to accurately predict how their actions will shape the future, and as such calls into question

how much blame each man actually bears for events that later lead to tragedy. If the Easterner is to be believed, then all the men are guilty, regardless of the fact that they were unaware of what they were doing at the time. The fact that the cowboy refuses to accept such culpability, however, points to the human impulse to deny one's ability to alter the future and, it follows, to accept moral responsibility for one's actions. Such a mindset points to a certain pre-determined fate beyond human control, and it is ultimately up to the reader to deduce which man is correct.

## 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.

### SECTION 1

In the town Fort Romper, Nebraska stands the Palace Hotel, which has been painted an eye-catching light **blue**. Any **train** coming through town will have a view of the hotel, which stands out from the winter landscape surrounding it and catches the gaze of anyone who passes by. While the hotel may appear garish and startling to many of the more civilized train passengers coming from the East, locals consider proprietor Pat Scully a skilled businessman for making his hotel stand out. Scully also often waits outside the train station, hoping to catch a few stragglers and convince them to spend the evening in his hotel.

*Nebraska was the new American West during the period "The Blue Hotel" is set, and Western genre conventions set the scene for the paranoia and violence that will plague the hotel guests. The hotel's garish color and isolation within the landscape reflect the alienation of the hotel and its occupants from the civilized world beyond. The deceptive eye-catching blue and Scully's habit of coaxing people back to the hotel suggest that the hotel is not as safe or wholesome as Scully would like it to appear.*

One morning, Scully manages to catch three such customers as they disembark from their train. One is a "shaky and quick-eyed Swede," one is a "tall bronzed cowboy," and one—the Easterner—is a "silent little man." So boisterous is Scully in his hospitality as he walks the men back to the hotel that they likely would consider it "the height of brutality" to reject his accommodations.

*The descriptions of the Swede, the cowboy, and the Easterner foreshadow their behavior at the hotel—the Swede's fear and paranoia will spark violence, the cowboy will act on his masculine impulse to present a strong front, and the Easterner will remain silent at moments when it is necessary for him to reveal the truth. The fact that these men feel they can't reject Scully's hospitality suggests that the men feel they cannot resist their fate.*

Once inside the hotel, Scully ends a game of **cards** between his son Johnnie and an old farmer, with whom Johnnie had been having an argument. Johnnie goes upstairs with the guests' suitcases, while the old farmer remains downstairs with the new guests.

*The cards appear here as a symbol of fate and deception. This argument foreshadows the fated arguments over cards later in the story that will lead to violence between the men. The argument also characterizes Johnnie as a hot-headed and volatile character.*

Scully directs the men to a basin of frigid water, and while the cowboy and the Easterner readily wash up, the Swede only hesitantly dips his fingers in. When Scully leaves to direct his daughters' in their preparation of lunch, his guests sit in the front room with the old farmer. There is an air of trepidation among the men, who "tread carefully amid new people" and respond succinctly to the farmer's attempts at small talk. The Swede, however, remains entirely silent, and appears to be furtively sizing up the others.

*The Swede's behavior around the basin of water indicates his paranoia. As the men sit together without Scully, it's clear that they are trying to size each other up and also mask their own fears and vulnerabilities. The Swede does this most dramatically by remaining silent and watching without interacting with the others.*

Later, at dinner, the Swede breaks his silence to ask Scully questions about local agriculture, yet barely seems to listen to the proprietor's answers; his eyes move between the men before he finally makes a statement about how dangerous Western communities can be. He laughs and winks at the other men, who don't understand what the Swede means.

*The Swede appears to fear Scully the least initially and to be hiding his anxieties through small-talk, so he doesn't appear suspicious of the others. However, his comment about the danger of Western communities and his strange laughter indicate that these questions are all a ruse, and that he is in fact very fearful of the Palace Hotel and its occupants. His desire to mask this fear confuses the other men, who don't understand his behavior.*

## SECTION 2

The men return from dinner into the front room with the "humming" stove and watch a "turmoiling sea of snow" outside the hotel window. Scully announces that a **blizzard** has blown into town. The men don't seem bothered by this news, settling in with their pipes with a sense of "lazy masculine contentment."

