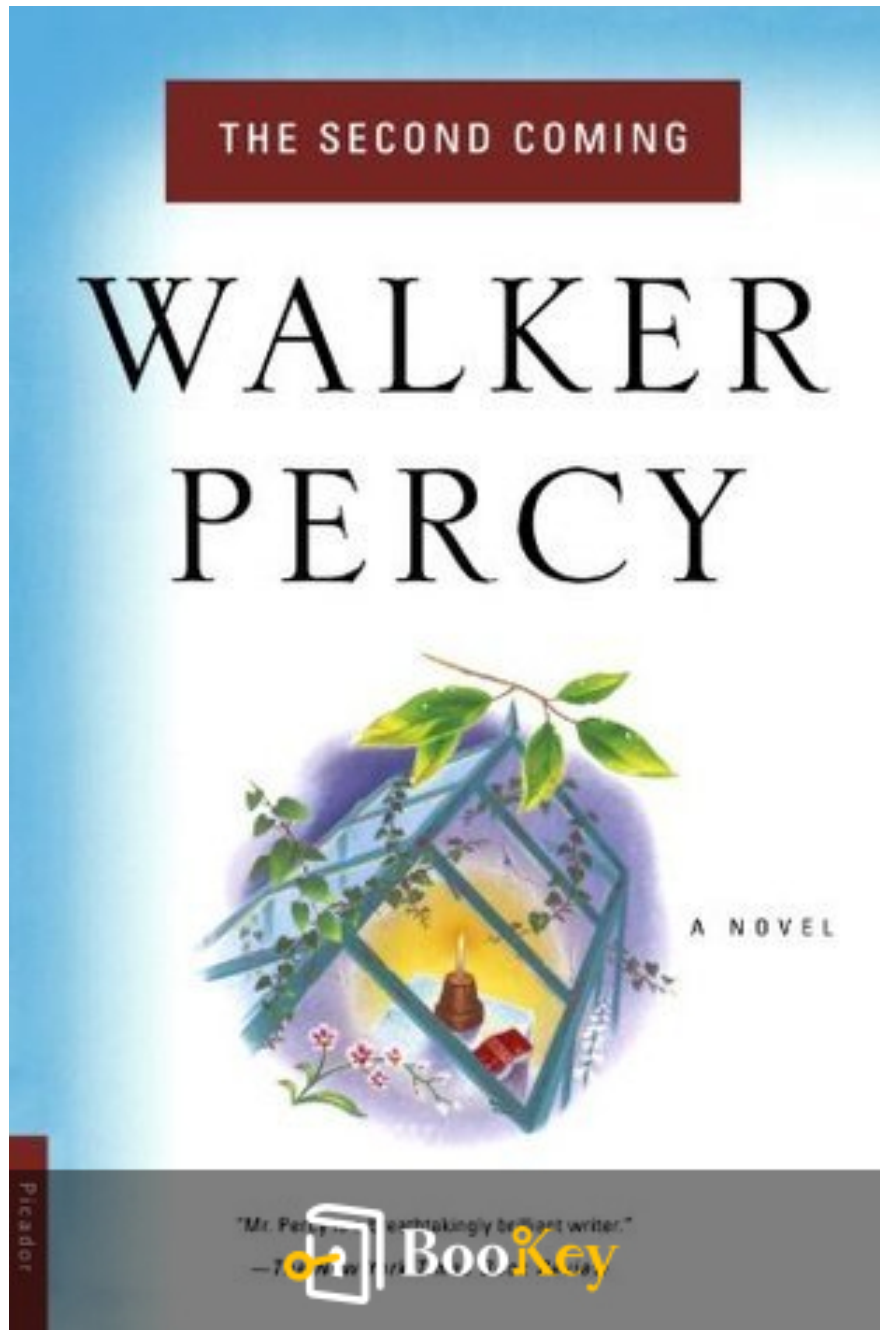


# The Second Coming PDF (Limited Copy)

Walker Percy



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# **The Second Coming Summary**

Exploring faith in a fractured modern world.

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## About the book

In "The Second Coming," Walker Percy invites readers into a labyrinthine exploration of modern existence, where the search for meaning clashes with the absurdity of contemporary life. At its core, the novel probes the existential crises and spiritual voids that characterize post-war America, as characters grapple with identity, faith, and the elusive nature of redemption. Through the poignant journey of his protagonists, Percy masterfully intertwines philosophy with narrative, urging us to confront our own disengagement from what truly matters. With a blend of wit and profound insight, this thought-provoking tale challenges us to reconsider the fabric of our lives, making it an essential read for anyone seeking to navigate the complexities of human experience. Prepare to be captivated by a narrative that is as timely as it is timeless, prompting reflections on the possibilities of renewal in an age thirsting for connection.

