

The Tin Drum Book Notes

The Tin Drum by Günter Grass

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Author/Context

Günter Grass was born on October 16, 1927 in Danzig, a northern port city in Poland. His parents owned a small retail grocery store. He attended both elementary and high school in Danzig, and later became an anti-aircraft gunner. He served as a soldier in World War II and was wounded by the Russians during an advance in 1944. In 1945, he was kept as a military prisoner by the American forces in Bavaria for several months. He became a farm and mine worker in the Rhineland after his release, then became an apprentice stone carver in Düsseldorf. Once the Düsseldorf Art Academy opened in 1948, he studied sculpture and painting there for two years. After that, he began to travel in Italy and France, and then resumed his art study in Berlin in 1953. The next year he married a Swiss ballet dancer named Anna Schwarz, and won third prize in a poetry competition. In 1956, he moved to Paris and held his first art exhibition in Stuttgart. In 1956 and 1957, he finished his first plays, then in 1958, he received prizes of stipends to proceed with his writing career. In 1959, he became famous with the publication of *Die Blechtrommel* (*The Tin Drum*), winning several international awards, including the Nobel Prize in Literature. He is most well-known for his fiction, which include *Katz und Maus* (1961; *Cat and Mouse*, 1963), *Hundejahre* (1963; *Dog Years*, 1965), *Der Butt* (1977; *The Flounder*, 1978), *Kopfgeburten: oder die Deutschen sterben aus* (1980; *Headbirths: or, the Germans Are Dying Out*, 1982), and *Unkenrufe* (1992; *The Call of the Toad*, 1992). *The Tin Drum* was later made into a motion picture (1979). Grass has been heavily involved in politics throughout his life, and his political essays have been influential in the thinking of the Social Democratic Party in Germany.

Grass' fiction borrows much of its influence from twentieth century movements such as Expressionism and Theater of the Absurd. He is known for his use of objects and objective correlative to propel his story line, instead of strict narrative. Grass sees a separation between the man-made categories of morality and logic and the actual thread of events. His chosen objects take on a certain ambiguity of meaning and lack straightforward morality. His objects take an individual personality in his novels, becoming extended metaphors and motifs that hold throughout the text. In the same vein, Grass plays with time in his work, both extending and foreshortening traditional narrative distance and flow. This holds for point-of-view as well - Oskar in *The Tin Drum* uses several points of view, sometimes layered simultaneously. Grass' work also represents success as parody; *The Tin Drum's* style is a parody of Goethe's novel *Wilhelm Meister*, which follows a young man through his education to maturity.

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Plot Summary

The Tin Drum is the fictional autobiography of Oskar Matzerath, who at the time of his writing is thirty years old. He is writing from inside a mental institution in Düsseldorf Germany, the reasons for which remain unknown to the reader until the end of the book. Oskar is, for all intents and purposes, a gnome; when he was a three year-old, he received a toy tin drum from his mother Agnes and decided voluntarily to stop growing, and to never become a grownup. At the same time, he developed a high-pitched singing voice that he could use to break glass - he nurtures this talent and uses it to many ends - defending his drum (which he is never without), breaking and entering, inscribing, and for the effect it has on an audience. As Oskar gets older, the events in his life impel him to grow - at the time of his writing, he measures four feet one inch, and in the middle of writing his book, he grows to four feet two inches.

Oskar's autobiography is also the biography of his family and its history, starting around the turn of the 20th century and extending until after World War II. He begins with his grandparents' generation and relates his story to the present day. His grand parents were Kashubes, a group of people who are neither ethnic Poles nor Germans, but hail from Kashubia, a province in northwest Poland. From them, Oskar inherits an "incendiary spirit." His grandfather Joseph was wanted by the police for setting fire to several sawmills. Oskar's grandmother, Anna, hid Joseph and then married him.

His grandparents moved to Danzig, a Polish port city, where Agnes, Oskar's mother, and Oskar were born. Anna started a family tradition of owning grocery stores and food delivery businesses; the first part of the story revolves around the clique of storeowners in a section of Danzig.

Although Oskar's mother marries a man named Alfred Matzerath, she has a lifelong adulterous love affair with her first cousin, Jan Bronski. Oskar calls both of these men his "presumptive father." Alfred is a card-carrying Nazi, and Jan is a sickly Polish National too weak to pass his army physicals.

Oskar does not go to school, and is self-educated, although he claims to have been borne with all of his intellectual capacities intact. His two great intellectual influences are Rasputin and Goethe. His mother died before World War II began. Oskar weathers the war years in Danzig, which is the first city invaded by Germany in the war. He is present for the invasion of the Polish Post Office, where Jan works. Jan is later executed for his grudging role in the defense of the post office.

With both Agnes and Jan dead, Alfred marries Maria Truczinski, who is Oskar's first love. Alfred marries her because he thinks he got her pregnant, but unbeknownst to either Maria or Alfred, it was Oskar that had impregnated Maria. She gives birth to Oskar's son, Kurt, who spurns Oskar from the day of his birth and will not comply with Oskar's wish for him to be a drum-wielding three-year old like himself.



During the war, Oskar takes up with a performing troupe of midgets like himself, led by his mentor, a midget-clown named Bebra. Oskar performs on his drum and breaks glass with his voice for legions of German soldiers on the front lines during World War II. He falls in love with Roswitha Raguna, an Italian somnambulist and midget like himself, but she is killed by artillery fire during the allied invasion of Normandy. After that, Oskar returns home.

Oskar becomes the leader of a band of anti-establishment youths called The Dusters. He refines their way of doing things and helps them break into government offices. They are finally caught in a church, sawing apart a statue of the Virgin Mary and the baby Jesus, because a sister of one of the members ratted them out.

Alfred, a member of the Nazis, is killed at the end of the war by the invading Russian army. Once Alfred is gone, Oskar, Maria, and Kurt are forced to emigrate to Düsseldorf to be with Maria's sister, Guste. There, Kurt and Maria take up trading on the black market, and Oskar becomes a tombstone engraver. Later, during the tough time of the currency reform after the war, Oskar becomes a model at the academy of art in Düsseldorf. Later, he takes up jazz with his friend Klepp and they put together a jazz band and play at a nightclub called "The Onion Cellar" in Düsseldorf. Once the nightclub owner dies, Oskar is offered a contract to take his drum on the road for solo acts. This leads to a recording deal and makes Oskar rich.

The record company turns out to be owned by Bebra, who becomes close to Oskar and then dies. Oskar stops drumming. Out walking in the fields outside Düsseldorf, Oskar finds the severed ring finger of the woman, a nurse named Sister Dorothea, who had lived across the hall from him in his Düsseldorf apartment and had been murdered. He keeps the finger because he had been in love with her. He then meets another man, Vittlar, with whom he becomes friends. For Vittlar's sake, he asks his friend to turn him in to the police for Sister Dorothea's murder, which Vittlar does. Oskar is put on trial for the murder and is wrongfully convicted and forced to live in a mental hospital, where he writes his memoirs.



Major Characters

Oskar Matzerath (Bronski): The main character and narrator of the novel. Oskar willfully stunted his growth at three feet tall as a three-year-old, although later in the novel he grows to four feet one inch. For a majority of the novel, Oskar is never found without his red and white lacquered tin drum, which he plays constantly. He is also endowed for most of his life with the ability to shatter glass with a high pitched scream, though he eventually loses this ability.

Bruno Münsterberg: Oskar's keeper in the mental institution. He keeps an eye on Oskar through a peephole in his bedroom door, and spends his time making elaborate works of knotted art with old pieces of string.

Anna Bronski (Koljaiczek/Wranka): Oskar's maternal grandmother, wearer of four potato-colored skirts, who hides Oskar's grandfather Joseph Koljaiczek under her skirts to keep him from the law. They bear a daughter, Agnes, Oskar's mother.

Joseph Koljaiczek (Wranka) / Joe Colchic: Oskar's maternal grandfather, who hid from the police under Anna Bronski's four skirts; he was wanted for arson (burning down a paper plant). He fathers Agnes, Oskar's mother, the day that he meets Anna Bronski, (whether while hiding under Anna's skirts or later that night is a subject of debate), and marries her that night. He then takes on the persona of Joseph Wranka, a dead riverman, living and working for many years. Once he is found to be Joseph Koljaiczek, he attempts escape from the law again, only to drown under a raft in his flight. A family myth remains that he actually survived drowning and fled to America, where he became a millionaire lumber baron in Buffalo, N.Y. under the name Joe Colchic.

Agnes Koljaiczek (Matzerath): Oskar's mother and closest confidant. Although she marries Alfred Matzerath, a soldier she meets as a nurse, she has an ongoing affair throughout her life with Jan Bronski, her cousin. Oskar suspects that Jan, and not Alfred, is his actual father. After an incident watching an eel fisherman at the coast, she begins to eat fish obsessively and eventually dies.

Jan Bronski: Vincent Bronski's son and Oskar's mother (Agnes Matzerath)'s cousin and lifelong adulterous lover. Jan is also the man that Oskar presumes to be his biological father. Jan is a skinny, perpetually sickly man, who was turned down four times for the army. He works in the Polish post office in Danzig and is taken prisoner while unwillingly defending it against the Germans when they invaded Poland on September 1, 1939. He is later executed.

Klepp (Egon Münzer): Oskar's friend who comes to visit him in the mental institution. A jazz flautist, he played in a jazz band with Oskar and Scholle, a guitarist, at the Onion Cellar, a club in Düsseldorf after WWII.

Gottfried von Vittlar: A friend of Oskar's, who comes to visit him in the institution. He first met Oskar in his mother's apple tree while Oskar was on a walk after WWII. Vittlar



is the reason Oskar is in a mental institution - Oskar asked him to turn him in as the murderer of the nurse Sister Dorothea, even though he was innocent.

Alfred Matzerath: Oskar's assumed father (Oskar presumes Jan Bronski to be his actual father), whom Agnes Koljaiczek met while working as a nurse. Alfred had been shot through the thigh in WWI. He and Agnes were later married. He is a strong and vocal supporter of Hitler throughout WWII, and is killed by Russian soldiers when they take Danzig after the war.

Albrecht Greff: The greengrocer and boy scout leader. He is obsessed with order, and knows little about the vegetables he sells. He is rumored throughout the book to be 'rather too fond' of the young boys in his troupe (which is eventually taken away from him in lieu of the emergence of the Hitler Youth Corps). Each morning in the winter, Greff goes out to the frozen sea, cuts a hole in the ice, and swims. He is preoccupied with inventing clever mechanical machines. When he is summoned to appear in court on a morals charge by the German authorities, Greff kills himself with an elaborate counterweighted machine that he invents in order to hang himself in his basement.

Lina Greff (Bartsch): Albrecht Greff's wife, a slovenly woman who rarely gets out of bed. She carries on an extended adulterous affair with Oskar, which Albrecht knows about but ignores. She provides Oskar with his first substantial sexual experiences.

Bebra: Oskar's lifelong mentor and role model; he is, like Oskar, a man who refused to grow. He first meets Bebra at the circus - Bebra is a musical clown. Later, Oskar joins up with a performing troupe Bebra has put together; they perform for soldiers on the front lines during WWII. Later, when Oskar is signed to a record and performing contract, Bebra is in charge of the company. Through Bebra, Oskar meets Roswitha Raguna, the love of his life.

Roswitha Raguna: A beautiful Italian woman who, though a bit taller than Oskar, has nevertheless chosen not to grow. She is the most celebrated somnambulist in all of Italy. When Oskar joins Bebra's performing troupe, he and Roswitha have a long love affair that lasts until she is killed by mortar fire on the front lines of France in WWII.

Herbert Truczinski: Oskar's friend who, in order to get away from almost certain death working in a bar on the Danzig waterfront (he was stabbed repeatedly by sailors), takes a job guarding a figurehead from an old sailboat named 'Niobe.' The figurehead is supposedly cursed and is responsible for Herbert's death - he takes an ax to the figurehead but kills himself in the process.

Maria Truczinski (Matzerath): Oskar's first sexual partner and the mother of the boy he considers his biological son, Kurt. Maria marries Alfred Matzerath after Agnes dies, because Alfred thinks he has gotten Maria pregnant. Oskar flees to western Germany with her after WWII.

Kurt Matzerath (Bronski): Kurt is Maria's son and the reason that she marries Alfred Matzerath, for he believes himself to be Kurt's father. Oskar, however, knows better - he is convinced he fathered Kurt with Maria in her bed after pouring fizz powder in her



navel. Kurt does not like Oskar and does not understand him; he is of normal size and does not understand how to drum.

P. Korneff: A tombstone artisan in Düsseldorf with whom Oskar gets a job chiseling inscriptions. Korneff has a constant skin infection - there are boils constantly erupting on the back of his neck.

Sister Dorothea (Köngetter): The nurse living across from Oskar in the Zeidler flat. He never lays eyes on her in the light, but is infatuated with her. He hides in her closet, then has a failed sexual episode with her in the flat's darkened bathroom. Her murder is wrongly pinned on Oskar, who comes into possession of her severed ring finger.

Minor Characters

Vincent Bronski: Anna Bronski's brother, and Oskar's great-uncle. He is a widower and lives on a farm in Kashubia. After a pilgrimage to Czestochowa (a place where the virgin Mary was sighted), he becomes obsessed with coronating the Virgin Mary as the Queen of Poland. His son is Jan Bronski, Agnes Bronski's lover.

Gregor Koljaiczek: Joseph Koljaiczek's elder brother, who marries Anna Bronski after his brother drowns. He is a drunk and works in a gunpowder factory. He dies in the flu epidemic of 1917.

Hedwig (Lemke) Bronski/Ehlers: Jan Bronski's wife, a Kashubian woman described as big and 'rawboned,' with an 'inscrutable bovine gaze.' She and Jan have two children, Stephan and Marga.

Gretchen Scheffler: Agnes Matzerath's friend, who takes it upon herself to educate Oskar after it is clear that he cannot go to school. Although she believes her attempts to be futile, it is from her that Oskar learns of Rasputin and Goethe, the two great intellectual forces in his life.

Alexander Scheffler: Gretchen Scheffler's husband, a baker, who travels constantly with his wife on the Third Reich's 'Strength Through Joy' ships.

Stephan & Marga Bronski/Ehlers: The children of Jan and Hedwig Bronski. Jan is as sickly as his father. They are either Oskar's cousins or half siblings, depending on whether Oscar's father is Jan Bronski or Alfred Matzerath.

Auntie Kauer: Oskar's kindergarten teacher, who would walk her students through town by harnessing them all together.

Meyn the trumpeter: A tenant in Oskar's family's apartment building, he is a gin-drinking drunk who is capable of playing beautiful music. Oskar often accompanies him on the drum. During WWII, he gives up drinking and joins the army. After he is discharged, he starts drinking again. Meyn owns four cats - one day he gets sick of



them, beats them to death and puts them in a dumpster. Laubchaud the watchmaker reports him to animal control.

Dr. Hornstetter: Oskar's doctor in the mental institution, who comes by his room almost every day, just long enough to smoke a cigarette. She insists that Oskar suffers from childhood isolation.

Old Man Heilandt: An older tenant of Oskar's apartment building. He had a shed in the courtyard behind the apartment building, where he would spend his time straightening old nails that he pulled out of crates.

Nuchi Eyke, Axel Mischke, Harry Schlager, Hänschen Kollin, and Susi Kater: The children Oskar's age that live in his apartment complex. They never accept him, but make fun of him and make him drink a soup they make out of pulverized brick, spit, urine, and live frogs.

Sigismund Markus: The Jewish toy store owner where Agnes buys Oskar his drums. Sigismund is secretly in love with Agnes; he volunteers to watch Oskar every week when Agnes has her hotel liaisons with Jan Bronski. He is killed by the Nazis when they take over Danzig, after they destroy his store.

Löbsack: The Nazi district chief of training, also a hunchback. Oskar regards him at first as the Nazi emissary of he and Bebra's kind, but then realizes he is mistaken.

Father Wiehnke: The priest at the Church of the Sacred Heart in Danzig, where Agnes Matzerath went every Saturday to confess.

Dr. Hollatz: The doctor that gained notoriety by publishing a paper studying Oskar's glass-breaking voice.

Sister Inge: Dr. Hollatz' assistant and a nurse, the only person in the office that Oskar allows to perform experiments on him.

Leo Schugger: A man whose occupation is to turn up as a mourner to funerals and offer condolences; he attended seminary school and Oskar calls his vision of the world 'radiant and perfect.'

Mother Truczinski: A woman living in Oskar's apartment building, the mother of Herbert, Maria, Guste, and Fritz Truczinski. She keeps Oskar company and offers him a place to sleep over the years after Maria and Alfred Matzerath are married.

Guste Truczinski (Köster): A quiet, unwed woman who is a waitress at a Danzig hotel. She then marries a soldier named Köster, whom she had only known for a few weeks, and moves to Düsseldorf. After the war, Maria, Oskar, and Kurt flee to the west and live with her.



Fritz Truczinski: Fritz keeps rabbits in the courtyard behind Oskar's Danzig apartment. He is in the army and is only known to Oskar through the postcards he sends home from the front lines in the west.

Laubschad the watchmaker: A man living in Oskar's apartment building who lives surrounded by clocks. He is a member of the local SPCA, and saves Meyn's cats from the garbage on the day of Herbert Truczinski's funeral.

Koybella: The janitor at the Polish Post Office in Danzig - he had one leg an inch shorter than the other, and was fabled to be able to fix toy drums. He is killed in the defense of the post office when it is attacked by the Nazis.

Victor Welhun: An extremely nearsighted man who loses his glasses at the post office battle. His job is delivering money orders. He is the only man who escapes German imprisonment and execution. Oskar refers to him only as 'Poor Victor.'

Ehlers: Hedwig Bronski's second husband, who causes Jan's former family to change their last names.

Felix & Kitty: The two acrobats in Bebra's troupe. Kitty is blonde and exotic; Felix is the tallest member of the group, measuring well over four feet.

Corporal Lankes: A tortured artist and soldier on the front line, Lankes becomes friends with Oskar, and takes a trip with him back to the Atlantic wall after the war is over. Lankes smokes incessantly, but never buys his own cigarettes, preferring to take them from whoever is near.

Ripper, Putty, Firestealer, Mister, Soup Chicken, Lionheart, Bluebeard, Totila, Teja, Belisarius, Narses, Störtebaker, Felix and Paul Rennwand: The major members of the Dusters, a group of young hoodlums that Oskar leads. They act as a guerrilla group against the government, breaking and entering. They are finally caught when they break into the church of the Sacred Heart and saw apart the statue of the Virgin Mary with the infants Jesus and John the Baptist.

Moorkähne: The leader of the other faction of Dusters, Moorkähne is shy and soft-spoken, a very good student, and has a limp because one of his legs is shorter than the other.

Lucy Rennwand: Felix and Paul Rennwand's sister, who takes the information on the Dusters to the police and is responsible for their getting caught.

Mr. Fajngold: A Polish refugee who comes to live with Oskar's family in the wake of the war. Although she had been killed, he is convinced that his wife Luba and his children Lev, Jakub, Berek, Leon, Mendel, and Sonya are there with him, and consults them on every decision. Fajngold had been the disinfectant at Treblinka Concentration Camp. Finally he proposes to Maria, who declines marriage and moves west with Kurt and Oskar.



Willem Slobber: The Düsseldorf version of Leo Schugger. According to Korneff, there is a whole fleet of Leo Schuggers, living under a different name in every city.

Sister Gertrude: A nurse that Oskar takes on a date; she leaves him at a dance hall because she is embarrassed to be with him.

Professor Kuchen: The first artist Oskar poses for; he does his work, as do his students, in charcoal.

Professor Maruhn: A sculptor and friend of Kuchen's; Oskar spends a lot of time posing for him, though Maruhn is never satisfied and never finishes a sculpture of Oskar.

Ulla: Corporal Lankes' sometime fiancée, whom he beats when he cannot find artistic inspiration. Ulla spends time posing with Oskar for the young art students.

Raskolnikov: A painting student who turns out the masterpiece of Ulla and Oskar posing together. He is so nicknamed because he never stops talking of Crime and Punishment, guilt and atonement.

Zeidler: Oskar's landlord in Düsseldorf, an undertaker who Oskar nicknames 'The Hedgehog.'

Mrs. Zeidler: Zeidler's wife, who wears poorly tailored suits and is given to throwing her husband into glass-throwing rages.

Dr. Erich Werner: Sister Dorothea's admirer, whom Oskar never sees but becomes jealous of through the letters he sends to Dorothea.

Mr. Stenzel: Maria's boss and second husband, whom she marries in Düsseldorf. Oskar doesn't like him, and stays away from Maria after she marries.

Scholle: The long-sought guitarist and third man in Oskar's jazz band 'The Rhine River Three,' which plays in the Onion Cellar.

Ferdinand Schmuß: The owner of the Onion Cellar, where Oskar's jazz band plays. Schmuß spends his time in the Rhine meadows, shooting sparrows.

Dr. Dösch: A man who frequented the Onion Cellar; after Schmuß's death, he offers Oskar a contract to take his drumming act solo.

Sister Beata: A nurse and best friend of Sister Dorothea. Dr. Erich Werner was in love with Sister Dorothea, Sister Beata was in love with Dr. Werner, and Sister Dorothea was not in love at all. Nevertheless, Sister Beata became jealous of the doctor's misplaced affections. She killed Sister Dorothea - the 'real' killer in the case for which Oskar is in the mental institution.



Objects/Places

Knotted string art: Bruno Münsterberg, Oskar's keeper in the mental institution, makes pieces of old string (which he finds after visiting hours in his patients' rooms) into elaborate pieces of knotted art. He dips the string in plaster to harden and places the sculptures on pedestals fashioned out of old knitting needles.

Kashubia: A rural region in the north of Poland, west of the city of Danzig (Gdansk). This is the region that Oskar's maternal grandmother, Anna Bronski, is from.

Four potato-colored skirts: The clothes that Anna Bronski, Oskar's maternal grandmother wears (simultaneously) each day, in accordance with a strict schedule: the skirt that was closest to her body one day is placed on the outermost layer the next, so that the skirts rotate in succession. She has a fifth skirt as well, just like the other four, which she rotates into the succession on washing days.

The tin drum: One of the centerpieces of the novel: Oskar is constantly in possession of a red and white lacquered toy tin drum, on which he constantly plays, and needs to play, in order to proceed successfully in life and to remember the past. He goes through cycles of drumming and not drumming throughout the novel, and it is a source of constant tension. He is forever destroying and getting new drums on which to play.

Danzig: The setting for the majority of the novel, Danzig (now Gdansk) is a major northern port town in Poland. Danzig was a free and independent city until September 1, 1939, when it became the first region taken by Germany at the outset of WWII. After the war, Danzig became a part of Poland again.

skat: A three-handed card game that Jan Bronski, Agnes Matzerath, and Alfred Matzerath play continuously throughout the novel. From time to time, their friends play with them as well.

glass-breaking scream: Since age three (when he was given his first tin drum), Oskar was endowed with the ability to scream with such a high pitch that he could shatter any piece of glass. He could control it, as well - at one point he can break windows on the other side of the city, and he can etch writing into glass. Once he begins growing at the end of the novel, he loses this ability.

nurses: Oskar has a lifelong fascination with nurses, starts when he is five. Every time he is in the hospital, he laments having to leave on account of the nurses. The woman he is wrongly accused of killing, sister Dorothea, is a nurse.

Sütterlin script: A style of handwriting referred to often in the novel; it was the standard German script taught in schools from 1915-1945.

Rasputin: A Siberian Peasant and faith healer who gained favor in the Court of czar Nicholas II of Russia before the Russian revolt of 1917 by allegedly healing Nicholas'



hemophiliac son. He was renowned for his sexual exploits, and assassinated by a group of aristocrats in 1916.

Goethe: Known as one of the centers of both German and world literature, Goethe spearheaded the German Romantic movement in the late 18th century. His plays and poems are known for their understanding of the human condition and human individuality. His greatest work is considered to be the dramatic poem *Faust*.

rostrum: The impromptu stages that were set up by the Nazis to hold rallies. They were marked by their symmetrical rows of Nazi flags, uniformed SS men, and party comrades.

