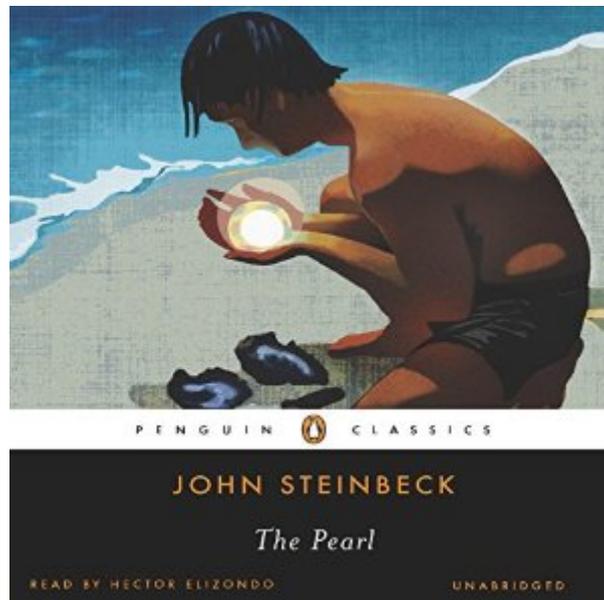


The book was found

The Pearl



Synopsis

In this short book illuminated by a deep understanding and love of humanity, John Steinbeck retells an old Mexican folk tale: the story of the great pearl, how it was found, and how it was lost. For the diver Kino, finding a magnificent pearl means the promise of a better life for his impoverished family. His dream blinds him to the greed and suspicions the pearl arouses in him and his neighbors, and even his loving wife cannot temper his obsession or stem the events leading to the tragedy. For Steinbeck, Kino and his wife illustrate the fall from innocence of people who believe that wealth erases all problems. Originally published in 1947, *The Pearl* shows why Steinbeck's style has made him one of the most beloved American writers: it is a simple story of simple people, recounted with the warmth and sincerity and unrivaled craftsmanship Steinbeck brings to his writing. It is tragedy in the great tradition, beautifully conveying not despair but hope for mankind.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Most people born and raised in America cannot even imagine the depths of poverty that most of the rest of the world are forced to live with. This story illuminates this fact, as we enter the world of Kino, a pearl diver and occasional fisherman, his wife Juana, and their baby son, Coyotito. All they have is a grass shack house, a few clay cooking utensils, and their prize possession, Kino's boat, inherited from his father and grandfather. The boat is the family's livelihood, providing the means to put a meal on the table and to provide a few pesos for store bought goods by selling the small pearls Kino is able to find. But Kino and his family, far from being depressed or unhappy, have a great treasure, the love they have for each other and their satisfaction with life as it is, with few disturbing dreams of

greater things. But their quiet, routine life is turned upside down the day that Kino finds a Great Pearl. Suddenly Kino can dream of better things: a rifle for himself, school for his son so he will be able to read and tell what is really in the books, a real house. But dreams can be deadly things. Dreams lead to desire, and desire to greed, and greed to violence. What happens to Kino and family from this point on is not a pretty story. Now we see that underneath the quiet, idyllic seeming small town and its inhabitants lie the seeds of cheating, betrayal, collusion, fear, and murder. And we see the gradual loss of Kino's real treasures. By the end of the book, events have reached the level of real tragedy, and you, along with Kino, are liable to end up in a state of emotional exhaustion. Steinbeck's prose for this book matches his characters and situation very well, a very minimalist sentence structure and set of speech patterns.

Referring to this novella, as a variant is in no way meant to detract from the work, or suggest that it is lacking in originality. The two other works Steinbeck's book "The Pearl" is sometimes linked to, add to the reading experience, and reinforce the transcendence of its message. "The Pearl Of Great Price" from a parable in the Gospel of Matthew, attempts to teach with the same jewel from the sea. Mr. Steinbeck was also a great reader of medieval texts, and one of these morality plays was in the form of a poem written in the 14th Century, entitled "Pearl" although the Author is unknown. These three works are separated by millennia, but their commentary on the human condition is consistent. Mr. Steinbeck wrote this after his triumph "The Grapes Of Wrath". The work was a monumental bestseller, it brought The Pulitzer Prize to the Author, and was rapidly made into a movie that is a classic in it's own right. Superficially one could argue Mr. Steinbeck achieved all that a writer might conceivably want, fame, fortune, and critical recognition. Unfortunately, like his work, often when you feel something good is about to happen, a positive change for his characters that have struggled, and fought to survive, he slams you face down on bedrock's reality. The acclaim for his work brought him great discomfort as well. He was labeled a socialist, a communist, an agitator, and became the focus of FBI attention, and not because they liked his book. He viewed and detested the treatment the racism toward Mexicans in Southern California, and witnessed the so-called "Zoot Suit Riots" that resulted. "The Pearl" might be called the lottery if it was written today.

I've been on a roll of reading things I really like, and the trend continues . . . *The Pearl* eats at you on a lot of levels. I used the word "eats" specifically because it is a book that makes you terribly uncomfortable. There is no solace in its chapters - the beginning is happy; the ending bleak. Kino is happy with his life - he thinks about his "ordinary morning, perfect morning" as the novella opens.

He has so little, yet his happiness is complete until his child is bitten by a scorpion. It is really Juana's insistence that they go to a doctor that dooms Kino. Though the doctor never SAYS to Kino "You are an animal", Kino knows why the doctor refuses to treat Coyotito, and his anger at his own impotence begins to eat him alive. On some level, he believes that money, education will make him "human" to the eyes of others. It is the ultimate irony that the pearl, which represents money (at least on one level), transforms him into what he was so unjustly called: an animal. Kino's desire to protect his "chance" causes him to behave in ways that he never would have dreamed. He beats his wife, acting on instinct at the exclusion of emotion, and is willing to sacrifice his family for what he sees within the pearl. He kills with pleasure, and while the killings are at least partially justified, he is unsettled by his own savagery. Kino is what he never before was - Steinbeck uses the word "animal" to describe his behavior on multiple occasions as he attempts to defend his pearl. It is the ultimate regression of his character from something that is human to something that almost isn't. So, why does this unhappy parable make us so uncomfortable? Because it goes so against what we as a society believe.

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