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## About the author

Walker Percy was an acclaimed American author known for his profound explorations of existentialism, identity, and the human condition, particularly set against the backdrop of the American South. Born in 1916 in Birmingham, Alabama, Percy faced a turbulent childhood marked by the early death of his father and the estrangement from his mother, which shaped his literary perspective. A graduate of the University of North Carolina and a physician trained at Columbia University, he ultimately turned to writing after being diagnosed with tuberculosis, which led him to contemplate the nature of existence and the human experience. His most notable works, including "The Moviegoer," which won the National Book Award, showcase his philosophical insights and often merge Southern Gothic elements with rich psychological depth. Throughout his career, Percy became a leading voice in American literature, adeptly delving into themes of modern alienation, faith, and the search for meaning in a fragmented world.

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## Chapter 1 Summary: II

In the opening chapter of "The Second Coming" by Walker Percy, we meet a woman basking in the October sunlight after enduring years of confinement at a sanatorium. Her surroundings—a quaint village with scenic mountains, bustling with tourists—evoke a sense of both wonder and disquiet within her. As she observes the people around her, particularly the vibrant women in dresses, she contemplates her own attire, which consists of newly purchased practical clothes that starkly contrast with the casual contemporary styles of the young people she sees. She grapples with the disorientation of having just re-entered society after her long absence, likening herself to Rip Van Winkle waking up from a long slumber.

The narrative provides insight into her past through hints of trauma and recovery, illustrated by her memories of electroconvulsive therapy (ECT), which has erased portions of her identity and memory. As she sits on a bench, she finds herself engaged in small talk with a young man, Richard, who is unaware of her struggles. The conversation reveals her difficulty connecting with others and rekindling her social skills. Each exchange reminds her of her previous self—one who was presumably more adept in social situations.

Following a haircut that symbolizes her fresh start, the woman reflects on a notebook where she has written instructions to help guide her through her



newfound freedom. She learns that she has inherited an estate from her Aunt Sally, which includes a house near Linwood and raises the stakes for her search for identity and belonging. The juxtaposition of her present comfort on the bench and her former life of chaos highlights a key theme in the narrative: the search for self amid the chaos of life and recovery.

By interacting with local residents and observing their lives, she begins to piece together fragments of her former self, pondering her purpose as she considers embarking on a journey to "take possession" of her inheritance. Yet, her internal struggle is palpable; she fights against feelings of alienation while attempting to reengage with a world that feels both familiar and foreign. As people around her carry on, she contemplates where she fits within it, navigating her way through the complex emotions tied to her past, present, and hopes for the future.

The chapter deftly explores themes of identity, recovery, and the human condition, imbuing a sense of hope amid uncertainty. As the woman prepares to reclaim her life, the reader is left contemplating how one reconciles the fragments of a past riddled with trauma in order to embrace a new beginning.





## Critical Thinking

**Key Point:** The search for self amid chaos

**Critical Interpretation:** Imagine stepping out into the world, just like her, feeling the warmth of the sun but also the shadows of your past traumas looming over you. What if, like her, you embraced each interaction as an opportunity to reconnect with who you truly are? Each moment of awkwardness becomes a stepping stone toward self-discovery, a chance to rewrite your narrative. You realize that amid the chaos of life, your pursuit of identity is not just about piecing together memories but also about boldly embracing your true self, limitations and all. This chapter encourages you to take possession of not only your inheritance but also your life, urging you to navigate the unknown with courage and curiosity, transforming feelings of alienation into avenues for growth.



## Chapter 2 Summary: III

In Chapter 2 of "The Second Coming" by Walker Percy, we follow a character, Billy, as he plays a round of golf with friends that feels increasingly symbolic of his fractured life and identity. The chapter begins with Billy slicing a ball out-of-bounds during the game, leading him to a reflective moment in the woods. For the first time, he feels an emotional detachment from his failures—signified by the sliced golf balls—realizing he doesn't care as much as he used to about the game or about how others perceive him.

