

Lord of Misrule Study Guide

Lord of Misrule by Jaimy Gordon

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Plot Summary

Tommy Hansel and his girlfriend Margaret “Maggie” Koderer got more than they bargained for when they decided to take their horses to Indian Mound Downs in hopes of making quick money. In the novel “The Lord of Misrule” by Jaimy Gordon, Maggie realized the racetrack life was more dangerous than she could have ever imagined. This story is both humorous and serious, and is filled with unique, lively characters both of the human and equine varieties.

Seasoned horse owner Deucey recognized right away that Maggie and her boyfriend were trying to make money when she showed up unannounced at Indian Mound Downs asking for four stalls. Tommy and Maggie’s bad luck began the first night they were there when Tommy’s horse the Mahdi was claimed by Gus Zeno, another owner. Also having bad luck that night was Medicine Ed, an elderly black groom who worked for Zeno. He believed he would win big if he bet on Boll Weevil, the horse Gus was running in a race against Hansel’s horse the Mahdi in that first race. Boll Weevil won the race but Zeno died as he was bragging about the horse he’d claimed. Although he won money on the race, Medicine Ed lost the employer who had been so good to him. Medicine Ed was suspicious of Tommy and Maggie but agreed to work for them after they arranged for him to keep the Winnebago that Zeno had given Medicine Ed as a home.

The story deepens when Two-Tie, an elderly racetrack gangster, learned that his niece had come to Indian Mound Downs. He didn’t want her to know about him but asked the stall manager at the racetrack to look out for her. Meanwhile Two-Tie asked Vernon to set up a special race for a horse named The Lord of Misrule, a horse owned by the son of his former girlfriend. About the same time Deucey, Medicine Ed and Maggie decided to buy Little Spinoza a horse that Joe Dale Bigg, the main trainer at the track, was trying to get rid of. Spinoza had a reputation as being a crazy horse who sometimes refused to run in races. The first race in which they ran Spinoza was disastrous but they entered him in a second race which he won. At the end of this race Nkem realized that Joe Dale would retaliate against Deucey and Maggie because he thought they arranged to win the race in order to humiliate him.

To make matters worse for Maggie and Tommy, Joe Dale took a sexual interest in Maggie. He claimed Pelter, the horse Maggie loved, so he would have a way to lure Maggie to his farm. Both Two-Tie and Tommy Hansel showed up at Joe Dale’s farm to rescue Maggie and get Pelter back. Two-Tie was especially angry because he had ordered that Pelter not be claimed. Because Tommy hit both Joe Dale and Biggy, Joe Dale’s son, during the confrontation Two-Tie knew that there would be more trouble coming.

The story reaches a climax when Pelter won the race that was arranged specifically for the Lord of Misrule to win. In the course of the race Mahdi bumped the Lord of Misrule causing him to fall. Little Spinoza was also caught up in the fall out and broke his leg. With those three horses down, Pelter won easily. In the winners circle Maggie knew Joe



Dale was angry with her. She was worried she'd be killed or worse. In hopes of saving her horse Maggie signed Pelter over to Medicine Ed. She left the stables and walked toward the river arriving at an abandoned race track. She found Little Spinoza's body where it had been left in preparation for the knacker to pick him up. As she was saying goodbye to the horse she heard Joe Dale's voice telling her how much he hated her. He told her he intended to have sex with her. Joe Dale didn't get his wish because Tommy interrupted him. He beat Joe Dale with a pitchfork and then hit Joe Dale with a car, throwing Joe Dale's dead body onto an old hot walking machine.



First Race, Chapter 1

Summary

In Chapter 1, as Medicine Ed walked a three-year-old around the grounds of Indian Mound Downs he talked to Deucey Gifford who was walking her horse, Grizzly, about that night's race. He told her Zeno had trucked in the red horse he was leading just for the race. Both horses were startled by a squawking automobile spring as a car was driven in through the back gate. The stall superintendent, Vernon "Suitcase" Smithers, asked the girl driving the car what she was doing there. The girl, with frizzy pigtails, claimed the horseman for whom she worked had called ahead and had been told there were five stalls free. When Suitcase told her they didn't have any stalls she offered him a small roll of bills. Deucey commented to the girl that even that money wouldn't buy her five stalls together. Her horses would be spread out so other owners could check out what she had. Suitcase told Deucey to be quiet.

Medicine Ed wondered why Zeno had himself driven just that one red horse up to the track that day. Zeno allowed Medicine Ed, who was seventy-three, to run his operations at Indian Mound Downs by himself. He thought of the medicines he was allowed to give the horses. Of those medicines bute short for butazolidin was considered fast luck oil. In the Winnebago in which Medicine Ed lived Zeno was snorting white powder. He lectured Medicine Ed on his choices in food and then told Medicine Ed if he saw Tommy Hansel and his girl he was to give them a hand if they needed it. After Zeno left Medicine Ed looked at the horse racing stats in the newspaper that Zeno left behind. He found the horse that Zeno had trucked in and was surprised to see that Zeno was listed as the owner. He also saw how few races the horse had run. It appeared he'd been in only two races.

Analysis

The reader can quickly put together the basis for the story from information shared in this first chapter. The story is set at Indian Mound Downs, a racetrack that Medicine Ed, an old negro groom, describes as being a cheap racetrack. He's happy because his boss, Zeno, is good to him but gets the feeling that something is about to go wrong. Medicine Ed's suspicions lie with a big red horse that Zeno has brought in specially for that night's race. Medicine Ed gets the feeling the horse is someone's secret.

The imagery in this novel is quite unique. The hot walker is compared to a "woebegone carnival ride" (11) while a manure pile is described on the same page as being "stubbled with pale dirty straw like a penitentiary haircut" (11). The horses are described as being sore, dumb, cheap and negatively affected by the red dust they constantly breathe in. The hot walking machine is a symbol that will appear over and over again in the novel. The machine is made to walk horses that have been exercising and need a cool down when there aren't enough hands to walk them individually. The horses go in a circle.



Even with all of the walking they are doing the horses on a hot walking machine basically go nowhere, somewhat like Medicine Ed who has worked all his life at the racetrack with nothing to show for it.

There is also a puddle that is described in this section of the novel. The puddle will be included in several different places in the novel. It seems to be a device to measure and describe weather, temperature and time of the year. In this first chapter the puddle is described as being almost a pond. Maggie hits this puddle with her car when she drives through the back gate of the racetrack. The water that splashes out of the puddle is described as looking like tomato soup because there is so much red clay dissolved in it.

Medicine Ed's age and experience as a groom is depicted by the fact that he doesn't even know the name of the horse he's walking. He's been working with horses for so long that the animal is just another horse. He only knows Zeno brought it in just for that night's race. As he walks the horse Medicine Ed thinks of an old song about a boll weevil that wants a home. This reference will be significant later in the plot. It will be the basis of one of the themes in the novel, that of home as Medicine Ed tries to work hard enough and long enough to provide himself with a home.

One of the important plot developments in this section of the novel is the arrival of the girl with the frizzly hair, as Medicine Ed refers to her. She comes looking for stalls claiming that the man she works for called ahead. Medicine Ed has been in the business long enough that he recognizes the bluff but is surprised that she has the nerve to bust in the back gate when she was sent away from the front gate. Deucey, the other groom working the horses, also recognizes the girl as a green hand in the racing business.

A few themes are introduced in this section of the novel. Luck is one of these themes. One of the references to luck in this section is made in reference to bute a medicine that horsemen call the "fast luck oil" (17). Along with believing in luck, notice that Medicine Ed is also superstitious. When he sees a sparrow with red wings, for instance, he believes it is a sign that Medicine Ed's life will soon fall apart.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss your first impression of the frizzly haired girl. Do you think she is a protagonist or an antagonist? Give reasons to support your answer.

Discussion Question 2

What do you learn about the lives of those who work at horse tracks in this section of the novel? What sort of life has Medicine Ed had, for instance?



Discussion Question 3

Do you suspect anything strange about the horse brought in by Zeno to run in that night's races? Why or why not? Give examples from the novel that lead you to your decision.

Vocabulary

contraption, devilment, goiter, clabbered, electrolytes



First Race, Chapters 2-6

Summary

In Chapter 2, Maggie prepared the five stalls she had been given. As Deucey had suggested the stalls were no where near each other. Of the stalls one was very nice and one was very bad. She knew that Tommy planned to more or less steal money with the horses he was bringing because they were all better runners than they appeared to be on paper. He wanted them to get in without being noticed, run their horses in the cheapest claiming races and then get out fast after cashing in on their bets.

Maggie wondered what Tommy, who believed in luck, would think of their arrangement. She wondered what the men at the tracks had up their sleeves and briefly considered that someone could get hurt but knew that Tommy didn't think that way. She had told Deucey that she was right about her and Tommy. Deucey suggested that if she had any questions about the racing life she should come to her. Maggie learned Deucey owned only one horse but that if she could ever get together the money she'd like to buy the little dark bay horse she was walking. Before Deucey left she told Maggie to let her know if they needed a place to sleep.

Maggie remembered that morning she had massaged Pelter's long back with brand X pink wintergreen horse liniment. She loved Pelter and worked with him regularly. As a result she thought he wasn't as sour as he used to be. She imagined the horse talking to her, telling her that he enjoyed her company.

In Chapter 3, Deucey arranged for Maggie to stay in Medicine Ed's tack room for the night while Medicine Ed was talking to Kidstuff, the farrier. When Kidstuff told Medicine Ed that Zeno's red horse's name was Boll Weevil Medicine Ed looked strange and walked off. Kidstuff told Maggie that Hansel had a horse in the race as well. Maggie cursed. Medicine Ed walked away shaken, Kidstuff asked him if he needed a doctor but Medicine Ed was already in his trailer. He returned soon.