Baby Jesus sculpture: The sculpture, of the Virgin Mary seated with the baby Jesus and John the Baptist on her lap, is in the church of the Sacred Heart. It is a key image of focus for Oskar - he spends time trying to get this baby Jesus to drum, and as the leader of the Dusters, he sneaks into the church to cut the sculpture into pieces and steal it.

Saspe cemetery: A cemetery on the outskirts of Danzig; it is the place where Jan Bronski is executed and buried by the Nazis.

severed horse's head: At the beach on Good Friday, Oskar, Jan, Agnes, and Alfred see an old man fishing for green eels with a black severed horse's head tied to a clothesline. The memory of this scene eventually kills Agnes.

coffin: Oskar spends a lot of time admiring and describing coffins, saying that his mother's coffin was a proper one because it suited the human body so well. It was black and 'tapered at the foot end.'

Herbert Truczinski's Back: On the scars on Herbert's back, Oskar sees (like images in clouds) the same promise he finds in his drum. The reproductive organs of women he has known, the ring finger of the murdered Sister Dorothea, and his own umbilical cord are all visible to Oskar.

Niobe: The cursed figurehead that Herbert Truczinski was put in charge of guarding at the Maritime Museum in Danzig. The sculpture is responsible for his death.

card house: Jan builds a house of cards during the battle for the post office, which is knocked down by the Germans. Oskar says card houses are 'the only dwellings worthy of humankind.' (Chapter 20, Pg. 247)

empty cartridge case: Leo Schugger gives Oskar the empty cartridge case used to execute Jan Bronski, then leads him to Saspe, the cemetery where Jan was shot and buried.

fizz powder: Before the war, this was what the lower classes substituted for soda - flavored powder that fizzed when mixed with water. Oskar and Maria have a long history



with fizz powder - Oskar would spit in Maria's hand, which was full of powder, and she would drink it.

lovebird: On the way to Matzerath's funeral, a soldier gives Maria a cage with a lovebird inside; Kurt tries to pull out its feathers, then throws rocks at it in the cemetery and hits it.

The Lion's Den: A dance hall in Düsseldorf that Oskar visits several times; it is a place for young people, built in a bombed out building.

The Onion Cellar: A nightclub in Düsseldorf where Oskar's jazz trio plays. In the club the owner, Schmuh, serves raw onions, which make the guests cry.

swarm of sparrows: Schmuh, the nightclub owner, liked to hunt sparrows, but as a rule he would only shoot twelve in a day, then give the remaining birds food. One day he killed thirteen; in the car on the way home, a swarm of sparrows attacked the car and forced an accident, killing Schmuh.

Lux: A rottweiler that Oskar rents to take walks with - Lux is the one that first finds Sister Dorothea's ring finger.

ring finger: Lux, Oskar's rented dog, brings Oskar a ring finger that turns out to belong to Sister Dorothea - it is this finger that responsible for Oskar's internment in the institution.

streetcars: In every city in which Oskar finds himself, the streetcar is his chosen means of transportation. In Danzig, the streetcar would take him not only through the city, but past Saspe cemetery on the way to the shore.



Quotes

Quote 1: "This is the time for the people who want to save me, whom it amuses to love me, who try to esteem and respect themselves, to get to know themselves, through me. How blind, how nervous and ill-bred they are! They scratch the white enamel of my bedstead with their fingernail scissors, they scribble obscene little men on it with their ballpoint pens and blue pencils." Chapter 1, pg. 16

Quote 2: "If I didn't have my drum, which, when handled adroitly and patiently, remembers all the incidentals that I need to get the essential down on paper, and if I didn't have the permission of the management [of the mental institution] to drum on it three or four hours a day, I'd be a poor bastard with nothing to say for my grandparents." Chapter 2, pg. 25

Quote 3: "But he has to dive on account of the launches and he has to stay under on account of the launches, and the raft passes over him and it won't stop, one raft engenders another: raft of thy raft, for all eternity: raft." Chapter 2, pg. 36

Quote 4: "[America is] the land where people find whatever they have lost, even missing grandfathers." Chapter 3, pg. 39

Quote 5: "Today Oskar says simply: The moth drummed. I have heard rabbits, foxes and dormice drumming. Frogs can drum up a storm. Woodpeckers are said to drum worms out of their hiding places. And men beat on basins, tin pans, bass drums, and kettledrums. We speak of drumfire, drumhead courts; we drum up, drum out, drum into. There are drummer boys and drum majors. There are composers who write concerti for strings and percussion. I might even mention Oskar's own efforts on the drum; but all this is nothing beside the orgy of drumming carried on by that moth in the hour of my birth, with no other instrument than two ordinary sixty-watt bulbs. Perhaps there are Negroes in darkest Africa and others in America who have not yet forgotten Africa who, with their well-known gift of rhythm, might succeed, in imitation of African moths - which are known to be larger and more beautiful than those of Eastern Europe - in drumming with such disciplined passion; I can only go by my Eastern European standards and praise that medium-sized powdery-brown moth of the hour of my birth; that moth was Oskar's master." Chapter 3, pg.48

Quote 6: "[Skat] was their refuge, their haven, to which they always retreated when life threatened to beguile them into playing, in one combination or another, such silly two-handed games as backgammon or sixty-six." Chapter 4, pg. 57

Quote 7: "I remained the three-year-old, the gnome, the Tom Thumb, the pigmy, the Lilliputian, the midget, whom no one could persuade to grow. I did so in order to be exempted from the big and little catechism and in order not, once grown to five-foot-eight adulthood, to be driven by this man [Matzerath] who face to face with his shaving mirror called himself my father, into a business, the grocery business, which as Matzerath saw it, would, when Oskar turned twenty-one, become his grownup world. To



avoid playing the cash register I clung to my drum and from my third birthday on refused to grow by so much as a finger's breadth. I remained the precocious three-year-old, towered over by grownups but superior to all grownups, who refused to measure his shadow with theirs, who was complete both inside and outside, while they, to the very brink of the grave, were condemned to worry their heads about "development," who had only to confirm what they were compelled to gain by hard and often painful experience, and who had no need to change his shoe and trouser size year after year just to prove that something was growing." Chapter 4, pg. 60-61

Quote 8: "What, after all, is a clock? Without your grownup it is nothing. It is the grownup who winds it, who sets it back or ahead, who takes it to the watchmaker to be checked, cleaned, and when necessary repaired. Just as with the cuckoo that stops calling too soon, just as with upset saltcellars, spiders seen in the morning, black cats on the left, the oil portrait of Uncle that falls off the wall because the nail has come loose in the plaster, just as in a mirror, grownups see more in and behind a clock than any clock can justify." Chapter 5, pg. 67

Quote 9: "The rabble behind me had long ceased their barbaric howls. I was beginning to fancy that my drum was teaching, educating my fellow pupils, making them into *my* pupils, when la Spollenhauer [Oskar's teacher] approached my desk. For a time she watched my hands and drumsticks, I wouldn't even say that her manner was inept; she smiled self-forgetfully and tried to clap her hands to my beat. For a moment she became a not unpleasant old maid, who had forgotten her prescribed occupational caricature and become human, that is, childlike, curious, complex, and immoral." Chapter 7, pg. 80

Quote 10: "I look for the land of the Poles that is lost to the Germans, for the moment at least. Nowadays the Germans have started searching for Poland with credits, Leicas, and compasses, with radar, divining rods, delegations, and moth-eaten provincial students' associations in costume. Some carry Chopin in their hearts, others thoughts of revenge. Condemning the first four partitions of Poland, they are busily planning a fifth; in the meantime flying to Warsaw via Air France in order to deposit, with appropriate remorse, a wreath on the spot that was once the ghetto. One of these days they will go searching for Poland with rockets. I, meanwhile, conjure up Poland on my drum. And this is what I drum: Poland's lost, but not forever, all's lost, but not forever, Poland's not lost forever." Chapter 8, pg. 107-108

Quote 11: "Even today I am occasionally sorry that I declined. I talked myself out of it, saying: 'You know, Mr. Bebra, I prefer to regard myself as a member of the audience. I cultivate my little art in secret, far from all applause. But it gives me pleasure to applaud your accomplishments.' Mr. Bebra raised a wrinkled forefinger and admonished me: 'My dear Oskar, believe an experienced colleague. Our kind has no place in the audience. We must perform, we must run the show. If we don't, it's the others that run us. And they don't do it with kid gloves.'" Chapter 9, pg. 114

Quote 12: "brown rallies on a drum which though red and white was not Polish." Chapter 10, pg. 124



Quote 13: "I was looking for Africa under those skirts, or perhaps Naples, which, as we all know, one must have seen before dying. This was the watershed, the union of all streams; here special winds blew, or else there was no wind at all; dry and warm, you could listen to the whishing of the rain; here ships made fast or weighed anchors; here our Heavenly Father, who has always been a lover of warmth, sat beside Oskar; the Devil cleaned his spyglass, and the angels played blindman's buff, beneath my grandmother's skirts it was always summer, even when it was time to light the candles on the Christmas tree or to hunt for Easter eggs; even on All Saints' Day. Nowhere could I have been more at peace with the calendar than beneath my grandmother's skirts." Chapter 10, pg. 125-126

Quote 14: "I asked the Satan within me: 'Did you get through it all right?'

Satan jumped up and down and whispered: 'Did you see those church windows? All glass, all glass!'" Chapter 11, pg. 137

Quote 15: "born of the folds of white fabrics" in which he saw the brooch "expand into heaven knows what: a sea of banners, the Alpine glow, a field of poppies, ready to revolt, against whom, Lord knows: against Indians, cherries, nosebleed, cocks' crests, red corpuscles, until a red occupying my entire field of vision provided a background for a passion which then as now was self-evident but not to be named, because the little word "red" says nothing..." Chapter 12, pg. 156

Quote 16: "I couldn't help feeling that her head would bob up again any minute and that she would have to vomit some more, that there was something more inside her that wanted to come out: not only that fetus aged three months who like me didn't know which father he had to thank for his existence; no, I thought, it's not just he who wants to come out and, like Oskar, demand a drum, no, there's more fish, not sardines, and not flounder, no, it's a little chunk of eel, a few whitish-green threads of eel flesh, eel from the battle of the Skagerrak, eel from the Naufahrwasser breakwater, Good Friday eel, eel from that horse's head, possibly eel from her father Joseph Koljaiczek who ended under the raft, a prey to the eels, eel of thine eel, for eel thou art, to eel returnest..." Chapter 13, pg. 163-164

Quote 17: "'Your genius, my young friend, the divine, but also no doubt the diabolical elements in your genius have rather confused my good Roswitha, and I too must own that you have in you a certain immoderation, a certain explosiveness, which to me is alien though not entirely incomprehensible.'" Chapter 14, pg. 172

Quote 18: "You've guessed it no doubt: Oskar's aim is to get back to the umbilical cord; that is the sole purpose behind this whole vast verbal effort and my only reason for dwelling on Herbert Truczinski's scars." Chapter 14, pg. 179

Quote 19: "Today I know that everything watches, that nothing goes unseen, and that even wallpaper has a better memory than ours. It isn't God in His Heaven that sees all. A kitchen chair, a coat-hanger, a half-filled ash tray, or the wooden replica of a woman



named Niobe, can perfectly well serve as an unforgetting witness to every one of our acts." Chapter 15, pg. 192-193

Quote 20: "Strange to say, I expected more from literature than from real, naked life. Jan Bronski, whom I had often enough seen kneading my mother's flesh, was able to teach me next to nothing. Although I knew that this tangle, consisting by turns of Mama and Jan or Matzerath and Mama, this knot which sighed, exerted itself, moaned with fatigue, and at last fell stickily apart, meant love, Oskar was still unwilling to believe that love was love; love itself made him cast about for some other love, and yet time and time again he came back to tangled love, which he hated until the day when in love he practiced it; then he was obliged to defend it in his own eyes as the only possible love." Chapter 22, pg. 278-279

Quote 21: "Who was doing all this: Oskar, he, or I?"

And Maria, who was sleeping upstairs and wide awake downstairs, who smelled upstairs of innocent vanilla and under the moss of pungent mushrooms, who wanted fizz powder, but not this little gentleman whom I didn't want either, who had declared his independence, who did just what he was minded to, who did things I hadn't taught him, who stood up when I lay down, who had other dreams than I, who could neither read nor write and nevertheless signed for me, who goes his own way to this very day, who broke with me on the very day I first took notice of him, who is my enemy with whom I am constrained, time and time again, to ally myself, who betrays me and leaves me in the lurch, whom I should like to auction off, whom I am ashamed of, who is sick of me, whom I wash, who befouls me, who sees nothing and flairs everything, who is so much a stranger to me that I should like to call him Sir, who has a very different memory from Oskar..." Chapter 22, pg. 280

Quote 22: "Oskar carried on negotiations with his two gods Dionysus and Apollo. ...If Apollo strove for harmony and Dionysus for drunkenness and chaos, Oskar was a little demigod whose business it was to harmonize chaos and intoxicate reason. In addition to his mortality, he had one advantage over all the full divinities whose characters and careers had been established in the remote past: Oskar could read what he pleased, whereas the gods censored themselves." Chapter 26, pg. 323

Quote 23: Lankes' calls his pillbox art: "Barbaric, Mystical, Bored."

Bebra: "You have given our century its name." Chapter 27, pg. 337

Quote 24: "'We dwarfs and fools have no business dancing on concrete made for giants. If only we had stayed under the rostrums where no one suspected our presence!'" Chapter 27, pg. 345

Quote 25: "While round us nothing stirred, he started in with his right stick, then a tap or two with his left, then both together. Blessed if he isn't crossing his sticks, say, that roll wasn't bad. He was very much in earnest and there was plenty of variety in his playing. He did some very complicated things but his simple rhythms were just as successful. There was nothing phony about his playing, he steered clear of gimmicks and just



played the drum. His style wasn't even religious, and there was no military vulgarity about it. He was a musician through and through, but no snob. He knew all the hits. He played 'Everything Passes,' which everyone was singing at the time, and, of course, 'Lili Marlene.' Slowly, a little jerkily perhaps, he turned his curly head with the blue Bronski eyes toward me, smiled, rather arrogantly it seemed to me, and proceeded to weave Oskar's favorites into a potpourri..." Chapter 28, pg. 357

Quote 26: Oskar (of Jesus): "You bastard, I hate you, and all your hocus-pocus."

Jesus: "Thou art Oskar, the rock, and on this rock I will build my Church. Follow thou me!" Chapter 28, pg. 358

Quote 27: "was sick of dragging a father around with him all his life." Chapter 32, pg. 404

Quote 28: "'The Lord, the Lord!' he cried, shaking the lovebird in its cage. 'See the Lord! He's growing, he's growing!'

Then he was tossed into the air with the cage, and he ran, flew, danced, staggered, and fled with the screeching bird, himself a bird. Taking flight at last, he fluttered across the fields in the direction of the sewage land and was heard shouting through the voices of the tommy guns: 'He's growing, he's growing!' He was still screaming when the two young Russians reloaded. 'He's growing!' And even when the tommy guns rang out again, even after Oskar had fallen down a stepless staircase into an expanding, all-engulfing faint, I could hear the bird, the voice, the raven, I could hear Leo proclaiming to all the world: 'He's growing, he's growing, he's growing...'" Chapter 32, pg. 407

Quote 29: "'Yes, Oskar, that's how it is with the Kashubes. They always get hit on the head. You'll be going away where things are better, only Grandma will be left. The Kashubes are no good at moving. Their business is to stay where they are and hold out their heads for everybody else to hit, because we're not real Poles and we're not real Germans, and if you're a Kashube, you're not good enough for the Germans or the Polacks. They want everything full measure.'" Chapter 33, pg. 416

Quote 30: "But Mr. Matzerath himself is unable to keep his story running in a straight line. Take those four nuns in the freight car. First he refers to them as Franciscans and the next time he calls them Vincentians. But what throws his story out of kilter more than anything else is this young lady with her two names and her one supposedly foxlike face. To be really conscientious, I should have to write two or more separate versions of his journey from the East to the West. But that kind of thing is not in my line. I prefer to concentrate on the Social Democrat, who managed with one name and, my patient assures me, one story, which he repeated incessantly until shortly before Stolp, to the effect that up to 1937 he had been a kind of partisan, risking his health and sacrificing his free time pasting posters, for he had been one of the few Social Democrats to put up posters even when it was raining." Chapter 34, pg. 424

Quote 31: "Cemeteries have always had a lure for me. They are well kept, free from ambiguity, logical, virile, and alive. In cemeteries you can summon up courage and



arrive at decisions, in cemeteries life takes on distinct contours - I am not referring to the borders of the graves - and if you will, a meaning." Chapter 35, pg. 438

Quote 32: "The fields were the fields of Denmark; the Erft was my Belt, whatever rot lay around was rotten in the state of Denmark - and I was Yorick....I looked on as Gründgens, Act III, scene I, labored his dilemma about being or not being, rejected this absurd formulation, and put the question more concretely: 'My son and my son's lighter flints, my presumptive earthly and heavenly father, my grandmother's four skirts, the beauty, immortalized in photographs, of my poor mama, the maze of scars on Herbert Truczinski's back, the blood-absorbing mail baskets at the Polish Post Office, America - but what is America compared to Streetcar Number 9 that went to Brösen?'" Chapter 36, pg. 459-460

Quote 33: "...My beautiful hair is a glossy chestnut brown. They made me a scraggly-haired gypsy. Not a one of them ever noticed that Oskar has blue eyes." Chapter 37, pg. 463

Quote 34: "Oskar had nothing but his fists with which to fill the two concavities. They were inadequate. Too hard, too nervous, they were alien and unhappy in these bowls which in my ignorance of their contents I should gladly have lapped up with a teaspoon day after day; I might have experienced a little nausea now and then, for too much of any fare will unsettle the stomach, but after nausea sweetness, such sweetness as to make nausea desirable, the seal of true love." Chapter 39, pg. 491

Quote 35: "...it is not true that when the heart is full the eyes necessarily overflow, some people can never manage it, especially in our century, which in spite of all the suffering and sorrow will surely be known to posterity as the tearless century. It was this drought, this tearlessness that brought those who could afford it to Schmueh's Onion Cellar, where the host handed them a little chopping board - pig or fish - a paring knife for eighty pfennigs, and for twelve marks an ordinary, field-, garden-, and kitchen-variety onion, and induced them to cut their onions smaller and smaller until the juice - what did the onion juice do? It did what the world and the sorrows of the world could not do: it brought forth a round, human tear. It made them cry. At last they were able to cry again. To cry properly, without restraint, to cry like mad. The tears flowed and washed everything away. The rain came. The dew. Oskar has a vision of floodgates opening. Of dams bursting in the spring floods. What is the name of that river that overflows every spring and the government does nothing to stop it?" Chapter 42, pg. 525

Quote 36: "What more shall I say: born under light bulbs, deliberately stopped growing at age of three, given drum, sang glass to pieces, smelled vanilla, coughed in churches, observed ants, decided to grow, buried drum, emigrated to the West, lost the East, learned stonecutter's trade, worked as model, started drumming again, visited concrete, made money, kept finger, gave finger away, fled laughing, rode up escalator, arrested, convicted, sent to mental hospital, soon to be acquitted, celebrating this day my thirtieth birthday and still afraid of the Black Witch." Chapter 46, pg. 587



Topic Tracking: Individuality/Identity

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Chapter 1

Individuality 1: Oskar describes both his grandfather and the two policemen in completely impersonal terms: as "Short and Wide" and "Long and Thin."

Chapter 2

Individuality 2: Joseph Koljaiczek, Oskar's grandfather, assumes the identity of Joseph Wranka, a drowned raftsmen, to escape charges of arson.

Chapter 3

Individuality 3: Oscar, instead of identifying with his father's wishes to follow him into mainstream society, chooses at the moment of his birth to identify with the drumming of the moth on the light bulb.

Individuality 4: Oscar begins with this quote to refer to himself interchangeably in either the first or third person, a motif that holds for the whole novel.

Chapter 7

Individuality 5: Oskar considers his two greatest theoretical influences to be Rasputin and Goethe: he creates a hybrid between the thinkers that plays their contrasting beliefs off one another. The uniting factor between the thinkers is their insistence on individuality - Goethe in an aloof, theoretical, romantic way and Rasputin in a more visceral, overtly subversive way.

Chapter 11

Individuality 6: There is a pervasive, internal tension that begins here and holds throughout the novel between Oskar and his relation to (and his identification with) the baby Jesus. At times Oskar says Jesus is his opposite (that the devil lives through him), and at other times he says he is the embodiment of Jesus himself. He spends time in the church of the Sacred Heart trying (and in time succeeding) to get the baby Jesus sculpture to play his drum.

Chapter 19

Individuality 7: During the German raid on the Polish Post Office, Jan, Oskar, and Koybella play skat. Jan, focusing his mind only on the game, begins to call Oskar Alfred and Koybella Agnes, and then vice versa.



Individuality 8: For the first time in the novel, Oskar calls Jan "Papa" at the skat game during the battle at the post office. He does not beat around the bush by calling him something like "my presumptive father."

Chapter 22

Individuality 9: Oskar spends a long time at the end of this chapter depersonalizing the experience of fathering his son Kurt with Maria. From this quote, both Oskar's conscious will and the identity of his son Kurt are thrown into question - no one knows who has acted in this situation.

Chapter 23

Individuality 10: In Paris with Roswitha, Oskar says the Eiffel tower caused them for the first time to become aware of their "grandeur and uniqueness." (Chapter 27, pg. 329)

Chapter 28

Individuality 11: This quote represents a new twist on the tension surrounding Oskar's identification with the baby Jesus. Oskar is continually trying to balance the forces that draw him to and repulse him away from, religion and this identification.

Chapter 32

Individuality 12: During Matzerath's funeral, Oskar owns up to killing his presumptive father with the Party pin because he "was sick of dragging a father around with him all his life." Chapter 32, pg. 404. He calls Matzerath his real father.

Individuality 13: By throwing his drum into Matzerath's grave, Oskar voluntarily begins to grow. He recognizes that he is older and he is now orphaned from all of his possible biological parents. Oskar eventually grows into a four foot, one inch hunchback, and loses the ability to break glass with his voice.

Chapter 34

Individuality 14: Bruno has caught Oskar in a way, for his credibility may be lacking. The truth of Oskar's relationships, and who he has described himself and his family to be, are called into question.

Chapter 36

Individuality 15: Here, Oskar's identity crisis takes on epic proportions; the events of the novel are assimilated into a Shakespearean question of being. Oskar identifies himself with Yorick, the dead former court jester in *Hamlet*, and the dead, piecemeal woman killed in the war, becomes Hamlet, the tragic hero.

Chapter 37



Individuality 16: Oskar has volunteered himself to be an art school model. He begins a long series of critiques on himself and the state of the world based on the representations of his physical form that various artists create.

Chapter 41:

Individuality 17: Oskar fails himself here, even as he thinks he knows the forces at work within him so well. The identification with the Devil is a pervasive motif, and, ostensibly, a reliable one for Oskar to fall back on. Even that fails him in his dealings with Sister Dorothea.

Chapter 42

Individuality 18: Individual guilt is pointed to the collective; perhaps the state of the collective conscience, the government, is as destructive as the lives of individuals. Just like Klepp's rebirth, the emphasis is on purity.



Topic Tracking: Red & White

Topic Tracking: Red & White

Chapter 2

Red & White 1: Oskar's grandfather, Joseph Koljaiczek, paints a sawmill fence red and white in a fit of Polish national sentiment. His boss rips out one red and one white fence slat, hits Koljaiczek with them, then demolishes the fence. Koljaiczek then sets fire to the sawmill.

Chapter 4

Red & White 2: Oskar refers for the first time to the triangular lacquered pattern on the outside of his drum, which is alternately red and white.

Chapter 6

Red & White 3: Oskar's kindergarten teacher Auntie Kauer starts to knit a harness of red yarn for her students to add to the several blue ones. Oskar laments that he never gets to wear the harness, though he does roll up the yarn for his teacher.

Red & White 4: Stephan Bronski is beat up by a fellow kindergartener, making his nose bleed even more red than Auntie Kauer's red yarn. The boy calls Stephan a "Polack" repeatedly as he hits him.