*Though the "turmoiling sea of snow" that Scully announces doesn't initially concern the men, it symbolizes impending chaos. The contradiction between the violent weather and the calm demeanor of the men demonstrates both the parts of their fate they can't control and their ignorance to their role in the violence to come.*

Johnnie and the old farmer begin playing another game of **cards**, which the cowboy and the Easterner watch intently. The Swede remains separately by the window, though he seems intrigued by the beginning of a new game. The game breaks suddenly into another argument, and the old farmer gets his coat and leaves the hotel. The Swede laughs at the old farmer's exit.

*The game between Johnnie and the farmer ends with an argument again, suggesting an ironic inevitability of violence following a game that often revolves around chance. This also foreshadows the violence to come following the later game between Johnnie and the Swede. The Swede's laughter at the farmer's exit, meanwhile, indicates his attempt to mask his fear, which only alienates him by making him seem strange to the other men.*

The men form another game of **cards**—the cowboy partners with Johnnie, and the Swede is asked to join on the side of the Easterner. The Swede is hesitant to play, edging "nervously" toward the table, but finally throws his hand in. When the Swede sits down at the table he laughs shrilly and nervously, startling and confusing the other men.

*The men playing cards together suggests the way they continue to tempt fate, despite the indications that it will lead to violence. The Swede's inability to mask his nervous laughter and his unwillingness to admit his fear further alienates him from the other men.*

The men begin to play and are soon too distracted by the game to take notice of the Swede's strange behavior. The cowboy is a "board-whacker," meaning he plays his **cards** aggressively and frequently slams his fist on the table. The Easterner and the Swede are unsettled by his intensity, looking "miserable" each time the cowboy throws down his high cards, but Johnnie seems pleased by his partner's victories. The Swede interrupts the game to say he supposes "a good many men" had been killed in the front room of the hotel. The jaws of all the men drop, and the game stops in the middle of a new deal. Johnnie becomes immediately defensive of the hotel, asking the Swede "What in the hell are you talking about?"

*The cowboy's board-whacking unsettles the other men, except for Johnnie who appears to be so obsessed with winning that he doesn't mind what intimidation tactics his partner uses. This aggressive play seems to push the Swede even further into paranoia, as he makes a strange statement about men being killed in the hotel—a clear reflection of his own fear. His inability to express this fear in a clear and unaccusatory way sets the men against himr and makes Johnnie particularly defensive.*

Despite Johnnie's arguments that the Swede is insane and that nobody has ever died in the Palace Hotel, the Swede insists that someone has been killed in that very room. He urges the other men to agree that his suspicions are valid, particularly the Easterner, but the latter says after "prolonged and cautious reflection" that he doesn't understand what the Swede means. Johnnie becomes more and more angry at the Swede, who suddenly feels that all the men are against him, even the Easterner, who he thought was his trusted partner.

*The Swede's alienation and his paranoia continue to grow. The Easterner's choice not to support the Swede foreshadows his later silence when the Swede accuses Johnnie of cheating—which, in turn, will lead to the Easterner's guilt at the end of the story. The Swede's inability to express his fear in a way that the men can understand builds tension between them.*

The Swede proclaims that he will be killed before he leaves the hotel. He backs himself up against a wall, "struggl[ing] to control his fright." He has "the dying-swan look" in his eyes. At this moment, the Swede takes notice of the **blizzard** blowing "**blue**" snow outside. Scully comes into the room and begins to ask the men what the fuss is about. The other hotel guests are confused by the Swede's behavior, and what has made him so afraid. Over the course of Scully's questioning of both sides, the Swede admits, "yes, of course, I'm crazy."

*As the Swede's fear and paranoia come to a head, Crane describes him as a "dying-swan" to indicate his fragile state. The men's confusion over the cause of the Swede's fear further alienates the Swede from the others. In this scene in particular, the wild blizzard is symbolic of the Swede's chaotic and irrational thoughts.*

The Swede insists on leaving the hotel because he does not want "to be killed." Scully tries to stop the Swede, insisting he won't be "troubled" under his roof. Against Scully's wishes, the Swede heads upstairs to pack his bags. Meanwhile, Scully questions the men downstairs, who state their innocence—the Easterner says that he "didn't see anything wrong at all" in the other men's behavior. Scully chastises his son for not being more hospitable, and Johnnie proclaims, "Well, what have I done?"