In Chapter 4, Medicine Ed knew when he heard the horse's name that he had to put his lucky money, fifty dollars, on that horse. He also decided to use his horse-goofer dust on Boll Weevil. Every horse he used it on won his race, but died or had gotten injured soon afterward and didn't run again. He'd stopped using his medicine when Broomstick, the only horse he'd loved, had broken her leg after he used the dust on her. He thought of his past and how it was his own fault that he didn't have a home or an education.

In Chapter 5, the point of view switches to the second person point of view while the tense switches to the present tense. Maggie is asleep in the straw when you come on to her. She lets you have sex with her willingly. You beg her never to leave you.

In Chapter 6, Maggie woke up when Tommy laughed. She questioned him about why they had put all their horses in different barns and Tommy told her he didn't know what it



meant, or that it meant anything. He suggested that if she thought they needed help that she call her Uncle Rudy, a man that Maggie referred to as a gangster. Two horses are described. Pelter was Maggie's favorite. Tommy told her the horse would be run in a claiming race even though Maggie loved him. The Mahdi, however, it the horse that Tommy wanted, the one he cared about. He believed the horse would be claimed. Even though he'd just been arrived in the van Tommy planned to race him that night.

Analysis

Notice the changes in tense and point of view in Chapter 5. Up to this point the story has been told by a third person narrator in the past tense. For Chapter 5, however, the tense changes to the present tense. That chapter is also narrated in the second person point of view. The "you" referred to in this chapter is Tommy as he arrives at the racetrack to find Maggie asleep in Medicine Ed's tack room. The use of this point of view gives this chapter, which is sexual in nature, a more intimate and urgent feel.

Another unique feature of this novel is that the language used for each character differs to distinguish each character from the others. When Medicine Ed, the elderly black groom goes to check on his lucky money he says to himself "they it is, nemmind if it look strange" (30). The bad grammar, "they" instead of "there" and the words "never mind" slurred into "nemmind" are representative of the elderly who are uneducated as Ed has said that he is. On the other hand, Maggie, who is educated and has even worked as a writer for a newspaper is very precise in her speech. "May I see that paper please" (29) she asks when she learns her boss has a horse racing that evening.

Luck is a theme that is continued in this section of the novel. Although Maggie is afraid someone might get hurt in the scheme they are trying to run at the racetrack she knows that Tommy lives on luck. As she describes him "Fat risk made his eyes brighten and soften, his forehead clarify, his nails harden, his black hair shine" (22). Luck is also mentioned in the section of the novel where Maggie confesses to Deucey that Deucey is right about her and Tommy. Deucey tells Maggie that she wrote the book about false-hearted luck and that if Maggie were to have any questions she should ask Deucey. From the characters' opinions, it appears that a good deal of horse racing depends on pure luck. Notice also that even Medicine Ed believes in luck. When he hears the red horse's name is Boll Weevil, the insect about whom he was just thinking in reference to a song about a boll weevil looking for a home, Ed believes this is a sign that it is time to cash in his lucky money and try to get him his own home.

It is in this section of the novel that the reader learns how Medicine Ed got his name. He was involved in hoodoo, a practice he claims not to have been involved with since 1955 when the one horse he ever really loved was killed, he believed, as a result of his use of black magic. He had a family recipe for a goofer dust Ed believed wasn't intended to undo a horse but instead to encourage it. He didn't seem to fully understand its power because those horses on whom he used the powder never raced again. In the case of Broomstick, that horse broke its leg and had to be put down. Also in the theme of



superstition, Ed believes he has the power to see into the future using a hand made object out of the mane and tail hairs of the horse of whom he wanted to know the future.

So far two sets of twins have been introduced in the novel. The first set of twins is the two red horses who don't appear to be related but look enough alike they could be taken as twins. Boll Weevil and the Mahdi are both red, both geldings, neither with any marks on them and both maidens in their races. The similarities are obvious enough to make all of the stable staff uncomfortable. The second set of twins referred to in the novel is Tommy Hansel and his twin. Of course, it is not certain he ever had a twin but his mother has made him believe that she was pregnant with twins when she was pregnant with him. She believes the second baby was lost in the womb. Tommy believes he somehow ate the other baby. It is indicated that Tommy's mother rarely made sense but that he had decided to believe her about the missing twin.

Notice that there are several references to Tommy as being strange. As Maggie thinks about her boyfriend she thinks that "he wasn't quite right in the soul, really" (22). When Medicine Ed sees Tommy for the first time he thinks to himself that Tommy looks crazy, and Medicine Ed gets the creeps just looking at the man. Another thing to notice about Tommy is his love for the Mahdi. While Maggie loves Pelter, Tommy's favorite is the Mahdi.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the "goofer dust" that Medicine Ed has used on his horses in the past. Research the term and talk about the type of magic with which it is associated.

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the author's use of the second person point of view in Chapter 5. Why do you think the author chooses to change to the second person point of view? How does it affect the reader?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the author's use of distinctive language for each character. How does this help to develop each character more fully?

Vocabulary

rufous, tripe, dank, culmination, credulous, bountiful, transient, crone, moiling, parse, surreptitiously, curvetted, cossack, traipsing, composure, medieval, consolation



First Race, Chapters 7-10

Summary

In Chapter 7, Medicine Ed was surprised because Boll Weevil and the Mahdi looked like twins. He thought that Tommy had a crazy look about him that gave Medicine Ed the creeps. Ed spied on the two through a crack in the stable wall and heard what Tommy said about Mahdi. Maggie mentioned to Tommy that Zeno had a horse in the race that looked just like theirs. Ed watched as Tommy picked Maggie up and threw her when she argued with him about Mahdi's ability to run the race. He picked her up and pushed her against the wall, telling her to shut up. Ed watched as Tommy left and Maggie sat and watched the horse. As Tommy had been talking to Maggie, his fingers were spearing her private parts inside her jeans. He lifted her up using his hand as it was inside her.

In Chapter 8, as they were being led to the gate the Mahdi and Boll Weevil stood out from the other entrants. Medicine Ed noticed that Tommy and Maggie weren't happy when they saw Zeno watching the race. When Zeno walked over to talk to Tommy, Tommy noticed Zeno was holding a shank and realized he'd bought the Mahdi. Tommy got a crazy look as he cursed and stomped about. Zeno told him the business would make him crazy.

In Chapter 9, Medicine Ed noticed Maggie go to bet on the horses just before the race. Tommy didn't see her go but he and Medicine Ed wound up at the betting windows at the same time a while later. As Medicine Ed was walking away Tommy caught him by the shoulder and offered him a job working for him. Ed said he'd think about it but in his mind he was thinking that Zeno would still be racing in years to come. He wasn't sure about the young fool's future in racing. He'd also seen the way that Tommy had treated Maggie when she disagreed with him. He realized Maggie was a sort of slave to Tommy but also knew that she had the strength to sneak out of her chains when she needed to do so.

Boll Weevil got out of the gate late but was soon passing other horses. The Mahdi was ahead of the pack but Boll Weevil was creeping up on him. The Mahdi got distracted just before the finish line and Boll Weevil was able to take the race from him. Zeno bragged to Medicine Ed about the horse he'd bought. When Medicine Ed realized that Zeno had bought Hansel's horse he felt dread. He knew things were about to change. He continued to believe Boll Weevil would die because of the powder. Ed intended to use the money he earned on a downpayment on a trailer in Hallandale. As Zeno continued to brag about his horse Ed noticed he got stuck on the word racehorse, never quite able to get it completely out. Ed believed luck was pulling the word back down Zeno's throat. Zeno fell over dead. Ed realized what he'd heard from Boll Weevil wasn't the good news of his own home but instead that he was about to lose the home he had.

In Chapter 10, Maggie checked in on the other horses after the race. As she stood in the shadows she heard a woman crying. She realized it was Deucey Gifford. She was



walking the pretty horse that Maggie had seen earlier. A man drove a Cadillac next to her talking to her as she walked. She told him that he couldn't make her take that horse. She didn't want to owe him anything. Maggie considered how she was scared of Tommy the same way Deucey was scared of the man in the car. She remembered how they had met. She thought she had been his replacement for the last woman who had been doing his work for him.

When she reached the tack room she thought at first it was empty but then Tommy put his hand over her mouth telling her to shut up, the same words she'd just thought to herself. He chained her to the wall using a leather shank. He pulled her pants down and fondled her as he talked. He told her that he'd seen her cashing in her bet on Zeno's horse. He asked her not to offend him by telling him how much she'd won. In a threatening manner he tells her that he knew she would give him the money if he needed it.

Analysis

As this first part of the novel ends it leaves the reader with a sense of dread. Zeno has died unexpectedly. Medicine Ed realizes what he thought was a sign of good luck wasn't a sign of good luck at all. His boss has died leaving him no choice but to take a job with the shady man he refers to as the "young fool." Tommy has lost the horse he liked to Zeno, a loss that has already made him angry. Maggie put in a bet on Boll Weevil, the horse that did win, and won a good deal of money with her bet. She worries that her act of treachery will anger Tommy. She has also seen Deucey arguing with a man and crying. She recognizes in Deucey the same fear that she feels when she is with Tommy. All of the characters seem to be in a problematic place that causes them fear, all for their own individual reasons.

Notice in this section especially the way that Tommy treats Maggie. He is abusive of her physically, mentally and sexually. He uses her sexual desire for him as a way to manipulate her. He threatens her even as he fondles her, leaving her stuck between her fear and her desire. There is hope for Maggie to break free from Tommy because Medicine Ed recognizes in her that she has the ability to sneak out of the figurative chains that Tommy has put on her when she wants to do so. He is proud of her when he sees her go and put in her bid on Boll Weevil. It is interesting that Medicine Ed, who is an old black man, would refer to the relationship between Maggie and Tommy as a type of slavery. Perhaps he is more empathetic toward her because he sees that she has little choice in her life, just like he feels he has little choice in his life.