Chapter 7

Red & White 5: Oskar tries to get Greff to be his teacher by practicing his Sütterlin script with a red pencil on white cardboard. It is obvious that Greff, the boy scout leader, does not understand Oskar.

Chapter 10

Red & White 6: Oskar makes reference to the rallies in terms of their color - he says he broke up "brown rallies on a drum which though red and white was not Polish." Chapter 10, pg. 124

Brown = color of the Nazi uniforms

Red & White = color of both the Polish and Nazi flag

Red & White 7: Oskar sings a hole in a jewelry shop window so that the man he believes to be his father, Jan Bronski, can steal a necklace of red rubies set in gold. In that scene, he is compared to the mythological Parsifal, whose attention was captured by drops of red blood in white snow.



Red & White 8: After the war, Oskar trades the necklace for a briefcase and twelve cartons of Lucky Strike cigarettes - the label for Lucky Strikes is a red circle on a white background.

Chapter 12

Red & White 9: In his parent's bedroom, Oskar thinks back to his childhood doctor's visits, and focuses on Sister Inge's white nurse's suit and brooch with a red cross. He says she made him fall into a sleep "born of the folds of white fabrics" in which he saw the brooch "expand into heaven knows what: a sea of banners, the Alpine glow, a field of poppies, ready to revolt, against whom, Lord knows: against Indians, cherries, nosebleed, cocks' crests, red corpuscles, until a red occupying my entire field of vision provided a background for a passion which then as now was self-evident but not to be named, because the little word "red" says nothing..." Chapter 12, pg. 156

Chapter 15

Red & White 10: After sitting on the granite banister outside the Maritime Museum waiting for Herbert, he describes slipping off the banister and his drum hitting against the rock - little pieces of red and white lacquer chip off and lie on the steps.

Chapter 17

Red & White 11: Oskar describes how his grandmother Anna would not like him under her skirts when the family was around, because they would remind her of begetting Agnes with Joseph Koljaiczek in the potato field. On such occasions, Anna would blush red. Oskar says her blushing was becoming to her, because her hair at the time was white, since she was almost sixty.

Chapter 21

Red & White 12: On the way to the beach with Maria, Oskar sets up a parallel between the painfully white walls of Saspe cemetery, where Jan Bronski is buried, and the salvation of Maria's necklace, a string of red wooden cherries.

Chapter 29

Red & White 13: Oskar relates that the mere sight of his son Kurt's knuckles would make his nose gush blood, simply because the boy's fists were clenched so tightly that his knuckles were white.

Chapter 30

Red & White 14: The Rennwand brothers perform Mass with mister dressed in their red and white choirboy uniforms. So as not to blind Oskar, Narses and Bluebeard use the red beam on their flashlights to light Oskar on the statue. When the police come in, they use their white beams only.



Chapter 39

Red & White 15: Raskolnikov, the brilliant art student who paints the masterpieces of Oskar and Ulla together, is described as having fiery red hair.

Chapter 45

Red & White 16: To save Victor Welhun from execution, Oskar drums the Polish national anthem, and ghostly spirits of the Polish cavalry, carrying the red and white banners of Poland, emerge from the ground and carry off both Victor and his executioners.



Book 1, Chapter 1: The Wide Skirt

The novel opens with Oskar Matzerath writing from inside a mental institution. He is being watched through a peephole in his door by his keeper, Bruno Münsterberg, whom Oskar says is an artist. Bruno spends his time scrounging for bits of string in his patients' rooms, which he ties into elaborate works of knotted string art, dips in plaster to harden, and mounts on pedestals fashioned from knitting needles. He thinks of coloring his artwork, but Oskar advises against it, preferring the white enamel of his hospital bed. Oskar maintains that his bed is the most perfect of all beds, that if he had his way he would only build its bars up higher to keep the world away. Telling of visiting days in the hospital, he says:

"This is the time for the people who want to save me, whom it amuses to love me, who try to esteem and respect themselves, to get to know themselves, through me. How blind, how nervous and ill-bred they are! They scratch the white enamel of my bedstead with their fingernail scissors, they scribble obscene little men on it with their ballpoint pens and blue pencils." Chapter 1, pg. 16

Oskar has convinced Bruno to buy him a ream of blank white paper (Oskar terms it "virgin" paper) so that he can write out his autobiography. He must ask Bruno to do this because he knows that none of the people who come to visit him on a regular basis would do it - it would be, as Oskar says, too "dangerous" to make such a thing available to him. But Bruno gets him the paper he needs and Oskar begins to write.

Oskar begins with his grandmother, Anna Bronski. She is sitting, in the year 1899, at the edge of a potato field in Kashubia. Sitting by a fire that she has built and uses to cook potatoes for her dinner, she is wearing the four potato-colored skirts that she wears constantly throughout the novel. She rotates the skirts in succession each day, moving the skirt that was closest to her body on the current day to the outside layer the next day. The skirts are large and billowing, and Anna must constantly gather them around her body in defense against the strong wind.

Anna sees three men zigzagging and jumping their way down the road by the potato field. Two of them, described only as "Long and Thin" and wearing the uniforms of the rural constabulary, are chasing after a man described only as "Short and Wide." Desperate, Anna lets "Short and Wide" slip under her four billowing skirts to hide from the two uniformed policemen. Anna goes right on trying to spear the hot, ash-covered potatoes from her fire. The two uniformed men stop at the edge of the potato field and ask Anna the whereabouts of the third man; she points them down the road. The two men remain for half an hour, suspicious, overturning and poking their bayonets into Anna's baskets of potatoes. They put the raw potatoes back in Anna's baskets and leave as the sun sets and it begins to rain, coughing and weeping in the direction Anna pointed them.

Topic Tracking: Individuality/Identity 1



Once the men are far away, Anna rises and lets "Short and Wide" out from under her skirt. His name is Joseph Koljaiczek; he buttons his pants quickly as Anna lets him out. Anna gives Koljaiczek four cooked potatoes and keeps one for herself. He follows Anna as she picks up her basket of raw potatoes and heads for Goldkrug in the black forest.



Chapter 2: Under the Raft

The chapter opens back in the mental institution. For the first time in the novel, Oskar mentions his tin drum, which he claims is responsible for his remembering of all essential past events. Oskar says:

"If I didn't have my drum, which, when handled adroitly and patiently, remembers all the incidentals that I need to get the essential down on paper, and if I didn't have the permission of the management [of the mental institution] to drum on it three or four hours a day, I'd be a poor bastard with nothing to say for my grandparents." Chapter 2, pg. 25

Oskar says that his drum tells him that it was that afternoon, under Anna's four skirts, while the two constables searched, that his mother, Agnes Koljaiczek (Matzerath) was begotten by Anna and Joseph Koljaiczek. Late that night the two are married after Vincent Bronski, Anna's brother, bribes a priest with a side of bacon to perform the ceremony. They then move away to the coast, where Koljaiczek finds work as a raftsman.

Oskar adds that his mother, throughout her life, denied that she had been begotten in a potato field. She admitted that Koljaiczek had "done his best" under the four skirts, but that their position was not conducive to conception. She maintained that it must have happened later that night, at some other more favorable location, after the two were in her brother's care. Anna would always nod and agree with her daughter, saying this it couldn't have happened in the potato field, because it had been too windy and rainy on that day.

Vincent Bronski is a widower living on a farm in Kashubia. Since he returned from a pilgrimage to Czestochowa (a place where the Virgin Mary was sighted) he has been obsessed with coronating the Virgin Mary as the Queen of Poland, finding proof for her claim to the throne in everything he reads. He has a son, Jan Bronski, whom Oskar describes as a sickly child always on the verge of tears. His job on the farm is to tend the geese. Jan collects little colored pictures and stamps. He is four when Anna and Koljaiczek arrive.

Once married, Anna and Koljaiczek flee in Vincent's horse-driven boxcart to the sea. In Danzig, the provincial capital, Koljaiczek remains in hiding for three weeks. He assumes the identity of a little-known raftsman named Joseph Wranka, who had drowned. He changes his hair, shaves his mustache, gives up his pipe for tobacco chewing, gets the necessary identification papers, and becomes a raftsman himself. Oskar then explains his grandfather's need to flee: he had gone to work in a sawmill and had gotten into a quarrel with his boss over a fence that Koljaiczek had painted white and red. The boss had ripped off two slats and hit Koljaiczek in the back, then broken the fence to pieces. Then Koljaiczek had set fire to the sawmill. This set off a rash of copycat acts of sawmill arson and fed growing Polish national sentiment - all acts were committed in the name of the Virgin Mary.



Topic Tracking: Individuality/Identity 2

Topic Tracking: Red & White 1

The disguise worked for Koljaiczek/Wranka until August 1913, when, like every other summer, he took on a job manning the "big" raft down the river. Timber was to be bought along the way, and a new sawmill manager was placed on board to oversee the buying. When introduced, Koljaiczek was suspicious that the supervisor knew that he was Koljaiczek and not Wranka. The tension between the two grew throughout the voyage, though neither one spoke of the suspected arson charge. The supervisor returned to Danzig early via train, and because of his lingering suspicion, asked the local police to open an investigation.

The police obliged, overlooking Wranka's military record, which was flawless, and of Koljaiczek, who had been disciplined for twice shouting anarchist slogans while drunk. Anna and Vincent were questioned; Anna's defense was that Wranka, far from being an arsonist, had been a member of the local fire department since 1904 (which was true). Slowly evidence against Koljaiczek was amassed from sawmill workers and raftsmen; disguised as fishing boats, the police began to shadow Koljaiczek's raft, which was still on its trek down the river. It took several days for Koljaiczek to notice the police, but even once he understood, he did not flee. Then, at Schichau, during a christening of a ship named the H.M.S. *Columbus*, the police cordoned off the river. At that moment, Koljaiczek's "old incendiary heart" awoke - Oskar says he "sloughed off" Wranka's skin - the water was covered shore to shore with rafts and logs, and so he fled barefoot over the water, jumping from raft to raft and log to log toward the town. Then he was blocked by two launches of celebrating people and forced into the water, where he swam toward shore. But then he was forced to dive - Oskar says:

"But he has to dive on account of the launches and he has to stay under on account of the launches, and the raft passes over him and won't stop, one raft engenders another: raft of thy raft, for all eternity: raft." Chapter 2, pg. 36

Koljaiczek's body was never found. Oskar says that he has no doubt that his grandfather drowned there under the raft, although several alternate versions of the story exist, where he lives either to be taken on by Greek sailors or Swedish fishermen. Another version states that Koljaiczek was seen after WWI in Buffalo, New York, calling himself Joe Colchic, where he had become a millionaire and a major stockholder both in match factories and fire insurance companies.



Chapter 3: Moth and Light Bulb

In the mental institution, Oskar reads Bruno a portion of what he has written concerning his grandfather. Bruno says it is "A beautiful death" and begins to recreate the story with his knotted string art.

Oskar is visited by his two friends, Klepp (Egon Münzer) and Vittlar (Gottfried von Vittlar). Klepp brings Oskar a jazz recording, and Vittlar brings him a chocolate heart on a pink ribbon. They parody scenes from Oskar's trial (alluded to here and explained later - see below). Oskar tells them the story of his grandfather Koljaiczek. In response, Klepp makes swimming motions and shakes his head. Vittlar accuses Oskar of being the murderer, he says because Koljaiczek must have known that it would be wholly too burdensome to have a living grandfather. He adds that his grandfather's punishment to Oskar and his family was to not give them the satisfaction of having a corpse. Then he says that once Oskar is released, the myth about America gives Oskar an aim - for America is "the land where people find whatever they have lost, even missing grandfathers." Chapter 3, pg. 39.

Oskar returns to drumming out his family's story. Once Joseph Koljaiczek drowned, his elder brother, Gregor Koljaiczek, stays on with the widow Anna Bronski. He had never known his younger brother very well, but after a year, she and Gregor were married, as Oskar says, because he was a Koljaiczek. He worked in a gunpowder factory, but Anna was forced into renting a smaller apartment and selling miscellaneous items for money downstairs from the apartment in a cellar store, because Gregor drank away all his pay. He drank, Oskar says, not because he was sad or happy, but rather because he was a thorough man, unable to leave even a drop in a glass or bottle. Gregor finally died of the flu in 1917.

Jan Bronski, Agnes' cousin, later moved into the empty room with Anna and Agnes. He had finished high school and had taken on an apprentice job at the main post office in Danzig. He was twenty but still sickly, and thus couldn't pass his army physical when drafted, four times in all, into WWI. It was then that Agnes first fell in love with him - this was the beginning of a lifelong love affair between the two. Jan transferred to the Polish Post Office and moved in to the apartment only when Agnes' relationship with Alfred Matzerath became known to him. Alfred was a WWI veteran, whom Agnes had met while working as a nurse in WWI. Alfred had been shot through the thigh. He was a staunch supporter of Hitler and a citizen of the German Reich. In 1920, Agnes and Alfred were engaged, and Anna left the cellar store to them and moved in with her brother Vincent Bronski, back to her potato fields. Alfred and Agnes were married in 1923. In the meantime, Jan Bronski met and married Hedwig Bronski. It was then, after all four of them had met by chance in a cafe, that Jan and Alfred became friends, and Jan and Agnes lifelong lovers.

Once married, Alfred and Agnes bought a failing grocery store and turned it around. The two were perfect professional partners - Agnes worked behind the counter, and Alfred dealt with wholesalers. In addition, Matzerath was incredibly fond of all kitchen work -



cooking, cleaning, etc. The couple moved into the flat adjoining the store. Oskar makes a point of asking his drum the wattage of the light bulbs in the bedroom of that apartment. Satisfied that the lights he first saw were two sixty-watt bulbs, he speaks of his birth. His mother gave birth at home. Oskar says that he was one of those infants whose mental development was completed at birth - it needed only "a certain amount of filling in." Seeing that it is a boy, Matzerath says that Oskar will take over the store when he is older. Agnes, Oskar's mother, says simply that when Oskar is three, he will have a toy drum. Weighing these two reactions, Oskar notices a moth darting between the two sixty watt light bulbs. He writes of the sound the moth made as a dialogue between the moth and the light bulb conferring some sort of absolution to the moth. He says:

"Today Oskar says simply: The moth drummed. I have heard rabbits, foxes, and dormice drumming. Frogs can drum up a storm. Woodpeckers are said to drum worms out of their hiding places. And men beat on basins, tin pans, bass drums, and kettledrums. We speak of drumfire, drumhead courts; we drum up, drum out, drum into. There are drummer boys and drum majors. There are composers who write concerti for strings and percussion. I might even mention Oskar's own efforts on the drum; but all this is nothing beside the orgy of drumming carried on by that moth in the hour of my birth, with no other instrument than two ordinary sixty-watt bulbs. Perhaps there are Negroes in darkest Africa and others in America who have not yet forgotten Africa who, with their well-known gift of rhythm, might succeed, in imitation of African moths - which are known to be larger and more beautiful than those of eastern Europe - in drumming with such disciplined passion; I can only go by my Eastern European standards and praise that medium-sized powdery-brown moth of the hour of my birth; that moth was Oskar's master." Chapter 3, pg. 48

Topic Tracking: Individuality/Identity 3

Topic Tracking: Individuality/Identity 4

Wailing and acting like a normal baby, Oskar decided to reject Matzerath's (who assumed he was Oskar's father) plans, and to go with his mother's plans. Oskar says it was only the promise of the drum that kept his from demanding a return to the womb.



Chapter 4: The Photograph Album

Oskar says that he has a treasure, which he has guarded throughout his life: his family photograph album. One of the tortures of Hell, Oskar says, will be to shut up a naked soul in a room with the framed photographs of his day.

Oskar relates his days with Klepp, just before his internment in the institution. The two would often go to the movies - for Klepp, they went to Westerns, and for Oskar they went to movies about doctors and nurses. After each show they would go to a photo studio and have passport photos taken. Having waited for the photos, they would go to a nearby bar, order beer, blood sausage, onions, and rye bread, and spread the photos over the table. They would compare the current photos with previous ones, then they would cut up the photos and rearrange the body parts on each picture, putting their noses on their ears, etc. Then they would give one of the altered photos away to the waiter, who always took one. Oskar never gave his pictures away to women, but one day Klepp, unbeknownst to Oscar, gave one away to the redheaded girl with the cigarette tray. Eventually he married her, as Oskar says, because he wanted his picture back.

Oskar then talks of the photographs, beginning with Joseph Koljaiczek on the first page. He has been photographed in his Joseph Wranka persona - not as the arsonist, but as the volunteer fireman, complete with uniform, helmet, and rescue medal. Just as with Gregor Koljaiczek and Alfred Matzerath's photos, Oskar says Joseph has a proud though tragic gaze, common from the sorrowful years of the German Empire. Vincent Bronski's photos have a mystical tone. Those of the sickly Jan Bronski have an air of self-conscious melancholy. The women of those generations, he says, were less expert at evoking their personalities through photographs. There is a photo of twenty-three nurses, Oskar's mother Agnes among them, clustered around an army doctor. Alfred Matzerath is in the photo, wearing a starched chef's hat and brandishing a ladle. After WWI, Oskar says, the trend is reversed; the men now seem nondescript, while the women more expressively sorrowful, as in a photo of Agnes at age twenty-three. The picture of Alfred and Agnes' wedding shows the family trying hard to mask their rural provincial roots with nice clothes - all except for Anna and Vincent, who Oskar says never succeeded.

Then Oskar is compelled to take up his drum and conjure up a photo of Agnes, Jan, and Alfred sitting together in the Bronski flat. The three are arranged in a triangle, Agnes seated, and Jan and Alfred standing. Oskar says he tried for a long time to deduce the photo's meaning geometrically. He took a ruler, a triangle, and a compass and drew triangles and arcs all over the photo, in order, he says, to get a point of view. All he has done, he says, is to dig a number of holes into the picture with his compass. In the end, he says, it is the most meaningful picture of the three major players in his early years because it makes "the ultimate solution so clearly discernible;" it shows a serenity not visible in their other snapshots, each of which carry some plainly evident emotion. A second triangle picture of the same three shows them playing skat, a three handed card game, which, Oskar says, "was their refuge, their haven, to which they always retreated



when life threatened to beguile them into playing, in one combination or another, such silly two-handed games as backgammon or sixty-six." Chapter 4, pg. 57.

Oskar moves on to his mother's friend, Gretchen Scheffler, who spent most of her time knitting. Her husband, the baker Alexander Scheffler and she would often take trips on the German "Strength through Joy" ships (a Nazi organization regulating all recreational activity).

Oskar mentions a photo of Albrecht Greff (Greff), the greengrocer and boy scout leader, with a boy of thirteen, one of his scouts. He was married to Lina Greff, through whom Oskar eventually gets to know the grocer.

Oskar describes a baby picture of himself. It was taken in a professional studio; he is sitting on a white rug made of polar bear fur. He focuses on his hands, which are clenched into fists, and the look of "earnest concentration" on his face. His hands are ready to strike, he says - to strike the drum, which has not been given to him, for he is not yet three. He moves on to a picture taken on his third birthday, in which he has his drum. He is holding his drumsticks crossed over the drum's serrated red and white fields, his blue eyes reflecting determination. He relates his decision at that moment to remain that three-year-old forever:

"I remained the three-year-old, the gnome, the Tom Thumb, the pigmy, the Lilliputian, the midget, whom no one could persuade to grow. I did so in order to be exempted from the big and little catechism and in order not, once grown to five-foot-eight adulthood, to be driven by this man [Matzerath] who face to face with his shaving mirror called himself my father, into a business, the grocery business, which as Matzerath saw it would, when Oskar turned twenty-one, become his grownup world. To avoid playing the cash register I clung to my drum and from my third birthday on refused to grow by so much as a finger's breadth. I remained the precocious three-year-old, towered over by grownups but superior to all grownups, who refused to measure his shadow with theirs, who was complete both inside and outside, while they, to the very brink of the grave, were condemned to worry their heads about 'development,' who had only to confirm what they were compelled to gain by hard and often painful experience, and who had no need to change his shoe and trouser size year after year just to prove that something was growing." Chapter 4, pg. 60-61

Topic Tracking: Red & White 2

Oskar admits in the same breath, however, that something did grow, to "Messianic proportions," though not always to his best advantage.



Chapter 5: Smash a Little Windowpane

Oskar opens by saying that the first thing made plain to him was that grownups were incapable of understanding him. He relates the story of his third birthday. Jan watched Agnes play the piano, while Anna, Hedwig, and Alexander Scheffler sat with Greff and listened to Boy Scout stories. Matzerath was busy cooking. Oskar, beating on his new drum, wandered into the adjoining grocery store and found the trap door to the cellar open, Matzerath having forgotten to close it. Oskar says he realized what the door demanded of him - not suicide, but sacrifice. He walked down the sixteen stairs, placing his drum in among the sacks of flour so as not to damage it. Then he walked up to the ninth stair and threw himself off, landing headfirst on the concrete floor. The clatter of broken glass brought everyone running.

Agnes blamed the fall on Matzerath - she screamed and flailed at him while they called the doctor. Oskar says that by falling intentionally down those stairs, he gave a reason, confirmed by the doctors and thus accepted by the grownups, for his not growing. In addition, he unintentionally made Matzerath a guilty man, blamed forever by his wife.

Once home from four weeks in the hospital, Oskar began to drum, keeping his drum with him at all times. At the same time, he developed a voice that was so high-pitched that he could break any piece of glass. He used this voice to keep the drum whenever a grownup tried to take it away. When the neighborhood children learned of this, they began to make fun of him by singing jingles. Like the Pied Piper, Oskar would drum along with the song and the children would follow him.

Oskar drummed until he wore a hole in the drum's top surface; it became jagged and sharp, and little shreds of metal fell inside and began to jingle. Instead of giving Oskar a new drum, however, the grownups wanted to take the current one away from him; his mother tried to bribe him with silly things like chocolate, while Matzerath yanked the drum away. Oskar responded with his first glass-breaking scream. The glass face of the grandfather clock in the living room exploded, but the clock's mechanism was unharmed and kept ticking. The grownups were taken aback; Oskar says he believes that Jan Bronski began to pray, but that the Lord didn't say a thing. Oskar then muses:

"What, after all, is a clock? Without your grownup it is nothing. It is the grownup who winds it, who sets it back or ahead, who takes it tot he watchmaker to be checked, cleaned, and when necessary repaired. Just as with the cuckoo that stops calling too soon, just as with upset saltcellars, spiders seen in the morning, black cats on the left, the oil portrait of Uncle that falls off the wall because the nail has come loose in the plaster, just as in a mirror, grownups see more in and behind a clock than any clock can justify." Chapter 5, pg. 67

From that moment on, Oskar says he broke only light bulbs if he could, as he is a lover of fine glassware. For his fourth birthday he received no drum, and broke several light bulbs when the grownups tried to take his rusty drum away, plunging the room into darkness. Immediately Oskar's Grandmother Koljaiczek went to get candles, but in the



darkness the intoxicated grownups paired off, Agnes with Jan, Alexander Scheffler with Lina Greff, and Matzerath with Gretchen Scheffler. Hedwig Bronski sat alone, but sang a Boy Scout song duet with Albrecht Greff. Oskar sat under the table, drumming. Anna Koljaiczek came back with the candles and reproached everyone for their sexual debauchery. They began to play skat, which Jan Bronski lost because instead of paying attention, he had taken off his shoe and had his foot up Agnes' dress under the table. The next day Jan Bronski came and exchanged the sailboat he had given Oskar for a new drum.

By Oskar's fifth birthday, it was obvious to his family that he would not grow. He began weekly visits to the doctor. This is the beginning of Oskar's fascination with nurses. When at one point the doctor tried to take Oscar's drum away, he destroyed the doctor's collection of biological specimens in jars. The doctor then published an article in a medical journal about the phenomenon. Oskar balks at how irrelevant it is; he has no real respect for doctors. Later, in the mental institution, Oskar is unable to break any glass at all, but likes to think back to when at first he broke glass only when necessary, then to later, when he broke glass out of playfulness, becoming, as he says, "a devotee of art for art's sake."



Chapter 6: The Schedule

Oskar says that Klepp often spends hours making schedules, including his eating of blood sausage and handing out illegal Communist propaganda. Klepp shows Oskar his schedule and it takes Oskar back to his first experience with a schedule.