The golf outing is not just about the sport; it is filled with lingering thoughts of his past, notably concerning his relationship with his deceased wife and a deep-seated connection to his father. Throughout the round, he encounters various characters, including Jimmy Rogers, whose invasive jokes and personal inquiries provoke unease in Billy. Jimmy's presence forces Billy to confront memories and impulse decisions from his past. We learn about the complexities in Billy's life: his marriage, his financial success, and the contrast with the authenticity he feels is lacking.

As the game progresses, Billy finds himself in flashes of memory regarding his father, a figure from whom he sought to escape. The narrative shifts between present actions on the golf course and vivid recollections of hunting trips with his father, exposing a long-buried trauma linked to masculinity



and expectation. He recalls an incident where his father, in a moment of frustration, tries to impart a lesson—their relationship permeated by a mix of anger and love.

In a parallel to his father’s legacy, Billy experiences moments of physical discomfort during the game, hinting at underlying health issues and reflecting a deeper sense of vulnerability. As he grapples with the notion of who he is versus who he was, he becomes aware of how these encounters on the golf course echo his life's broader themes—success versus personal fulfillment, past versus present, and a search for meaning amid idealized memories.

Ultimately, the chapter highlights the complexity of self-awareness in the face of old wounds and life choices while balancing humor and the absurdity of golf. Billy's day on the course culminates with an epiphany about his existence: he realizes he does not need to carry the burden of his past alone. Despite the pressures and memories that weigh him down, a sense of clarity emerges—the understanding that while we navigate the absurdities of life, we must ultimately confront our truths and forge our paths, regardless of our histories.

Aspect	Summary
Character Focus	Billy explores his fractured identity during a round of golf with friends.

Aspect	Summary
Initial Event	Billy slices a golf ball out-of-bounds, prompting reflection.
Emotional Reflection	He experiences emotional detachment from his failures and peers' perceptions.
Past Influences	His thoughts linger on his deceased wife and his relationship with his father.
Character Interactions	Jimmy Rogers' invasive comments provoke unease and memories in Billy.
Memory Flashes	Billy recalls hunting trips with his father, revealing trauma linked to masculinity.
Health and Vulnerability	Billy's physical discomfort hints at underlying health issues reflecting his vulnerabilities.
Thematic Exploration	Contrasts success with personal fulfillment and past experiences with current realities.
Climactic Realization	Billy understands he need not bear his past burdens alone; he seeks clarity about his existence.

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## Chapter 3: IV

In Chapter 3 of "The Second Coming" by Walker Percy, the protagonist, Allison, finds herself in a greenhouse that feels like a refuge from her fragmented past. Although she has no memory of her previous life, she is focused on creating a safe and warm space in her new surroundings, which are filled with old plants and broken structures. As she discovers the potting shed, she begins to make it her own, clearing it of debris and fashioning a makeshift sleeping area. Here, she finds two weathered books that prompt her reflections on words and language, which she feels have lost meaning in her interactions with people.

Allison's conversations with herself and her environment highlight her struggle to express her thoughts and feelings. She grapples with feeling uprooted and disconnected, yet she also finds moments of clarity. When a large brindled dog unexpectedly joins her, it creates a sense of companionship and connection. Their interactions are lightly comedic, yet they underline Allison's isolation and unconventional approach to social encounters.

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## Chapter 4 Summary: V

In Chapter 4 of "The Second Coming" by Walker Percy, we follow Will Barrett as he makes his weekly visit to a nursing home funded by his late wife. This ritual feels almost hauntingly unchanged: he traverses the same sparkling hallways and interacts with the same patients, but instead of accompanying his wife Marion in her wheelchair, he finds himself alongside Jack Curl, the chaplain. This shift marks a significant point in Will's life, illustrating the profound loneliness he experiences after Marion's death.

During this visit, Will is struck by a realization. Despite the usually distracting presence of Jack Curl, he finds himself detached and reflective, thinking about the nature of his life and his past. He recalls the days in hospitals, the pain of witnessing others' suffering — his father in Georgia, and Jamie who died in Santa Fe. It's a poignant moment of introspection for Will, as he recognizes that throughout his life, he was driven to act only in the face of disaster. It's as if chaos was the compass guiding him, providing him with a purpose. In his current state, however, he experiences a transformation; he now knows what to do without needing a tragedy to spur him into action.

Will vividly remembers a moment from his past when he had to confront his father lying in a swamp, waiting for help and trying to process the depth of their relationship. In that moment, as his father's eyes conveyed a silent





sorrow and understanding, Will realized the weight of unspoken truths. His father seemed to communicate a farewell, urging him to discover his own path moving forward. This memory encapsulates the chapter's exploration of loss, the search for meaning, and the evolution of Will's perspective on life after tragedy, laying the groundwork for his character's journey ahead.

