

Chapter summaries of.....

The Pearl by John Steinbeck

Chapter 1

Kino awakes and watches the hanging box where his infant son, Coyotito, sleeps. He then watches his wife, Juana, who has also awakened and rests peacefully. Kino thinks of the "Song of the Family", a traditional song of his ancestors, as the dawn comes and Juana begins to prepare breakfast. Kino's ancestors had been great makers of songs, and everything they saw or thought had become a song. Juana sings softly to Coyotito part of the family song. Kino looks at them and thinks that "*this is safety, this is warmth, this is the Whole.*"

Kino sees a movement near the hanging box where Coyotito sleeps. A scorpion moves slowly down the rope supporting the box. Kino thinks of the Song of Evil, the music of the enemy, as the "Song of the Family" cries plaintively. Kino stands still, ready to grasp the scorpion, but Coyotito shakes the rope and the scorpion falls on him. Kino reaches to catch it, but it falls onto the baby's shoulder and strikes. Kino grabs the scorpion and kills it as Coyotito screams in pain. Juana begins to suck the puncture to remove the poison.



Having heard the baby's screams, Kino's brother, Juan Tomas, and his heavy-set wife Apolonia enter with their children. Juana orders them to find a doctor. The doctor never comes to their cluster of brush houses, so Juana decides to go to the doctor herself. The event becomes a neighborhood affair, for Juan Tomas and Apolonia accompany them and even the beggars in front of the church follow Juana as she marches toward the doctor. Kino feels weak as he approaches the doctor's home, for the doctor is not of his race and thus believes that Kino's people are simple animals.

Kino tells the doctor's servant that his child was poisoned by a scorpion. The doctor is a fat man who longs for civilized living. Although the doctor is at home, he refuses to treat Coyotito unless he knows that he has money. The servant asks if Kino has money, and when he can only offer small seed pearls, the servant tells Kino that the doctor has gone out. Kino strikes the gate with his fist, splitting his knuckles.

Chapter 2

Kino and Juana walk slowly down the beach to Kino's canoe, the one thing of value that he owns. The canoe is old, bought by Kino's grandfather, and is the source of food for Kino. It is their most important possession, for "a man with a boat can guarantee a woman that she will eat something." Coyotito still suffers from the scorpion bite: the swelling on his shoulder continues up his neck and his face is puffed and feverish. Juana makes a poultice from

brown seaweed. This poultice is *"as good a remedy as any and probably better than the doctor could have done."*

Kino and Juana get into the canoe so that Kino can find pearl oysters that may pay for the treatment for Coyotito. Kino dives for pearl oysters, where he thinks of the "Song of the Pearl That Might Be" and the "Song of the Undersea". Kino works steadily under the water until he sees a large oyster lying by itself with its shell partly open, revealing what seems to be a massive pearl. Kino forces the oyster loose and holds it tightly against him.

When Kino comes up for air, Juana can sense his excitement. Kino opens the various oysters he had caught, leaving the largest one for last. He worries that the large pearl he saw was merely a reflection, for *"in this Gulf of uncertain light there were more illusions than realities."* Finally, Kino opens the oyster to see a rich, perfectly curved pearl. Juana lifts the poultice of seaweed from Coyotito to see that the swelling has begun to recede. Kino puts back his head and howls, causing the men in other canoes to look up and race toward Kino's canoe.

Chapter 3

The news of the pearl travels quickly through Kino's small village. Before Kino and Juana return home, the news had already spread that Kino had found "The Pearl of the World," as it comes to be known. The local priest learns, as well as the doctor who refused to treat Coyotito. When the doctor learns, he tells the patient that he is treating that he must treat Coyotito for a scorpion sting. All kinds of people grow interested in Kino, and the news stirs up something infinitely evil. The pearl buyers consider how they might deal with Kino and offer him the lowest possible price.