It began in kindergarten. Hedwig Bronski would take Oskar and her son Stephan Bronski together to the same kindergarten, which was attended by six to ten other children. Their teacher, Auntie Kauer, would take them for walks through town. She would harness the children together with shafts of pale-blue knotted wool with bridles of wood with bells attached on the sides. Auntie Kauer would hold the reins and have the children trot along in front of her, singing prayers and hymns like "Jesus for thee we live, Jesus, for thee we die."

Oskar laments that he was forced to leave the kindergarten, on account of Stephan. In the spring when Oskar was seven, Auntie Kauer, in a fit of childlike exuberance, began to knit a new harness for the children, which was to be bright red. Just then, they heard cries - there was a boy on top of Stephan, punching him repeatedly in his already bleeding nose. He called Stephan a "Polack" as he hit him. Auntie Kauer broke up the fight as Oskar wound up the red yarn. It was then suggested that Stephan leave the kindergarten for good. Oskar refused to stay if Stephan was not there, even though he held no great liking for him.

Topic Tracking: Red & White 3

Topic Tracking: Red & White 4

Then it was time for Oskar to try school. Stephan Bronski was sent to Polish public school, Oskar to German school. On the first morning of school, Alfred tried to take away Oskar's drum. Oskar used his singing voice and shattered a vase. Alfred raised a hand to strike Oskar, but Agnes and Jan stopped him.

Oskar describes the school as a place where mothers were taking their children to offer them for sale. He says the granite water fountain troughs reminded him of his Uncle Vincent's piglets suckling at a sow. In Oskar's classroom, the mothers lined up along one wall and stayed for the first day of class. Both the children and the mothers laughed as Oskar came in with his drum - Oskar's mother Agnes felt ashamed of her son. Although completely calm, Oskar lamented only that he was not tall enough to see outside, for Greff was outside with his boy scouts.

Oskar's teacher came in and asked the class to sing a song with her. Oskar, disgusted that the singing children are so undisciplined, pulls out his drumsticks and begins to drum. His teacher nod at him in encouragement. Oskar says:

"The rabble behind me had long ceased their barbaric howls. I was beginning to fancy that my drum was teaching, educating my fellow pupils, making them into my pupils, when la Spollenhauer [Oskar's teacher] approached my desk. For a time she watched



my hands and drumsticks, I wouldn't even say that her manner was inept; she smiled self-forgetfully and tried to clap her hands to my beat. For a moment she became a not unpleasant old maid, who had forgotten her prescribed occupational caricature and become human, that is, childlike, curious, complex, and immoral." Chapter 7, pg. 80

She then complemented Oskar but tried to take away his drum. Oskar gave her a warning scratch on her glasses with his voice. She let go of the drum but called him wicked. She changed her glasses and announced that she would give the students' their schedule of classes, and made them all repeat it after her. Oskar repeated the schedule by beating on his drum. The teacher found the drumming repulsive; she tried to take the drum again. This time Oskar sung out the classroom's windows. The teacher took out a cane and slammed Oskar's desk; he refused to have his hand hit, so she hit his drum with a violent glint in her eye. Oskar shattered the lenses of her glasses. The mothers threatened to pounce on Oskar's mother, but Oskar came to her aid and they left, pausing only long enough for a photograph by the school photographer.



Chapter 7: Rasputin and the Alphabet

Oskar tells Bruno and Klepp in the background of that school picture the words "My first School day" on a blackboard in Sütterlin script.

Oskar's parents had decided that their attempt to put Oskar in school had been sufficient; they no longer worried about his education. Oskar mentions Meyn the Trumpeter, a tenant of Oskar's apartment complex who spent his time in the attic drinking gin and playing his trumpet, who recognized Oskar as his drum accompanist. Their duet drove Meyn's four cats out onto the roof. Oskar asked Meyn to teach him to read, but Meyn knew only three things: gin, the trumpet, and sleep.

Oskar tried to get Greff the greengrocer to teach him. He went to the store without his drum, for Greff didn't appreciate it, choosing him because Greff had books everywhere, though they were mostly magazines featuring half-naked youths exercising with well-oiled muscles. Greff was having trouble at the time - he had been accused of fraud when the Bureau of Weights and measures had inspected his store. Oskar entered the store and picked up three or four white pieces of cardboard and a red pencil, and tried to get Greff's attention by practicing his Sütterlin script. But Oskar was not the right type of little boy; it was clear that Greff didn't understand him.

Topic Tracking: Red & White 5

Oskar tried Lina Greff as a teacher, but she spent weeks on end in bed and smelled of decaying nightgown. As a test to guard against envying the schoolchildren who had learned to read, Oskar smelled the sponges that children used as blackboard erasers and hung off their school bags. He compared the smell to that of Satan's armpits.

Finally, although she was far from perfect, Oskar turned to Gretchen Scheffler as a teacher. She was childless and Oskar blamed that fact on the sickening sweetness of her apartment decoration. Oskar never used his glass-breaking voice on her china, and pretended to love the teddy bears and crocheting in order to get Gretchen to teach him to read. His plan worked, and after a few visits Gretchen produced the few books she had: from her dead seaman brother, seven or eight volumes of Köhler's *Naval Calendar*, *The Service Ranks of the Imperial Navy*, *Paul Benke*, *The Naval Hero*, *Keyser's History of the City of Danzig* and *A Struggle for Rome*, and from Gretchen's collection Gustav Freitag's *Debit and Credit*, Goethe's *Elective Affinities*, and a book called *Rasputin and Women*. After a long hesitation, Oskar chose to study Rasputin and Goethe.

Topic Tracking: Individuality/Identity 5

In this choice Oskar chose what he terms a "conflicting harmony" that "was to shape or influence my whole life." Oskar tried hard to balance his childish learning to read with the fact that he was already as intellectually complex as an adult; in the same vein, he wet his bed on purpose every morning, so as to seem to be a childish bed-wetter to the grownups. When Gretchen would try to make him read fairy tales, Oskar would cry out



like a child for Rasputin. Gretchen was convinced that Oskar could not understand or learn - what Oskar did was to tear the pages out of the two books, crumple them, and hide them under his sweater. Then he would smooth them out at home and read them in peace. He would take the two sets of pages, shuffle them like cards, create a whole new book of Rasputin and Goethe together, and store it in the attic.

Oskar says he ate too much of Gretchen's cake in those days. He became very fat, and would often vomit up the expensive cakes once he got home. He paid for his lessons by becoming a dressmaker's dummy, as Gretchen would spend her free time making clothes for the baby she never had.



Chapter 8: The Stockturm. Long-Distance Song Effects

In the institution, Oskar mentions Dr. Hornstetter, a nervous woman who comes into his room to smoke cigarettes and re-diagnose the fact that Oskar suffers from childhood isolation. Oskar says she is right - he hardly ever played with other children when he was young, preferring his Rasputin and Goethe medley to childish games.

There was a courtyard behind Oskar's building, a place where the housewives took all of their rugs to beat the dirt out of them, a ritual that Oskar hated. The courtyard was where the children in Oskar's building played. There was a shed in the courtyard that belonged to Old Man Heilandt. The shed was full of rusted machinery, and he would let Oskar in but none of the other children. The old man spent his time straightening old nails that he pulled out of wooden crates.

One day the children in the apartment building, Nuchi Eyke, Axel Mischke, Harry Schlager, Hänchen Kollin, and Susi Kater were playing by making a soup out of whatever they could find around the building. They asked Old Man Heilandt to spit into the pot three times, added pulverized brick, then two live frogs. Then all the children, including Susi Kater, the only girl, took turns peeing into the pot. Oskar ran away from the children; it was the wrong thing to do. He went to the attic and tried to drum, but the children followed him, carrying the soup, and formed a ring around him. Axel pinned Oskar down while Susi took a spoon and forced some of the soup into Oskar's mouth. The children left, and Oskar went to a corner and threw up the soup. He looked out over the town and sang with his glass-breaking voice - nothing broke, but Oskar was convinced of the possibility of long-distance singing and resolved to leave his home and escape soup-makers and tiny courts.

Oskar's mother took Oskar shopping every Thursday, and every two weeks she took him to Sigismund Markus' toy store to buy a new drum. From ages seven to ten Oskar went through a drum in two weeks. From ten to fourteen it was down to less than a week. Later, the timing became unpredictable: the time it took Oskar to demolish a drum based itself on Oskar's mental stability at the time.

Markus was in love with Agnes Matzerath, but he never acted on his impulses; rather he paid her complements and sold her silk stockings and Oskar's drums at incredible prices. Agnes would then ask if she could leave Oskar with Markus for a few hours to run some errands. All three of them, Oskar included, knew that she was in fact going to meet Jan Bronski in a hotel room, then go out with him for coffee. Oskar knew because he had accompanied his mother on several occasions, waiting for her in the hotel lobby.

One Thursday when Markus was not being too attentive to Oskar, Oskar took his drum and left the store, making his way to the Stockturm, a tower in Danzig about 150 feet tall. He had to wedge his drumsticks in between the iron door and the brick and use them as a lever to open the door. He climbed the spiraling staircase, lamenting the fact



that there were pigeons everywhere on the tower. Pigeons he says, or doves, are used as a sign of peace when they should not be; even hawks and vultures are less quarrelsome. At the top, Oskar looked out at the coffee mill shape of the Stadt-Theater, then began trying to sing out its windows. It was the first time Oskar used his voice for its own sake, when he was not threatened. He became, just as a great painter, an artist with a specific style. He tried several different pitches, then in the end succeeded with an almost noiseless scream. He then spotted Agnes and Jan returning from the café, and he rushed back to the toy store.

When he arrived, he saw Markus kneeling in front of Agnes. He was begging her not to continue her liaisons with Jan, for he was with the Poles, who were sure to lose to the oncoming Germans. He begged her and Oskar to go with him to London. Agnes refused, saying she could not, on account of Jan. Markus backed down and agreed, although he warned Agnes to choose Matzerath and the Germans over Jan and the Poles. Oskar says that now, when he revisits the Stockturm and the Stadt-Theater, he searches for Poland, with every organ of his being, but not his soul, for that is not an organ. He says:

"I look for the land of the Poles that is lost to the Germans, for the moment at least. Nowadays the Germans have started searching for Poland with credits, Leicas, and compasses, with radar, divining rods, delegations, and moth-eaten provincial students' associations in costume. Some carry Chopin in their hearts, others thoughts of revenge. Condemning the first four partitions of Poland, they are busily planning a fifth; in the meantime flying to Warsaw via Air France in order to deposit, with appropriate remorse, a wreath on the spot that was once the ghetto. One of these days they will go searching for Poland with rockets. I, meanwhile, conjure up Poland on my drum. And this is what I drum: Poland's lost, but not forever, all's lost, but not forever, Poland's not lost forever."
Chapter 8, pg. 108



Chapter 9: The Rostrum

That Christmas Agnes bought four tickets to the theater - for herself, for Oskar, and for Stephan and Marga Bronski. Oskar laments the fact that there were too many children there for his taste - Marga spent her time playing at the balcony rail. Oskar identified with the play - it was *Tom Thumb*. It was marked by the fact that the audience never saw Tom Thumb; he was instead played by an invisible offstage voice. The play made Agnes cry; she called Oskar Tom Thumb until after Christmas.

They did not go to the theater again until the summer of 1933, when Agnes, Oskar, Alfred Matzerath, and Jan Bronski took a trip to the Opera-in-the-Woods. A morning in the park, then an afternoon at the beach - Agnes, who was already beginning to get fat, wore a straw-colored bathing suit. Oskar was supposed to go naked; he covered his private parts with his drum. Later they had coffee and cake; Agnes ate three helpings of five-story cake.

Jan was friends with the brothers who did the lighting for Opera-in-the-Woods, who told jokes and introduced them to one of the Opera's shareholders. This man offered Jan and his entourage his tickets for that evening's performance of *The Flying Dutchman*. Oskar fell asleep during the opera, but he awoke to the sound of a blond woman singing loudly on the stage, which Oskar interpreted as screaming in pain because there was a spotlight on her. He thought her screaming was a pleading to one of Jan's friends to turn the light off. When he did not oblige, Oskar let out a scream of his own and destroyed the light, plunging the theater into darkness, starting a fire, and creating a panic in which he lost his drum.

Because of this episode, Agnes decided to take Oskar to the circus. It was there that he first met the musical clown Bebra, a man who was to become Oskar's lifelong influence and role model. He, like Oskar, had refused to grow into an adult. As soon as he sees Oskar, he is impressed that he decided to remain a three-year-old. Bebra announced that he is directly descended from Prince Eugene, whose father was Louis XIV. He said that he had decided to stop growing on his tenth birthday: "Better late than never," he said. He announced he was fifty-three years old; Oskar said he was nine-and-a-half. Oskar, being impressed with Bebra's act, decided to show him his glass-breaking voice. Bebra offered to hire Oskar right then; Oskar says:

"Even today I am occasionally sorry that I declined. I talked myself out of it, saying: 'You know, Mr. Bebra, I prefer to regard myself as a member of the audience. I cultivate my little art in secret, far from all applause. But it gives me pleasure to applaud your accomplishments.' Mr. Bebra raised a wrinkled forefinger and admonished me: 'My dear Oskar, believe an experienced colleague. Our kind has no place in the audience. We must perform, we must run the show. If we don't, it's the others that run us. And they don't do it with kid gloves.'" Chapter 9, pg. 114



Bebra warns Oskar that "they" are coming; that "they" will fill rostrums, and that Oskar should always take care to be on top of and not in front of the rostrum. Bebra kisses Oskar on the forehead as he leaves, angering Agnes.

Agnes followed Sigismund Markus' advice - she stopped seeing Jan except at family skat games and stayed with Alfred, who joined with the Nazi party in 1934. The portrait of Beethoven over the piano, a present from Greff, was replaced with a portrait of Hitler. Though Alfred wanted to banish the Beethoven portrait, Agnes made him keep it up, hanging it over the sideboard. Oskar says the two portraits, Hitler and the genius, sat unhappily staring eye to eye. Alfred pieced together his Nazi uniform slowly, piece by piece, and started attending Sunday rallies religiously. Jan Bronski caught on and began to visit Agnes on Sundays while Alfred was out. Not wanting to disturb them, Oskar would slip out and head toward the rallies.

Oskar admired one of the party's members - a hunchbacked man named Löbsack, the Nazi's district chief of training. He thought Löbsack to be a man fighting on behalf of those like Bebra and himself, as he derived his intelligence and wit from his hump, but realizes he is wrong. The party heads spoke from a rostrum - a platform on which was set up symmetrical rows of flags and people for a rally. Per Bebra's orders, Oskar spent his time at the rallies on the rostrum.

One Sunday Oskar took another tack - he approached the rostrum from its "uncouth" and went underneath. Oskar began to beat out a waltz on his drum over the rectilinear march played by the band. Couples in the audience started dancing. Oskar switched to the Charleston, and after a moment of chaos, the crowd understood and everyone began to dance. For an hour, the SS and SA men tore holes in the rostrum looking for a culprit, but they never found Oskar, who slipped out as an unnoticed three-year-old.



Chapter 10: Shopwindows

Oskar says he made a habit of spending time with his drum under rostrums until November of 1938, breaking up rallies and transforming marches into waltzes. Oskar maintains, however, that he was not a resistance fighter - "resistance" is a much-overused word. He prefers the reader to see him only as an eccentric who rejected the uniforms and colors of the mainstream.

Topic Tracking: Red & White 6

Oskar learned to play the tempter from his grandmother Anna Koljaiczek. She came in from the country to Danzig each Tuesday for market, selling eggs, butter, and geese. Every hour a man who rented out hot bricks would push a brick under Anna's four skirts. Oskar envied those bricks, for he always wanted to be under his grandmother's skirts. He says:

"I was looking for Africa under those skirts, or perhaps Naples, which, as we all know, one must have seen before dying. This was the watershed, the union of all streams; here special winds blew, or else there was no wind at all; dry and warm, you could listen to the whishing of the rain; here ships made fast or weighed anchors; here our Heavenly Father, who has always been a lover of warmth, sat beside Oskar; the devil cleaned his spyglass, and the angels played blindman's buff, beneath my grandmother's skirts it was always summer, even when it was time to light the on the Christmas tree or to hunt for Easter eggs; even on All Saints' Day. Nowhere could I have been more at peace with the calendar than beneath my grandmother's skirts."
Chapter 10, pg. 125-126

Seldom did Anna allow Oskar under her skirts. Oskar sat next to her and learned her tricks. She would tie string to an old pocketbook and throw it on the sidewalk. When someone picked it up, she would yank the string to embarrass them, then ask them to buy her wares.

Oskar had his own version of temptation: late at night he would slip out of the apartment and into town. He watched the people passing dark store windows, waiting for someone who seemed tempted by a certain object. Then he would sing out a section of the window with his voice, making a circular cut in the glass. He would watch as the person would slip the coveted object into their coat and move along. From November, 1936 to March, 1937, Oskar instigated sixty-four attempted and twenty-eight successful burglaries. The people, however, were not thieves by trade - the police either recovered the stolen items or the people returned them. Although Agnes and Alfred questioned him about the robberies from time to time, Agnes blamed Bebra's influence on Oskar as the reason for the thefts. Back in the institution, Oskar says it was evil that compelled him, though now he feels no compulsion toward temptation.

In January 1937, Oskar stood in a doorway across from a jewelry store in town. He saw Jan Bronski coming silent and alone down the street, and stop in front of the shop



window, staring at a ruby necklace. Instead of drumming him away, Oskar sang a hole in the window for this man whom he presumed to be his father. Jan quickly picked up the necklace and put it in his pocket. Oskar drummed out "Father, father" on his drum and Jan came across the street and found Oskar in the doorway. Jan reached out to him and led him home; a few days later, Jan gave the necklace to Agnes. After WWII, Oskar traded the necklace for a leather briefcase and twelve cartons of Lucky Strike cigarettes on the black market.

Topic Tracking: Red & White 7

Topic Tracking: Red & White 8



Chapter 11: No Wonder

Oskar laments the fact that he lost his glass-breaking voice ability in the year before he was committed to the institution. When he saw his friend Vittlar, he was reduced to using the man's first name, Gottfried, because his voice was so lowly.

The incident with Jan and the necklace put a temporary end to Oskar's temptations. At that time, however, Agnes found religion; Oskar says she did so because she had fallen into a routine of sin with Jan Bronski. So she went and confessed to Father Wiehnke every Saturday at the Church of the Sacred Heart.

Oskar remembers his baptism, which Father Wiehnke had performed. During the ceremony he had asked if Oskar would renounce Satan. Before Oskar could shake his head (even though he was an infant), Jan Bronski said he would. Oskar says he had no intention of renouncing Satan: once outside and waiting for a taxi, Oskar says:

"I asked the Satan within me: 'Did you get through it all right?' Satan jumped up and down and whispered: 'Did you see those church windows? All glass, all glass!'" Chapter 11, pg. 137

There were three colored sculptures of Jesus in the church. The first was of a frowning Jesus whose robes were open, exposing a bleeding heart. In this sculpture, Oskar saw a striking resemblance to Jan Bronski, his presumptive father. The second sculpture showed Jesus with his eyes closed and muscles bulging from underneath his robes: Jesus the divine athlete. The third sculpture showed the Virgin Mary with two young boys seated on her right leg of her lap - Jesus and John the Baptist. Mary was looking at John, who was clothed, and didn't notice Jesus, who was naked. Baby Jesus Sculpture. Oskar identified with the two little religious figures, going so far as to say that the Jesus was his "spit and image."

Topic Tracking: Individuality/Identity 6

Oskar climbed the steps to the sculpture, then stroked and pressed the naked sculpture's uncircumcised penis; Oskar felt a strange and disturbing sensation within himself as he did so. He climbed the sculpture and hung his drum around the sculpture's neck. He stuck his drumsticks into the boy's hands. He waited for Jesus to drum; this test would determine who the real Jesus was - Oskar or Jesus himself. Jesus did not drum. Oskar did a drumming demonstration to teach Jesus, but this only drew attention from Father Wiehnke, who cracked the sculpture in removing the drum. Oskar kicked and bit Father Wiehnke to get back his drum, then ran away, Satan jumping inside of him. Oskar tries to sing out some of the windows of the church, but he failed, lamenting the fact that it was almost Easter and Jesus would be in charge.



Chapter 12: Good Friday Fare

Oskar was mad at Jesus for not drumming, but glad the drum was all his. He was angry that the windows did not break, but the fact that they did not preserved his Catholic faith.

Matzerath, who was a Protestant, closed the store on Good Friday. He, Oskar, Agnes, and Jan took a streetcar to a beach resort, which was still mostly boarded up, as it was mid-April. On the way they passed Saspe cemetery, where Agnes said she'd like to be buried. Alfred thought the soil too sandy. Once there, they walked along the beach and saw no one save a lone old man sitting on the breakwater. He had a wriggling sack next to him and held onto a clothesline that disappeared into the water. The man, with a tobacco stained smile, pulled in the clothesline. Although ready to leave, Oskar's group stayed to watch. The man climbed down the rocks and heaved a severed horse's head, attached to the clothesline, onto the breakwater. Clinging to the black horse's head were green eels, which the man pulled off the horse and put in his bag, which Matzerath held. The man pulled open the horse's mouth and pulled out two large eels from the horse's throat, causing Agnes to throw up her breakfast. Circling seagulls swooped down and ate what Agnes had disgorged. The man pulled an eel out of the horse's ear, spilling the horse's brains out of its head.

Jan, though weak, led Agnes away. Matzerath bought four of the eels. The man explained that the bag was full of rock salt, which caused the eels to wriggle to death and scrape off their slime. The practice was illegal, but the man did it anyway. Oskar left Matzerath and the old man and found Jan and Agnes; Jan's hand was in Agnes' shirt, and Agnes' hand was in Jan's coat pocket.

The group took the streetcar home, and Alfred promised to make the eels for dinner, which Agnes didn't want. She smoked in public, which Alfred didn't like. Once home, an argument over the eels and Oskar falling down the stairs ensued. Sick of it, Oskar went into Alfred and Agnes' bedroom and hid in the clothes closet, completely motionless. He thought back to his visits with the doctor, Dr. Hollatz who had his assistant, Sister Inge, perform experiments on Oskar. He envisioned her crisp white uniform and her brooch with a red cross.

Topic Tracking: Red & White 9

Alfred had put the cooked eels on the table, but Jan and Agnes refused to eat them. Agnes began to scream in Kashubian, which Alfred could not understand. Agnes came into her room, with Oskar in the closet, and wept on the bed. At Alfred's request, Jan came in to pacify her and when words didn't work, he put his hand inside her dress until she stopped crying. Alfred dumped the eels in the toilet and made scrambled eggs with mushrooms for dinner; the three adults passed the time by playing skat all night long.



Chapter 13: Tapered at the Foot End

Exactly two weeks after Easter, Agnes began to eat fish obsessively. She would start in the morning with herring, then move on to any sort of fried, boiled, preserved, or smoked fish she could find. She began to vomit at intervals throughout the day, neglecting to answer either Jan's or Alfred's questions about why she was doing so. After drinking the oil from several cans of sardines, she was taken to the hospital. There, Agnes was found to be three months pregnant. Dr. Hollatz said she had jaundice and fish poisoning, but Oskar says it was the memory of the eels in the severed horse's head, and the fear of seeing it again, that did her in. For four days she retched, then finally died. Oskar says in his mother's death she and Jan Bronski had become Romeo and Juliet; she had died for him, held their love on a pedestal, and sacrificed herself. Oskar describes his mother's funeral, who was buried not in Saspe but next to her stepfather, Gregor Koljaiczek:

"I couldn't help feeling that her head would bob up again any minute and that she would have to vomit some more, that there was something more inside her that wanted to come out: not only that fetus aged three months who like me didn't know which father he had to thank for his existence; no, I thought, it's not just he who wants to come out and, like Oskar, demand a drum, no, there's more fish, not sardines, and no flounder, no, it's a little chunk of eel, a few whitish-green threads of eel flesh, eel from the battle of Skagerrak, eel from the Naufahrwasser breakwater, Good Friday eel, eel from that horse's head, possibly eel from her father Joseph Koljaiczek who ended under the raft, a prey to the eels, eel of thine eel, for eel thou art, to eel returnest..." Chapter 13, pg. 163-164

At the funeral, Anna Koljaiczek fell on her daughter's coffin and cursed Alfred in Kashubian as a murderer. Oskar admired his mother's coffin; he laments that that all human things are not, like a coffin, tapered at the foot end to suit us perfectly. Throughout the ceremony, Oskar wanted to sit on the foot end of that coffin and drum out the ceremony - just sit there and drum until his sticks rotted away. After the ceremony, Sigismund Markus showed up at the cemetery. After an altercation, he was shown the exit by Alexander Scheffler and Meyn the Trumpeter. Oskar slipped out and went to meet Markus, and led him through the cemetery's iron gate, where they met Leo Schugger, a man who spent his time going from funeral to funeral offering condolences. Markus and Leo talked, then Markus left in a waiting taxi. After the funeral, the group retired to Vincent Bronski's farm and spent the evening playing skat. Oskar slipped under Anna's four skirts and fell asleep there, as close as he could be to his mother's beginnings.



