

Subject: Adult Breast Feeding
Genre: American Novel
Setting: The Great Depression (USA)
Author: John Steinbeck
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Preface:

"The Grapes of Wrath", by John Steinbeck, is a story set in the 1930s during the Great Depression era of the United States. Literary critics will tell you it is a story of poverty and despair: but it is also a story of great compassion from people who had lost everything.

We pick up the story where Rose of Sharon had just delivered a stillborn child in the middle of a rainstorm. Weakened by the ordeal, she and her family move out of danger of flood; to the safety of an old barn where they find others.

An Excerpt from the Grapes of Wrath

by John Steinbeck

"Ma looked. There were two figures in the gloom; a man who lay on his back and a boy sitting beside him, his eyes wide, staring at the newcomers. As she looked, the boy slowly got up to his feet and came toward her. His voice croaked. 'You own this here?'

'No,' Ma said. 'Jus' come in outa the wet. We got a sick girl. You got a dry blanket we could use an' get her wet clothes off?'

The boy went back to the corner and brought a dirty comforter and held it out to Ma.

'Thank ya,' she said. 'What's the matter'th that fella?'

The boy spoke in a croaking monotone. 'Fust he was sick - but now he's starvin'.'

'What?'

'Starvin'. Got sick in the cotton. He ain't et for six days.'

Ma walked to the corner and looked down at the man. He was about fifty, his whiskery face gaunt and his open eyes were vague and staring. The boy stood

beside her. 'Your pa?' Ma asked.

'Yeah! Says he wasn' hungry, or he jus' et. Give me the food. Now he's too weak. Can't hardly move.'

The pounding of the rain decreased to a soothing swish on the roof. The gaunt man moved his lips. Ma knelt beside him and put her ear close. His lips moved again.

'Sure.' Ma said. 'You jus' be easy. He'll be awright. You jus' wait'll I get them wet clothes off'n my girl.'

Ma went back to the girl. 'Now slip 'em off,' she said. She held the comforter up to screen her from view. And when she was naked, Ma folded the comforter about her.

The boy was at her side again explaining : 'I didn' know. He said he et, or he wasn' hungry. Las' night I went an' bust a winda an' stoled some bread. Made 'im chew 'er down. But he puked it all up, an' then he was weaker. Got to have soup or milk. You folks got money to git milk?'

Ma said : 'Hush. Don' worry. We'll figger somepin out.'

Suddenly the boy cried : 'He's dyin' I tell you! He's starvin' to death, I tell you.'

'Hush,' said Ma. She looked at Pa and Uncle John standing helplessly gazing at the sick man. She looked at Rose of Sharon huddled in the comforter. Ma's eyes passed Rose of Sharon's eyes, and then came back to them. And the two women looked deep into each other. The girl's breath came short and gasping.

She said 'Yes.'

Ma smiled. 'I knowed you would. I knowed!' She looked down at her hands, tight-locked in her lap.

Rose of Sharon whispered : 'Will - will you all - go out?' The rain whisked lightly on the roof.

Ma leaned forward and with her palm she brushed the tousled hair back from her daughter's forehead, and she kissed her on the forehead. Ma got up quickly. 'Come on, you fellas,' she called. 'You come out in the tool shed.'

Ruthie opened her mouth to speak. 'Hush,' Ma said. 'Hush and git.' She herded them through the door, drew the boy with her; and she closed the squeaking door.

For a minute Rose of Sharon sat still in the whispering barn. Then she hoisted her tired body up and drew the comforter about her. She moved slowly to the corner and stood looking down at the wasted face, into the wide, frightened eyes. Then slowly she lay down beside him. He shook his head slowly from side to side. Rose of Sharon loosened one side of the blanket and bared her breast. 'You got to,' she said. She squirmed closer and pulled his head close. 'There!' she said. 'There.' Her hand moved behind his head and supported it. Her fingers moved gently in his hair. She looked up and across the barn, and her lips came together and smiled mysteriously'