However, Kino and Juana do not know the anger and bitterness they have engendered. Juan Tomas asks Kino what he will do now that he has become rich, and Kino answers that he and Juana will be married in the church. Kino envisions how he will be dressed, and sees Coyotito in a yachting cap and sailor suit from the United States. Kino then imagines buying a rifle. Thinking of the rifle breaks down barriers for Kino, as he imagines the whole lot of things that he might have. He thinks that Coyotito will go to school and learn to read. He claims that *"my son will make numbers, and these things will make us free because he will know, he will know and through him we will know."*

The priest visits Kino and Juana, and tells them that he hopes that they will remember to give thanks and to pray for guidance. The doctor also visits, and although Kino tells him that Coyotito is nearly well, the doctor claims that the scorpion sting has a curious effect that comes later and if he is not treated he may suffer blindness or a withered leg. Not sure whether or not the doctor is telling the truth, Kino nevertheless lets him see the baby. The doctor takes a bottle of white powder and a gelatin capsule, and gives Coyotito a pill. The doctor tells them that the medicine may save the baby from pain, but he will come back in

an hour to check on him. After the doctor leaves, Kino wraps the pearl in a rag and digs a hole in the dirt floor where he conceals the pearl.

When the doctor returns, he gives Coyotito water with ammonia and tells Kino that the baby will get well now. Kino tells the doctor that he will pay him once he has sold his pearl. The neighbors tell the doctor that Kino has found the *Pearl of the World* and will be a rich man. The doctor suggests that Kino keep the pearl in his safe, but Kino says that he has it secure. The doctor realizes that Kino will likely look to the place where it is stored, and sees his eyes move to the corner where he had buried it. After the doctor leaves again, Juana asks Kino whom he fears, and he answers everyone.'



That night, Kino thinks that he hears noises in his hut. He grabs his knife and strikes out in the dark. The person scurries out. Juana tells Kino that the pearl is evil and will destroy them. She tells him to throw it away or break it, for it will destroy them. Kino says that the pearl is their one chance, and that the next morning they will sell the pearl.

Chapter 4

In La Paz, the entire town knew that Kino was going to sell the pearl that day. Kino's neighbors speak of what they might do with the pearl. One man says that he would give it as a present to the Pope, while another said he would buy Masses for the souls of his family for a thousand years, while another thought he would distribute it among the poor of La Paz. Everyone worries that the pearl will destroy Kino and Juana.

Before leaving to sell the pearl, Juan Tomas warns Kino and Juana to get the best price for the pearl, and tells him how their ancestors got an agent to sell their pearls, but this agent ran off with the pearls. Kino had heard the story told as a warning of punishment against those who try to leave their station. Kino and Juana, followed by neighbors, reach the offices of the pearl buyers.

The pearl dealer inspects the pearl and tells him that his pearl is like fool's gold, for it is too large and valuable only as a curiosity. Kino cries out that it is the *Pearl of the World*, and no one has ever seen such a pearl. The dealer offers a thousand pesos, to which Kino says that it is worth fifty thousand and the dealer wants to cheat him. The dealer tells Kino to ask the others around him. Kino can feel the evil around him as other dealers inspect the pearl. One dealer refuses the pearl altogether, while a second dealer offers five hundred pesos. Kino tells them that he will go to the capital. The dealer offers fifteen hundred pesos, but Kino leaves with the pearl.

That night, the townspeople argue whether Kino should have accepted the money, which was still more than he would have ever seen. Kino buries the pearl again that night, and remains terrified at the world around him. Juan Tomas tell Kino that he has defied not only the pearl buyers, but the whole structure of life, and he fears for his brother. Juan Tomas warns him that he treads on new ground. Juan Tomas reminds Kino that his friends will protect him only if they are not in danger, and tells him "*Go with God*" before he departs.

In the middle of the night, Kino feels a sense of evil from outside of his brush house, and he prepares to use his knife. Kino steps outside to see if there are prowlers. Juana can hear noise from outside, so she picks up a stone and steps out of their hut. She finds Kino with blood running down his scalp and a long cut in his cheek from ear to chin. Juana once again tells Kino that the pearl is evil and they must destroy it. Kino insists that he will not be cheated, for he is a man.

