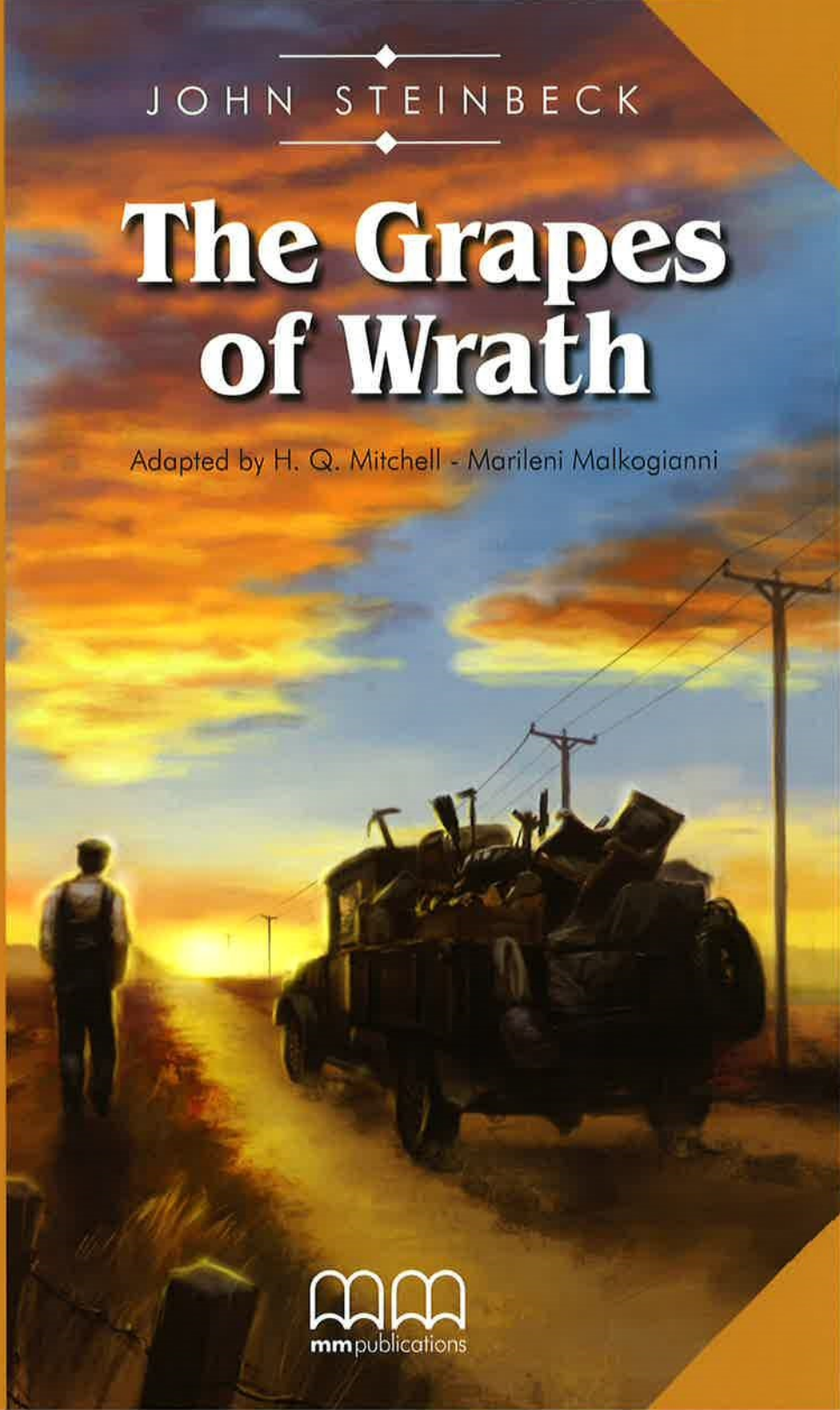
TOP READERS

JOHN STEINBECK

The Grapes of Wrath

Adapted by H. Q. Mitchell - Marileni Malkogianni



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CHAPTER 1

ONCE THE LAST RAINS HAD COME AND GONE, THE FARMERS IN Oklahoma could do nothing but wait. They watched helplessly as their crops turned brown and withered in the burning heat. Then, the wind came, bringing with it a thick red dust that settled on the fields and darkened the sky. The air was hot and still, and the dust made it difficult to breathe. The crops were ruined and the farmers sat huddled in groups, wondering what to do next.

