***The Grapes of Wrath* (John Steinbeck)**

**Chapter Nineteen**

Once California belonged to Mexico and its land to Mexicans; and a horde of tattered feverish Americans poured in.  And such was their hunger for land that they took the land--stole Sutter’s land, Guerrero’s land, took the grants and broke them up and growled and quarreled over them, those frantic hungry men; and they guarded with guns the land they had stolen.  They put up housed and barns, they turned the earth and planted crops.  And these things were possession, and possession was ownership.

The Mexicans were weak and fled.  They could not resist, because they wanted nothing in the world as frantically as the Americans wanted land.

Then, with time, the squatters were no longer squatters, but owners; and their children grew up and had children on the land.  And the hunger was gone from them, the feral hunger, the gnawing, tearing hunger for land, for water and earth and the good sky over it, for the green thrusting grass, for the swelling roots.  They had these things so completely that they did not know about them anymore. They had no more the stomach-tearing lust for a rich acre and a shining blade to plow it, for seed and a windmill beating its wings in the air.  They arose in the dark no more to hear the sleepy birds’ first chittering, and the morning wind around the house while they waited for the first light to go out to the dear acres.  These things were lost, and crops were reckoned in dollars, and land was valued by principal plus interest, and crops were bought and sold before they were planted.  Then crop failure, drought, and flood were no longer little deaths within life, but simple losses of money.  And all their love was thinned with money, and all their fierceness dribbled away in interest until they were no longer farmers at all, buy little shopkeepers of crops, little manufacturers who must sell before they can make, Then those farmers who were not good shopkeepers lost their land to good shopkeepers.  No matter how clever, how loving a man might be with earth and growing things, he could not survive if he were not also a good shopkeeper.  And as time went on, the business men had the farms, and the farms grew larger, but there were fewer of them.

Now farming became industry, and the owners followed Rome, although they did not know it.  They imported slaves, although they did not call them slaves: Chinese, Japanese, Mexicans, Filipinos.  They ice on rice and beans, the business men said.  They don’t need much.  They couldn’t know what to do with good wages.  Why, look how they live.  Why, look what they eat.  And if they get funny--deport them.

And all the time the farms grew larger and the owners fewer.  And there were pitifully few farmers on the land any more.  And the imported serfs were beaten and frightened and starved until some went home again, and some grew fierce and were killed or driven from the country.  And farms grew larger and the owners fewer.

And the crops changed.  Fruit trees took the place of grain fields, and vegetables to feed the world spread out on the bottoms:  lettuce, cauliflower, artichokes, potatoes--stoop crops.  A man may stand to use a scythe, a plow, a pitchfork; but he must crawl like a bug between the rows of lettuce, he must bend his back and pull his long bag between the cotton rows, he must go on his knees like a penitent across a cauliflower patch.

And it came about that owners no longer worked on their farms.  They farmed on paper; and they forgot the land, the smell, the feel of it, and remembered only that they owned it, remembered only what they gained and lost by it.  And some of the farms grew so large that one man could not even conceive of them anymore, so large that it took batteries of bookkeepers to keep track of interest and gain and loss; chemists to test the soil, to replenish; straw bosses to see that the stooping men were moving along the rows as swiftly as the material of their bodies could stand.  Then such a farmer really became a storekeeper, and kept a store.  He paid the men, and sold them food, and took the money back.  And after a while he did not pay the men at all, and saved bookkeeping.  “These farms gave food on credit.  A man might work and feed himself; and when the work was done, he might find that he owed money to the company.  And the owners not only did not work the farms any more, many of them had never seen the farms they owned.

And then the dispossessed were drawn west--from Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico; from Nevada and Arkansas families, tribes, dusted out, tractored out.  Carloads, caravans, homeless and hungry; twenty thousand and fifty thousand and a hundred thousand and two hundred thousand.  They streamed over the mountains, hungry and restless--restless as ants, scurrying to find work to do--to lift , to push, to pull, to pick, to cut p anything, any burden to bear, for food.  The kids are hungry.  We got no place to live.  Like ants scurrying for work, for food, and most of all for land.