Chapter 14: Herbert Truczinski's Back

After his mother's death, Oskar lost all his will; he stopped breaking up demonstrations with his drum and singing out the glass of shop windows. Oskar plunged himself into Gretchen Scheffler's books, and spent time taking walks alone. On one of these walks, Oskar ran into Bebra, who invited him to a cup of coffee at the Four Seasons hotel. With Bebra was a beautiful woman who, like Oskar and Bebra, had chosen not to grow: her name was Roswitha Raguna. Bebra asked about Oskar's dejection; he told of his mother's death. Roswitha immediately invites Oskar to travel around Europe with her and Bebra. In the same breath, however, as she gazed into Oskar, she trembled and withdrew from him. Oskar asked Bebra to explain why she shied away. He said:

"Your genius, my young friend, the divine, but also no doubt the diabolical elements in your genius have rather confused my good Roswitha, and I too must own that you have in you a certain immoderation, a certain explosiveness, which to me is alien though not quite incomprehensible." Chapter 14, pg. 172

Oskar refused their offer to travel, which relieved Roswitha. Oskar asked for an empty water glass, and when it came he sang a heart-shaped hole in its side. He engraved an inscription underneath the hole with his voice: it said "Oskar for Roswitha". She took it happily. Outside, Oskar told Bebra of his drumming career under rostrums - Bebra whispered that he had failed as a teacher; politics are so filthy.

Oskar found himself with no one - Alfred was consumed with grief, Jan stopped visiting, and Anna at times blamed Oskar and his drumming for his mother's death. Oskar was reduced to stomping up and down the four flights of stairs of the apartment building with his drum. Sometimes he would play duets with Meyn the Trumpeter, who was always dead-drunk in the attic, until Meyn joined the Mounted SA and went sober. The children of the apartment had grown up and didn't make brick soup anymore; Oskar hardly knew them. When he needed company, he would go to the second floor and knock on the door of Mother Truczinski, who always let him in. She had four children, Herbert, Maria, Guste, and Fritz Truczinski.

Herbert became one of Oskar's great friends. Herbert worked in a bar for sailors on the waterfront, frequented mostly by Scandinavians. Once or twice a month, Herbert came home in an ambulance, having been stabbed in the back by a sailor after a fight. Once his back healed, Oskar would be allowed to inspect the scars on Herbert's massive back. In the institution, Oskar compares those scars to the "secret parts" of a few women he has known - "hard, sensitive, and disconcerting."

Oskar says he finds a suggestion of his own umbilical cord in the scars on Herbert Truczinski's back:

"You've guessed it no doubt: Oskar's aim is to get back to the umbilical cord; that is the sole purpose behind this whole vast verbal effort and my only reason for dwelling on Herbert Truczinski's scars." Chapter 14, pg. 179



As Oskar pushed on each scar with his finger or drumstick, Herbert would tell him the story that went along with it - all were battles that took place over Herbert's pride. A few weeks later, Herbert would not have his scars pushed anymore - he had killed a Latvian sea captain in self-defense and could not get over his guilt. He gave notice at the bar and quit, although his boss tried in vain to persuade him otherwise.



Chapter 15: Niobe

Herbert was reduced to mulling over his troubles; Oskar got him to go into a partnership with him. Oskar would sing out the windows of a store and Herbert would do the salvaging of the loot. They robbed two delis and a furrier. They were forced to give it up, however, because disposing of the goods involved revisiting the black market of the waterfront, which Herbert had no intention of doing. After another bout of mulling, Herbert got out his suit and went looking for a job - he became a guard at the Maritime Museum.

The pride of the museum's collection was a figurehead from a Florentine galleon, captured by Pirates from Danzig in 1473. The green figurehead was a carving of a naked woman; the carving was known as Niobe or "the green kitten". The model for the sculpture had been put on trial for witchcraft after its completion and the sculptor's hands were cut off as a result. Over the centuries, every one of the sculpture's owners befell some grand misfortune; Danzig's citizens blamed much of their misfortune on its presence. While no museum attendant would guard the sculpture, and visitors would not enter the room, Herbert Truczinski volunteered his services.

Reluctantly, he let Oskar accompany him to the museum. On the third day, on the pretext of cleaning, the two entered the sculpture's room and they studied her proportions; Herbert thought there was too much of her, preferring little dainty women. Oskar drummed on her breasts, and Herbert drove a nail into her knee; she didn't react. Oskar, at the time, was convinced of Niobe's indifference toward him and Herbert. He says:

"Today I know that everything watches, that nothing goes unseen, that even wallpaper has a better memory than ours. It isn't God in his Heaven that sees at all. A kitchen chair, a coat-hanger, a half-filled ash tray, or the wooden replica of a woman named Niobe, can perfectly well serve as an unforgetting witness to every one of our acts."
Chapter 15, pg. 192-193

After two weeks the ticket seller at the museum refused to let Oskar in with Herbert because Oskar was irresponsible. In the end he was let in one last time, but both he and Herbert were disinclined toward games - Niobe caught the afternoon light in her amber eyes and seemed to be plotting.

The next day Herbert guarded Niobe alone and Oskar sat outside the museum on a banister. Oskar drummed in protest, then ate lunch outside with Herbert, then watched him drink gin in a local bar.

Topic Tracking: Red & White 10

Suddenly an ambulance showed up at the museum - Oskar slipped inside along with them and went to Niobe's room. Herbert was hanging from Niobe's front, his face covering hers. He was naked to the waist, showing off his scars. He had taken a safety



ax and plunged it into the statue; in the process he had driven the other end into himself. His trousers were open and his penis was still erect. Oskar says that in order to draw upon this scene, he is obliged to bang on his drum with all of his might, not with his drumsticks but with his fists.



Chapter 16: Faith, Hope, Love

At Herbert's funeral, Leo Schugger again offered his condolences to the assembly at the cemetery. Meyn the trumpeter went back to drinking gin and played the trumpet beautifully over Herbert's grave. Leo Schugger neglected to give Meyn his sympathies, but rather cried in fear at seeing him. Once home, Meyn found his four cats, who he fed herring heads. The stench of the cats, however, became unbearable to him. He reached for the poker that sat by his stove and flailed out at the cats until they were dead. He put the cats into a potato sack and took them downstairs to dump them in the trash, but neglected to notice that the sack was not blood-proof - it began to drip as he went down the stairs. The garbage can was full and the lid would not stay on well - after Meyn dumped his cats, the lid began to move. The cats were not quite dead. In his house, Laubschad the watchmaker, a member of the local SPCA, saw the garbage lid moving. He went out, took out the cats, and took care of them until they died the following night. He complained to the SPCA and Meyn was fined and kicked out of the SA - even his observed bravery in setting fore to a local synagogue could not save him.

Across from the burning synagogue, which Alfred and Oskar had watched burn, Oskar slipped away to Sigismund Markus' toy store. The Nazis had painted "Jewish Sow" across the store window in Sütterlin script. They had kicked in the window, and several soldiers had defecated inside the store. The soldiers broke into Markus' office, where they found him with an empty water glass. Oskar worried for his drum - he left the store quickly, taking three drums with him. Outside several women were handing out religious tracts from between a banner that read "Faith... hope... love," from Corinthians, chapter 13. Oskar says we are waiting for the Savior, but that the savior is really the gasman, offering special rates on the gas of the Holy Ghost, which lets you cook. The Savior, the gasman, became Santa Claus -- Oskar himself questions these imaginative answers, listing a number of things he doesn't understand.



Book 2, Chapter 17: Scrap Metal

On visiting day in the institution, Maria brings Oskar a new drum. Oskar would not accept the receipt from the store - he even had Bruno wash the price tag off the drum with hot water before he would look at it. Maria takes the old drum, well worn as it is. Per Oskar's instructions, she is to put it in the cellar at home, along with all of Oskar's other used drums. Oskar asks himself what it is that makes him collect his worn out drums - his answer is fear of a drum prohibition sometime in the future. This complex started on November 9, 1938, the day he lost Sigismund Markus to the Nazis and with it, his supply of drums.

Oskar had salvaged three drums from the ruins of Markus' shop. He drummed carefully and seldom in order to save them. Oskar began to lose weight in his depression. To get away from Dr. Hollatz, Oskar began to eat; the price, however, was that he ruined his three drums quickly. Alfred was of no help - he was lost to the Party (the Nazis), and held long conversations with the portraits of Hitler and Beethoven hanging in the living room - Beethoven spoke of destiny, Hitler of Providence. On Sundays, Alfred would spend his time collecting money for the Party. One day, Oskar took the collection box when Alfred was napping and tried to use it as a replacement drum - it was a miserable failure. Oskar learned then that no substitute could replace his drum. Now he had to carry on his deceptions without his drum; he had to pretend he was three years old alone. Oskar went looking for Jan Bronski.

With Agnes gone, Jan and Alfred's friendship had gone by the wayside - mostly since they came down on opposite political sides of the inevitable war - their meeting was forbidden. Once or twice a month, Jan would stop by after midnight to play skat with Alfred and Alexander Scheffler. Alfred and Jan soon found skat partners closer to their own way of thinking. Jan found Koybella, the janitor at the Polish Post Office where he worked. Koybella, Oskar thought, could probably fix his tattered drum. To get to Koybella, he waited for Jan on his normal route home from work. Jan didn't come on time - as he waited, he thought of the lengths he went to, to gain admission to the space underneath his grandmother's skirts. Only when she was alone could he gain free admission - he would go beneath her skirts and smell a rancid butter smell, and he would drum.

Topic Tracking: Red & White 11

Jan finally showed up, putting his hands over Oskar's eyes. Looking at the battered drum that Oskar showed him, Jan led him back to the post office, where he came from to search for Koybella the repairman. On a normal day it would have been a pleasant trip, dropping off the drum for repair. But as it was, the Polish Post Office workers had been undergoing military training for the past few months in preparation for the Nazis; they had turned the post office into a fortress. Jan had escaped from the post office, to get out of defending it against the oncoming Germans, but now Oskar had forced him to go back on account of his drum. Jan was secretly counting on the barricade of German SS men at the post office to turn him away; they did not, and Oskar and Jan were pulled



inside the post office door, where the workers were putting up sandbags in defense. Oskar, unable to find Koybella, found a windowless room on the second floor filled with carts of unsent mail, and fell asleep.



Chapter 18: The Polish Post Office

Oskar slept dreamlessly on the letters. He was awakened by the sound of machine-gun fire - the Germans had attacked the post office. Oskar's first thought was of his drum's safety - he dug a hole in the basket of letters and placed his broken drum inside. Oskar went in search of Koybella or Jan. In the hall, he could hear shots being fired from inside the building by the postal workers. Thinking his glass-singing talents could be enlisted to help the Poles, he instead got tangled in the grownups' feet. He watched the first Polish wounded as they were carried into the building. The first man was grazed in the arm. The second had been shot in the belly. A third wounded man was taken to Oskar's windowless room; he followed, lamenting that the man was placed into one of the mail baskets to bleed his drum. The drum, after all, had nothing in common with the blood of the Poles.

In a few minutes, the SS men blasted into the building, but reinforcements from the windowless room held them off. When the man came back, Oskar went to the third floor, to the apartment of the Chief Postal Secretary. On a shelf in the children's room in the apartment, high up amid other toys, sat a new tin drum just like those Oskar used. In the room he found Jan and Koybella behind a makeshift wall of sandbags. Koybella was busy shooting into the street at regular intervals with a rifle. Jan was huddled up and trembling in fear. Oskar gestured that he wanted Jan to reach for the drum, but Jan couldn't understand. Oskar tried to calm him down, but the Germans responded with a field howitzer that blew apart the iron fence around the building and scared Jan so that his eyes stood out of his head and made him scream. Koybella crept over and checked Jan for a wound; he was not hurt. Koybella gave him a gun, and with coaxing, Jan went to his post, emptied the magazine quickly, and slumped over again. Koybella looked at him and laughed, then kicked him in the shins.

Oskar never took his eyes off of the drum. During a lull, Koybella began to reach for it for Oskar - then a burst of machine-gun fire pulled him back to his window. After a time, Jan, who had been motionless, moved to the window he was supposed to man, and lying on the ground, put his right leg in the air in front of the window, exposing it for some German to shoot and get him off the battlefield. Enraged, Koybella rushed at Jan and began to pummel him with his fists. He was standing in front of the window; before he could do any real damage, he had been shot. Sitting under the window, the new drum suddenly fell into Oskar's arms. Before Jan would leave to haul Koybella downstairs, he insisted on picking up his belongings: his comb, his photographs, his purse, and all thirty-two of his skat cards, which had been scattered over the room. In the hallway, Koybella asked, "Is it all there?" Jan reached between the old man's legs and nodded.



Chapter 19: The Card House

Victor Welhun helped Jan and Oskar carry Koybella to the windowless room. On the way, they consoled themselves by thinking that the British and French would come to save them. Oskar knew better than to expect help. Jan, scared to death, was admitted to the room along with Oskar and Koybella, in which all of the wounded had been placed, on top of the unsent mail. After dressing Koybella's wounds, Jan couldn't think of what to do. He pulled out his skat cards and he, Oskar and Koybella began to play. Koybella could hardly keep himself upright; Jan and Oskar tied him to a mail basket with a pair of suspenders. Koybella was only conscious for the game itself; between hands he sagged in the suspenders. Oskar was troubled, for this was the first time he had let on that he was not a three-year-old in mind as he was in body; he let on that he could play skat. Jan began to confuse himself - he started calling Oskar Alfred or Matzerath and Koybella Agnes, then vice versa.

Topic Tracking: Individuality/Identity 7

Jan was about to play out a great hand of skat, but Koybella toppled over dead, spilling unsent mail from the basket all over the room. Jan could not understand - he shouted to "Alfred" to sit up. Oskar consoled Jan, calling him "Papa," telling him to let Koybella be.

Topic Tracking: Individuality/Identity 8

Victor Weluhn came into the room, saying he had lost his glasses. He said that Jan should make a run for it; the French were not coming. When Jan did not respond, he left, perhaps unable to see Jan without his glasses. Jan began to laugh - he threw his cards in the air, caught them, then set about using them to build a house of cards. The Germans had used flame-throwers to smoke out the remaining post office defenders. The post office's commander had surrendered. The Germans took thirty men prisoner - only three or four escaped. Victor Weluhn was one who escaped; he fled, had himself fitted for new glasses, had a few beers, then started running. His escape continues even now. The SS men found Jan and Oskar in the room of unsent mail. When they opened the door, the draft blew over Jan's house of cards. Outside, Oskar played the three-year-old again, throwing a tantrum; he was put in an official SS car. Jan, taken prisoner, had the queen of hearts from his deck of skat cards in his hand; he waved it at Oskar, his son, as the car pulled away.



Chapter 20: He Lies in Saspe

Oskar says he has misled the reader in the last chapter - the events were not so grand or blameless as he made them out to be. As soon as the guards came into the room, Oskar had begun making himself out to be the childish victim, and making Jan out to be the evil culprit who used Oskar as a shield for bullets. Jan didn't notice, and this fact comforts Oskar, for it relieves him of responsibility. Jan was lost in his world of cards.

Oskar says he has two great burdens of guilt in his life: it was he who sent both Agnes and Jan to their graves. While Oskar was placed in the hospital with a fever and given back to Alfred, the thirty prisoners were taken to the run-down cemetery in Saspe and executed. Oskar learned this from Leo Schugger, who knew about all the burials in Danzig, even unannounced ones.

In the hospital, the high bars on the beds in the children's ward kept Oskar happily separated from his family and their friends. Vincent and Anna wanted Oskar to confess the truth to the Germans: that he had convinced Jan to return to the post office, which he did not want to defend. Oskar did no such thing, but watched Poland fall to the Germans in eighteen days. Oskar left the hospital and was given back his drums. Once out, he took a walk and chanced upon Leo Schugger - Oskar was afraid of him. After spending most of the day together, Leo pushed Oskar into a doorway, pulled something out of his pocket, and handed it to Oskar. In his hand was an empty cartridge case. Leo closed his hand and Oskar followed him silently. Leo played the Pied Piper, playing the casing, leading Oskar on. He led Oskar into Saspe cemetery, measured out paces in Latin, marked the spot with a piece of wood, then deposited the casing, which was tapered at the foot end, next to it. A fleet of military planes flew overhead, preparing to land. Suddenly Leo darted away, leaving Oskar alone, and dropped something as he left which Oskar thought he should pick up. It was a skat card - the seven of spades. A few days later, Anna was able to come back to the farmer's market in Danzig. Oskar approached her, handed her the skat card and cartridge case, and whispered "He's lying in Saspe," and ran off.



Chapter 21: Maria

Oskar says that while the governments of Europe spent all of their time and money gobbling up the metal of Europe, Oskar was running out of drums. He did his best to destroy the drum he had found in the post office because it reminded him of his guilt over Jan's death, but it somehow survived his attack. Oskar was convinced he would get a new guiltless drum for Christmas, but he did not. He was sure the grownups had hidden it from him; when he was proven wrong, he used his glass-breaking voice for the first time in a long time, and shattered all the decorations on the Christmas tree. Alfred could not understand.

Since Oskar was too small to work in the store, Alfred took on Maria Truczinski to work behind the counter. Maria understood Oskar better than Alfred - she bought him a new drum every four or five weeks. She acted with servility toward Alfred, and spent her free time playing the harmonica. She succeeded in bringing customers back to Alfred's store that had been lost when Agnes died. Maria was Oskar's first love - she was the first person that Oskar didn't mind touching him. Maria took to putting Oskar to bed - he would blush when she undressed him and put him in the bathtub. She did daring things in front of Oskar - she would take off her outer garments and clean them with gasoline. Maria smelled to Oskar of vanilla - she did not wear perfume, but smelled that way naturally.

In July, 1940, after Maria's brother Fritz Truczinski had been drafted, Maria and Oskar went to the beach. They rode the streetcar to the beach, having to pass Saspe cemetery on the way. Oskar tried to convince himself not to look, but the car turned and he was greeted with an unwelcome view of the cemetery, which was still painfully whitewashed. He took a long whiff of Maria's vanilla scent and looked to her necklace, a string of red wooden cherries.

Topic Tracking: Red & White 12

Oskar was allowed into the women's changing area of the beach on account of his height, even though he was almost sixteen. In the private changing room with Maria, Oskar undressed first, facing the wall, though Maria turned him around to put on his woolen bathing suit. Then Maria began to undress quickly. Oskar drummed a little, then stopped. Maria whistled while undressing, more loudly as she finished. Oskar felt rage, shame, indignation, and disappointment as he felt himself become erect. He threw himself on Maria, burying his face in her pubic hair, and looked for the source of her vanilla scent. Maria laughed and tried to pull away. The vanilla scent brought tears to his eyes, then the scent switched to that of mushrooms or some acrid spice, reminding Oskar of Jan Bronski lying smoldering in the earth and he let go of her. Oskar slipped on the boards of the cabin and began to cry. Maria picked him up and called him a little rascal who didn't know what was what.



Chapter 22: Fizz Powder

Oskar begins by talking about fizz powder, a soda substitute of flavored powder that fizzed like soda when mixed with water. Agnes would sell it in little bags of green, orange, raspberry, or lemon flavor.

Oskar and Maria spent the first summer of the war on the beach reserved for ladies. One day, looking for her harmonica, Maria produced a package of fizz powder from her beach bag. Maria grew thirsty, but the water fountain was thirty-five paces away, over burning sand. After a long while, Maria picked up the package, opened it, and placed it back on the towel. Oskar picked it up and held it out to Maria, who put one finger in the package and offered the finger to Oskar. Oskar tasted the powder-covered finger. Maria held out an empty hand and Oskar filled it with powder. Oskar summoned up all of his saliva and spit into the hand full of powder. It fizzed, and Maria felt something she had never felt before. Maria licked her own palm. After a few minutes, she filled her hand again, then made it known that she wanted Oskar's saliva. But Oskar was little; his saliva could not replenish quickly. He had to walk across the burning sand to the water fountain in order to wash out his mouth and replenish his saliva. When he returned, Maria was on her belly and didn't move. Her hand was empty of fizz powder. Oskar never found what had happened to that handful of powder.

Alfred had joined a new skat club with his Party friends, which was to meet two evenings a week. Oskar began to spend those nights at Mother Truczinski's house, and since Oskar refused to sleep on the couch, he was obliged to spend the night in Maria's bed. She whistled, as always, as she undid her braids. She would blow a kiss at the retouched portrait of her father, and would leap into bed. The smell of vanilla put Oskar to sleep. Three days later it was the same routine, but Oskar had put a package of green fizz powder on the quilt. Maria turned off the light but breathed uneasily in the dark at the sight of the powder. Maria switched the light back on, Maria held out her hand, and Oskar readied his saliva. In the next two weeks the two emptied a dozen packages of fizz powder in the bed and mixed it with saliva. Oskar began to get good at summoning saliva; he could make Maria squirm in ecstasy three times with one package.

Although Maria would fall right to sleep after these fizz powder sessions, Oskar found it difficult. He spent all day and all night consulting his drum, his Rasputin-Goethe medley, and his memories of Jan and Agnes for answers to his questions about loving Maria. He says:

"Strange to say, I expected more from literature than from real, naked life. Jan Bronski, whom I had often enough seen kneading my mother's flesh, was able to teach me next to nothing. Although I knew this tangle, consisting by turns of Mama and Jan or Matzerath and Mama, this knot which sighed, exerted itself, moaned with fatigue, and at last fell sickly apart, meant love, Oskar was still unwilling to believe that love was love; love itself made him cast about for some other love, and yet time and time again he came back to tangled love, which he hated until the day when in love he practiced it;



then he was obliged to defend it in his own eyes as the only possible love." Chapter 22, pg. 278-279

As Maria quivered and thrashed with the bubbling fizz powder, her nightgown would bunch up until it gathered just below her breasts. One night Oskar filled her navel with powder and spit in it; Maria's reaction was much more intense. Oskar put his tongue inside and tasted raspberries. Maria turned off the light and went to sleep, while Oskar continued. Oskar again felt himself become erect. He questioned the culprit of his actions:

"Who was doing all this: Oskar, He, or I?"

And Maria, who was sleeping upstairs and wide awake downstairs, who smelled upstairs of innocent vanilla and under the moss of pungent mushrooms, who wanted fizz powder, but not this little gentleman whom I didn't want either, who had declared his independence, who did just what he was minded to, who did things I hadn't taught him, who stood up when I lay down, who had other dreams than I, who could neither read nor write and nevertheless signed for me, who goes his own way to this very day, who broke with me the first day I took notice of him, who is my enemy with whom I am constrained, time and time again, to ally myself, who betrays me and leaves me in the lurch, whom I should like to auction off, whom I am ashamed of, who is sick of me, who I wash, who befouls me, who sees nothing and flairs everything, who is so much a stranger to me that I should like to call him Sir, who has a very different memory from Oskar..." Chapter 22, pg. 280

Topic Tracking: Individuality/Identity 9

Today, Oskar says, this "little gentleman" is at a loss to recognize Maria.



Chapter 23: Special Communiqués

In the mental institution, Oskar tried an experiment. He sent his keeper Bruno out to find him fizz powder, but the stores no longer sold it. In the end, the lab technician at the hospital synthesized some for Oskar out of sympathy. It was visiting day: both Klepp and Vittlar came to visit Oskar. Stalin had died that day, and Klepp, the purveyor of Communist propaganda, was in mourning. When Klepp left, Oskar whispered to Vittlar if he knew about fizz powder. Vittlar became incredulous, said he was an angel that could not be tempted, and left.