Luck again appears as a theme in this section of the novel. As Medicine Ed realizes his horse has won the race, he also realizes that the power of the powder he used can backfire on him in ways he never imagined. In this section he refers to luck as a "ho," short for whore. He says it is this whore that pulls the word "racehorse" back down in Zeno's throat making him choke on it and causing him to die. Although Ed won money on his horse, as he had hoped he would, he knows that he won't be able to put down



money on the home he wanted to buy for himself because he has lost his boss and his steady income.

It is in this section of the novel that the blue car makes its first appearance. It is an important symbol in the book because the person riding in the car never brings good news. Maggie doesn't know who is driving the midnight blue car but realizes that person must be powerful because Deucey is crying as she argues with the man.

Horse racing is primarily a gambling business. It is not uncommon for owners or grooms to put money down on horses that weren't their own just to make money. Maggie feels in some way like she has betrayed Tommy for not betting on his horse. It is, however, another horse that wins and Maggie wins money in her bet. Similarly, Ed bets on the horse his owner is running because he has a feeling about the horse. One could argue that Ed's use of his goofer dust is illegal, since he claims the horse he uses it on always wins, but it appears that Ed brings enough punishment on himself each time he uses the dust that he punishes himself.

Discussion Question 1

Medicine Ed has said that Tommy's behavior gives him the creepy crawlers. What disturbs you about the way Tommy acts? Do you think he is mentally stable?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss how the author incorporates race track lingo into the story. How does the use of this language help the reader to feel as if they are really part of this lifestyle?

Discussion Question 3

How has the author developed her plot thus far? What is the tone of the novel? Discuss how the author has developed this tone.

Vocabulary

capitulate, rivet, aspires, exult, preened, masticating, espied, paragon, palfrey



Second Race, Chapter 11

Summary

In Chapter 11, jockeys and owners gathered at Two-Tie's house for an all night card game. They talk about Biggy, Joe Dale's son, who was arrested after he got caught with a carload of heaters on the grounds of the racetrack. They laughed about how Biggy wasn't a good choice for a groom after he had come after a horse with a loaded gun. They gossip that Joe Dale is making Deucey take the horse, named Little Spinoza, with which Biggy had so much trouble. Joe Dale Bigg had paid twenty-thousand dollars for the horse but it had turned out to be a bum horse. Deucey joined the game. She told them she and Biggs had not come to an agreement about Spinoza but that she didn't think he was crazy. She told the men that she believed Joe Dale's deal would cause her trouble and that she wouldn't take his horse. As Two-Tie looked around the men gathered at his card game he compared them to breeds of dogs.

Compared to his dog Elizabeth Two-Tie thought his comparison of the jockeys and owners to dogs was an insult to dogs. Elizabeth was very devoted to Two-Tie. When he straightened the two bow ties that he wore in the mirror he thought about Lillian and how he had treated her badly. As he talked to Lillian he told her that her son, Donald, had called him from Nebraska asking for a favor. He planned to do it, for Lillian, not for her low life son. He called the racetrack on the phone and asked for Mr. Smithers. He criticized Vernon for not telling him about the changes in the fourth race the night before. Vernon finally admitted he had messed up and that he owed Two-Tie a favor. He asked Vernon to write a race just for Donald's horse. When he explained the horse was stakes horse that had once been a legend Vernon guessed it was Lord of Misrule.

Two-Tie also told Vernon that a relative of his, the daughter of his beloved niece, might be headed his way. He wanted Vernon to watch over the girl. Two-Tie told Vernon that girl, Margaret Koderer, had come in with the man who ran the Mahdi in the race the night before. He asks information about the horseman she came in with as well. Before he hangs up the phone with Vernon he warns him not to short his niece on stalls. He also asked Venon not to mention him as Maggie didn't know who he was. As he walked Elizabeth after his phone call to Vernon he thought about how he'd gotten banned from the racetracks but considered it was actually good for him because it had given him the chance to see the whole picture of the racing business.

Analysis

Notice how the author drops in bits of humor to keep the story from being too dramatic. One of these touches of humor comes when Two-Tie describes the jockeys and horse owners who come to his all night card to dogs. He indicates that just like dogs, who sleep two-thirds of the time, these four players in his card game were asleep, "like sixty-seven percent of the other dogs on the planet" (69).



The reader gets a good deal of information about the character Two-Tie in this chapter. Two-Tie is a racetrack “gangster” who has spent his life making money off the horses. He still makes money off the horses even though he’d been banned from going to the track in person. He has enough influence over Mr. Smithers at the racetrack so he can keep ahead of what is happening. He also invites the horse owners and riders to his house for poker parties so he can hear the latest news. His big regret in life is that he did not marry Lillian, a girl whom he suspects really loved him but he let her walk out without stopping her. In her honor he wears a black bow tie. It is an important symbol in the novel because it symbolizes Two-Tie’s regret. It is also a symbol of the man himself because he wears it along with a second bow tie, hence giving him his nickname Two-Tie. He wants to help his niece, Maggie, out but doesn’t want her to know he’s working in her favor. He’s also putting together a race to help Lillian’s son though he isn’t doing it as a favor for Donald but instead for Lillian. Remember the race that Two-Tie asks Vernon to put together for him as it will be important later on in the novel.

In the theme of luck it seems that Maggie’s luck is about to change because she has her great uncle looking out for her best interests. Vernon promises Two-Tie that he will get Maggie better stalls. Two-Tie, who is a questionable character, emerges as a sort of redeemer or guardian angel at least for the girl.

In the theme of life at the racetrack the reader learns how a race can be created just to benefit one horse and one owner as Two-Tie is trying to do for Donald. Using calculations based on the age that Two-Tie gave Vernon for Maggie the reader is able to guess that the novel is set in the mid-1970’s. He says that she is about 25. Her mother died in 1955 when Maggie was a small child. That means about twenty years have passed since the death of Maggie’s mother making the time frame of the novel somewhere around 1975.

Two-Tie gives a look at racetrack life from his viewpoint of many years in the business. He has come to realize there is something inappropriate about a life spent earning one’s money at the racetrack. He has come to realize life is better if a person can do something that will benefit others.

Remember also in this section the information given about Biggy, Joe Dale and Little Spinoza. It is described that Joe Dale bought Little Spinoza with the hope the horse would be a good racer. Instead the horse is rumored to be crazy, sometimes refusing to come out of the starting gate at races at all. Ultimately the horse is an embarrassment for Joe Dale. To top things off Little Spinoza apparently had some sort of run in with Joe Dale’s mentally handicapped son Biggy. Biggy was kicked in the head by Little Spinoza. It is rumored the imprint of the horse’s shoe is still visible in Biggy’s forehead.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss Two-Tie’s regret that he didn’t marry Lillian when he had the chance. How is his regret over that lost opportunity similar to Medicine Ed’s regret that he doesn’t have his own home? How are the two men’s regrets different?



Discussion Question 2

Two-Tie admits that he has decided to help Donald for Lillian's sake. Why do you think he has decided to look out after Maggie?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss Two-Tie's comparison of the various jockeys and horse owners who visit his house for the poker game. Why do you think he decides to compare them to dogs? How do these comparisons help the reader know these characters better?

Vocabulary

askew, impounded, debutante, tout, curtail, redundant, haberdashery, benediction, piety, sanguine, olfactory, demure, decrepity, incessant



Second Race, Chapters 12-13

Summary

In Chapter 12, Medicine Ed thought about how he and the horse Pelter had fallen in with some strange people. He'd gotten so irritated with Maggie that he'd finally shown her how to work with the horses just as a way to defend himself from all of her questions. When Maggie asked Medicine Ed how he knew what to do with the horses he told her it all came down to beliefs, just like religion. Medicine Ed missed having his Winnebago on the racetrack grounds to slip off into when Maggie asked too many questions. He'd wound up working for the young fool because he had gotten him a spot in the trailer park behind the Horseman's Motel to park the RV and had even hooked it up to his own electricity.

Suitcase had left the young fool have Zeno's stalls in Barn Z. Medicine Ed suspected it was because Suitcase realized Pelter was one of the young fool's horses. His idea was that Suitcase thought that Pelter's owner wouldn't have sold him to just anyone. Medicine Ed noticed Deucey looking for Medicine Ed to walk Spinoza for her. He likes the horse but realized that he scared easily. Right now the horse wasn't Deucey's but wasn't Joe Dale Biggs' either. Medicine Ed knew it was Biggy's fault that Spinoza didn't have a home. He remembered the incident with Biggy, the dentist and Spinoza. Spinoza had not yet been castrated Medicine Ed wasn't sure why not. He recalled the horse would sometimes refuse to come out of the gate at all at races. When he did come out he had won only once that Medicine Ed could remember. Maggie crooned over Little Spinoza and begged Deucey to let her walk him.

Even though the young fool was paying him well as he had promised, Medicine Ed wondered where the money was coming from in his operation. He'd never seen any of the owners around the barn like he did for Zeno. Medicine Ed began talking to Deucey about Spinoza how it was too bad that no one was willing to take the horse even though he had good bloodlines and his price was only three thousand dollars. When Medicine Ed hinted at Deucey that he had heard Joe Dale had given her the horse she reminded Medicine Ed there were no deals at the racetrack where there weren't strings attached. Deucey knew that if she took anything from Joe Dale he would own her.

As they talked Joe Dale's car rolled toward them. The man motioned to Deucey and asked her to get in the car saying that Joe Dale had something to discuss with her. Deucey got out of the car a short while later mumbling cuss words. The window for the backseat passenger went down and Medicine Ed was surprised to see Two-Tie sitting there. He said hello to Margaret and told her that he looked like her mother except for the hair. Deucey said that to make matters worse Two-Tie had asked her to stand as the owner-trainer of someone else's horse, someone she suspected was a crook. Deucey tried to figure where she could get three grand quickly to buy Spinoza. Meanwhile Maggie asked if the man in the car had been Rudy Samuels. No one answered because no one knew him by that name. Both Maggie and Deucey said they had a thousand



dollars they could put down on Little Spinoza. Medicine Ed said he could get a thousand and that he'd think about going in on their deal.