Key Points	Details
Setting	Nursing home funded by Will's late wife, Marion.
Main Character	Will Barrett
Change in Routine	Will visits with Jack Curl, the chaplain, instead of Marion.
Theme of Loneliness	Will feels profound loneliness post-Marion's death.
Realization	Will reflects on his life, driven to action only in disaster.
Introspection	Will recalls his father's suffering and the pain of witnessing loss.
Memory of Father	Will remembers his father in a swamp, facing unspoken truths.
Character Evolution	Will's perspective shifts; he seeks purpose beyond tragedy.
Overall Themes	Exploration of loss, meaning, and Will's character journey.



## Critical Thinking

**Key Point:** Life's purpose can emerge from reflection and self-discovery rather than chaos and tragedy.

**Critical Interpretation:** Imagine pausing in your daily life to reflect on your experiences and relationships. Like Will Barrett, you might find that your true direction doesn't always have to come from facing disasters or overwhelming challenges. Instead, it can manifest when you take a step back and confront your deepest feelings and memories. This shift in perspective can inspire you to live purposefully and authentically, allowing you to define your own path without waiting for life's upheavals to motivate you. Embrace the quiet moments of introspection, for therein lies the key to understanding who you are and what you want, fostering a life filled with intentional actions and deep connections.



## Chapter 5 Summary: VI

In Chapter 5 of "The Second Coming" by Walker Percy, we find Allison actively engaged in a practical yet ambitious project, aiming to heat her greenhouse by moving a significant stove known as the Grand Crown. The chapter opens with her contemplating the best way to manage the declining temperatures, ultimately deciding against purchasing a new heater to uphold her sense of thrift. Instead, she opts to hoist the Grand Crown, an impressive piece of machinery that symbolizes her determination and resourcefulness.

Allison navigates the hardware store with purpose, selecting supplies like rope, blocks, and tools, showcasing her mechanical savvy. While there, she interacts with a mechanic and a young man, Will, who works at the car wash. Their dialogues reveal her curiosity about others and her growing confidence in asserting herself. This newfound assertiveness is highlighted when she confidently requests four creepers from Jerry, the parts man, despite feeling a moment of discomfort when faced with what seems like his leering demeanor.

As she embarks on the task of moving the stove, Allison grapples with the practical challenges it presents, calculating weight, rope lengths, and the best methods for hoisting it. Her excitement and ingenuity shine through as she figures out how to maneuver it safely, reflecting her mastery over mechanical tasks. As she unveils the stove's impressive features, her detailed



observations reveal her appreciation for craftsmanship—she sees it not just as a functional object, but as something beautiful and historic, hinting at her intellectual curiosity and sentimental nature.

Throughout the chapter, themes of independence and empowerment are woven into the narrative. Allison transforms from someone who hesitated to assert her needs to a determined individual, ready to engage with her environment and problem-solve in innovative ways. The mechanical elements of the stove and her process of manipulating it serve as metaphors for her personal growth and agency—she is not just hoisting a stove; she is lifting herself, carving out her place in the world with grit and determination.

As she meticulously plans the next steps for her project, the chapter concludes with her feeling optimistic, her vision becoming clearer. The stove, now viewed as both a practical solution and a cherished artifact, encapsulates her journey of self-discovery and the rich possibilities of her intellectual and physical endeavors. The chapter ends with the sun setting, suggesting the close of a productive day and the promise of more accomplishments to come.



## Chapter 6: VII

In Chapter 6 of "The Second Coming" by Walker Percy, we follow the protagonist, Will Barrett, as he navigates a complex emotional and existential landscape. The chapter opens with Will preparing himself for an extended period of introspection, driven by a need to confront his insomnia and search for meaning in his life. He takes a considerable number of tranquilizers, symbolizing his desire to escape reality rather than face it.

Dressed casually, he embarks on a journey that appears both mundane and deeply significant. His encounters with others, like Mrs. Guthrie at the post office, serve as poignant snapshots of his disconnectedness from the outside world and hint at the isolation he feels. He wanders through a foggy golf course, evoking a feeling of introspection and familiarity, which reflects his yearning for something greater than his current existence.

Will's physical journey leads him to a cave, where he meticulously plans to wait and see if he can extract profound answers regarding existence, God, and life itself through a self-imposed experiment. Here, surrounded by

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on, and the mind maps help reinforce wh  
I've learned. Highly recommend!

