Summary Of Winesburg Ohio Essay, Research Paper

Short Summary of Winesburg, Ohio

“Prologue: “The Book of the Grotesque”

An old writer hired a carpenter to raise his bed level with the windows. The carpenter wept telling the old writer about his brother’s death. Lying in bed, the old writer’s thoughts of dying made him more alive. He dreamt of versions of people he had known and wrote a book entitled “The Book of the Grotesque.” He wrote that the world had been filled by thoughts which man made into beautiful truths. The figures grasped one of the truths as absolute. This decision transformed the figure into a grotesque and truth into a lie.

“Hands”

Wing Biddlebaum lived isolated from town life. He would hear ghostly voices and spoke closely only with George Willard. Wing tried desperately to hide his hands. One day, Wing revealed his hands without noticing and caressed George’s shoulder while talking. Suddenly, Wing ran quickly home. Wing had previously been a school teacher named Adolf Myers who was loved by the boys he taught. He spoke of dreams and touched their shoulders. One boy invented unspeakable things and the town drove out Adolf. He moved to Winesburg and was ashamed by his innocent hands.

“Paper Pills”

Doctor Reefy was an old man with large knuckles. After his girl-wife’s death, he would sit in his office and write thoughts on paper. The thoughts formed balls in his pockets until he developed a truth. The truth grew to terrible proportions before Doctor Reefy began again.

The girl visited the Doctor because she was pregnant. After her parents’ death, suitors had pounced upon her. Once she had visited Doctor Reefy, she did not want to leave. They married in the fall. The Doctor read his little scraps of paper to her before she died that spring.

“Mother”

Elizabeth and Tom Willard owned the New Willard House. As a girl, Elizabeth was passionate. Some disease had since dulled her. Tom was ashamed of her. A bond existed between Elizabeth and George. Elizabeth prayed that George would live to express meaning for them. When George did not visit, Elizabeth grew worried. She overheard Tom tell the boy to snap out of his dreaminess. Elizabeth secretly decided to stab Tom. George explained to her that he just wanted to think but because of something his father said, he was leaving. His mother wanted to cry with joy but she no longer could.

“The Philosopher”

Doctor Parcival’s left eye lid flapped like a window shade. He lived in his dirty office. He liked George Willard and told him stories about himself. His mother liked his brother the most even though his brother was selfish. Parcival hoped to convince George to be like his brother, a superior being.

An accident occurred and a girl was thrown from a stagecoach. Someone ran up to Parcival but he refused to see the dead girl. When George arrived, Parcival thought that he would be hanged. Parcival pleaded with George to inform the world that all people are Christ and are crucified.

“Nobody Knows”

George Willard had been nervous all day. Deciding to act, he ran into the night so he would not lose his courage. George called to Louise Trunnion, as she washed dishes in the kitchen. Louise asked how he was sure she wanted to see him. George felt frustrated because he had received a letter from her.

As they walked, George was afraid to touch Louise but finally decided to be man. When George got back to town later, he happily found a man to talk to. Walking home, he thought how Louise had nothing on him.

“Godliness” Part I

During the Civil War, four Bentley sons were killed. Growing old, Mr. Bentley turned the farm over to his weak son, Jesse. He brought a gentle wife from the city and allowed her to overwork herself. She died from childbirth. The entire farm was scared of him. At a young age, Jesse had given himself to God. He would ask God to grant him favors. When Katherine was expected to give birth, Jesse pleaded with God for a son he could name for the Biblical David. Then they could ward off the Ohio farmers who were enemies of God.

“Godliness” Part II

David was born to Louise, Jesse’s daughter, and John Hardy. Due to his mother’s moodiness, David was unhappy. He loved Jesse’s farm and once tried to run away to it. When David returned, his mother cared for him kinder than she ever had.

David went to live with Jesse and was much happier. Jesse believed that his prayers had been answered. He took David into the woods, hoping a miracle would finally occur. The boy was frightened and ran into the woods, falling. When he awoke, he was safe in his grandfather’s arms. Jesse cried out sadly to God.