In Chapter 13, Margaret is compared to Mary the mother of Jesus. She had equal parts both sinister and dexter parts. She was a Jew, both a good and bad aspect of her personality. Maggie was luck, she had left her family when Tommy had asked. She also allowed him to do as he wanted with her. Tommy believed she was his twin.

Analysis

The blue car appears again in this section of the novel. This time Two-Tie is in the car. Joe Dale and Two-Tie ask Deucey to front as owner for someone else's horses. She refuses. Although Two-Tie has appeared in the previous chapter as a sort of redeemer for Maggie, the reader gets a bad taste in his mouth for the man in this section as he tries to strong hand Deucey into taking charge of horses of which she isn't interested in being in charge. Notice also that although Two-Tie has asked others not to speak to Maggie about him he speaks to her himself, even goes to the danger of being seen on the racetrack, an area from which he has been banned to speak to her. By this point the reader has probably caught on that Maggie's frizzy hair is her most distinguishing feature. Two-Tie comments that she is beautiful, that she looks just like her mother, with the exception of her hair. Maggie, who knows her uncle only by his birth name of Rudy Samuels, asks if that was the man in the car. No one answers her because they don't know Two-Tie by his birth name.

Luck continues to be called up frequently in this section of the novel. Deucey, for instance, believes she is lacking in luck. She tells Medicine Ed she doesn't believe she has enough luck to own two horses. "Every time I ever had two horses I end up with none" (90). This becomes self fulfilling prophecy for Deucey. Medicine Ed is probably the character who believes in luck and superstition the most. When Maggie runs backwards in front of him as he leads one of the horses he believes it is bad luck. He also worries about Maggie using what he called "bad luck money" (94) to buy her part of Little Spinoza's ownership. Medicine Ed believes this money is bad luck simply because it is the money Maggie won off Boll Weevil's race.

In the theme of good versus evil notice that Maggie has an outspoken innocence about her. She isn't afraid to tell Medicine Ed that she suspects he talks about her behind her back. At the same time she says what she thinks about him to his face.

Notice what Medicine Ed says to Maggie when she assumes that all the horses at larger tracks that run stakes races are all healthy animals who are in good shape. He tells her that there is no real difference between small time tracks and large tracks. As Maggie struggles to find her way around the track Medicine Ed advises her to learn from the old grooms, to watch them and see what they do and then follow their lead. Another aspect of life at the race track is illustrated by Deucey when she struggles with her desire to have Little Spinoza but at the same time wants to keep from getting tied up with Joe



Dale. Joe Dale has tried to give her the horse but she knows if she takes it she will be indebted to Joe Dale, a situation in which she doesn't want to be.

Notice also that Medicine Ed tries to figure why Suitcase has decided to put all of Tommy's horses together in one barn. He believes it is because Suitcase might have decided Tommy is legitimate because he has Pelter, once a stakes winning horse, who had been owned by Roland Hickok. Suitcase indicates he didn't think Hickok would have sold the horse to just anyone. In reality, remember, it is Two-Tie who asks Suitcase to put all of his niece's horses together in one barn and not give her the run around. Suitcase covers his reasoning for the change well with his interest in Pelter.

Also of interest in this section is Medicine Ed's curiosity about where Tommy's money is coming from. The boy is paying him well and taking care of his horses well but as far as Medicine Ed can tell he doesn't have anyone with money backing him. This concerns Medicine Ed first of all because he's familiar with race track finances and wonders when Tommy's money will dry up. Second of all since Zeno's death Medicine Ed is at Tommy's mercy for his livelihood. If Tommy goes bankrupt, Medicine Ed loses his ability to make money and has to go looking for another job.

Thus far in the novel Medicine Ed has been interested in finding a permanent home for himself. He's tired of working all the time and tired of feeling displaced. This desire for a home may endear Little Spinoza to him because he believes the horse is also looking for a home. Even though the horse has good breeding, no one seems to want him because he has been termed as being crazy. This lack of a home on the horse's part may account for some of Medicine Ed's decision to go in with Maggie and Deucey to buy the horse.

Medicine Ed begins trying to teach Maggie how to properly care for horses more for his own sanity than to actually benefit her. She has been driving him crazy with her questions and impatience. In the theme of religion Medicine Ed compares the different thoughts on the proper care of horses to religion. Just as different religious sects follow different practices, so do different grooms, he explains. Religion also comes up in Chapter 13, the chapter narrated from Tommy's point of view. He compares Maggie to Mary the mother of Jesus as he points out her virtues as well as her sins.

Notice also that Tommy continues to refer to Maggie as his twin sister. It is an interesting concept that makes the relationship between the two have almost an incestuous feel. Notice also Tommy believes his luck came to him when he got Pelter. He thinks that if he ever loses Pelter that he will also lose Maggie.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss Deucey, Medicine Ed and Maggie's decision to try to buy Little Spinoza. Do you think this is a good idea? Why or why not? Why will Deucey not accept the horse as a gift?



Discussion Question 2

In her book Gordon not only gives the human characters personalities but also creates personalities for the horses. How do these personality descriptions for the horses, like Little Spinoza and Pelter, add to the story?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss Tommy's comparison of Maggie to Mary mother of Jesus. Do you think he loves Maggie or is he just infatuated with the idea that she has brought him luck?

Vocabulary

etiquette, vintage, peculiar, conformation, pickney, discretion, insolence, melancholy



Second Race, Chapters 14-16

Summary

In Chapter 14, Medicine Ed told Little Spinoza that Maggie and Deucey planned to have Spinoza castrated. He told the horse he'd take his testicles and do good with them. Medicine Ed had no problem getting Two-Tie to loan him money to buy his part of Little Spinoza's ownership when he asked. Medicine Ed lied and told Two-Tie he needed the money to go to the dentist. While they talked, Two-Tie tried to get information from Medicine Ed about Tommy Hansel. He learned the man had sold cars prior to being in horse racing. He also asked Medicine Ed how Tommy got along with Maggie. Medicine Ed told Two-Tie the two seemed to get along well. When Two-Tie pressed Medicine Ed said he believed Maggie's fascination with Tommy and with the horses would pass. Medicine Ed felt pity for Two-Tie after he hung up the phone. He almost liked Maggie a little since he knew she was related to Two-Tie. After he heard Maggie arguing with Tommy later Medicine Ed told her she was likely to lose her home and job if she kept up her nagging. He was surprised when she agreed with him.

In Chapter 15, Little Spinoza's castration is described from the viewpoint of the horse as the feeling of the ground coming up to meet him and the sounds of the snippers are described. After the castration the point of view returns to the third person. When the vet castrated Little Spinoza Maggie noticed that Medicine Ed slipped out of the barn, picked up the testicles, put them in a can and slipped back into the barn so quickly she wondered if he had really been there at all. Maggie spent her time rubbing Little Spinoza with old gunny sacks. She felt she could communicate with the horse this way. She wondered why she enjoyed taking care of other organisms in this way. She talked to him about the loss of his sex life and told him it would have been too hectic for him. At its best, sex was a form of slavery, she said.

After Alice the exercise girl had ridden Little Spinoza she said he wasn't scared anymore. Maggie contended there was speed in him somewhere but Alice couldn't find it. Deucey admitted she had a thing for Alice and wanted her to beg Deucey to let her ride Little Spinoza in a race. Medicine Ed, Deucey and Maggie finally found a \$5,000 claiming race in which to enter the horse. Maggie and Medicine Ed were listed as owners. Deucey managed to get Earlie Beaufait to ride the horse. Earlie warned them he would punish the horse if it acted up on him but that he would also find the speed if the horse had any.

While they were preparing Spinoza the day of the race Joe Dale Bigg stopped by in his blue car. He asked why Maggie and Medicine Ed were listed as owners. Joe Dale tried to give Deucey the money back she had paid him for Spinoza. Deucey refused. Joe Dale asked about Maggie, studied her and commented on her small size.

In Chapter 16, the tense changes to the second person point of view. You (referring to Tommy) told Maggie her act of buying into Little Spinoza's ownership without your



permission was her unruliest act yet. You asked how she thought you should punish her and believed she intended for you to punish her sexually. You were angry because you had wanted to claim the Mahdi back and would have if you had the money. You knew there might come a day when her horse had to race against your horse. You left her tied up after you finished with her sexually to humiliate her as you asked her again what she meant by buying into the horse. She criticized the race you'd put Pelter into saying she was afraid he would do well then their bets would be off. You had to sit down when she said she was trying to keep busy so she didn't have to think about things too much and want to leave. You put your hands around her neck and told her how easy it would be for you to kill her. You felt her blocking you out and dropped your hands telling her that you didn't feel like killing her. You untied her as she had asked, but knew that she would never bow down before you and thank you for granting her her life.

Analysis

While most of the novel features the thoughts and view of the human characters there is a short section in Chapter 15 when the point of view changes to that of Little Spinoza. The thoughts and descriptions of the castration comes directly from Little Spinoza as he hears and feels what is going on even though he can't feel anything because of the medicine he has been given. The point of view quickly changes back to an emphasis on Maggie as she watches Medicine Ed collect the testicles in a can and disappear before anyone even sees him. The author probably decides to tell this small piece of the novel with an emphasis on Little Spinoza because the horse is the only one who would know what it is like to be castrated.

In the theme of luck and superstition notice that Medicine Ed promises Little Spinoza that he will do good with his testicles. The reader has to wonder if Medicine Ed has hoodoo plans for Little Spinoza's discarded parts. Notice also Deucey's belief that her luck is running thin because she has two horses in her ownership. It is as if she believes she doesn't have enough luck to cover both the horses, keep them safe and running well.