*Scully refuses to give his hotel and reputation a bad name. Johnnie's inability to see his own wrong-doing reflects a larger inability of all the characters to see how they contribute to the impending violence and alienation of the Swede.*

## SECTION 3

Scully goes upstairs to find the Swede, who is packing his suitcase. The Swede is startled to see Scully's shadow in the door, as the proprietor resembles "a murderer." Scully asks the Swede if he's gone "daffy," and the Swede admits that he was sure the men were going to kill him. Scully says he can't understand how Swede got that idea into his head and redirects the conversation by talking about an electric streetcar that they are planning to run through town, along with a new **railroad**.

*Scully's appearance as a "murderer" reflects the Swede's building paranoia, and also suggests Scully's role in forcing the men to remain together (and thus his contribution to the escalating tensions). Scully's excitement over the new electric streetcar and railroad, meanwhile, underscore Fort Romper's current isolation and relative lawlessness. The train in particular is a symbol in the story of a link to modern civilization.*

The Swede tries to pay his dues and leave, but Scully refuses to take his money. Instead, he urges the Swede to follow him into another room, where he shows him pictures of his children. Scully talks about his dead daughter Carrie as well as his son Michael, who is a successful lawyer. The Swede pays no attention to the photographs, instead looking at the "gloom in the rear" of the room. Before Scully lets the Swede go downstairs with his suitcase, he reaches under the bed and finds a bottle of whiskey. He urges the Swede to drink, but the Swede looks skeptically at Scully and at the bottle. He grimaces at Scully when he takes a drink, as if he thinks the liquor might be poisoned. As the Swede drinks, he "laugh[s] wildly" with "his lips curled absurdly around the bottle."

*Instead of allowing himself to bond with Scully, the Swede is distracted by his own paranoia and the dangers he suspects might be lurking in the dark corners of the room. The Swede's laughter as he drinks what he suspects is a poisoned bottle of whiskey demonstrates that he feels helpless against his fate; he only tries half-heartedly to refuse the drink, and eventually holds the bottle up to his lips as if he knows he is destined to die.*

## SECTION 4

Meanwhile, downstairs, the cowboy, span class="inline-character">Johnnie, and the Easterner are speculating on the reasons behind the Swede's strange behavior. The cowboy thinks, based on the Swede's accent, that he is actually a Dutchman. The Easterner says that he can't determine the Swede's background but is quite sure that his behavior comes from his fear of being killed in the West. The Easterner thinks the fear likely comes from reading violent dime novels, which makes the cowboy "deeply scandalized"—"this ain't Wyoming, ner none of them places. This is Nebrasker." The Easterner laughs, saying that the Swede must think he's "right in the middle of hell," while the cowboy comments that he hopes they don't get snowed in with such a strange man.

*Johnnie, the cowboy, and the Easterner bond over their shared confusion and concern over the Swede's behavior, connecting them to each other at the same time they alienate the Swede. The Swede's ignorance about the realities of life in Nebraska is the cause of his fear, and the reason that he has alienated himself from the others in the group.*

Scully and the Swede come downstairs boisterously, as if they are now friends. The other men are confused by the sudden change in the Swede's behavior. Scully demands that the men make room around the fire for the Swede, who begins talking loudly and arrogantly. The others sit in stunned silence—except for Scully, who appears as hospitable and eager as ever. However, when the Swede gets up to get himself a drink of water, Scully leans over the table to the other men and says that upstairs the Swede thought Scully was trying to poison him. Johnnie urges his father to throw the Swede out into the snow, but Scully insists that the Swede is just afraid, and that he is "okay now." The other men nod at the Easterner, who they believe was right in his assumptions about the Swede acting out of fear. Johnnie remains skeptical, saying the Swede was now acting "too fresh."