We ain’t foreign.  Seven generations back Americans, and beyond that Irish, Scotch, English German.  One of our folk in the Revolution an’ they was lots of our folks in the Civil War--both sides.  Americans.

They were hungry, and they were fierce.  And they had hoped to find a home, and they found only hatred.  Okies--the owners hated them because the owners knew they were soft and the Okies strong, that they were fed and the Okies hungry; and perhaps the owners had heard from their grandfathers how easy it is to steal land from a soft man if you are fierce and hungry and armed.  The owners hated them. And in the towns, the storekeepers hated them because they had no money to spend.  There is no shorter path to a storekeeper’s contempt, and all his admirations are exactly the opposite[**\***](http://home.earthlink.net/~copaceticcomicsco/GrapesofWrath.html#Except).  The town men, little bankers, hated Okies because there was nothing to gain from them.  They had nothing.  And the laboring people hated Okies because a hungry man must work, and if he must work, if he has to work, the wage payer automatically gives him less for his work; and then no one can get more.

And the dispossess, the migrants, flowed into California, two hundred and fifty thousand, and three hundred thousand.  Behind them new tractors were going on the land and the tenants were being forced off.  And new waves were on the way, new waves of the dispossessed and the homeless, hardened, intent, and dangerous.

And while the Californians wanted many things, accumulation, social success, amusement, luxury, and a curious banking security, the new barbarians wanted only two things--land and food; and to them the two were one.  And whereas the wants of the Californians were nebulous and undefined, the wants of the Okies were beside the roads, lying there to be seen and coveted:  the good fields with water to be dug for, the good green fields, earth to crumble experimentally in the hand, grass to smell, oaten stalks to chew until the sharp sweetness was in the throat.  A man might look at a fallow field and know, and see in his mind that his own bending back and his own straining arms would bring the cabbages into the light, and the golden eating corn, the turnips and carrots.

And a homeless hungry man, driving the roads with his wife beside him and his thin children in the back seat, could look at the fallow fields which might produce food but not profit and that man could know how a fallow field is a sin and the unused land a crime against the thin children.  An such a man drove along the roads and knew temptation at every filed, and knew the lust to take these fields and make them grow strength for his children and a little comfort for his wife.  The temptation was before him always.  The fields goaded him, and the company ditches with good water flowing were a goad to him.

And in the south he saw the golden oranges hanging on the trees, the little golden oranges on the dark green trees; and guards with shotguns patrolling the lines so a man might not pick an orange for a thin child, oranges to be dumped if the price was low.

He drove his old car into a town.  He scoured the farms for work.  Where can we sleep the night?

Well, there’s a Hooverville on the edge of the river.  There’s a whole raft of Okies there.

He drove his old car to Hooverville.  He never asked again, for there was a Hooverville on the edge of every town.

The rag town lay close to water; and the houses were tents, and weed-thatched enclosures, paper houses, a great junk pile.  The man drove his family in and became a citizen of Hooverville--always they were called Hooverville.  The man put up his own tent as near to water as he could get; or if he had no tent, he went to the city dump and brought back cartons and built a house of corrugated paper.  And when the rains came the house melted and washed away.  He settled in Hooverville and he scoured the countryside for work, and the little money he had went for gasoline to look for work.  In the evening the men gathered and talked of the land they had seen.

There’s thirty thousan’ acres, out west of here.  Layin’ there.  Jesus, what I could do with that, with five acres of that!  Why, hell, I’d have ever’thing to eat.

Notice one thing?  They ain’t no vegetables not chickens not pigs at the farms.  They raise one thing--cotton, say, or peaches, or lettuce.  ‘Nother place’ll be all chickens.  They buy the stuff they could raise in the dooryard.

Jesus, what I could do with a couple pigs!

Well, it ain’t yourn, an’ it ain’t gonna be yourn.

What we gonna do?  The kids can’t grow up this way.