In the theme of good versus evil it appears at times that Tommy and Maggie's relationship is almost that of good versus evil. Medicine Ed describes Maggie as being "frizzly like old rope" (105) and comments that she is stronger than Tommy. Notice also that when Medicine Ed warns Maggie that if she keeps nagging Tommy she will lose her position with him. She agrees with him and admits that she should never have quit her own job to work with Tommy. In this section Maggie is already recognizing the mistakes she has made in agreeing to join Tommy in his racetrack adventure. She doesn't like the way Tommy ignores her intelligence and often abuses her when she speaks up for herself but she isn't sure how to get out of the life she has created for herself.

It is in this section that Maggie speaks out against Tommy because she realizes he isn't following the protocol he told her about when they first came to the track. She believes they were there to make money no matter the circumstances. He has gotten distracted



by losing the Mahdi. He seems most angry that Maggie uses her money to buy a horse of her own instead of helping him get what he wanted.

Remember from this section how whiney Tommy gets when Maggie suggests that she is thinking about leaving the racing life. It is in this section of the novel that a change takes place in their relationship. Of all the times that Tommy has been on the border of abusing Maggie and even crossed that border this is the first time that it appears that he has really scared her when he puts his hands around her throat and threatens to kill her. Shortly after his momentary thought that he could kill her Tommy returns to his former way of thinking, that she has been the one who has saved his life.

Although Medicine Ed didn't like Maggie at first he realizes more and more that Maggie understands his position in life more than he'd thought was possible. For instance, he realizes she is right when she suggests he bought into Little Spinoza because he wanted to have a say in his life and work, something he'd never had before. Also in the theme of racetrack life, notice that Maggie has picked up the habit of rubbing Little Spinoza with an old wash softened cloth bag. Medicine Ed doesn't believe the act of rubbing a horse has any medicinal or therapeutic purposes. Remember this because it will be important later in the novel.

Spinoza and his journey to become a racing horse once again is a light point in the novel as his three owners scratch their heads trying to find some way to make him run. He isn't scared of everything now that he's been gelded but also won't put forth much effort during exercise. "Alice says he's moony. Don't get me wrong, she tells me, he's having a good time out there, looking at the geese flying down to the river and listening to the wind" (114).

Remember in the previous section that Tommy is afraid that if he lost Pelter he would also lose Maggie. Medicine Ed seems to agree with this idea when he talks to Two-Tie about the relationship between Maggie and Tommy. He tells Two-Tie that he believes a good deal of the attraction between the two is tied up in the horses and Maggie's ideas of romance.

Notice in the end of Chapter 15 Maggie's snub at Joe Dale. He asks her how she likes the racetrack and she answers she doesn't like all the dirt. This response could be interpreted two ways. She could be referring to the physical dirt in the barns and track areas or the dirty owners and trainers, as she has concluded that Joe Dale is.

Finally, notice that Deucey, who is a lesbian, had hoped Alice, the exercise girl, would show an interest in Little Spinoza and beg to be allowed to ride him. Deucey is attracted to Alice and hopes this might be the beginning of a relationship for the two of them.

Discussion Question 1

What do you think Medicine Ed plans to do with the horse testicles? What do you think he means when he tells Little Spinoza he will do good with them?



Discussion Question 2

Discuss the way the Tommy uses sex as both a punishment and reward for Maggie. Why does he try to pretend like he is in power over her when he really feels so indebted to her?

Discussion Question 3

Why does the author combine so much sexual language and references in the parts of the novel told from Tommy's point of view. What do you think the author hopes to convey to the reader by this use of sexuality?

Vocabulary

affronted, notorious, brusque, incuriously, predecessor, byzantine, taciturn, incipient, libertine, squalid, incorrigible, egregiously, perfidious, disgorge, consort



Second Race, Chapters 17-20

Summary

In Chapter 17, Vernon called Two-Tie to let him know that Pelter was in a race. Vernon told him the Mahdi was also running that same Saturday and that Tommy Hansel was talking about claiming the horse back. Vernon wondered if Tommy was crazy. Two-Tie warned Vernon that no one should try to claim Pelter in the race. He also found out the race he wanted arranged for the Lord of Misrule was going badly but Two-Tie gave Vernon some ammunition he could use in getting plans for the race in motion. Before they hang up Vernon told Two-Tie that Maggie was listed as part owner on a horse owned by Bigg. Vernon said the horse was in a race on Friday and that Maggie, Deucey and Medicine Ed were all listed as owners. Two-Tie believed Bigg had cheated the three of them by selling them a bad horse. Vernon didn't say anything because he was also friends with Bigg. Two-Tie believed Bigg might also like to have Maggie if he saw her but Vernon argued Maggie wasn't Bigg's type.

In Chapter 18, Medicine Ed, Maggie and Deucey all expected the worst from Spinoza's first race. Even though it's only 30 minutes until race time Spinoza was not acting as if he knew he was going to have to race. Alice walked by and to their surprised offered to ride Spinoza in the next race. As Spinoza was paraded out and got closer to the starting gate he began to remember where he was and what was about to happen. When the tattoo man rolled up Spinoza's lip the horse's eyes grew wide. When he was shut in the gate Spinoza went crazy and reared up. He came out of the gate sideways with Earlie barely clinging to his neck. Although he started out behind Spinoza worked his way up to the fourth place spot. When Earlie asked him to run, however, Little Spinoza seemed to stop trying. Earlie started cursing and whipping the horse but it had no effect. After the race was over Earlie rode up to them, removed his goggles and hit Spinoza three more times across his face. Deucey yelled at him to get off the horse. He did so and let go of the reins allowing Spinoza to run away. Maggie went after him speaking to him in her special language and was able to catch him. They realize the horse had speed but needed to find someone who could keep him running to the end of the race. Maggie suggested they should let Alice ride him in the next race.

In Chapter 19, the tense changes again from third to second person point of view, from Tommy's perspective. You realized you had power over Joe Dale Bigg when he came looking for Maggie. Bigg mentioned he knew that you had gotten Pelter from Roland Hickok. After he'd made you feel proud for being chosen as the owner of Pelter Bigg also mentioned you were lucky because you got girls to work for you. You knew he would get to Maggie. Hansel told Bigg it was because of Pelter that Maggie worked so hard. You knew that Bigg wanted to make a deal with you and you decided to take it but turn it upside down on him. Bigg suggested he could send owners Hansel's way with horses he could race. Figuring you had nothing to lose you told Bigg you wanted the Mahdi back. Bigg said he'd see what he could do. You didn't intend to do what Bigg had asked you to do for him. You believed he could do you no harm.



In Chapter 20, although Medicine Ed felt like his world was coming apart he found some harmony the night that Little Spinoza raced again. Earlie Beaufait had badmouthed the horse and Alice, the new jockey who would be riding him. People assumed when Deucey put Spinoza in a \$3,000 claiming race she was just trying to get out of him what she put in. Alice had the idea she could put Spinoza to sleep until the point in the race she wanted to wake him up and make him run. They figured they would be the only three who would put in money in on Spinoza, except perhaps Two-Tie because Medicine Ed would have to tell him when he asked for another loan. Appropriately, Hansel was out of town seeing about a horse the week of the race that Deucey put him in.

As Alice rode by singing a church hymn to Spinoza before the race Medicine Ed rubbed a red flannel bag in his pocket. Medicine Ed remembered his mother singing that song and could hear her voice. When the horses left the gate Little Spinoza was running far behind the pack. With three-eighths of the mile left Alice let Spinoza run. He sailed past the other horses to win the race. Medicine Ed was happy about the win until he looked around and saw Joe Dale Bigg's face. Bigg looked like he thought there had been a plan to make him look like a fool. Medicine Ed rubbed the flannel bag. He couldn't do anything for Deucey or Maggie but he prayed that the trouble would stay away from him. The bag contained a leave alone powder along with Spinoza's dried testicles.

Analysis

Notice in this section that Vernon's speech is just about as bad as Medicine Ed's. "Sadday" for Saturday, "oughta" for ought to and "wit" for with. As Two-Tie talks to Vernon he asks him to put out the word that no one is to claim Pelter in the race. Two-Tie does this because he believes it will upset Maggie if her horse gets claimed. The order to keep Pelter from getting claimed has lasting effects.

Notice also that Two-Tie gives Vernon his opinion of Joe Dale act of selling Spinoza to Maggie. He believes that his niece has been suckered into buying a bad horse from a con man. Significant is the idea that he is becoming more lenient in his actions because he is emotionally attached to Maggie even though he doesn't really know her. As is the case for decisions made based on emotions, Two-Tie may be making some bad decisions or at least not fully thought through decisions because he's letting his affection for Maggie get in the way. Notice also the reader learns for the first time that Vernon is friends with Joe Dale as well as Two-Tie. This will put Vernon in a difficult situation later in the novel.

The author's description of Little Spinoza's first race is both humorous and upsetting. A variety of similes are used, comparisons using the words like or as, to describe the horse. Before the race the horse is described as being "as cool as a Tiffany cocktail stirrer" (p. 130) and not seeming to notice he is going to run a race. As he is led to the post the author describes Spinoza's actions as being like "a small boy on his way to dip tadpoles in the woods, marching along, splish splash, across the rain-glazed parking lots, gazing at everything brightly and airily, swinging his little pail" (133). It is when he is



checked by the tattoo man that Spinoza's eyes get big and he seems to remember what is happening. It is at this point that the tone of the story of Spinoza's race changes as he becomes difficult. In Deucey's words the horse "looks like a grenade without the pin all of a sudden" (134). The author has changed the tone by changing the way she describes the horse. He has gone from being like a harmless little boy to a weapon of war that might explode at any moment.