“Surrender” Part III

Louise Bentley was unwanted at birth. At fifteen, she was sent to the Hardy family to attend school. Louise’s hard work made the Hardy girls resent her. Louise looked to John Hardy for companionship. Encountering Mary Hardy with a boy, Louise wished she too could be loved. She wrote John a note.

Weeks passed. When John responded, Louise loved him. Afraid that Louise was pregnant, they married. Louise wanted a partner but John wanted sex. Louise felt trapped by her new life. When David was born, she recoiled. A boy did not need her help.

“Terror” Part IV

When David Hardy was fifteen, he liked to be outdoors. One morning, Jesse and his grandson caught a lamb born out of season. Jesse wanted to make a sacrifice to God so God would speak to him and David. Jesse decided to touch the boy’s head with blood. David let go of the lamb and ran. Jesse chased him with a knife, looking for the lamb. David hit Jesse in the head with his slingshot. Weeping, David proclaimed he would never return to Winesburg. Jesse woke groggily and claimed that a messenger from God had taken David.

“A Man of Ideas”

Joe Welling was a quiet man except for his uncontrollable seizures of speech. When Joe’s mother died, he moved into the New Willard House. Forming the successful Winesburg Baseball Club, he gained the respect of the town. Joe began a love affair with Sarah King. Sarah’s father and brother were violent but Joe was not frightened. George overheard the meeting between Joe and the King men. Explosively Joe lectured about a new vegetable kingdom and won them over. Joe persuaded the Kings to travel to their house so he could tell Sarah his new ideas.

“Adventure”

Alice Hindman dated Ned Currie until he moved to Cleveland. Ned said he would come back to marry her. They became lovers before he left. Ned forgot about Alice but Alice could not forget. She worked to keep busy. At twenty-five, Alice was alone too much so she joined the Methodist Church and allowed Will Hurley to walk her home. At twenty-seven, Alice ran outside naked. She wanted to make contact with another lonely human. She yelled to an old man but he was deaf. Alice realized that even people in Winesburg must live and die alone.

“Respectability”

Wash Williams, the telegraph operator, looked like an ugly monkey. All but his hands were dirty. He hated the people of the town, especially women. Like a hideous poet, Wash told George his story. When young, Wash and his cherished wife would plant seeds in their garden. He discovered that his wife had lovers and sent her home. Wash was persuaded to visit. His wife was stripped naked by her mother for him. Wash struck her mother but would never have the chance to kill her. He wanted George to not make the same mistake he had.

“The Thinker”

The town believed that Seth Richmond was deep but Seth wished he could feel things passionately. One evening, George asked Seth to tell Helen White that he loved her. Seth was enraged. Helen was meant to be his.

Seth told Helen he planned to leave town because he felt separated from it. Though he told her about George, Seth pictured loving Helen. He tried to impress her with his plans and told her they would never see each other again. Seth watched Helen walk home alone in confusion. Love must come only to those who talk a lot.

“Tandy”

A young girl lived alone with her father, Tom Hard. Tom was absorbed by agnosticism and ignored the girl. A stranger came to Winesburg to stop drinking but failed. One night, the drunken stranger wept to Tom, his daughter, and George Willard, explaining that he was addicted to love. He had missed his love but a new quality in women was coming. He told the girl to be Tandy, to be better than man or woman.

Days later, when Tom said his daughter’s name, she wept. The girl demanded to be called Tandy Hard. She refused to be quieted.

“The Strength of God”

Reverend Curtis Hartman would pray for help before a sermon. One Sunday, the minister was shocked to see Kate Swift naked in the next house through the bell tower window. His sermons became wholly directed at her. The minister broke a corner of the window. His soul was deeply troubled. Curtis peered at Kate naked in bed. One night, he decided to give himself over completely to the sin of his thoughts. The naked woman appeared and prayed. The minister ran into George Willard’s office, crying that Kate was a message of truth from God. He had been delivered.

“The Teacher”

Kate Swift saw genius in George Willard and encouraged him to work toward understanding people’s thoughts. She gave him the feeling that she was in love with him. He was excited and annoyed. One night, a passion burned inside of Kate’s cold exterior. She walked in the cold to George’s office and spoke about life. She saw a man in George and wanted to be loved. Suddenly, Kate punched George’s face and ran away. Reverend Hartman stumbled in, saying Kate was a messenger of truth. Later, George realized he must have missed something Kate was trying to tell him.