*The Swede again tries to hide his vulnerability and fear behind a veil of confident boisterousness, which only serves to alienate him further from the other hotel guests—who are growing weary of the Swede's strange behavior. Despite Scully's hospitality, it is clear that he, too, is confused and unnerved by the Swede. Johnnie is clearest in his distrust of the Swede in this scene, foreshadowing his impending violent confrontation with the man.*

Scully gives a short speech about how, as a hotel keeper, his hospitality is the most important part of his character, and that "no guest" would be turned away because they were "too afraid" to stay under his roof. As such, he says, he cannot throw the Swede out of the hotel. The cowboy and the Easterner agree with him.

*Scully's speech makes it clear that his reputation is more important to him than are the clear signs that tensions are building in his hotel. This suggests his own culpability in the violence to come.*

## SECTION 5

At supper that evening, the Swede is boisterous, aggressive, and dominates the conversation, nearly "breaking out into riotous song." The other men respond simply or not at all to his statements and try to keep out of his way, as do Scully's "daughters" who flee the room with "ill-concealed trepidation." Scully encourages the Swede, remaining calm even as the Swede slaps him on his bad shoulder. Johnnie is concerned that Scully is letting the Swede walk all over him, but Scully responds by "scowling darkly" at his son's judgements.

*The Swede's alienation continues to build, as does the ill-fated tension between him and Johnnie. The daughters' concern contrasts with the men's inability to admit vulnerability. The tension created by the Swede even begins to break bonds between Scully and Johnnie, who, as father and son, were formerly the most tightly-knit of the group.*

After supper the Swede insists the men play another game of **cards**, with a "threat" in his tone. Scully refuses to play because he plans to meet the 6:58 p.m. **train** at the station, but Johnnie grins menacingly and agrees to play the Swede. This game of cards has a different tone than those they played earlier, however. The cowboy is no longer whacking the board, and the others sit mostly in silence. In the middle of their game, when Scully leaves to go to the station, a gust of wind comes in from the **blizzard** and scatters the cards across the floor. The wind "chills the players to the marrow," and after the cards are returned to the board, the Swede becomes the board-whacker.

*The Swede is transformed in this scene from the fearful guest into a violent and aggressive figure. This is likely because he no longer feels a need to conceal his feelings, as he has resigned himself to his impending death. The Swede's aggression comes at a cost—the other characters are so alienated from him they no longer respond to his behavior, and instead sit in silence. The wind scattering the cards symbolizes the building chaos and violence that will soon strike.*

Scully returns from his trip to the **train** station and continues to read his newspaper. Everything seems peaceful until the Swede's voice rings out through the silence. He accuses Johnnie of cheating, transforming the room instantly into "a torture chamber." Johnnie looks into the Swede's menacing eyes. The other men gasp and stand up. Suddenly, a fight breaks out over the **card** table. All the men are pushing and shoving each other and only fragments of speech are caught. The men stomp on the cards, which have been scattered on the floor, as they fight, the "fat and painted kings and queens" looking wonderingly at the "war" above them. Scully tries to shout to stop the fight, while the Easterner questions "What's the good of a fight over a game of cards?"

*The violence that has been building over the course of the story finally comes to a head. The men ultimately fight over cheating at cards, which symbolize the interplay of fate and chance; as such, this fight suggests larger questions about what control—if any—the men have over their own destinies. That the cards have been scattered suggests that either their fate is out of their hands, or that they have willingly abandoned trying to maintain rational order and instead have succumbed to chaos.*

The fight ceases for a moment, and Johnnie is able to confront the Swede. The Swede insists that Johnnie is cheating, but that latter insists that he is not. The Easterner begs the men to think about the rationality of their behavior by repeating that there is little using in fighting over a game of cards. Nevertheless, the Swede, "like a demoniac," continues to shout that Johnnie cheated and that he will "show [Johnnie] what kind of man" he is. Johnnie "coolly" agrees to continue to the fight. The cowboy asks Scully what he will do, and the proprietor responds with his eyes "glowing," "We'll let them fight."