Consider the way that Earlie treats the horse. He knew Little Spinoza's reputation before he agreed to ride him yet he is surprised when the horse acts up in the gate. He takes his frustration out on Little Spinoza, beating him on the face with his stick three times after the race is finished. Even though Earlie thought the race was disastrous, Maggie, Medicine Ed and Deucey are pleased that they have found that Little Spinoza does have some speed in him but are unsure how to make his speed work for them. They also realize they need to find some way to keep him calm during the race. They consider Alice's offer to ride the horse the next time out. Medicine Ed has already said that Alice "look like some conjure woman's helping hand" (131). The reader has to wonder if Alice, like Medicine Ed, also practices some sort of dark magic that could be used on Little Spinoza. When Alice suggests that she could put the horse to sleep and keep him asleep until she needed to call on his for speed his owners are doubtful but allow her to try it.

In his twisted mind Tommy believes that he is gaining some popularity at the track when Joe Dale comes to him looking for Maggie. Joe Dale butters Tommy up by praising his horses and the fact that Roland Hickok had taken to him. During the conversation Tommy shares with Joe Dale the information that Maggie loves Pelter even more than she loves him. When Joe Dale offers to send some owners Tommy's way Tommy recognizes this is Joe Dale's way of getting Tommy under his power but Tommy believes he can work Joe Dale's offer against Joe Dale. Instead of taking the offer to work with owners, Tommy says he wants to be able to claim the Mahdi back. Notice that Tommy realizes he has put Maggie in a dangerous situation by making a deal with Joe Dale but he doesn't seem too terribly worried about her.

Joe Dale is one of the characters that represents pure evil in the novel. He knows what he wants and goes after it regardless of who gets hurt. In Chapter 19 Tommy thinks how the man doesn't even like his horses. Tommy describes Joe Dale as being "nothing but a dark emptiness — the absence of good" (144).

In the theme of life at the racetrack Medicine Ed gives some interesting background on the way that the grooms' pride in their work and the treatment of the horses has fallen sharply. Many of the grooms laugh at the way Medicine Ed takes care of the horses but he is disturbed when he sees the way the animals are abused and neglected. He notes they are started in racing too young, aren't allowed the proper rest between races and are given a variety of medicines to make them run faster but in the end the horses wear out more quickly than ever.

In the theme of luck and superstition notice that Deucey and the other owners of Little Spinoza believe it is good luck that Earlie had badmouthed Spinoza. They believe these



bad rumors will keep people from betting on him. Religion and luck combine when Medicine Ed hears the song that Alice sings to put Spinoza to sleep. He can hear his mother singing the song, reminding him of when he was a small child. Medicine Ed hears the words of the song “We will understand it better by and by” (151) just as Spinoza begins to make his move.

Notice again the literary devices that the author uses to describe Spinoza’s actions and the reactions of the owners who are watching the race. Instead of fighting in the box Spinoza steps “into the eight slot civil as you please, like a man walk in a cloak room to ask for his hat” (150). As they watch Spinoza fall behind in the race the author personifies trouble and disappointment in the quote “Trouble cotton up they lungs. Disappointment sit heavy on they heads” (150).

An important symbol in this section of the novel is the red flannel bag that Medicine Ed keeps in his pocket and rubs often during Spinoza’s race. The bag contains a leave alone powder as well as Spinoza’s dried testicles. Medicine Ed believes the concoction in the bag will keep him safe from Joe Dale’s anger. He believes, however, that both Deucey and Maggie will be hurt by the man but believes there is nothing he can do to help them.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Medicine Ed think trouble is coming after Little Spinoza wins his race? Does he suspect something might happen? Is this why he made up his bag of leave alone powder in advance?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss Medicine Ed’s reaction to the song that Alice sings to Spinoza during the race. Why is it special to him? Who does he believe is talking to him through the song?

Discussion Question 3

Do you think Tommy is being foolish for trying to conduct business with Joe Dale? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

petrified, insinuate, affable, candid, geniality, decreed, apprentice



Third Race, Chapters 21-23

Summary

In Chapter 21, as Maggie cooked beans and bread for Tommy she realized she liked her life. She believed he was a true racetracker in his virtues as well as his faults. He had a college education like she did and he thought they were predestined to be together. She realized, however, that her life was getting dangerous. The morning after Spinoza had won the race Deucey had her front teeth knocked out. She said she fell down but Maggie didn't believe her. She slept in the stall with Little Spinoza that week to make sure nothing would happen to him but on Tuesday she found Grizzly dead in his stall. Someone had poured him a half gallon of sweet feed. Maggie also felt there was something strange about Tommy going off to see about a horse. The day before he'd left Tommy was fine but on Wednesday he seemed fevered and hurried telling Maggie he was tired of their life and wanted to make it big. She hadn't seen him since he'd left four days ago.

As she stirred the beans the phone rang. Tommy whispered to her that he couldn't talk. He told her to get a stall ready for another horse. He also told her that she and Medicine Ed would have to get Pelter ready for the race the next day by themselves. He wanted the horse to be dosed with bute before the race. As she was asking him if he wanted to know how Pelter was she heard a woman's voice and Tommy became businesslike telling her to do what he asked. After he confirmed she remembered what he'd asked he hung up. Maggie decided to loosen the bonds between the two of them.

In Chapter 22, during a poker game Medicine Ed told Two-Tie how pretty Pelter looked winning his race. Jojo, the jockey said the horse had run like an angel. Two-Tie said he wouldn't have wanted to have seen Breezy D'Ambrisi take Pelter away. During the race Hansel had also bought the Mahdi back. Two-Tie told them that D'Ambrisi would never race Pelter but would give him back to Maggie. The others suggested D'Ambrisi might have had someone else who had told him to buy Pelter. They were surprised because Two-Tie was getting so upset about the horse. They were so disturbed by his actions that the card game broke up early that evening.

In Chapter 23, Two-Tie called asking for Mr. Smithers. When Mr. Smithers did come to the phone Two-Tie was cold with him. Smithers told him Pelter had been claimed by D'Ambrisi. Two-Tie told Vernon he already knew about the claim. Even though Two-Tie demanded to know Vernon wouldn't tell him who had put the money up for Pelter. Two-Tie guessed it was Bigg. When Two-Tie asked why Bigg wanted the horse Vernon asked his friend to let it go. Two-Tie threatened to call Posner about Bigg's actions. Vernon changed the subject by telling Two-Tie that the race for the Lord of Misrule was coming along.



Analysis

Significant in this section of the novel is Maggie's change in her opinion of Tommy. She begins the chapter believing that she is happy with the racetrack life. Her set of mind changes when it becomes clear that Tommy has been spending time in New York not to see about a horse but to see about another woman. It is a turning point in their relationship because at this point Maggie decides to begin to separate herself from Tommy. Also significant is that Breezy D'Ambrisi claims Pelter even after Two-Tie put out the word that Pelter is not to be claimed. Notice how uncomfortable the people at Two-Tie's poker game get when he tells them that D'Ambrisi will give the horse back to Maggie. They wonder about his interest in Pelter and Maggie.

Note the change in Two-Tie's behavior. He is described as being a gentleman and unexcitable. This is the first time many of the people who are seeing his fit have seen him excited. He'd always stayed aloof and had no attachments in the past. It is possible that Maggie will be Two-Tie's downfall. One of the major questions that the author raises about Two-Tie is whether the man is ultimately good or evil. He appears to be a character who is neither completely evil, like Joe Dale, or completely innocent, like Maggie. He manipulates people to get what he wants but often pads his threats with favors for the person he is threatening. Even though Two-Tie believes he has the power to keep Maggie safe and from being separated from her horse, his emotions may be getting the best of him. He may be allowing his affection for his niece to cloud his better judgement and may be making decisions that will hurt both him and her.

Also interesting in this section of the novel is the way that Pelter's win is described. Although this third part of the novel focuses on that race, the race has already been run before the section even starts. The author begins the section with various people reporting to Two-Tie how well Pelter ran despite his age. The author may not include the details of the race in this section of the novel because she wants to focus more closely on the fall out from Pelter being claimed.

More people in this section begin to refer to Tommy as being crazy in this section of the novel. When he claims the Mahdi back for more money than the horse is worth people say that he is losing his mind. Even Maggie remembers him telling her that when trying to make money at the racetrack he couldn't worry about losing a horse. His original money making scheme was to "throw a sure winner in the cheapest possible claiming race and cash that big bet instead" (159). It appears that with the Mahdi Tommy has forgotten his own advice. Maggie also wonders about Tommy's sanity when she thinks about the way he sees her as his twin, his predestined one.

Despite all their talk about luck and superstition Maggie and the others are realizing just how cruel a place the racetrack can be. After Spinoza wins his race, an occurrence that should be good, the three are fearful for their lives because of the way that Joe Dale retaliates. Deucey is beaten up after Little Spinoza wins. She won't tell them who did it or even confirm she was beaten. She instead makes up a story about falling down drunk that they all know isn't true. If Joe Dale is responsible for Deucey's injuries it



would prove he really is a low life for having a woman beaten physically. Because she is afraid something will happen to Spinoza Deucey sleeps in his stall the next several nights, however, it is Grizzly who is killed in retaliation.

Notice that while Maggie is fixing food for Tommy she is thinking to herself about luck. She believes that luck is not something someone could have just once in a while. “A person had to see himself, or herself, as lucky not just once in a while, but plugged into a steady current of luck like an electrical appliance, a fan or a toaster” (p. 159). Maggie also believes that one can push one’s luck and lose the thing they love. Just as she is deciding that she is happy with Tommy she learns that he is having an affair with a woman up north. Maggie believes it is because she pushed her luck that she is learning that Tommy is cheating on her.