Outside a roadside restaurant, a truck driver was walking slowly to his truck when a young man approached him. The man was in his twenties; he had dark brown eyes and a thin face, and was wearing a cheap grey suit. "Could you give me a lift, mister?" asked the young man.

The truck driver hesitated. "Are you going far?" he asked.

"Not too far," replied the young man.

The truck driver nodded and motioned to the young man to climb into the cab.

"Thanks, mister," said the young man.

"Are you looking for a job?" asked the truck driver as the truck began building up speed.

"No," said the young man, "I'm going home to work on my father's cotton farm."

The truck driver glanced at the dead fields of corn next to the road. "The drought has destroyed all the crops in the region," he said, "hasn't your father's farm been affected?"

The young man shrugged. "I don't know. I've been away for a long time."

"What's your name?" asked the truck driver.

"Joad. Tom Joad," replied the young man.

"Where did you get that suit?"

"McAlester prison," answered Tom. "They gave me the suit when I was released a couple of days ago."

The truck driver glanced at Tom but said nothing.

"Do you see that road up ahead?" asked Tom.

"Yes," said the truck driver.

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"That's where I get off."

The truck came to a stop next to a dirt road and Tom climbed out of the cab. "Thanks for the lift," he said as he closed the door.

"Good luck," shouted the truck driver as he pulled off.

Tom waved at the truck driver and made his way down the dirt road. In the distance, he saw a dusty willow tree. A man was sitting on the ground, leaning against the tree and whistling a sad tune. The man had a long, thin face and grey hair; he was wearing overalls and a blue shirt.

"It's hot today," said Tom as he neared the man.

The man stared at him. "Aren't you Tom Joad, old Tom's boy?" he asked.

"Yes, I am," said Tom.

The man smiled. "I don't suppose you remember me," he said. "I knew you when you were a boy."

Tom studied the man's face for a moment. "Why, you're the preacher!" he exclaimed.

"I was a preacher," said the man. "I was Reverend Jim Casy, but I'm not a preacher anymore."

"That's a shame," said Tom. "My family used to enjoy your sermons."

The man sighed. "So how is your family?" he asked.

Tom shrugged. "I don't know. I haven't been home in four years."

"Have you been travelling?"

"No," replied Tom. "I was in prison. I'm out on parole."

"So you haven't heard from your family in four years?" asked Casy.

"I got a card from Ma a couple of years ago. And Granma sent me a Christmas card last year." Tom removed his cap and wiped his brow with the back of his hand. "I'd better get going now," he said. "I want to be home before sunset."

"I haven't seen your father in years," said Casy.

"Well, why don't you come with me?" said Tom. "Pa will be happy to see you."

Casy stood up and dusted himself off and the two men began the walk to the Joad farm. When they arrived, they found the farm in an

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alarming state. The farmhouse had been pushed off its foundation; the withered cotton crops were growing wild and the Joads were nowhere to be seen.

"What happened here?" murmured Tom.

The two men walked slowly to the wooden house; parts of it were crushed and the windows were broken. Tom entered the house cautiously. It was empty.

"All the furniture is gone," said Tom as he walked out onto the front porch.

"Perhaps they moved," said Casy.

The men sat down on the edge of the porch and gazed out at the brown cotton crops. In the pale evening light, they saw a figure coming slowly through the fields.

"Look!" said Casy.

Tom stared into the distance. "That's Muley Graves, our neighbour!" he exclaimed. Tom stood up and waved. "Muley!" he cried.

The man stopped in his tracks; then he walked quickly towards the two men.

"You remember Muley," said Tom.

Casy nodded.

"Why, it's Tommy Joad!" said the man when he was close enough to see Tom's face. "When did you get out, Tommy?"

"Two days ago," replied Tom. "Where's my family, Muley? What happened here?"

Muley sighed. "They're at your Uncle John's house."

"What are they doing there?" asked Tom. "Why did they leave?"

"The bank forced them off the land," said Muley. "The drought destroyed all the crops and none of us tenant farmers could afford to pay our mortgages, so they made us leave. The bank wants to combine all the small farms into one large farm – they think they'll make a profit that way. They sent men to drive us off our land and they've been destroying farmhouses with tractors to make sure we don't come back. They did the same thing to me, but I refused to leave. I don't care what they say, this is my land."

Tom's face reddened. "They can't do that!" he cried.

"They can and they have," said Muley. "Your family is planning

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