*Though the Easterner attempts to be a voice of rationality, he only asks questions he knows the other men won't answer rather than actually stepping in and taking action. The decision of the men to continue the fight suggests, somewhat ironically, an active acceptance of chaos and violence in lieu of control. Scully embraces his role as facilitator of this fight, no longer hiding behind his eagerness and hospitality.*

## SECTION 6

The men get dressed in their winter clothes and open the door to the **blizzard**. The wind blows the **cards** against the wall. It is bitterly cold, the landscape **blue** and barren, with the **train** station in the distance. The men find a patch of grass protected from the snow behind the hotel, and the Swede calls out in the wind that the other men will gang up on him during the fight. Scully makes it clear the fight will be fair—it will just be between the Swede and Johnnie, and anyone who tries to get involved otherwise will have to deal with Scully.

*The cards blowing against the wall indicates that any chance the men had to control their fate has been lost. The blue color of the landscape reflects the blue of the hotel, suggesting that the lack of self-control bred within its walls has bled into the surrounding world. The far-off train station, meanwhile, symbolizes the great distance between the violent men and civilization and reason. The Swede is very aware at this point of his alienated status in the group, though Scully tries to insist that the fight will be fair.*

The men make "arrangements" and prepare for the fight—"obedient to the harsh commands of Scully," who looks in this moment like a Roman veteran. In the pause before the fight, the Easterner takes a mental snapshot of the scene. He captures the "iron-nerved master of the ceremony" Scully, Johnnie, who looks "heroic" and "brutish," and the Swede, who is "pale, motionless, terrible." All the while the **blizzard** wails "into the black abyss of the South"

*The seemingly methodical preparation for the fight and depiction of Scully as a "Roman veteran" suggest the men are trying to impose a sense of order onto chaos. The Easterner's mental snapshot further pins the men to their roles in the violence—Scully has forced the men together and in that way is the "master of ceremonies" who orchestrated the building tension. That Johnnie appears heroic, meanwhile, is ironic and underscores the story's theme of deception, given that it will ultimately be revealed that Johnnie was, in fact, cheating. The "pale, motionless, terrible" Swede is isolated and alone, identified primarily via his clear separation from the others.*

The fight begins, and all the men are shocked at how violently and rapidly it starts. The men are just a jumble of flailing arms and legs, which appear like "swiftly revolving wheels" in the muddle of bodies. Throughout this, the cowboy is struck by a "war-like" rage, bolts forth "with the speed of a bronco," and starts urging Johnnie to murder the Swede, screaming, "Kill him!" Finally, Johnnie falls back in the grass, winded. Scully asks his son with "melancholy" tenderness if he thinks he can keep going. Johnnie finally manages to say yes.

*The sudden onset of the fight reveals how quickly "order" can explode into violent chaos. This scene suggests that prior civility between the men was a veneer, a mask for steadily building tension. This is reflected by the cowboy's sudden, intense bloodthirstiness; the animalistic description of the cowboy further suggests that his behavior is somewhat instinctive—and, more broadly, that within all men is the capacity for such violence.*

The fight continues. Johnnie dodges the Swede and sends him to the ground as the others cheer. However, the Swede gets back up and then leans against a nearby tree. The Easterner notices that the man's situation is marked by the "splendor of isolation." Johnnie is finally knocked to the ground. Scully asks Johnnie if he's finished fighting, and Johnnie says yes. He starts crying over his defeat. Scully announces to the Swede, calling him "Stranger," that Johnnie is "whipped." The Swede walks alone to the hotel.

*The Swede's alienation is clear in this scene—he stands alone beside the spindly, half-dead tree, is thought of by Scully as a "stranger," and returns to the hotel by himself. The fact that the other men cheer when the Swede falls is further indicative of his loneliness and his isolation from the group.*

Scully asks Johnnie if he can walk, but Johnnie is more concerned about whether or not he hurt the Swede. The men carry Johnnie back into the hotel and gather around the stove to warm up. Suddenly women enter the room, including Johnnie's mother. She scolds Scully for allowing their son to get so badly hurt, telling him that he should be ashamed of himself. The girls who join her "sniff disdainfully" at the cowboy and the Easterner, who are referred to as "accomplices."