In the camps the word would come whispering, There’s work at Shafter.  And the cars would be loaded in the night, the highways crowded -- a gold rush for work.  At Shafter the people would pile up, five times too many to do the work.  A gold rush for work.  They stole away in the night, frantic for work.  And along the roads lay the temptations, the fields that could bear food.

That’s owned.  That ain’t our’n.

Well, maybe we could get a little piece of her.  Maybe--a little piece.   Right down there - a patch.  Jimson weed now.  Christ, I could git enough potatoes off’n that little patch to feed my whole family!

It ain’t our’n.  It got to have Jimson weeds.

Now and then a man tried; crept on the land and cleared a piece, trying like a thief to steal a little richness from the earth.  Secret gardens hidden in the weeds.  A package of carrot seeds and a few turnips.  Planted potato skins, crept out in the evening secretly to hoe in the stolen earth.

Leave the weeds around the edge--then nobody can see what we’re a-doin’.  Leave some weeds, big tall ones, in the middle.

Secret gardening in the evenings, and water carried in a rusty can.

And then one day a deputy sheriff: Well, what you think you’re doin'?

I ain’t doin'’ no harm.

I had my eye on you.  This ain’t your land.  You’re trespassing.

The land ain’t plowed, an’ I ain’t hurtin’ it none.

You goddamned squatters.  Pretty soon you’d think you owned it.  You’d be sore as hell.  Think you owned it.  Get off now.

And the little green carrot tops were kicked off and the turnip greens trampled.  And then the Jimson weed moved back in.  But the cop was right.  A crop raised--why, that makes ownership.  Land hoed and the carrots eaten--a man might fight for land he’s taken food from.  Get him off quick!  He’ll think he owns it.  He might even die fighting for the little plot among the Jimson weeds.

Did ya see his face when we kicked them turnips out?   Why, he’d kill a fella soon’s he’d look at him.  We got to keep these here people down or they’ll take the country.  They’ll take the country.

Outlanders, foreigners.

Sure, they talk the same language, but they ain't’ the same.  Look how they live.  Think any of us folks’d live like that? Hell, no!

In the evenings, squatting and talking.  And an excited man:  Whyn’t twenty of us take a piece of lan’?  We got guns.  Take it an’ say, “Put us off if you can.”  Whyn’t we do that?

They’d jus’ shoot us like rats.

Well, which’d you ruther be,m dead or here?  Under groun’ or in a house all made of gunny sacks?  Which’d you ruther for your kids, dead now or dead in two years with what they call malnutrition?  Know what we et all week?  Milled nettles an’ fried dough!  Know where we got the flour for the dough?  Swep’ the floor of a boxcar.

Talking in the camps, and the deputies, fat-assed men with guns slung on fat hips, swaggering through the camps: Give ‘em somepin to think about.  Got to keep ‘em in line or Christ only knows what they’ll do!  If they ever get together there ain’t nothin’ that’ll stop ‘em.

Quote: In Lawrenceville a deputy sheriff evicted a squatter, and the squatter resisted, making it necessary for the officer to use force, The eleven-year-old son of the squatter shot and killed the deputy with a .22 rifle.

Rattlesnakes!  Don’t take chances with ’em, an’ if they argue, shoot first.  If a kid’ll kill a cop, what’ll the men do?  Thing is, get tougher’n they are.  Treat ‘em rough.  Scare ‘em.

What if they won’t scare?  What if they stand up and take it and shoot back?  These men were armed when they were children.  A gun is an extension of themselves.  What if they won’t scare?  What if some time an army of them marches on the land as the Lombards did in Italy, as the Germans did on Gaul and Turks did on Byzantium?  They were land-hungry, ill-armed hordes took and the legions could not stop them.  Slaughter and terror did not stop them.  How can you frighten a man whose hunger is not only in his own cramped stomach but in the wretched bellies of his children?  You can’t scare him--he has known a feat beyond every other.

In Hooverville the men talking: Grampa took his lan’ from the Injuns.

Now, this ain’t right.  We’re a-talkin’ here.  This here you’re talkin’ about is stealin’.  I ain’t no thief.