Also in the theme of life at the racetrack notice that when Maggie tells Tommy about Little Spinoza’s success in his race she makes sure to use the “racetrack form of the verb” (p. 164). Even though the race is over and in the past, she doesn’t tell him that Little Spinoza won his race using the verb in its proper past tense but instead uses a form of the present tense of the verb as was used in racing lingo. Notice also in this section that Tommy tells Maggie to use bute on Pelter in the race coming up against the Lord of Misrule.

Discussion Question 1

Why do you think that Tommy tells Maggie to use bute on Pelter during the coming up race?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss Joe Dale’s method of retaliation after Little Spinoza won his race. How does his behavior affect your opinion of him?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the character of Two-Tie. Do you think he is getting too involved in Maggie and Pelter? Why or why not? Do you think it will lead to his down fall?

Vocabulary

transmigration, credulous, blatant, predestined, deft, provocation, vigilance, tout, amok, indiscreet, furtive, punctilious



Third Race, Chapters 24-27

Summary

In Chapter 24, when Medicine Ed saw Maggie laying in Pelter's empty stall he remembered his own hurt when Broomstick, the one horse he'd loved, had died. Tommy was in such a way about getting the Mahdi back that he didn't say anything to Maggie about Pelter. Medicine Ed watched Maggie from the tack room trying to think what he could say to her to make her feel better. As he watched he saw Bigg's car drive up. Medicine Ed could tell that Maggie didn't like Bigg. Bigg tormented Maggie about the loss of Pelter but then began to catch her interest by suggesting that he could talk to D'Ambrisi about Pelter. Medicine Ed tried telepathically to send Maggie a message to stay away from Bigg. He told Maggie that if she got in the car with him they could go and talk to D'Ambrisi right then. Even though Medicine Ed continued to try to send warning messages to Maggie she got in the car with Bigg anyway.

In Chapter 25, Medicine Ed called Two-Tie to tell him that Maggie had gone with Bigg. Two-Tie got his gun and called Roy's Taxicab. Elizabeth insisted on going with him.

In Chapter 26, the tense changes again from third to second person point of view, from Tommy's perspective. You went looking for Maggie. You went to see if she was in Pelter's stall but instead D'Ambrisi was there. He said Joe Dale had made him claim Pelter. Thinking that Pelter was in D'Ambrisi's van you walked toward it but D'Ambrisi said the horse was in Bigg's barn. Posner had called D'Ambrisi telling him he had to give the horse back. D'Ambrisi didn't want to go to Bigg's barn to get the horse alone. You saw Medicine Ed who told you that Maggie had gone with Bigg. You followed D'Ambrisi out to the road.

In Chapter 27, Maggie got into the car with Bigg even though she knew she shouldn't do so but she didn't really think he would hurt her. When they arrived at the farm Bigg motioned to his son, Biggy, who was leaning against a fence and told him to get them sodas. Biggy brought sodas in open bottles. Maggie drank her's right away. Bigg told her that he made D'Ambrisi claim Pelter for him because he had a thing for her and wanted to have something that she cared about. He wanted her attention in exchange for getting her horse back. Joe Dale offered to take her to see Pelter but Maggie realized she couldn't stand up. She managed to get up. As she tried to walk across the room and noticed Bigg smiling at her she realized he had drugged her.

As Joe Dale talked to Maggie in Pelter's stall Maggie knew that no matter what she did she would get hurt. As Joe Dale continued to try to convince Maggie to do as he wanted she heard shouting outside. Joe Dale left and Maggie considered her options for getting away. She decided her best bet was to try to ride Pelter though she'd never been much of a rider and had never ridden bareback. She thought of a monkey that had grabbed hold of her blouse once when she was in a pet store. She thought she would be like that monkey if she could get on Pelter. Once she got on the horse and he broke into a run



she felt she could stay on him if he didn't stop or swerve. As they ran past a taxi parked in the driveway a dog in the backseat barked and scared Pelter making him swerve and Maggie fall off.

Maggie lay on the ground next to the taxicab and watched as an elderly man wearing two bow ties came out of the ranch house. He asked her if she was all right. If Joe Dale had laid a hand on her he said he would kill him. Maggie asked if he was her Uncle Rudy. Before he could answer Biggy came out of the house and hit the man across the back of the neck making the gun that he was carrying discharge. Two-Tie told Biggy to go back in the house and offered to take Maggie home. He told her that he had worked everything out for her and that she would get her horse back that night. Maggie believed him. He advised her not to take anything else from Joe Dale. He asked her if she needed money and then told her to memorize the name Lord of Misrule.

Analysis

In this section of the novel the reader is faced with the theme of good versus evil and must make decisions about the ambitions and motivations of particular characters. For instance, notice the way that Joe Dale is cruel to Maggie. Even though he wants something from her he still torments her about her loss of Pelter. Does Joe Dale believe that his cruelty is endearing? Does he really believe that Maggie will cooperate with him after he's been so mean to her? He must be doing something right because even with his cruelty fresh on her mind Maggie still goes with Joe Dale when he promises her he will take her to her horse. Even though Maggie and Medicine Ed, who spies on Joe Dale as he lures Maggie into his car, don't know it at the time Joe Dale is able to get Maggie's horse back for her because he is the one who ordered Pelter be claimed in the first place. Notice that in Chapter 26 when D'Ambrisi confronts Tommy at Indian Mound Downs the reader learns for sure that it is Joe Dale who put D'Ambrisi up to claiming the horse in the first place.

Another character the reader might want to think about in terms of good or evil is D'Ambrisi. Is he a good or evil character? Is he just stuck between three people who are stronger than he? When Two-Tie compares the racing people who attended his poker party to dogs he called D'Ambrisi a "chickenshit dachshund, the kind that pees itself, and your shoes, whenever you give it a pat on the head" (68). When Tommy sees D'Ambrisi in front of Pelter's stall on Page 187 notice the way that he describes the man. He is a "runt" who "slouched" like a "cowardly low-rent demon." D'Ambrisi works for Joe Dale, the man who put him up to claiming Pelter. He doesn't want to do anything to anger Joe Dale because he might lose his job. In the same respect D'Ambrisi appears to be very afraid of Posner who has given him a call and told him to give the horse back. Notice that Tommy agrees to go with D'Ambrisi only because he has learned that Joe Dale not only has Pelter but also has Maggie

The tone turns serious in Chapter 25 when Two-Tie learns Maggie has gone with Joe Dale. He gets his gun to take with him when he goes to Joe Dale's farm. Although the scene could be one that is very heavy and dramatic the author includes splashes of



humor that keep the story from getting too heavy. One of these humorous aspects is Maggie's actions as she struggles with the affects of the drug that Joe Dale gave her. Through the author's description the reader can imagine Maggie trying to get on Pelter to make her getaway even though her body isn't working correctly. This humor continues into the next section of the novel.

There are a few more things the reader should notice in this section of the novel. First, notice that Medicine Ed is able to empathize with Maggie's pain over losing Pelter. He understands how she feels because he had lost the one horse that he loved. For this reason Medicine Ed seems like a rational, reasonable human being. Tommy, on the other had, believes that Maggie needs to stop moping about losing her horse. Even though he basically went crazy when he lost his favored horse, he is able to find no sympathy for Maggie and her feelings. He wants her to be happy for him that he got his horse back but believes she should just get over her sadness about Pelter. This reaction on Tommy's part makes the reader dislike Tommy and wonder if he really is the best choice for Maggie.

Also in this section of the novel Maggie credits it to her luck that she is able to get onto Pelter and ride away on him. "She was riding a racehorse out of the hands of a storybook villain. Her luck had changed. She would make it" (199). These are Maggie's thoughts just before Pelter swerves when Elizabeth barks at him and she falls off. Notice that even with Maggie's lack of education in the racing business she is aware that Joe Dale's operation is not best for the horses. She describes what she sees as a low overhead, high turnaround operation. Again there is a reference to the story about Little Spinoza and the dentist. Maggie recognizes Biggy by the scar on his forehead

Notice that whenever Joe Dale's car comes to the racetrack, it is always a sign of something bad about to happen. When the writer mentions the slowly driving car the reader's heart drops wondering what is coming. Even Medicine Ed realizes Joe Dale is up to no good when he comes to the racetrack because he spies on the man as he lures Maggie into his car.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss Maggie's decision to get into Joe Dale's car even though she knows it isn't a good idea. What do you think went into her decision? What might have you done in the same situation?

Discussion Question 2

Why do you think Two-Tie takes a gun to Joe Dale's house when he goes for Maggie?



Discussion Question 3

Discuss the way the author keeps this section of the novel from becoming too dramatic even though it deals with serious topics like the kidnapping and drugging of Maggie.

Vocabulary

morose, rapacious, fractious, exuded, sadistic, miscreant, declivities, inert, prehensile, exuberance, abashed, fastidious



Third Race, Chapters 28-29

Summary

In Chapter 28, Two-Tie had such an urge to kill Joe Dale when the man came running from the barn that he had to remind himself he didn't want to die in jail in order to keep from killing the man. As Two-Tie and Joe Dale were arguing Biggy came out of the house with a deer rifle. Joe Dale made his son put the rifle down but told Two-Tie he'd decided not to give Maggie back the horse. As Two-Tie asked if D'Ambrisi had not called him and tried to find some way to tell him they were taking the horse D'Ambrisi drove onto the farm with his trailer. Joe Dale was angry. D'Ambrisi said he'd gotten a call from Baltimore telling him to give the horse back. Two-Tie promised Joe Dale he would be compensated and asked where Pelter was. As Maggie was thinking she was going to have to go after the horse herself Hansel came down the hill leading Pelter. Maggie told Hansel that she couldn't move because someone had given her a tranquilizer. Hansel thanked Joe Dale for looking after Maggie and then punched him in the face. Biggy tried to hit Hansel but Hansel ducked out of the way. He picked up the deer gun and hit Biggy in the back of the head with it. Even though Two-Tie was impressed that Hansel could take care of business, he knew there would be more trouble.