*That Johnnie is more concerned with the Swede's injuries than his own suggests that Johnnie refuses to be vulnerable and is instead focused on the damage he's caused. The rush of women into the scene highlights the men's shameful behavior, as well as the reality that they each had more control over their actions then any of them want to admit—even the cowboy and the Easterner are referred to as accomplices, underscoring their culpability in the seemingly chaotic, inevitable violence.*

## SECTION 7

The cowboy proclaims that he would like to fight the Swede, but Scully doesn't let him. He says, with "mournful heroism," the fight was Johnnie's, and that it does no good if they all come after him. Scully makes it clear that "it wouldn't be right" for them to gang up on the Swede. The Swede comes downstairs and demands to know how much he owes Scully, but Scully says he owes him nothing. The Swede responds that if anything, Scully must owe him something for his treatment. He then ruthlessly mocks the cowboy

*Scully's questionable idea of what is "right" here demonstrates that he does not think he has done anything wrong. The question of what the men owe each other reflects the story's broader investigation into each man's responsibility for the violence. That the other men stare blankly at the jeering Swede cements that latter's status as an outsider; the Swede seems to be living in his own plane of existence, unable to communicate with the men in front of him.*

The Swede leaves. As soon as the door to the closes, Scully and the cowboy go into hysterics, talking about all the ways they imagine hurting the Swede. They cry frantically together, "Oh if only we could—" talking over each other and agreeing in unison at the hurt they would cause the Swede if they could. The Easterner remains conspicuously silent.

*Scully and the cowboy bond over shared rage at the Swede. It is notable that they don't really listen to each other here, but rather build on the other's violent thoughts. The Easterner remains silent, not contributing to but also not stopping the scene around him; he will later come to deem his passivity as a marker of his own guilt.*

## SECTION 8

Outside, the Swede walks through the **blizzard** into town, following a line of barren trees. The town seems totally deserted, and the storm makes it impossible to imagine anyone surviving on such an inhospitable and violent earth; men are "lice" clinging to "a whirling, fire-smitten, ice-locked, disease-stricken, space-lost bulb."

*The barren and deserted environment of Fort Romper reflects the Swede's extreme isolation, and also foreshadows his imminent death. Crane's philosophical note about men being "lice" clinging to a violent earth ties into the story's broader theme of fate and helplessness; in a way, the violence of existence seems inevitable and far beyond men's reach, yet men try desperately to cling to it anyway.*

Finally, the Swede finds a saloon. The light above the door is red and makes the snow "blood-colored." The Swede comes in and orders a class of whiskey, which he drinks in one gulp. The bartender asks him if he's had a bad night, because of the blood on his face. The Swede says no, adding that the night has been "good enough for [him]." The bartender then asks about the **blizzard**, and the Swede says that the weather "suits him."

*The red light on the saloon door and the "blood-colored" snow foreshadow the Swede's imminent death inside the bar. It is important that the Swede associates himself with the blizzard, which symbolizes chaos, at this point in the story—this suggests his fear and paranoia have caused him to spin out of control. This chaotic behavior will eventually bring about the Swede's death.*

The Swede begins to boast about beating Johnnie Scully in a fight at the **blue** hotel. The other men in the bar, including a few merchants and the gambler, take notice of him. The gambler is a particularly strange character, respected by people in the community because he is a family man, despite the fact that by trade he is a swindler and a criminal. Though the gambler is accepted by people in town because of his "exemplary home life," there are some restrictions on that acceptance; he isn't allowed, for example, to join the local men's club.

*The Swede immediately alienates himself from the other bar patrons with his story about fighting Johnnie, who is a local and therefore likely to draw the sympathy of the crowd. By building this tension, the Swede seems almost as if he is actively trying to bring about his death, which he foretold earlier in the story. This scene also introduces the gambler, whose social acceptance underscores the importance the town puts on appearances; the Swede has been alienated because he has, in contrast to the gambler, failed to outwardly behave according to social norms of propriety.*

The Swede becomes angry that the other men in the saloon won't drink with him because he was boasting about fighting Johnnie. He gets up to start a fight. The gambler encourages him to sit down, talking calmly despite the Swede's aggression. The gambler says to the Swede, "My friend, I don't know you." The Swede then grabs the gambler by his throat, and in response the gambler pulls out a knife which "shoots forward" and stabs the Swede. The Swede falls with a cry of "supreme astonishment."