Chapter 5

Kino senses movement near him, but it is only Juana who arises silently from beside him. Kino sees her near the hanging box where Coyotito lay, and then watches her go out the doorway. Kino begins to feel a great sense of rage as he hears her footsteps going toward the shore; Juana is going to throw the pearl back into the ocean. Kino chases Juana, then strikes her in the face with his clenched fist and kicks her in the side. He then turns away from her and walks up the beach. Juana knows that when Kino said that he is a man, he meant that he was *"half-insane and half-god"* and knows as a woman that *"the mountain would stand while the man broke himself; that the sea would surge while the man drowned in it."*

While walking on the beach, men attack Kino in search of the pearl, which is knocked from his hand and lands on the pathway. Juana soon sees Kino limping toward her with a stranger whose throat has been slit. She finds the pearl for Kino, and tells him that they must go away before daylight. Kino says that he struck the attacker in order to save his own life, but Juana says that this does not matter. He orders her to get Coyotito and all of the corn they have. Kino finds his canoe with a splintered hole in the bottom. He rushes home to find Juana and Coyotito, but Juana tells Kino that their house was torn up and the floor dug, and someone set fire to the outside.

Juana and Coyotito go to Juan Tomas and Apolonia. When Kino tells about the man he has killed, Juan Tomas says that it is the pearl and he should have sold it. Kino begs his brother to hide them until nightfall. Kino tells Juan Tomas that he will head north. Kino says that he will not give up the pearl, because *"if I give it up I shall lose my soul."*

Chapter 6

As Kino and Juana travel northward, Kino feels a sense of exhilaration along with his fear. They walk all night and rest during the day so that they may not be found, and attempt to cover their tracks so that they cannot be followed easily. Kino warns Juana that *"whoever finds us will take the pearl,"* but Juana wonders whether the dealers were right and the pearl has no value. Kino says that they would not have tried to steal it if it were not valuable. Kino repeats what they will have once they sell the pearl: the church wedding, the rifle, education for Coyotito.

When they stop to rest during the day, Juana does not sleep and Kino stirs as he dreams. When they hear noises from the distance, Kino orders Juana to keep Coyotito quiet. While Juana hides, Kino moves through the brush to see what he heard, and notices in the

distance three bighorn sheep trackers, one of whom is on horseback. Kino realizes that if the trackers find them, he must leap for the horseman, kill him and take his rifle. As the horseman passes by Kino, he does not notice him. Kino and Juana both realize that if the trackers find them, they will kill them to get the pearl.

Kino and Juana escape into the mountains, not bothering to cover their tracks. Kino orders Juana and Coyotito to leave him, for he can go faster alone, but she refuses. Kino and Juana take a zigzag path in order to thwart the trackers, and eventually find a small stream and the entrance to a cave. Kino tells Juana to hide in the cave, and he fears that Coyotito will cry, alerting the trackers.

While hiding in the cave, Kino finds that the trackers are by the stream. So that he will not be seen, Kino takes off his white clothing and creeps near them as they rest. The trackers can hear Coyotito, but think that it is merely a coyote pup. As the tracker prepares to shoot what he thinks is a coyote, Kino approaches the trackers and pounces on them. He grabs one of the trackers' rifle and shoots him between the eyes, and stabs another with his knife. The third tracker escapes up the cliff toward the cave, but Kino shoots him. Kino stands silently and hears nothing but the cry of death. Coyotito has been shot.

Kino and Juana arrive back in La Paz; he carries a gun while she carries her shawl with a limp, heavy bundle. Their return to La Paz becomes a notable event: *"there may be some old ones who saw it, but those whose fathers and whose grandfathers told it to them remember it nevertheless. It is an event that happened to everyone."* Juana appears hardened and fatigued. Kino thinks of the "Song of the Family", which has become his battle cry. As they return to La Paz, nobody speaks to them and even Juan Tomas cannot bear to say a word. Kino and Juana approach the gulf, and in the surface of the pearl Kino remembers seeing Coyotito lying in the cave with his head shot away. Kino throws the pearl into the ocean.