No?  You stole a bottle of milk from a porch night before last.  An’ you stole some copper wire and sold it for a piece of meat.

Yeah, but the kids was hungry.

It’s stealin’, though.

Know how the Fairfiel’ ranch was got?  I’ll tell ya.  It was all gov’ment lan’, an’ could be took up.  Ol’ Fairfil’ kep’ ‘em in food an’ whisky, an’ then when they’d proved the lan’, ol’ Fairfil’ took it from ‘em.  He used to day the lan’ cost him a pint of rotgut an acre.  Would you say that was stealin’?

Well, it wan’t right, but he never went to jail for it.

No, he never went to jail for it.  An’ the fella that put a boat in a wagon an’ his report like it was all under water ‘cause he went in a boat--he never went to jail neither.  An’ the fellas that bribed congressmen and the legislatures never went to jail neither.

All over the state, jabbering in the Hoovervilles.

And then the raids--the swoop of armed deputies on the squatters’ camps.  Get out.  Department of Health orders.  This camp is a menace to health.

Where we gonna go?

That’s none of our business.  We got orders to get you out of here.  In half an hour we set fire to the camp.

They’s typhoid down the line.  You want ta spread it all over?

We got orders to get you out of here.  Now get!  In half an hour we burn the camp.

In half an hour the smoke of paper houses, of weed-thatched huts, rising to the sky, and the people in their cars rolling over the highways, looking for another Hooverville.

And in Kansas and Arkansas, in Oklahoma and Texas and New Mexico, the tractors moved in and pushed the tenants out.

Three hundred thousand in California and more coming.  And in California the roads full of frantic people running like ants to pull, to push, to lift, to work.  For every manload to lift, five pairs of arms extended to lift it; for every stomachful of food available, five mouths open.

And the great owners, who must lose their land in an upheaval, the great owners with access to history, with eyes to read history and to know the great fact:  when property accumulates in too few hands it is taken away.  And that companion fact: when a majority of the people are hungry and cold they will take by force what they need.  And the little screaming fact that sounds through all history:  repression works only to strengthen and knit the repressed.  The great owners ignored the three cries of history.  The land fell into fewer hands, the number of the dispossessed increased, and every effort of the great owners was directed at repression.  The money was spent for arms, for gas to protect the great holdings, and spies were sent to catch the murmuring of revolt so that it might be stamped out.  The changing economy was ignored; and only means to destroy revolt were considered, while the causes of revolt went on.

The tractors which throw men out of work, the belt lines which carry loads, the machines which produce, all were increased; and more and more families scampered on the highways, looking for crumbs from the great holdings, lusting after the land beside the roads.  The great owners formed associations for protection and they met to discuss ways to intimidate, to kill, to gas.  And always they were in fear of a principal--three hundred thousand--if they ever move under a leader--the end.  Three hundred thousand, hungry and miserable; if they ever know themselves, the land will be theirs and all the gas, all the rifles in the world won’t stop them.  And the great owners, who had become through their holdings both more and less than men, ran to their destruction, and used every means that in the long run would destroy them.  Every little means, every violence, every raid on a Hooverville, every deputy swaggering through a ragged camp put off the day a little and cemented the inevitability of the day.

The men squatted on their hams, sharpfaced men, lean from hunger and hard from resisting it, sullen eyes and hard jaw.  And the rich land was around them.

D’ja hear about the kid in that fourth tent down?

No, I jus’ come in.

Well, that kid’s been a-cryin’ in his sleep an’ a-rollin’ in his sleep.  Them folks thought he got worms.  So they give him a blaster, an’ he died.  It was what they call black-tongue the kid had.  Comes from not gettin’ good things to eat.

Poor little fella.

Yeah, but them folks can’t bury him.  Got to go to the county stone orchard.

Well, hell.

And hands went into pockets and little coins came out.  In front of the tent a little heap of silver grew.  And the family found it there.

Our people are good people; our people are kind people.  Pray God some day kind people won’t all be poor.  Pray God some day a kid can eat.

And the associations of owners knew that some day the praying would stop.

And there’s the end.