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## Chapter 7 Summary: II

In this gripping chapter from "The Second Coming" by Walker Percy, the protagonist finds himself alone in the back seat of a luxurious Mercedes, enveloped in darkness after the rain has stopped. It's four o'clock, and while external cues urge him to start the engine, he instead succumbs to a wave of shivering and nostalgia. As he sits there, he is reminded of the car's comforting smells—leather and wax, a tangible connection to pleasure and past experiences shared with his wife, Marion. This moment of reflection triggers a flood of memories from their outings together, where they felt like any other couple enjoying simple pleasures, despite Marion's wheelchair.

He recalls the joy of picnics and tailgating with friends, the camaraderie and public spectacle of life unfolding around them, contrasting with his current isolation. It's a bittersweet remembering of a life filled with sunshine, laughter, and warmth, highlighting the deep connection he felt with Marion during those times.

As he pours himself a drink from the miniature bar in the car, the protagonist reflects on how he has changed—or perhaps hasn't—over the years. He sees his younger self in the rearview mirror, recalling a road trip with his father that was marked by silence rather than connection. That trip was formative; it encapsulated both hope and despair, feelings of freedom contrasted with an inability to truly bond.





He grapples with the idea that despite the passage of time, some things remain constant. Even with the accumulation of experiences, he's left wondering whether he has learned anything significant in life, pondering the weight of his father's influence and the inescapable presence of mortality. The imagery he conjures is filled with reflections on the nature of life, defeat, and the absurdity of existence itself.

Yet beneath the comedic panic of his shaking body and cold hands lies a stark realization: regardless of the triumphs and tragedies of the century or his own life, he feels an inextricable link to his own mortality. He questions whether he is bound to a fatalistic destiny, destined to confront death as a pivotal theme of his existence. The chapter concludes with a haunting recognition of his frail condition, leaving readers pondering the intersection of death, memory, and identity—deeply resonant themes that echo through the alcoves of modern existence.



## Chapter 8 Summary: III

In Chapter 8 of “The Second Coming” by Walker Percy, the protagonist, Will Barrett, awakens in a car and is unexpectedly visited by Kitty, a bold and vibrant character. Their conversation reveals that Will has missed a family wedding, which is notable for its casual nature and the presence of Leslie, his daughter. As he remembers his absence, there’s a mix of humor and tension between him and Kitty, hinting at unresolved emotions and connections.

Kitty shares updates about their lives, particularly concerning Allie, Will's troubled wife, who is living secluded near where they are located. Her remarks about their mutual friend Walter, who has left, and Leslie’s new ambitions for a community project using the Peabody Foundation money, shake Will from his indifference. As their conversation unfolds, it becomes clear that Kitty’s affection for Will is complicated, revealing both a history of camaraderie and a lingering tension between them.

Kitty expresses concern for Allie’s wellbeing, suggesting that Allie struggles with life and may need more structure and support than they can provide. She believes Allie has not been able to cope with the world and hints at wanting to find a way to help—possibly by committing her to a more supportive environment. The notion that Allie doesn’t belong in this world resonates deeply with Will, but he struggles to accept the situation, reflecting



on their shared past and his own difficulties.

The exploration of themes like mental health, familial responsibility, and social expectations is central to the conversation, displaying both humor and gravity. Will's reflections on his life, his relationship with Allie, and the fond yet complex dynamics with Kitty showcase the novel's rich character development.

As Will decides to return home, he is struck by the eerie emptiness of his house, which feels devoid of life, as if everyone has abandoned it. The juxtaposition of his earlier carefree attitude against a stark realization of isolation carries weight, suggesting a transformation in his character.

He received two notes upon entering his empty home: one from Leslie expressing a desire to reconcile and partner on the Peabody Foundation project and another urgently from Bertie, calling for attention. As he contemplates the changes around him, he is hit with feelings of nostalgia and confusion. His phone conversation with Bertie reveals the urgency of the unfolding events, including sports and potential futures within their community, and instigates a question of identity and purpose in Will's life.

The rapid developments in Will's journey culminate in a bus accident, leading him to a hospital where doctors both diagnose him with a rare form of epilepsy and assert an optimistic prognosis. Here, themes of



self-discovery, vulnerability, and mortality come to the forefront. The complicated interplay between his past and present, his relationships with Kitty and Leslie, and the shadow of Allie's struggles coalesce in this chapter, making it a compelling introspective journey, filled with the rich, emotional textures characteristic of Percy's writing.

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