“Loneliness”

Nothing ever worked out for Enoch Robinson. In New York for art school, Enoch disliked his friends. They did not understand the meaning behind his paintings. He replaced them with imaginary people who said the right things. When Enoch got lonely, he married. Enoch acted responsible until he felt trapped and moved back to his old apartment with imaginary friends.

As Enoch told George Willard, Enoch snapped at a woman who kept visiting him. He cried how big he was in his room. She understood, and he hated her. When she left, his people left. He grew old all alone.

“An Awakening”

Belle Carpenter was a strong woman who was no longer bullied by her father. Some evenings, she would walk with George Willard although she secretly loved, Ed Handby. Ed saw George as his only obstacle. One night, George hypnotized himself with his words about order. He felt large and spoke large words. George arrived at Belle’s house after Ed had threatened Belle. Belle was content to go with George to make Ed suffer. George talked. When George kissed her, Belle looked over his shoulder. Suddenly, Ed appeared and pushed the boy aside. Ed lead Belle away.

“”‘Queer’”

Cowley & Son’s store was made up of peculiar items. Angered because his father acted queerly, Elmer Cowley turned a revolver on a salesman. Elmer wanted to be like George Willard, a typical citizen of Winesburg. That evening, Elmer tried to talk to George, but could not.

Elmer decided to move to a city where he would be unrecognizable. Elmer stole money from his father and had George awaken. Elmer tried to again to show George he was normal but instead said his father’s senseless “laundry” expression. Elmer hit George and sighed with pride.

“The Untold Lie”

Ray Pearson and Hal Winters were farm hands. One day, Ray thought back to when he met his wife and the trap that ensued. Hal asked if marriage was worth the sacrifice. He had gotten Nell Gunther into trouble. Ray could not respond.

Walking to town, the world came alive to Ray. He threw off his overcoat and ran. Ray would tell Hal not to make the sacrifice. When Ray found Hal, he lost his nerve. Hal told Ray he would take responsibility. Ray picked up his overcoat and thought it was better that he had not lied.

“Drink”

Tom Foster’s grandmother found a pocketbook and moved Tom to Winesburg. Tom did not have a hard time fitting in because he would not assert himself. Tom and his grandmother found work quickly in Winesburg. Tom was made happy by small things. He had always avoided vices but he fell in love with Helen White.

Tom decided to get drunk. Stumbling into town, George Willard saw him. Tom mumbled about making love to Helen, making George angry. Tom tried to explain how he had needed to get drunk once. It was like making love.

“Death”

Elizabeth Willard and Dr. Reefy talked about their thoughts and dreams. Elizabeth felt more alive. Dying, her father had pleaded with Elizabeth to escape. She married Tom instead because it seemed appropriate. Once, she tried to escape but could not go through with it. During her storytelling, Elizabeth became young to Dr. Reefy. He kissed her passionately. Elizabeth ran out of the office.

Four years later, Elizabeth reached for death as a lover. Elizabeth struggled to tell George about the money her father had left her but was too ill. His dead mother became more alive to him. Affected by some outside influence, he muttered the same words of Elizabeth’s past lover and Dr. Reefy.

“Sophistication”

In late fall, thoughts of being a man filled George Willard’s head, as it does with every boy at some point. He felt lonely thinking about his departure from Winesburg. George thought of Helen White, who had gone to college but was home for the fair. George was marching toward Helen’s house when he saw her outside and took her hand. The two walked to the deserted Fair Ground, thinking about their triviality. They wanted love, but felt lonely. They would kiss but not for long. Embarrassed, the two played like animals. The silent night together had satiated a great need for both.

“Departure”

George Willard rose at four and prepared for his departure. He walked onto the streets where he had walked countless times and then returned to town. At the station, several townsfolk waited to shake his hand. When the train arrived, George quickly jumped on. Helen White ran up but George did not see her. When George was sure no one was looking, he counted his money. George was surprised the train had not yet left. His mind turned to trivial matters. He had a passion for dreams. When he looked up next, Winesburg was gone.