*Again, the Swede's feelings of loneliness and isolation cause him to lash out, which leads to violence. The gambler, meanwhile, makes it clear that the Swede is alienated by asserting that he doesn't know him. The description of the knife "shooting forward" as if on its own volition demonstrates that the gambler is not really guilty of the crime but is only a means to carry out a fate that the Swede has brought upon himself. Whether the Swede is actively at fault for his own death or simply succumbing to fate is left up for debate by the story, though his astonishment at being stabbed suggests he did not entirely expect his own demise.*

The other men run out of the bar, and the bartender looks shocked. The gambler cleans his knife and calmly tells the bartender to tell the police that they can find him at his house. The bartender leaves the Swede's body on the floor, and goes out into the **storm** in order to find help "and company." The Swede's dead eyes are fixed on the sign on the cash register which reads, "This registers the amount of your purchase."

*The Swede is alienated even in death. Yet the fact that the Swede's eyes are fixed on the register suggests that he has brought this fate upon himself—he has, essentially, only received what he was owed for his behavior.*

## SECTION 9

A few months later, the cowboy and the Easterner meet up near the Dakota state line. The Easterner tells the cowboy that the gambler got a three-year sentence for killing the Swede. The two speculate on why he got such a short sentence, with the Easterner noting there was "a good deal of sympathy for him in Romper." The cowboy asserts that if only the bartender had been "good" he "would have gone in and cracked that there Dutchman on the head with a bottle in the beginnin' of it and stopped all this here murderin'." The Easterner says, "it could have gone a thousand ways."

*The sympathy that the people of Romper feel for the gambler further indicates the Swede's alienation as well as the belief that gambler wasn't really at fault for the murder. The cowboy suggests the bartender bears responsibility for the Swede's death because he didn't stop the fight before it got out of hand, yet the cowboy fails to consider how he, himself, did the same thing back in the hotel— and, according to his own logic, thus played a role in the Swede's death as well. The Easterner, for his part, suggests that this violence wasn't fated, but could have been avoided any number of ways.*

The Easterner and the cowboy both feel sorry for the gambler. Yet when the Easterner suggests the Swede wouldn't have been killed if everything "had been square," the cowboy becomes enraged, insisting the Swede had it coming for him. In response, the Easterner reveals that the Swede wasn't crazy, and that Johnnie actually was cheating at **cards**. He then calls the cowboy a fool and admits that he himself had been too afraid to say anything during the fight. The Easterner then explains that he believes that all the men are equally guilty for the murder of the Swede. He describes the gambler as simply "the apex of a human movement."

*By exposing Johnnie's deception, the Easterner reveals that each of the men played a role in the Swede's death. The Easterner also makes it clear here that he perpetuated the ignorance that lead directly to the alienation of the Swede. To the Easterner, the gambler's behavior was simply due to momentum, the final blow in a chain of events set in motion by the hotel guests.*

The cowboy balks at the Easterner's accusation. He shouts, "injured and rebellious ... into this fog of mysterious theory," asking the Easterner, "Well I didn't do anything, did I?"

*By describing the Easterner's theory as a "mysterious" fog, Cranes suggests the impossibility of divining—and thus manipulating—fate. Even if it's possible that the men at the hotel could have avoided hurting each other by doing things differently, that clarity is only available in hindsight. At the same time, it's clear that they all, in one way or another, contributed to a chain of events that led to the Swede's death. Whether this means the men carry actual moral guilt is left up for debate; the cowboy, at least, asserts his innocence based on the idea that the Swede's brought his death upon himself.*

## HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

### MLA

Valley, Rebecca. "*The Blue Hotel*." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 27 Sep 2018. Web. 21 Apr 2020.

### CHICAGO MANUAL

Valley, Rebecca. "*The Blue Hotel*." LitCharts LLC, September 27, 2018. Retrieved April 21, 2020. https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-blue-hotel.

To cite any of the quotes from *The Blue Hotel* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

### MLA

Crane, Stephen. The Blue Hotel. Dover Thrift Editions. 1993.

### CHICAGO MANUAL

Crane, Stephen. The Blue Hotel. Mineola, NY: Dover Thrift Editions. 1993.