Maria came to visit Oskar. They talked of her son Kurt, then had Bruno bring in the makeshift fizz powder. He poured it in her left hand and spat into it. She became indignant and angry, then went to the sink and washed her hand off. Oskar pleaded with her to remember, but she did not. She was taken with fear, tried to change the topic, then left weeping. Oskar says he could never forget that powder, for it had made him a father - he had made Maria pregnant that night with the raspberry fizz powder in her navel, as she slept. He is sure of this because it was not until ten days later that he had found Alfred on top of Maria on the sofa.

Oskar found them as he came downstairs from meditating in the attic. They were twisted into a grotesque position and Oskar disregarded Maria's screams to leave and leaped onto the small of Alfred's back. He placed his drum there and beat it furiously, and Alfred and Maria fell apart. Oskar maintains bitterly that he is Kurt's father, and that he inherited from Jan Bronski, his true father, the trait of getting there ahead of Alfred Matzerath.

Oskar caused a fight between Maria and Alfred, for since he was on Alfred's back, Alfred could not shake Oskar off until it was too late; he thought he had gotten Maria pregnant. Alfred stormed out to go play skat, and Oskar was left alone with Maria. She turned on the radio and listened to the report from the front lines of the war, then sat at the table and began to weep. In order to console her, Oskar went into the adjacent store, got some fizz powder, crawled under the table, dumped it into Maria's dangling hand, and mixed it with her saliva. Maria kicked him soundly in the chest and he went sprawling. They both stood up; Maria began to call Oskar names. She hit him in the back of the head and stuffed a towel in his mouth, which he bit hard. Then she laughed and forgot her anger, and went to stroke Oskar's hair. When she came close, Oskar landed an uppercut between her legs, where Alfred had been, then sank his teeth into the same spot. Oskar let go and began to cry with hate and love, while Maria cried in pain.

Alfred married Maria because she was pregnant. If Oskar had rightfully gotten to name Kurt, he says he would have named his son after the boy's great-grandfather, Vincent Bronski.



Chapter 24: How Oskar Took His Helplessness to Mrs. Greff

Oskar says that he never liked Greff the greengrocer; Greff never liked him either. Greff was a vegetarian and would talk about vegetables of idealized perfection. Oskar thought it was nonsense; in his rural family they were practical about potatoes and such. Greff was a generally overdone person, and above all, Oskar hated that Greff could not give up the boy scout troupe that had been taken away from him when the boys were placed into the Hitler Youth Corps. The boys would come by often to see Greff and they would sing the songs they had used to sing. The meetings were tolerated because both Greff and several boys had become higher-ups in the Hitler Youth or the Nazi Party.

Greff loved two things most of all: nature and young boys. As an aside, he loved cleanliness and orderliness; his wife Lina Greff, was a slovenly woman who was perpetually greasy. For Greff, a love of nature meant asceticism. Twice a week in the winter he would ride his bicycle to the frozen ocean before dawn and spend forty-five minutes digging a hole in the ice. He would lift the disk of ice out of the sheet and undress completely, then jump in and bathe for two or three minutes. On Sundays he would bathe in the company of several young boys, who would play and rub each other, then Greff, with snow.

Greff's store opened with money from Lina's father, and could easily have made lots of money, had Greff not been cited by the Bureau of Weights and Measures. Yet Greff did not mean to cheat anyone. He was given to coming up with elaborate mechanical contraptions, and he had invented a set of chimes that went off whenever someone weighed something - a move that the government bureau did not like.

As Maria became more obviously pregnant, Oskar's hatred for her mounted. He was angry that the child's name would be Matzerath and not Bronski. That being so, Oskar resolved to attempt abortion. When Maria was five months pregnant, he pushed her off a ladder; she turned an ankle but the baby was fine. Three weeks before her due date, Oskar tried again. He sat in the living room, drumming softly, as Maria napped on the couch. Suddenly he couldn't take it; he had to do away with her bulging belly. He picked up a pair of scissors and prepared to deflate her belly. Maria caught Oskar's hand just in time. Oskar was taken to stay upstairs with Mother Truczinski.

According to Oskar's calculations, Oskar's son Kurt was born two weeks early. He resolved to give the boy a drum when he turned three, just as Agnes had done for him. When Kurt was baptized, Anna and Victor were invited as Oskar thought proper because Hedwig and her new Husband, Ehlers, who replaced Jan Bronski, had stopped by and gotten themselves invited. At the Protestant church, Oskar refused to enter. After the ceremony, while the rest of the guests ate, Oskar slipped away and went to see Kurt in his cradle. He could think of nothing to say to the infant short of promising him a drum at three. Back in the dining room, chocolate pudding with vanilla sauce was served. The sauce made Oskar feel helpless; he could not get away from it or its representation. He

slid off his chair, crawled to Lina Greff, and breathed in her moldering scent. Oskar vomited at her feet, and resolved from then on to take his helplessness to Lina Greff.



Chapter 25: 165 lbs.

Just as the mud had set in on the front lines of the war, Oskar says he, too, bogged down in the mud of Lina Greff. Maria had taught Oskar to appreciate the delicate side of femininity; Lina taught Oskar femininity on a grand scale - she made a man of him. Lina was permanently bed-ridden and slightly ailing, and could not get away from Oskar. She simply laid herself out for him to experiment with.

Having lost the visits from his former boy scouts, Greff the greengrocer spent his time tinkering with his homemade contraptions. The boys were fighting and some had died in the war.

When he visited the bedridden Lina, he left his drum and climbed in wearing all of his clothes. Two hours later, he would climb out again, fully clothed. Then, with all of Lina's unpleasant scents clinging to him, he would go to visit Greff. After Oskar had been with his wife several times, Greff started a ritual: before Oskar was finished with Lina, Greff would come in with a basin full of warm water, soap, and a towel. Oskar would wash and then go to see Greff: even second hand, Greff could not stomach his wife's smells. Oskar and Greff, however, never became friends.

In September, 1942, Greff invented a drumming machine, set in motion by unbalancing the scales with potatoes. Oskar liked the machine and asked Greff to demonstrate it often; Oskar realized, however, that Greff had not built it for Oskar, but for himself. "Its finale was his finale," Oskar says.

One morning Oskar went into the street and Greff's store was not open, which never happened. He drummed up Lina Greff's attention; she was immediately worried. She went into the store, then down to the cellar. She began to scream. She desperately called the police, then came back to the window and screamed again. The whole neighborhood came outside, but Lina didn't let anyone into her window. Lina called to Oskar; someone lifted him up and she held him to her bosom and she stopped screaming and instead began to whimper. Oskar was embarrassed; Maria was watching him in Lina's arms from the doorway of Alfred's shop. Oskar slipped down, out of Lina's grasp, and walked into the shop. He walked over and peered into the open cellar hatchway; he saw Greff's hiking shoes hanging in mid-air. He walked down the stairs and saw that Greff had hanged himself from a hugely elaborate counterweighted system of beams and pulleys. He was counterweighted with potatoes; on the bag, a tag read "165 lbs. (less three oz.)" - Greff had weighed himself to the ounce. He was in a boy scout uniform, and on the last few steps to the basement, there were four framed pictures: Balden-Powell (founder of the Boy Scouts), St. George, the head of Michaelangelo's David, and his favorite boy, Horst Donath, killed on the front lines. Ripped into pieces on the stairs was a court summons asking Greff to appear on a morals charge.



When the paramedics came, they cut Greff down and the counterweight fell, causing a large version of his drum machine, suspended above the scaffolding - it was Greff's grand finale.



Chapter 26: Bebra's Theater at the Front

Greff's elaborate structure caused Oskar to look upon suicide as a noble form of death. During the time after Greff's death, Oskar was given a geography lesson by the advancing armies over the radio. But Oskar grew tired of home. He chanced upon Master Bebra and Roswitha Raguna on the way back from Gretchen Scheffler's, where he had read up on the ancient general Narses, a midget like Oskar who had conquered countries. Bebra and Roswitha convinced Oskar to go abroad with them to Paris and the west. Bebra had become an officer in the Propaganda Company of the Army; his job consisted of entertaining the troops. Driving in the car, Roswitha caressed Oskar; she told him that she had never forgotten him and still had the glass he had sung an inscription in for her. In the park, Oskar thought over the offer for the sake of form, then accepted.

He took leave of Maria, Alfred, and Kurt; Maria was responsive to his caresses for the first time in years, and Alfred stood dumbfounded in the kitchen as Oskar handed him something for the first time ever. He ate with Mother Truczinski, then slipped out that night and to the attic. He took out a new drum he had hidden, and debated whether or not to bring his Rasputin-Goethe medley. He ended up taking both the authors with him. He says:

"Oskar carried on negotiations with his two gods Dionysus and Apollo. ...If Apollo strove for harmony and Dionysus for drunkenness and chaos, Oskar was a little demigod whose business it was to harmonize chaos and intoxicate reason. In addition to his mortality, he had one advantage over all the full divinities whose characters and careers had been established in the remote past: Oskar could read what he pleased, whereas the gods censored themselves." Chapter 26, pg. 323

Oskar left his apartment building grudgingly, and was almost made late at the train station when he paused too long at the church of the Sacred Heart. At the station, Oskar was introduced to Bebra's other troupe members, Felix & Kitty. Roswitha and Kitty sewed a field-gray uniform for Oskar, cutting it to his size. Felix had forged papers for Oskar; he became Roswitha's brother to the authorities. During an air raid in Berlin, the commanding officer had Bebra put on a show. Felix and Kitty tied themselves in knots, Bebra performed songs on beer bottles, Roswitha played the fortune teller, and Oskar played his drum, then shattered a beer bottle over a soldier with his voice. After the show, Oskar and Roswitha lay together. Roswitha was scared, but Oskar infused her with his courage. He was eighteen, but could not tell Roswitha's age - her face showed no trace of time. She could have been nineteen or ninety-nine - there was no way to tell.



Chapter 27: Inspection of Concrete, or Barbaric...

The troupe started their tour, finally arriving in Paris in September. Oskar and Roswitha spent all their time together, admiring the Eiffel tower and exchanging kisses. Oskar compared the arching legs of the tower to his time under his Grandmother Anna.

Topic Tracking: Individuality/Identity 10

In Paris, Oskar upgraded his performance - instead of exploding beer bottles with his voice, he would destroy priceless pieces of blown glass from the French castles. He went chronologically through history, starting with the reign of Louis XIV, then Louis XV, then Louis XVI, and finally that of Louis Philippe. Only seldom did someone in the crowd of soldiers recognize this historical acumen. The troupe spent the winter in Paris - they stayed in first class hotels and Oskar and Roswitha spent their time comparing the beds together.

After performing inland, the troupe moved to the coast and was offered a tour of the Atlantic wall. They stayed with peasants and enjoyed the local wine. The next day, they went out to the pillboxes on the front line, where they met a man named Corporal Lankes. They begin talking to him. He tells Bebra that they build a live puppy into the concrete foundation of every pillbox they build. As Lankes' superior officer leaves, Roswitha, Oskar, Felix, and Kitty jump up on the pillbox and play. Bebra asks Lankes his profession; he says he is an artist, stylistically somewhere between Rembrandt and Velasquez. Lankes has decorated the entrance to the pillbox with his art; Bebra likes it very much. Lankes calls the decorations "Oblique Formations," but underneath the decorations in small letter it reads "Barbaric, Mystical, Bored." Bebra says to Lankes: "You have given our century its name." Chapter 27, pg. 337. On top of the pillbox, Oskar and Roswitha have written a poem, which they read to the group. After the poem is read, the troupe opens up a picnic basket full of breakfast and begins to eat on the concrete. They have foie gras, caviar, cookies, Dutch chocolate, ginger and plum preserves, boiled eggs, and corned beef. They offer some to Lankes, who eats with them.

In the distance on the beach, the group spies five umbrellas - it is a group of nuns, come to pick the shellfish stuck in the military installations on the beach. Sister Scholastica, an older nun, is looking for Sister Agneta, a younger nun who has run off and been lost in music that Roswitha has put on a gramophone. Lankes superior officer calls him on the telephone and orders Lankes to open fire on the nuns. He does so as the troupe listens to another record. Together, they mull over Lankes' art and the puppy bones that will be found in a thousand years when the pillbox is dug up.

That night, the troupe had two shows. At 5AM they awoke to the sound of the allied invasion. Canadians landed in the troupe's sector. During the evacuation, Roswitha asked Oskar to get her a cup of coffee at the field kitchen. Oskar refused, so Roswitha



went to get it herself. She reached the coffee at the same moment that an allied naval shell hit the field kitchen. After receiving orders to go to Berlin, Bebra spoke of Roswitha's death. "We dwarfs and fools have no business dancing on concrete made for giants. If only we had stayed under the rostrums where no one suspected our presence!" Chapter 27, pg. 345

In Berlin, Oskar parted from Bebra, who gave him five drums as a present and had Felix and Kitty accompany him home. He arrived in Danzig on June 11, 1944, one day before Kurt's third birthday.



Chapter 28: The Imitation of Christ

When Oskar returned home, nothing had changed. The only difference was in Alfred, who shed authentic, speechless tears when he saw Oskar. Oskar resolved at that moment to recognize Alfred as a potential father and call himself Matzerath in addition to Bronski. They took him in, but the questions began. They were angry that Oskar had simply disappeared, for they had had to swear to the police that they had not killed him. Now that he was back, a representative from the Ministry of Public Health came by to place Oskar in a mental institution, but Alfred refused because he had promised Agnes that he would not do so. Every two weeks there was a letter in the mail asking for Alfred's release to take Oskar away, but Alfred refused to sign.

For his third birthday the next day, Kurt received several toys that he dismantled or broke immediately. Oskar's son was already an inch taller than Oskar; it was time, he thought, to make the boy a drummer and put an end to the needless growth. Since Oskar had not taken over the store, Oskar presumed that Alfred planned to turn it over to Kurt - this, Oskar thought, had to be prevented at all costs. He wanted to create Kurt in his own image. Oskar fantasized of the two of them drumming together, and sharing the same ideals of childhood, history, and family. At that time, Oskar thought that true family life was only possible under his grandmother Anna's skirts. Today, however, he can supersede the holy trinity with a snap of his fingers - the imitation of Christ has become an occupation. He has fantasies that Anna will invite Jan, Maria, Agnes, and the other Bronskis to a meeting under her skirts. He shudders at the possibilities, contenting himself with the thought of himself and Kurt alone under the skirts.

Oskar relates to the reader his giving three-year-old Kurt the drum. He dropped the sailboat he was destroying and took the drum. As Oskar was handing him the drumsticks, Kurt misinterpreted the action and knocked the sticks to the ground. Oskar bent to pick them up, and Kurt hauled off and struck him with the drum, then hit him repeatedly until Oskar collapsed. Then he took the drum and chipped off the lacquer on a chair, then began to beat it with his broken sailboat toy - no rhythm was discernible.

In the coming months, Stephan Bronski was killed on the eastern front lines. Next, Fritz Truczinski was killed on the western front. This caused Mother Truczinski to have a small stroke, from which she never fully recovered. As a result of her brother's death, Maria found religion. She started going to Protestant services, but they did not satisfy her. She became a Catholic, like Oskar's mother. She took Oskar one afternoon to the church of the Sacred Heart so she could be converted. Leaving her to prayer, Oskar went to inspect the statue of the Virgin Mary with the boys John the Baptist and Jesus. Nothing in the church, even the expressions on the boys' faces, had changes from years before. Once again, as he had done years before, he placed his drum around the boy Jesus' neck. But now he did not want a miracle, he just wanted to show Jesus up. Oskar laughed as he placed the drumstick in the statue's hands; he challenged Jesus to drum. And all of a sudden, he did:



"While round us nothing stirred, he started in with his right stick, then a tap or two with his left, then both together. Blessed if he isn't crossing his sticks, say, that roll wasn't bad. He was very much in earnest and there was plenty of variety in his playing. He did some very complicated things but his simple rhythms were just as successful. There was nothing phony about his playing, he steered clear of gimmicks and just played the drum. His style wasn't even religious, and there was no military vulgarity about it. He was a musician, through and through, but no snob. He knew all the hits. He played 'Everything Passes,' which everyone was singing at the time, and, of course, 'Lili Marlene.' Slowly, a little jerkily perhaps, he turned his curly head with the blue Bronski eyes toward me, smiled, rather arrogantly it seemed to me, and proceeded to weave Oskar's favorites into a potpourri..." Chapter 28, pg. 357

Oskar became angry with Jesus; he took back his drum in anger. As Oskar ran away with his drum, Jesus asked him three times: "Dost thou love me?" Becoming more angry, Oskar replied finally: "You bastard, I hate you, and all your hocus-pocus." Triumphantly, Jesus replied: "Thou art Oskar, the rock, and on this rock I will build my church. Follow thou me!" Chapter 28, pg. 358. Oskar hissed with rage.

Topic Tracking: Individuality/Identity 11

Back in the attic, Oskar took his rage out on old light bulbs. He sang several to pieces, then inscribed JESUS on another in Sütterlin script.



Chapter 29: The Dusters

Oskar returned to the church of the Sacred Heart several times, trying to get the baby Jesus to repeat his drumming performance. Jesus never obliged. Cold and shivering in the church night after night, Oskar began to cough, a habit that remains with Oskar to this day when he enters a church. Oskar began to go to church because nothing kept him at home - every time he saw his son Kurt, the boy would attack him.

Topic Tracking: Red & White 13

Matzerath took to hugging Oskar often, and even kissed him once, as he struggled against the doctors, who wanted to put Oskar in an institution. Oskar took to singing glass apart often, as it gave him proof of his existence. Each time he left the church of the Sacred Heart, he chose some window to break with his voice, and he always took a different way home. One day he arrived at church late. The door was locked, so Oskar took a long way home, in order to vent his rage. He sang out street lamps and came upon a chocolate factory. About to sing out its windows, Oskar noticed a group of boys that had been following him. It was clear that they were converging on Oskar. He squeezed through the factory fence, but four boys were waiting for him. There were twenty in all who converged, all between the ages of fourteen and sixteen. They addressed each other in code: Ripper, Putty, Firestealer, Mister, Soup Chicken, Lionheart, Bluebeard, Totila, Teja, Belisarius, Narses, and Störtebaker. Störtebaker, the leader, questioned Oskar and threatened to give him a "dusting." Firestealer asked Oskar what his name was. Oskar replied "My name is Jesus." Firestealer gave Oskar a "dusting" - he dug his knuckles into Oskar's arm above the elbow, and gouged until Oskar felt pain. They asked his name again; Oskar maintained that he was Jesus. Just then the air-raid sirens went off; several boys had to leave to help man the artillery. Störtebaker allowed that Oskar was Jesus, but wanted to know how he could break glass with his voice. Oskar resolved to take these children under his wing, to lead them as Jesus had. To bring them in, he gave an example of his singing skills - he broke the windows of the chocolate factory. The boys were enthralled; they danced and shouted. Störtebaker sighed, then admitted Oskar to the gang. Oskar said that "Jesus" would lead them, and that they were to follow.

They were the Dusters, a group of boys that had become famous in Danzig for raiding the offices of the Hitler Youth, stealing medals from soldiers and ammunition from stockpiles. Their grand ambition was to raid the city's rationing office.



Chapter 30: The Christmas Play

The first thing Oskar did when he took over the Dusters was demand to be introduced to and ally with Moorkähne, the leader of the other faction of Dusters. Moorkähne also recognized Oskar as Jesus. The storeroom and treasury of the Dusters was Putty's basement - it was filled with stolen army surplus, including several guns. Oskar made them bury the guns in the back yard and give him the firing pins, for he didn't want to use that type of weapon. At the time, the Duster's assets amounted to two thousand, four hundred twenty Reichmarks. Later, when they were forced to confess, the police counted their assets at thirty-six thousand Reichmarks.

Oskar never went on the Duster's expeditions - he scouted for them during the day, then sang out the windows of the targeted building at night from inside Mother Truczinski's apartment. He would then eat baked apples as the Dusters were busy looting government property. He was never present for the raids, and cannot say if it was the Dusters who drowned two Patrol Service officers in September 1944. He maintains however, that contrary to legend, the Dusters were autonomous - they were not directed by Edelweiss pirates or grownup Polish Nationalist groups. Once, the group had been approached by a grownup communist party, but the schoolboys couldn't be bothered with ideology. Their fight was against all grownups. A few of the boys broke off and joined with the communists, however, and they were replaced by Felix and Paul Rennwand, both choirboys at the church of the Sacred Heart. Their sister, Lucy Rennwand, was allowed to attend their swearing in - the boys placed their left hands on Oskar's drum, which they thought of as their symbol.

Oskar and the Dusters began to decorate Putty's basement with stolen items from churches. Oskar's aim was to erect a complete nativity set in the basement. Finally, the boys broke into the church of the Sacred Heart - actually, they were let in by Felix and Paul. Oskar had them all genuflect as they entered, then Firestealer went to work on the Virgin Mary/baby Jesus/John the Baptist statue with a saw. He took half an hour to saw off John the Baptist from Mary's thigh. Then Bouncer, Felix, and Lionheart took forty minutes on the baby Jesus. Moorkähne had not shown up with his faction, making the boys nervous. When Jesus was placed on the ground, his halo broke off. The sculpture was hollow cast over an iron skeleton. Oskar noticed the general malaise of the boys and knew something had to be done. He had Störtebaker lift him into the place where the baby Jesus had been. Narses and Bluebeard shone their flashlights at Oskar on the Virgin Mary's lap. Mister came out dressed as a priest. The Rennwands came out dressed in red and white choirboy uniforms. Mister proceeded to give the boys a full Mass. Oskar, on the statue, substituted drum solos for hymns.

Topic Tracking: Red & White 14

The police burst in with their flashlights, but Oskar stayed on the statue and the boys remained kneeling. Lucy Rennwand was among the police - she had ratted the boys out. Just as in the post office, Oskar reverted to acting like a three-year-old and played the victim in Father Wiehnke and Lucy's arms as the boys were led away. Oskar was

put on trial with the boys, but was acquitted. Oskar calls the trial the second trial of Jesus.



Chapter 31: The Ant Trail

Oskar begins with the image of a picturesque swimming pool, graced by many young, slender people. A young man climbs the ten-foot diving board and everyone watches, his friends goading him to dive. This, Oskar says, is the situation he and the Dusters were in at their trial. All of the boys dove from the board. That left Oskar alone, who stood up on the board and said he could see the whole world from up there. He celebrated the simultaneity of the world, weaving the fabric of history. Even when Lucy pleaded, Oskar did not jump, but turned and made his way down the ladder rung by rung. As Oskar left the courthouse, a man approached Matzerath and asked him to consider putting Oskar in an institution, because he was gullible and so easily taken in by disreputable elements. For ten days, Matzerath considered the offer, then on the eleventh day, signed the release, but the city was under artillery fire then, and the mail had stopped.

Over half the flats in the apartment building were empty, as the tenants had already fled. Matzerath, however, had been stockpiling food, unbeknownst to the authorities, in the cellar of the store; the remaining members of the building took to the cellar during the air raids. Old Man Heilandt and Matzerath carried Mother Truczinski down during the early raids, then later they left her sitting at her window. After one big raid, Matzerath and Maria found her dead with her jaw open, squinting like she had a gnat in her eye. Old Man Heilandt made a coffin for Mother Truczinski out of her bedroom door. Oskar made him make it properly - tapered at the foot end. She was cleaned and put in the box, but her legs had stiffened in a sitting position; Old Man Heilandt had to break her legs to get her in the coffin. They were obliged to bury her in the park; the cemetery was closed to all but the military. Oskar slipped away and took a walk. Dangling from the trees in the road were hanged soldiers who all looked like Störtebaker. Oskar hoped they had gotten Lucy Rennwand too, but he could not find her body. Back at the burial site, the ground was frozen and Matzerath and Heilandt had to dig away the dirt with a pickax.

From then on, Oskar's family lived in their basement, for the Russians were coming swiftly, burning and pillaging in their path. Oskar emerged only to retrieve his belongings from the attic - extra drums from Bebra, his Goethe-Rasputin book, and the fan that had belonged to Roswitha. Seeing the fire, Matzerath for the first time doubted the triumphant final victory of his Nazi Party. Lina Greff, the widow, convinced Matzerath to remove his Nazi Party pin, which he did, but could not decide what to do with it - anywhere he put it, the Russians would find it. He tried to stamp on it, but Kurt and Oskar pounced on it, Oskar refusing to let it go on account of Kurt's potential safety. Just then, they heard the screams from the neighboring families, and knew the Russians had arrived.

Six or seven Russians opened the hatch to the cellar; Oskar focused on a trail of ants on the cellar floor running from the potatoes to the sugar. He was reassured that the ants did not respond to all the sudden screaming. Three of the soldiers went instantly to Lina Greff, and raped her in turn. Maria was spared, for she had Kurt on her lap, and as Oskar had read in Rasputin, the Russians loved children. A soldier picked Oskar up and



played the drum with his fingers, then handed him off when the first soldier went to take his turn with Lina Greff. There were lice on the soldier's collar, and Oskar wanted to catch one, but it meant dropping Matzerath's Party pin. He held it out to Matzerath, who unknowingly grasped it. Fear gripped Matzerath; he put the pin in his mouth. The soldiers saw the move and pointed their guns at Matzerath, who tried to swallow the pin. It stuck in his throat; Matzerath began to choke and flail. One of the soldiers emptied a whole magazine into Matzerath before he could die of suffocation. The ants had to build a new trail around Matzerath's body; the soldiers took artificial honey with them as they left.



Chapter 32: Should I or Shouldn't I?

Refugees from Poland began to arrive in Danzig. To Oskar's family, a man named Mr. Fajngold arrived, whose wife Luba and children Lev, Jakub, Berek, Leon, Mendel, and Sonya had been killed. Fajngold remained convinced, however, that his wife and family were alive - he showed the imaginary family around the store, and introduced them around to everyone. He and his imaginary family were shown Matzerath's corpse - Fajngold helped to carry Matzerath upstairs; Maria and the imaginary Luba dressed the body. Lina Greff was of no help - she was busy in her house with a whole group of Russians. Fajngold convinced Old Man Heilandt to make another coffin for Matzerath. He used the door between the kitchen and the living room from Mother Truczinski's flat, but this time didn't bother to make the coffin tapered at the foot end. Heilandt wouldn't cart the coffin as far as the city cemetery; they went to Saspe instead.

On the way, looting soldiers helped to push the coffin along. One gave Maria a cage with a lovebird in it; Kurt tried to pull out its feathers. A guard let the group pass through to the cemetery, but assigned two boys of sixteen to guard the party with their machine guns. Oskar found meaning in the fact that Jan Bronski and Matzerath were to be buried in the same place. Kurt was throwing rocks at the lovebird. Maria started to cry as she dug Matzerath's grave. Oskar began a long debate with himself, asking "Should I or Shouldn't I?" to himself over and over again. He reasoned: he was now an orphan - his parents and presumptive parents were dead. He settled on "I should" as Kurt hit the bird with a stone. Oskar owned up to the fact that he had killed Matzerath deliberately; he had opened the pin in his hand before giving it to Matzerath. Standing over the grave, Oskar resolved: "It must be," then threw his drum into the grave, on top of the coffin. The sand struck the drum; suddenly, Oskar began to grow, the fist sign being a violent nosebleed. He could not walk, for his joints were already inflamed. Outside the cemetery, Leo Schugger sat on a tank and offered his condolences. Suddenly, Leo began to dance when he saw Oskar:

"'The Lord, the lord,' he cried, shaking the lovebird in its cage. 'See the Lord! He's growing, he's growing!'"

Then he was tossed into the air with the cage, and he ran, flew, danced, staggered, and fled with the screeching bird, himself a bird. Taking flight at last, he fluttered across the fields in the direction of the sewage land and was heard shouting through the voices of the tommy guns: 'He's growing, he's growing!' He was still screaming when the two young Russians reloaded. 'He's growing!' And even when the tommy guns rang out again, even after Oskar had fallen down a stepless staircase into an expanding, all-engulfing faint, I could hear the bird, the voice, the raven. I could hear Leo proclaiming to all the world: 'He's growing, he's growing, he's growing...'" Chapter 32, pg. 407

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Chapter 33: Disinfectant

In the institution, Oskar says that he asks his keeper, Bruno, to measure his height each day after breakfast. Oskar, at present, measures four foot one, when for most of his life he was exactly three feet.

Oskar completes the story of Matzerath's funeral: after Oskar had thrown his drum into the grave, his son Kurt had heaved a stone and hit Oskar in the back of the head. Oskar leapt for his drum, but was pulled out by Old Man Heilandt without the drum. It was after this stone hit him that he began to grow, according to Maria and Fajngold, although he had been growing already.

When the group returned from Matzerath's funeral, they found new people living in the Truczinski flat, where they had been staying. Fajngold, Maria, Kurt, and Oskar moved downstairs to their original apartment. Maria and Fajngold thought Oskar was sick; finally they found an exhausted lady doctor from the army to examine Oskar; she smoked cigarettes and fell asleep. All she could say was that Oskar needed a hospital; the family should move away to the west. She gave Oskar pills for pain and left. Oskar's head swelled; he had a constant fever. He imagined in his fever that he was on a merry-go-round run by the Heavenly Father; God became Rasputin, the Goethe.

Fajngold took to spraying Oskar with Lysol to rid him of the infestation of lice that the Russian soldiers had delivered. Fajngold had been the disinfector at Treblinka Concentration Camp, and thus was an expert at removing lice. He had sprinkled disinfectant on so many dead bodies that he had lost count; the numbers did not matter. He had escaped the Concentration Camp during a revolt where the inmates had killed several guards.

Oskar's fever left him, then returned again, bringing Lysol baths with it. In the store, Fajngold phased out groceries in favor of black market goods that were always changing: sewing machines, furs, tools. Kurt became an expert in the black market trade. Anna Koljaiczek came by once, searching for kerosene and bringing stories of the destruction in the countryside; all of the towns had reverted to their prewar names. Both Vincent Bronski and Anna were recovering from wounds they incurred at the hands of the invading soldiers. She said:

"Yes Oskar, that's how it is with the Kashubes. They always get hit in the head. You'll be going away to where things are better, only grandma will be left. The Kashubes are no good at moving. Their business is to stay where they are and hold their heads for everybody else to hit, because we're not real Poles and we're not real Germans, and if you're a Kashube, you're not good enough for the Germans or the Polacks. They want everything full measure." Chapter 33, pg. 416

When Fajngold wanted to introduce Anna to his family, she consoles him, saying that she, too, is always looking for her daughter Agnes, who never appears. Fajngold left her with kerosene, honey, and disinfectant; she put it under her skirt and left. Fajngold



called to his family less and less; finally he proposed to Maria. But Maria declined, saying that Danzig was washed up; it was time to move to the west with her sister Guste. Three days later, she had travel papers for herself, Kurt, and Oskar. Fajngold took them to the station and the three boarded an overcrowded freight train headed west.



Chapter 34: Growth in a Freight Car

Chapter 34: Growth in a Freight Car

Oskar says that to this day, the aches and pains of growth are with him still - he grinds his teeth to keep the sounds in his joints down. His fingers are swollen; he cannot hold his drumsticks to drum, or his fountain pen to write. He thus turns his story over to his keeper, Bruno, to relate the story of his train trip to the west with Maria and Kurt.

Bruno says that although he has other patients in the mental hospital, Oskar is his most harmless - Bruno never has to call other nurses to subdue him. Bruno says that he will take the story about to be related and transform it into a piece of his knotted string art, calling it "Refugee from the East." He has made others as well, such as "Potato in Four Skirts," of Anna Koljaiczek, "Columbus," of Joseph Koljaiczek, "The Beautiful Fish Eater," of Agnes Matzerath, "The Two Skat Players," of Alfred Matzerath and Jan Bronski, and "Rough Going," of Herbert Truczinski.

Oskar, Kurt, and Maria pulled out in the freight car on June 12, 1945. There were thirty-two other people in the car, including four Franciscan nuns, and a young girl Oskar insists was Lucy Rennwand. This was not the girl's real name (it was Regina Raek), but Oskar insisted on calling her Lucy. This girl was traveling with her parents, grandparents, and a sick uncle who had cancer of the stomach. The uncle identified himself loudly as a Social Democrat. Everyone in the car was sitting or lying on straw. The train was stopped often in open fields by bands of Polish gangsters, who would open the sliding doors and leave with some of the travelers' luggage. When this would happen, the nuns would hold up their crosses in defense; the young gangsters never failed to cross themselves before taking the passengers' luggage. The sick uncle held up a paper saying he was an attested member of the Social Democratic Party; the boys knocked the paper aside and took his family's luggage.

The boys made a good impression on Oskar, for their leader reminded him of Störtebaker. When this boy was taking Maria's knapsack, Oskar reached in and quickly pulled out his family's photograph album. Oskar showed the boy a picture of his grandmother; the boy took someone else's suitcase. Also in the bag were the tax vouchers from the Matzerath store, the Ruby necklace that Oskar helped Jan steal for Agnes, and the Rasputin-Goethe medley. Between bouts of growing pains in his joints, Oskar looked over the two volumes. Oskar tells Bruno that the constant jarring of the train both promoted his growth and saved him from the terrible shooting pains he experienced when the train stopped for the gangsters. Several of the young gangsters took an interest in Oskar's photo album; he showed them each one of the photos, but had to scratch out Matzerath's Party pin when one Polish partisan got offended. Bruno, however, becomes skeptical of Oskar, and doubts his credibility. He says:

"But Mr. Matzerath himself is unable to keep his story running in a straight line. Take those four nuns in the freight car. First he refers to them as Franciscans, and the next time he calls them Vincentians. But what throws his story out of kilter more than



anything else is this young lady with her two names and her one supposedly foxlike face. To be really conscientious, I should have to write two or more separate versions of his journey from the East to the West. But that kind of thing is not in my line. I prefer to concentrate on the Social Democrat, who managed with one name and, my patient assures me, one story, which he repeated incessantly until shortly before Stolp, to the effect that up to 1937 he had been a kind of partisan, risking his health and sacrificing his free time pasting posters, for he had been one of the few Social Democrats to put up posters even when it was raining." Chapter 34, pg. 424

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When the Social Democrat refused to take off his suit for a band of gangsters, and instead told his poster story again, he was kicked in the stomach. He vomited, then began to vomit blood. He died that night, blaspheming God and summoning the cause of the worker.

The gangsters' visits became shorter; there was little left to take. Oskar says he grew three and a half to four inches between Danzig and Stettin. In Lüneburg, Oskar was taken to a hospital on account of a high fever. Kurt and Maria were forced to stay in a refugee camp on the city's outskirts. Maria got permission from the doctors to move Oskar to Düsseldorf, near Maria's sister, Guste. From August 1945 to May 1946, Oskar lay in Düsseldorf City Hospital, where Oskar became enamored with the nurses.

Taking up his own pen again, Oskar says that Bruno has just measured him, and he has grown an inch, to four foot two. He has left to run and tell a doctor of the growth.



Chapter 35: Firestones and Tombstones

In Düsseldorf, Oskar, Maria, and Kurt take up with Maria's sister Guste Truczinski. Guste had married a soldier named Köster, who was shipped to the Arctic front soon after they had met. He was reported to be a prisoner in Russia, and Guste forever clung to the hope that he would come back.

When Oskar was discharged from the hospital, he came to Guste's apartment and found Kurt and Maria dealing in the black market. Maria, just as Matzerath always had, dealt in synthetic honey. Oskar was put to work weighing and making up packages of honey in Guste's kitchen. Six-year-old Kurt was busy adding up figures - he'd been to six weeks of school and was already an entrepreneur. Guste drank coffee and stroked Oskar's newly grown hump - she thought it was good luck. She frowned on the black market dealings.

Kurt started dealing in flints and dealing shrewdly with his customers. He had a flint monopoly; no one knew where he got them, he said only that he had a "source." Oskar would roar at Kurt for him to tell his source, but Kurt never told and it made Maria indignant - she would get angry because Oskar did nothing to help the family earn money. Oskar began taking the pocket money Kurt gave him and leaving all day long to avoid the shame of not making money. Oskar became interested in adult education, and spent time at the British Center engaging in long discussions on religion. He began to read and go to the theater avidly, but did not become cultured. His binge, Oskar says, was followed by a hangover - in the spring of 1947 he abandoned it all.

It had not been two years since Matzerath had died; already Oskar was tired of being a grownup. He longed for his drum and to be three feet tall. Oskar took to visiting the City Hospital; the nurses almost made him happy with their gossip. Oskar wished to make a "conquest" of one of the nurses, but without his drum he was unsure of his potency. Oskar would walk through cemeteries during this time:

"Cemeteries have always had a lure for me. They are well kept, free from ambiguity, logical, virile, and alive. In cemeteries you can summon up courage and arrive at decisions, in cemeteries life takes on distinct contours - I am not referring to the borders of the graves - and, if you will, a meaning." Chapter 35, pg. 438

Along the border of the Western Cemetery, there were six manufacturers of tombstones. Oskar loitered outside a shop owned by one P. Korneff. When the man came outside to rake the gravel on his doorstep, Oskar noticed he was painfully skinny and old. He walked with a stoop. The back of his neck was covered with pink adhesive tape, which covered a crop of erupting boils. Oskar asked to see the shop, then when Korneff mentioned it, inquired about being taken on as an apprentice. Korneff replied that it was hard work; Oskar had better think it over, but he would take him on. After a week of putting up with the guilt and shame Maria poured on him, Oskar went and retrieved the ruby necklace that he and Jan Bronski had once stolen for Agnes. He took a streetcar to Central Station and traded the necklace for a real leather briefcase and twelve cartons



of Lucky Strike cigarettes. Oskar went back to Guste's apartment and gave Maria, Kurt, and Guste the cigarettes - a virtual fortune. He told them the only condition on the gift was that they would leave him alone, and give him a lunch to take with him each morning; he was going to begin to inscribe tombstones.

Oskar worked for Korneff for a hundred Reichmarks a month. He was too weak for the heavy chiseling work, but he excelled at the fine work - scalloping and finishing borders. Against Korneff's wishes, Oskar chiseled left-handed. Oskar was finally happy in his work. Before long, Oskar could outdo Korneff at the inscriptions and was put in charge of all ornamental work. Oskar was particularly fond of inscribing O's; they tended to be too large. Finally, the following October, Oskar was allowed to help Korneff put up a tombstone. Korneff had doubted Oskar's strength and had always enlisted outside help for the job. On the way, Oskar saw Sister Gertrude, a nurse he knew, and resolved to ask her out. When they reached the entrance to the cemetery, Oskar says that Leo Schugger was standing there. Korneff said he didn't know a Leo Schugger; the man's name was Willem Slobber. Korneff says he knows a whole fleet of men just like Slobber and Schugger who live in different cemeteries.

In the cemetery Korneff complained about the two boils on the back of his neck as they dug the hole for the tombstone. He said they were about to burst; he could always tell. A funeral procession wound past them; Oskar climbed on Korneff's back and pulled the heads off the boils as the funeral procession prayed - Korneff recited the Lord's Prayer with them as Oskar squeezed.



Chapter 36: Fortuna North

Oskar says only wealthy people got tombstones, and "wealth" was relative. Five sacks of potatoes got a plain head-marker. A tomb for two brought Oskar and Korneff material to make new suits. An apprentice of the supplier made the suits for them. Oskar got a single-breasted dark blue pinstriped suit. It took five fittings for the apprentice to figure out how to deal with Oskar's hump. Korneff's suit was double-breasted. From another man, Korneff bartered nice shoes. He gave Maria money to buy him dress shirts, letting her keep the ample change.

A week later, Oskar went to the hospital to visit the nurses, dressed in his new suit. Although she was reluctant, Oskar found and convinced Sister Gertrude to meet him in town that night, promising her that he had saved up plenty of cake rationing stamps. They met, but Oskar was disappointed; Sister Gertrude had neglected to wear her nurse's uniform. Oskar took her to a pastry shop where they ate cake; he had one piece and she had three. Oskar invited her dancing; she accepted enthusiastically, realizing too late that Oskar was too small to dance with. They went to a dance hall called The Lion's Den, where Oskar and Gertrude were seated - Oskar bought drinks and American cigarettes. When Oskar stamped out a half-smoked Camel, Gertrude picked it up and put it in her purse, saying it was for her fiancé. He asked her to dance; she let him lead reluctantly. Soon, the pair was the object of attention. When they sat down to applause, Gertrude blushed, said she had to go to the lady's room, and never came back. The young couples consoled him from the dance floor; he was asked to dance by a woman who turned out, along with her friend, to work at the telephone exchange. Oskar spent the evening in the dance hall with the women. He never saw Sister Gertrude again except at a distance. He became a regular at The Lion's Den, however, and made friends, though he never touched the drums.

In the winter his tombstone job changed; he had to take care of the equipment and get ready for the spring thaw. Oskar practiced his relief sculpture and shoveled snow, then began setting up stones in March at a cemetery near a coal power plant called Fortuna North. Three rows away, two men were exhuming a woman in order to move her. Oskar went over to watch; the men were transferring the pieces of the woman that came out one at a time into a zinc casket. Oskar had a spade, former property of the Reich Labor Service, and began to dig; in his spade he found both the woman's middle and a ring finger, which had been chopped off by the gravedigger. Looking at those fingers, the woman, half in and half out of the casket, became Hamlet. Oskar became Yorick, the fool.

"The fields were the fields of Denmark; the Erft was my belt, whatever rot lay around was rotten in the state of Denmark - and I was Yorick....looked on as Gründgens, Act III, scene I, labored his dilemma about being or not being, rejected this absurd formulation, and put the question more completely: 'My son and my son's lighter flints, my presumptive earthly and heavenly father, my grandmother's four skirts, the beauty, immortalized in photographs, of my poor mama, the maze of scars on Herbert Truczinski's back, the blood-absorbing mail baskets at the Polish Post Office, America -



but what is America compared to Streetcar Number 9 that went to Brösen?" Chapter 36, pg. 460

Topic Tracking: Individuality/Identity 15

After this crisis, Oskar stopped going to The Lion's Den. In May he proposed to Maria, who declined his marriage but wished him the best. Oskar says Yorick did not become a good citizen, but a fool like Hamlet himself.



Chapter 37: Madonna 49

Oskar says he would have been a good citizen had he married, owning a large stonecutting business. It was the currency reform, however, which though allowing for general prosperity, made Oskar fall victim to art. He left Korneff before he could be let go because of the currency reform. Oskar neglected his appearance, spending his time standing on street corners. He sat on park benches for hours on end. In the park he was approached by four young art students, who wanted to use Oskar as a model. Oskar accepted and was placed on a revolving pedestal in the studio of Professor Kuchen.

"The coal-breathing professor gave his disciples a short briefing: What he wanted was expression, always expression, pitch black, desperate expression. I, Oskar, he maintained, was the shattered image of man, an accusation, a challenge, timeless yet expressing the madness of our century. In conclusion he thundered over the easels: 'I don't want you to sketch this cripple, I want you to slaughter him, crucify him, to nail him to your paper with charcoal!'"

...My beautiful hair is a glossy chestnut brown. They made me a scraggly-haired gypsy. Not a one of them ever noticed that Oskar has blue eyes." Chapter 37, pg. 463

Topic Tracking: Individuality/Identity 16

Oskar says these students saw only the Rasputin in him and neglected the Goethe. Nevertheless, Oskar posed for six hours a day. The drawings took on different shapes; some had backgrounds showing war scenes. Oskar was glad when the sculptors asked him to pose in the nude. He posed for Professor Maruhn, friend of Kurchen's and a lover of classical form. Oskar spent weeks with Maruhn, who found it impossible to find a suitable pose for Oskar. He could not bring himself to apply clay to the perfectly formed internal skeleton in a manner resembling Oskar. Maruhn had his students try to sculpt Oskar, but though they applied clay, the hump weighed too much and would always sag and break off. There were three groups of sculpture students - first, the homely, gifted women, who abstracted Oskar's penis, but reproduced the rest of his body perfectly; second, the pretty, scatterbrained women, who paid no attention to his body but reproduced his penis accurately; and third, the men, who abstracted Oskar completely. Next, the painting students wanted in on Oskar. They saw only his blue eyes and painted the whole canvas in blue tones.

At an artists' ball for Carnival, Oskar met two lesbians from China who successfully used his hump. He had dressed as a court jester - Yorick. Then he saw Corporal Lankes, who asked him right off, as usual, for a cigarette. Oskar and he reminisced; with Lankes was a beautiful woman, Ulla, who was very drunk. Oskar resolved to introduce her to the artists at the Academy, where she could model. Lankes loved the idea; back at his studio he had to slap Ulla to make her agree. She and Oskar began to pose nude together. It took brilliant students to capture the two of them together; a student called Raskolnikov turned out the masterpiece of Oskar and Ulla posing together, calling it "Madonna 49." The students called the student Raskolnikov because



he was forever talking of Crime and Punishment, of guilt and atonement. Lankes now only beat Ulla when his disposition demanded it; Oskar wanted often to be violent with her, but took her to pastry shops instead. Raskolnikov, however, had an affair with her without even touching her. He would have her pose with her legs apart, then sit and whisper of guilt and atonement until he had an orgasm. Then he would leap up and paint brilliantly. Raskolnikov kept putting objects in Oskar's hands to hold as he posed; finally when he brings Oskar a drum to hold, Oskar refuses, saying he has atoned, his drumming is done.

Maria saw a poster with Oskar on it, advertising an exhibition of the work done on him. Maria saw the exhibition and informed Oskar that he was a degenerate; she wanted no more help from him or his filthy money. Oskar resolved to move away.



Chapter 38: The Hedgehog

Oskar and Ulla went house hunting for Oskar - the Academy gave him a recommendation and the addresses of students not planning on returning for the next semester. Oskar went back to Korneff, who was exactly the same, but had weathered the currency reform; not only was he selling tombstones, he was refinishing stone edifices on buildings with war damage, finding newfound prosperity. He hired Oskar back on a half-time basis. In three hours' work, he earned a third of his monthly rent.

The first apartment Oskar looked at was rented out by an undertaker named Zeidler. When he opened the door, his face was covered in shaving cream. Oskar took a look at the room and didn't like it; it was a converted bathroom with blue tile walls. Oskar asked if the bathtub could be removed, Zeidler said no, and Oskar said he would accept the room. Oskar asked about tenants; Zeidler said the room next door was occupied by a nurse, which intrigued Oskar. Before he left, Oskar asked to be shown the toilet.

Oskar moved in that afternoon. Mrs. Zeidler was there, seated in a gray suit. There were carpets everywhere in the flat, on the walls and superimposed on the floor. When Mrs. Zeidler whispered to him, Zeidler flew into an instant rage and hollered at her. He ran to the china case, picked up eight liquor glasses, and threw them at the cast iron stove, shattering glass all over the room. Then he got a dustpan and brush, and swept the whole mess up. Then Oskar took his belongings, including the Drum Raskolnikov gave him, to his room.

From that day on, Oskar was infatuated with the unseen nurse across the hall. He says his nurse infatuation is a kind of disease, brought on by having been saved and brought to life every few years by legions of nurses. This time it was Sister Dorothea who held his attention. He would hear her footsteps, but never see her and become restless. Her silences were even more disconcerting. Oskar took to examining the mail each morning and looking at the return addresses of the letters to Sister Dorothea. Oskar learned she had a good friend named Beata; Oskar composed several letters to her, aimed at winning over Dorothea, but never sent them. He became jealous when letters from a Dr. Erich Werner began to arrive, addressed to Dorothea. Oskar resolved in that moment to become a doctor himself - simply because he could expose Dr. Werner as a quack and win over the unseen Sister Dorothea.



Book 3, Chapter 39: In the Clothes Cupboard

Aside from his infatuation with Sister Dorothea, Oskar spent his time inscribing tombstones and posing with the Muse Ulla at the art academy. It was Raskolnikov's idea to paint Ulla dressed as a nurse alongside Oskar and call it "Fool Heals Nurse." It was Oskar's suggestion to paint Oskar as the guilt and Ulla as the atonement (Raskolnikov's only themes).

Topic Tracking: Red & White 15

Oskar had taken to checking Sister Dorothea's doorknob to see if it was locked. It always was, until one day, as Oskar began to despair, the door opened. He debated; finally it was the thought of Maria, who had taken a new lover, her boss, that made him go inside. The room was windowless and dark. The smell of vinegar was everywhere, although there was no bottle of vinegar to be found. From her comb, Oskar saw she had blond hair that had begun to fall out; this image roused feelings of love in Oskar. Oskar crossed the room to Sister Dorothea's bed and on the way found one of her bras.

"Oskar had nothing but his fists with which to fill the two concavities. They were inadequate. Too hard, too nervous, they were alien and unhappy in these bowls which in my ignorance of their contents I should gladly have lapped up with a teaspoon day after day; I might have experienced a little nausea now and then, for too much of any fare will unsettle the stomach, but after nausea sweetness, such sweetness as to make the nausea desirable, the seal of true love." Chapter 39, pg. 491

Oskar thought Dorothea's bed miserable. He wished she had a white-enameled hospital bed. Oskar examined the clothes cupboard, which was well organized inside. In the hat compartment Sister Dorothea kept books, mostly crime novels. Oskar entered the cupboard and squatted on his heels; he tried to close the doors, but the catch was broken and light seeped in. In the cupboard he came upon a black patent leather belt; Oskar said in the dark it could easily have been one of the eels that caused the death of his mother Agnes after that Good Friday spent on the beach. Sister Dorothea wore that eel when she went out without her nurse's uniform. Oskar did something in the cupboard he had not done for years - he drummed. Then he checked the room for neatness and left.



Chapter 40: Klepp

In the hallway, Oskar was satisfied that there was no sign of Dr. Werner in Sister Dorothea's room. He heard a cough from the end of the hall that Oskar says now was calculated to get his attention - Oskar ignored it. A few days later, in the morning before going to the Academy to be painted with Ulla as a Greek god, he went through the mail and found a letter from Dr. Werner to Sister Dorothea. He went to the kitchen and boiled water, then took the letter and steamed the envelope open so as not to damage it. The letter was not overtly tender, but through the coldness Oskar sensed that it was a love letter. Oskar resealed the letter and began to laugh as he replaced it under Dorothea's door. Then, at the end of the hall, Oskar heard a voice plaintively ask him to bring some water. This was Klepp's apartment - he was not sick, he simply used Oskar as an excuse to get water. Klepp's apartment smelled of a corpse that doesn't stop smoking cigarettes, sucking peppermints, and eating garlic - Oskar says Klepp smells this way even now. In the dirty room were several packages of spaghetti, olive oil, tomato paste, salt, and a case of lukewarm beer. Klepp urinated in the beer bottles lying down, for he seldom bothered to move. Klepp always used the same water to cook his spaghetti, which became increasingly viscous, and stayed in bed up to four days at a time.

Oskar and Klepp talked for a long while. Klepp said he stayed in bed so as to ascertain whether his health was good, middling, or poor. In a few weeks, he said, he hoped to learn that it was middling. Klepp offered Oskar to share in a plate of spaghetti with him. They cooked it in the water Oskar had brought, but used Klepp's pasty cooking pot. When it was done, Klepp put Oskar's food on a greasy plate he had found under his bed; he wiped it off with a newspaper. The fork and spoon stuck to Oskar's fingers. Klepp squeezed tomato paste and poured oil on the spaghetti, and bid Oskar eat. Oskar says that once he summoned the courage to eat, he rather liked the meal.

On Klepp's wall was a picture of Queen Elizabeth of England. Klepp claimed to be a supporter of the British royal family. Oskar challenged him on this; Klepp asked for an explanation. In response, Oskar rushed to his room and got the drum Raskolnikov had given him. He sat in Klepp's apartment, and for the first time, succeeded in drumming the past. He told Klepp everything through his drum; after a while Klepp joined in on his flute, helping Oskar relate his life story. After several hours of playing, Klepp jumped up, ripped up the picture of Elizabeth, and denounced the royal family. Klepp even washed himself of his own accord - he was purified, resurrected. That night, Klepp suggested they start a jazz band; Oskar made up his mind to stop stonecutting and play the drums full time.



Chapter 41: On the Fiber Rug

Oskar says that today it is Klepp who is trying to get Oskar out of bed; he is trying to get even because Oskar had made him forsake his bed. In the wake of their first duet, Klepp became a dues-paying communist. The promise of the jazz band excited Oskar. He and Klepp talked about it incessantly, deciding they needed a third man, a guitarist who could also play banjo. It was during this time that Klepp and Oskar would cut up their passport photos over beer and blood sausage. They looked in all the Düsseldorf bars for a guitarist, and though they picked up with some bands, they found no one. Oskar had trouble playing; half his thoughts were with Sister Dorothea. But he gave himself up to Klepp. He stopped posing with Ulla, who was engaged again to Corporal Lankes, and no longer needed the money; he hated posing without her. Oskar no longer went to see Maria and Kurt, because her new husband (and boss) Mr. Stenzel was always around.

One day, Zeidler asked Klepp and Oskar to help him install a new coconut fiber rug in the hallway, which they did. They were rewarded with a bottle of schnapps, which they drank as they worked. They sang the praises of the carpet, then when Mrs. Zeidler joined them, Zeidler flew into a rage, and broke glasses against the stove.

It was on this rug that Oskar met Sister Dorothea. Unable to sleep, Oskar got up and went to the toilet, wrapped in a cut-off remnant of the coconut fiber rug. Entering the bathroom in the dark, Oskar heard a feminine scream. Oskar made no motion to leave, though it was clear that the woman was sitting on the toilet. Oskar presumed it was Sister Dorothea; he tried to cover up the situation with conversation. The nurse tried to push him away, but aimed too high in the dark for Oskar's small stature. She exclaimed "Oh heavens, it's the devil!" Oskar giggled, then replied that indeed he was Satan. He filled the role easily. He let her slip to her knees, then to her back. He covered her with the length of the coconut fiber mat, covering her up to her mouth. He hissed like the Devil, and could see the fiber mat act like the fizz powder had on Maria. But Oskar found himself unable to consummate the relationship; he was unable to become erect. He pleaded with Satan, but Satan did not oblige; Oskar was humiliated. He was forced to tell her that he was Oskar Matzerath, her neighbor and admirer. Sister Dorothea began to sob. She got up and started packing to move out, right then. She left that night; Oskar never got to see her face.

Topic Tracking: Individuality/Identity 17

The Zeidlers came out; Zeidler was in a rage and Mrs. Zeidler giggled. Zeidler threatened to put Oskar out; just then, Klepp came in with their long-sought guitarist, Scholle. They picked him up without a question and took him to his room. They stayed up until daybreak, and then played together on the banks of the Rhine. They decided to call themselves "The Rhine River Three."



Chapter 42: In the Onion Cellar

The newly formed band practiced outside the city in the meadows. By chance, the nightclub owner Ferdinand Schmuh would go to those same meadows to shoot sparrows. He would make his wife drive to the country, then she would stay in the car while he hunted. In his left pocket he kept his ammunition, in his right he kept bird food. He would never shoot more than twelve sparrows in a day. One day, Schmuh addressed the trio, imploring them to not scare away the birds with their music. Klepp knew of Schmuh and said so; impressed, they began to talk. They played for him and Schmuh offered them a nightly gig playing at his club, the Onion Cellar.

The Onion Cellar was a new club that thought it was exclusive; there was a doorman who filtered out those who could not pay. Schmuh would greet each and every customer personally. The Onion cellar was an actual cellar, though the ceiling had been removed. The décor of the place was aimed at making it look "authentic." But there was neither a bar nor a menu in the Onion Cellar. There was only one thing served in the club. Schmuh would don a silk shawl, disappear, and reappear with a basket on his arm. He would hand out cutting boards, shaped like either pigs or fish, to the customers, then paring knives. Then, he would hand each person an ordinary onion. At the signal, the customers would peel, then cut into the onions. The onions would make their eyes begin to water.

"...it is not true that when the heart is full the eyes necessarily overflow, some people can never manage it, especially in our century, which in spite of all the suffering and sorrow will surely be known to posterity as the tearless century. It was this drought, this tearlessness that brought those who could afford it to Schmuh's Onion Cellar, where the host handed them a little cutting board - pig or fish - a pairing knife for eighty pfennigs, and for twelve marks an ordinary, field-, garden-, and kitchen-variety onion, and induced them to cut their onions smaller and smaller until the juice - what did the onion juice do? It did what the world and the sorrows of the world could not do: it brought forth a round, human tear. It made them cry. At last they were able to cry again. To cry properly, without restraint, to cry like mad. The tears flowed and washed everything away. The rain came. The dew. Oskar has a vision of floodgates opening. Of dams bursting in the spring floods. What is the name of that river that overflows every spring and the government does nothing to stop it?" Chapter 42, pg. 525

Topic Tracking: Individuality/Identity 18

The weeping customers would then pour their hearts out to each other; one Miss Pioch told of her lover Mr. Vollmer who only loved her when he could take care of her black and blue toenails, which he himself had stepped on. On Mondays the weeping was loudest; that was when the young students came. One couple, Gerhard and Gudrun, wept for each other's facial hair - he, Gerhard, had none and she, Gudrun, had to shave her beard in vain. Oskar saw them months later, and the Onion Cellar had cured them; he had a waving beard and she a slight fuzz over her lip.



Once the customers were done weeping, Oskar's band provided a transition back to normal life. Scholle was forever happy, Klepp laughed at the tears, and Oskar was one of the few in the world who could still cry without onions. Schmuhs, for his part, never used his onions, but instead shot sparrows and gave his washroom attendant a tongue lashing once a week. Sometimes customers would take two onions in a row; on such occasions the Onion Cellar would degenerate into an orgy. Oskar and his band were responsible for playing music when this happened, in order to break it up. Once when Schmuhs's wife came to the Onion Cellar, she began telling stories about her husband. Schmuhs got angry and handed out a free round of onions and the room degenerated into a pitiful orgy. But Scholle and Klepp would not play; Oskar had to take up his drum, and becoming a three-year-old again, pounded on his drum. He led them out of the nightclub and around the city; he gave them permission to relieve themselves, and everyone in the procession wet themselves. Oskar turned them into a kindergarten class, then giggled and headed back to the Onion Cellar by himself.



Chapter 43: On the Atlantic Wall or Concrete Eternal

Schmuh fired Oskar and the rest of "The Rhine River Three," for his drum solo that turned the patrons of the Onion Cellar into children without even using onions. Oskar thinks that Schmuh feared his competition. But the patrons complained; the band was brought back part time.

One day Schmuh took Oskar, Klepp, and Scholle with him sparrow hunting. Schmuh's wife drove. The three musicians stayed behind by the river while Schmuh hunted. He hunted quickly, shooting his maximum twelve sparrows before Klepp could finish a handful of raisins. As they were about to leave, a sparrow appeared, not far away. It was a perfect specimen, and Schmuh could not resist adding the thirteenth sparrow to his pile. Everyone piled in the car to leave except Oskar, who decided to walk home. As Oskar passed a gravel pit on his walk, he saw the car twenty feet below, upside down. Some workers had removed three injured people. Scholle, Klepp, and Schmuh's wife were almost unhurt - a few broken ribs - but Schmuh had been killed. Oskar visited Klepp in the hospital and asked him the story. Klepp said a swarm of thousands of sparrows had swarmed the car and forced it over the edge of the pit. Oskar says he is skeptical of the story. In the cemetery during Schmuh's funeral, Oskar saw Korneff, who doffed his cap according to regulation and did not recognize Oskar.

At the funeral Oskar was approached by a man named Dr. Dösch, who said he had been present when Oskar had reduced the Onion Cellar patrons to blubbering pant-wetting children. He offered Oskar a contract to take his drum act on the road; Oskar said he'd need time - he wanted to take a trip to straighten out his head. Oskar did, however, accept an advance from the doctor. Although not his first choice, Oskar took his trip with Lankes. At the door to Lankes' apartment, Ulla announced that she and Lankes were engaged again. Oskar was going to invite her along, but Lankes boxed her on the ear and put an end to that. Oskar didn't defend her, he says, because she was a Muse, and it was better to keep Muses at arm's length. Oskar and Lankes went to Normandy, where they had first met.

Lankes was a constant smoker but never bought cigarettes. Every time he bummed a cigarette, he took a ten-pfennig piece out of his left pocket and put it in his right. That way, he said, he would make almost two marks a day, just by smoking. He and Oskar took a train north, looking at all the bombed-out villages from WWII. They took up residence in Dora seven, the pillbox Lankes used in the war. Lankes traded some fisherman a codfish for a picture of their boat; Oskar cleaned and prepared the fish while Lankes painted. Once done, Oskar had to convince Lankes that he had gotten the better half of the fish; Lankes would not eat it unless he knew that he had beaten Oskar. They drank red wine; Lankes told the story of how drunk he and his buddies had been on wine when the Normandy invasion started. Herzog, Lankes' superior during the war, turned up unexpectedly. He wanted to inspect the pillbox, but Lankes refused him,



saying it was passé. Herzog held that nothing was passé, that one cannot escape the judgment of history. Lankes hit him and tossed him off the edge of the sand dune.

Oskar and Lankes reminisced about the nuns they had seen on the day before the invasion. A few minutes later, a young nun strolled by. A voice from far off called to her - her name was Sister Agneta, the same young nun as they had seen before. Lankes talked to her before she was whisked away. As they got smaller, Lankes said they weren't nuns anyway, they were black sailboats. Lankes said Agneta's steering mechanism had gone awry; she came back to the pillbox and Lankes showed her around underground. The other nuns came by, looking for Agneta; Oskar pointed them down the beach. Lankes came out again and began to eat his fish; the sister, he said, was inside mending a rip in her habit. Agneta came out, tried the fish, then ran off toward the water. Lankes imagined the artistic possibilities of nuns and water. When he got home he painted these possibilities, and it was Lankes' success that made Oskar take the deal with Dr. Dösch.



Chapter 44: The Ring Finger

Oskar stopped playing music with Klepp, though they still spent their time together. He was sick of jazz and didn't deny that his style had changed and wasn't jazz any more. Klepp found another drummer for the band and got another gig. The drumming contract was Oskar's last resort. Even though he threw away Dösch's business card, he remembered the number; after a few days, he called and the doctor excitedly set up a meeting.

In the office there was an enormous oak desk. Behind the desk sat Bebra, who had been paralyzed and could only use his fingertips and his eyes. Behind Bebra was a painting, a life-size bust of Rosowitha, which brought Oskar to tears. Oskar admitted everything to Bebra, whom he called his judge - Bebra knew he had killed Agnes and Jan, but he confessed to Matzerath's killing as well. Bebra laughed. A contract was brought in, and Bebra was led off in his motorized chair.

Even though Oskar was making good money, he did not leave the Zeidler flat, for Klepp's sake. Oskar was billed as a little Messiah; he filled two thousand seats a concert with the middle-aged and elderly. They loved to be reduced to blubbling three-year-olds; his biggest hits were drum numbers evoking his childhood. He got several old-time miners to scream out several windows with their voices.

Oskar's second visit with Bebra was easier. He was given his own electric wheelchair, and they chatted as they had years before at the Four Seasons café. Oskar's second tour was praised by the religious press; he turned old sinners into children with hymns. On the third tour, he turned old women into Indian maidens and old men into players of cops and robbers.

Oskar signed a deal with a record company; he had the sterile walls plastered with pictures of old people. The record sold like hotcakes and Oskar became rich. He gave Maria a proposition: if she would throw out Stenzel, her newest lover, he would buy her a brand new modern delicatessen. This she did, and together Oskar and Maria built the store. Now, Oskar says, business is booming; Maria has just opened up a branch store. After Oskar's seventh or eighth tour, Bebra died. Oskar inherited a small fortune and the bust of Rosowitha. Oskar became depressed; he refused to play his drum and canceled two tours. Klepp was getting married; he moved out and Oskar was left alone in the Zeidler flat. Oskar rented the room that Sister Dorothea had owned, just so no one else would live there.

Oskar tried a different tack with his depression. He went to a store specializing in the rental of dogs and rented Lux, a powerful rottweiler. The dog led Oskar down to the river, where Oskar let him off his leash in the fields. The dog stayed by Oskar, who kicked him to get him to roam a little. Oskar sat down and drummed up his childhood with two old sticks on a rusted iron drum. Suddenly Lux was back, wagging his tail - he had something in his mouth. Oskar tried to push him away, but the dog insisted. Oskar looked - it was a woman's ring finger, neatly severed. There was a ring on it set with

aquamarine. While walking back with the finger in his pocket, Oskar was surprised by Vittlar, who was sitting up in the crook of an apple tree.



Chapter 45: Last Streetcar or Adoration of a Preserving Jar

Vittlar questioned Oskar about what he had in his pocket; he had seen that it was a finger. He wanted to try on the ring set with aquamarine. Oskar says that he hadn't seen Vittlar in the tree because Vittlar has a knack for blending in and looking like his surroundings. In the mental hospital, Oskar says that he asked Vittlar to bring him a transcript of the statement he made to the police regarding the finger. Oskar relates that statement in full.

Vittlar says that Oskar took the ring off the finger at his request and gave it to him; it fit Vittlar well. The two heard plane engines about to land overhead. Although they were curious as to how the plane was going to land, they did not look up at it - they called this game Leo Schugger's asceticism. Vittlar and Oskar took a cab downtown, got rid of the dog Lux, and went to Korneff's stonecutting shop. Oskar had Korneff make a plaster cast of the ring finger. Korneff promised to make him some more when the cast had hardened. Oskar treated Vittlar to dinner; speaking of the ring finger, Vittlar said he should give it to a lost and found. Oskar said no; calling it a "drumstick," he said he had been promised such a finger on the day of his birth, that Herbert Truczinski's back had foreseen the acquisition, that he had foreseen it in the cartridge case from Saspe cemetery.

Three days later Oskar and Vittlar got together again. Oskar surprised Vittlar by showing off his and Sister Dorothea's old rooms. In Dorothea's room, he had placed the ring finger in a preserving jar filled with alcohol. Oskar said he sometimes worshipped and prayed to the finger. Vittlar asked for a demonstration. Oskar agreed on the condition that Vittlar transcribe the prayer. In the prayer, Oskar described his relationship to and the physical traits of Sister Dorothea - he knew the finger had belonged to her, although he denied killing her and that he never actually saw her face. Vittlar believes him, citing Oskar's sheer devotion to the finger. Vittlar went on tour with Oskar to Western Germany, and Oskar paid Vittlar a salary to do so. Oskar declined offers to continue traveling abroad; he did not want, he says, to get caught up in the "international rat race."

Vittlar and Oskar would spend time downtown in Düsseldorf. One Friday night they stood together downtown, watching the last streetcars pull into the station. A few cars were left outside and not parked in a barn - Oskar and Vittlar nodded to each other, then climbed into a car. Vittlar took the driver's seat and as they pulled out, Oskar commended him on his driving. Oskar had them drive in the direction of The Lion's Den dance hall. Three men were sitting on the tracks, and Vittlar cried "All Aboard" as two of the men, wearing green hats with black arm bands, dragged the third man onto the streetcar. The two suited men slapped the man and made him whimper. Oskar inquired as to what the man had done. The third man turned out to be Victor Weluhn, the man who had lost his glasses in the battle for the Polish Post Office in Danzig, then fled to



escape arrest. The two uniformed men had an execution order for Welhun, dated 1939. They had been on the man's trail nonstop for a decade.

Oskar told Vittlar that they had to save Victor, for he was nearsighted and would be looking in the wrong direction when the men shot him. The men stayed on until the last stop. The chosen execution sight was the same fence along which Oskar had met Vittlar. The men tied Victor to the same apple tree from which Vittlar had first seen Oskar. Oskar gave Vittlar his briefcase containing his preserving jar, and took his drum out from under his shirt. When talking did not work to save Victor, Oskar began desperately to drum. He drummed out a rhythm containing "Poland is not yet lost; while we live, Poland cannot die" - part of the Polish national anthem. Suddenly a brigade of horsemen emerged from the ground, carrying the red and white banners of the Polish cavalry. They glided along over the field and swept up Victor and his executioners and disappeared off into the east.

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Vittlar told Oskar his performance was a triumph. Oskar said he'd had too many triumphs, what he needed was a failure. Vittlar said he was being arrogant, that he would do anything to be famous like Oskar. Oskar laughed, rolling on the ground. He told Vittlar to take his briefcase containing the jar with the ring finger. He told him to take it to the police and turn him in as Sister Dorothea's killer; that would get his name in the papers.

Thus ended Vittlar's statement - Oskar says he told himself to sleep a little before the police got to him. He awoke in the field in broad daylight with a cow licking his face. Oskar told himself to flee.



Chapter 46: Thirty

In the mental institution, Oskar writes of his flight on his thirtieth birthday. Klepp gave him jazz records, and Vittlar gave him chocolate and said that when Jesus was thirty, he gathered disciples. Oskar doesn't like the idea. Oskar's lawyer came and told him that the ring finger case that put Oskar there was being reopened. He said that new evidence had been found pointing to one Sister Beata as the real killer. Oskar says he has been dreading this - that they would reopen the case and discharge him from the hospital, take away his white enamel bed, and force him to take up disciples.

Dr. Erich Werner, the man who had sent Sister Dorothea the coy love letters that Oskar had secretly read, was in love only with Sister Dorothea. Sister Dorothea's best friend Sister Beata, however, was in love with Dr. Werner. Even though Sister Dorothea was not in love with Dr. Werner, Sister Beata became jealous of the doctor's affection for her friend and killed her. But Doctor Werner had been sick and Beata wanted to take care of him - she made sure that he did not get better, and he, too, died at Beata's hand. Oskar had found Dorothea's severed ring finger and had Vittlar turn him in for a crime he did not commit.

When Oskar fled, he was twenty-eight, and he fled in order to add validity to Vittlar's statement against him. Although his grandmother's four skirts were the destination of choice, they lay to the east behind the Iron Curtain. Oskar decided to make a run for America and the fable of his supposed paper baron grandfather Joseph Koljaiczek, who according to the legend, was living in Buffalo, New York under the name Joe Colchic. Oskar decided to go through Paris first. On the train, Oskar resolved that no flight was complete without a general, insidious fear. He had to talk himself into being afraid; he says the fear is still with him today.

Oskar says that the gear her concocted took the form of the Black Witch from the childhood songs the children used to sing in Danzig. This witch takes on many forms herself - sometimes, for instance, she takes the form of Goethe. Oskar arrived in Paris and took the Metro, fearing capture by the International Police at any moment.

Oskar wonders at his story's ending, and is unsure that the escalator at the Metro stop is a symbolic enough ending; he offers his thirtieth birthday as an alternate ending. At thirty, he says, you've lost your right to cry. On the Metro escalator, Oskar began to laugh. He could see detectives waiting for him at the top of the escalator. Oskar was thrown into the past on the escalator, for as he says, an escalator ride is a good time to reconsider.

Oskar says that thirty brings a man possibilities, for there are so many things he should do: start a career, start a family, emigrate - Oskar might open a stonecutter's business, propose again to Maria, or go to America.



At the top of the escalator, two detectives stood in raincoats. The two brazen lovers and the old woman with Oskar on the escalator ride turned out to be detectives. Oskar sums up his life:

"What more shall I say: born under light bulbs, deliberately stopped growing at age of three, given drum, sang glass to pieces, smelled vanilla, coughed in churches, observed ants, decided to grow, buried drum, emigrated to the West, lost the East, learned stonecutter's trade, worked as model, started drumming again, visited concrete, made money, kept finger, gave finger away, fled laughing, rode up escalator, arrested, convicted, sent to mental hospital, soon to be acquitted, celebrating this day my thirtieth birthday and still afraid of the Black Witch." Chapter 46, pg. 587

The detectives at the top of the stairs called him Matzerath. Oskar replied that he was Jesus, first in German, then in French, and finally in English. They arrested him as Oskar Matzerath.

Oskar says that tomorrow he will drum up the Black Witch and consult her. She has always been there with him, through everything. She was in every action; her shadow has followed him always, and she is forever in front of him, coming closer.