In Chapter 29, through the summer while Maggie worked and Tommy stayed busy elsewhere the two grew apart. Joe Dale suggested Tommy was having an affair with a woman named Natalie. Maggie knew she had to get away from that life. She had come to the realization that she might get killed.

Analysis

As the interactions between Two-Tie, Biggy and Joe Dale become more serious with guns coming out and such, the author continues to lighten the tone by describing the contrasting humor of the situation. Chapter 28 is told with a focus on Two-Tie's point of view. As the situation gets stranger and stranger he wonders how he got mixed up in that particular situation at all. Notice the language the author uses. Joe Dale "wiped a smile back onto his face" (205) when he sees Two-Tie. The sentence seems strange since the typical saying is that someone wiped a smile off someone else's face.

As Two-Tie, Biggy and Joe Dale are in the middle of a heated discussion with Two-Tie holding a gun, Biggy bringing out a deer rifle and Joe Dale ordering Two-Tie off his property D'Ambrisi interrupts the conversation when he comes up pulling his horse trailer. The trailer is described as being "the worst-looking horse van Two-Tie had ever seen, rusted out and patched in different colors like a gypsy wagon, some of its holes plugged with gray gobs of unsanded fiberglass and smeared with pink primer" (207). As Joe Dale began arguing with D'Ambrisi Maggie sat listening with her chin resting on the



sill of the cab's window. She piped up explaining to Joe Dale that she thought that Two-Tie was her uncle.

The men continue arguing so Maggie decides to take action into her own, not properly functioning hands. "Damn it, I'm going to crawl up there myself, she muttered. She sprang the door handle and fell out on the frozen mud" (209). It is at this point that Tommy Hansel appears like the storybook hero leading Pelter and taking charge of the situation. Notice that even though Two-Tie has just been threatened by Joe Dale, he still gets distracted when Joe Dale refers to Tommy as being crazy. Two-Tie asks Joe Dale to back up his claim as if something that Joe Dale said in the heat of the moment was something that Two-Tie could take seriously.

There is foreshadowing that there is trouble coming as Two-Tie watches Tommy first hit Joe Dale in the face and then hit Biggy in the back of the head with the deer rifle. Two-Tie is impressed to see that Tommy is taking up for Maggie but disturbed because he knows this show of violence on Tommy's part will bring trouble for them all.

Notice that later in this section of the novel Joe Dale comes to the track in his car trying to torment Maggie about the fact that Tommy is shacking up with another woman. He is disappointed because he doesn't get the lift out of her that he wants. It is when he talks to her like he does that Maggie realizes she has to get away from racing.

Discussion Question 1

How does the author keep the tone in Chapter 28 from getting too heavy?

Discussion Question 2

How do Two-Tie's memories of Joe Dale affect your opinion of Joe Dale? Does it surprise you that Two-Tie and Joe Dale were once close friends? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the state of Maggie and Tommy's relationship after they get Pelter back from Joe Dale. What is Joe Dale's motivation in telling Maggie about the woman with whom Tommy is having an affair?

Vocabulary

disinclination, guile, vaguely, faux, orifices



Fourth Race, Chapters 30-32

Summary

In Chapter 30, everyone was watching when the Lord of Misrule arrived. Medicine Ed referred to the horse as the Devil while Maggie commented she was feeling scared by the horse. They were surprised when the track's racing superintendent came out of the office to see the horse.

In Chapter 31, Medicine Ed began napping in the afternoon at the stables. He didn't walk over to his Winnebago any longer. He was afraid he was going to lose it. Medicine Ed had noticed even since the episode at Joe Dale's farm the young fool seemed to be going crazy. He was going to put the Mahdi in the race against the Lord of Misrule and believed it was some sort of competition where good would win out against evil. Maggie was going to run Pelter in that race as well. She had told Medicine Ed she planned to leave after she collected the money from the race. She realized there was something wrong with Tommy but didn't know what to do about it.

In Chapter 32, everyone was putting money on the Lord of Misrule. Even Jojo Wood who was set to ride Pelter in the race told Two-Tie he should bet on that horse. After everyone had left, Two-Tie took Elizabeth out for a walk. Even though he was finally in a position where he could help Maggie, he was worried. He noticed Donald hadn't come to see him even though he was in town. He thought of how he hadn't done anything for Donald when Lilian had died. He was afraid because he knew Donald blamed him for Lilian's death. He'd happened to run into Donald the night before at supper. The look in his eyes had been awful before Donald pretended to be happy to see him. He had thought Donald was doing badly because he'd needed the race set up for him but it appeared it was just the opposite. Donald was doing well but was still running an old sore horse who was past his prime. Two-Tie warned himself he needed to stay away from the race.

When he and Elizabeth got home from their walk Roy's taxi was sitting outside. Elizabeth got inside. He whistled and called for her but she wouldn't come out of the cab. When he leaned inside the taxi to make her get out Two-Tie was pushed inside the car. Biggy, who had a gun pushed against Two-Tie's backside, was making him get in the car. When he realized it wasn't Roy in the driver's seat but D'Ambrisi wearing Roy's hat and coat he knew it was over for both he and Elizabeth. He figured the two of them would take him to Donald or to Joe Dale but instead they started driving out past the landfill. Suddenly Two-Tie couldn't take anymore and tried to grab the gun from Biggy. There were three gunshots. Two-Tie realized he'd been hit. He was carried into the woods. He heard Elizabeth groaning as she settled in beside him.



Analysis

Good versus evil is a major theme that is presented in several different ways in this section of the novel. Good versus evil is Two-Tie being killed by D'Ambrisi and Biggy. Even though Two-Tie is a gangster and has done his share of evil in the world he has won a soft spot in the reader's heart by trying to take care of Maggie. Even as he knows that he is going to be killed by D'Ambrisi and Biggy he asks them not to leave Elizabeth alive with no one to take care of her. He dies thinking of others even if the one he is thinking of is his elderly dog.

Good versus evil also appears in the race between the Lord of Misrule and the Mahdi. The Lord of Misrule symbolizes evil. The race that has been set up for this horse is a fixed race intended for that horse to win so that certain people can win big money by betting on him. The horse is described as being the embodiment of the devil. His personality is described as being poisonous. His legs are so scarred and worn by years of racing that he can't stand correctly.

Medicine Ed listens as Tommy talks to his horse, the Mahdi, about a competition between good and evil. Good and evil seem to be warring in Tommy's own brain as he believes he can put the Mahdi in the race against the Lord of Misrule and win the race. Tommy thinks that the race will be an ultimate fight between good and evil in which the Mahdi can defeat the devil in the form of the Lord of Misrule.

Another symbol mentioned in the description of the Lord of Misrule's arrival at Indian Mound Downs is the puddle near the back gate. It is described as "the puddle that never dried, the puddle that had no bottom" (217). Just as the puddle appeared to have no bottom, there also appears to be no end to the shady deals carried out at the racetrack.

Medicine Ed begins to worry again about losing the only home he has in this section of the novel. He sees Tommy getting crazier and crazier and stops going to his Winnebago because he is afraid that soon he will lose it because it is Tommy who arranged to get it moved to the trailer park in the first place. When he hears Maggie talking about leaving the racetrack and getting "us" home he wonders if she intends to include him in her escape plan.

Discussion Question 1

Why do you think that Medicine Ed wonders if Maggie's talk about getting "us" home includes him? Why would she think she needs to take care of him?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss Two-Tie's feeling that he needed to stay away from the race involving The Lord of Misrule. Why do you think he felt so uncomfortable about the race?



Discussion Question 3

Were you satisfied with the way Two-Tie's life ended? Do you think he deserved better? Worse? Explain your reasoning behind your answer.

Vocabulary

luminous, prognosticator, valise, degrade, prudent, decrepit



Fourth Race, Chapters 33-37

Summary

In Chapter 33, the day of the race was the hottest of the summer. A young, crude boy who commented about the private parts of every woman who passed had been set to watch the Lord of Misrule.

In Chapter 34, Medicine Ed looked for a chance to spread his goofer dust in the Lord of Misrule's stall. He intended to bet enough on the horse that he'd be able to buy his home and not worry about working any more. Joe Dale had warned Medicine Ed that Hansel had better not mess up the intended results of the race. Medicine Ed tried to tell Joe Dale that the Mahdi wouldn't last in a race with the Lord of Misery as he called the horse. Joe Dale told Medicine Ed he was responsible for stopping Tommy Hansel from trying to win the race or letting him know if he couldn't stop him.

This portion of Chapter 34 switches from past to present tense as Medicine Ed mixes up his goofer dust. He tries to concentrate just on the dust. He is distracted because he has realized the power the dust holds and the harm it can do. He tries to convince himself it is Tommy who has brought down the trouble and he is just trying to save himself from it. When he's finished with the dust Medicine Ed isn't sure of it. He notices it doesn't feel right. Later when the boy asks Maggie if she wants to party Medicine Ed nods to her to take up the boy's offer. As soon as the boy is gone Medicine Ed spreads the dust in the horse's stall.

In Chapter 35, Maggie worked on Pelter. She advised him not to try to win but to run his race well. She told him she was betting on the Lord of Misrule because she needed money to get away.

In Chapter 36, Lord of Misrule is the first horse to be taken out of his stall. Tommy Hansel came next because his madness had gotten rid of all of his habits of procrastination. As Tommy led Mahdi to the gate it is indicated the horse might be showing signs of soreness. The other contestants Sonia's Birthday, Sudanese and Hung the Moon are described as they make their way to the post. Deucey had talked to Medicine Ed about the idea that Spinoza could win the race. Medicine Ed warned her against trying even though it made Deucey unhappy. When Medicine Ed told Maggie what Deucey wanted to do Maggie shook her head and said everyone had lost their minds over that race. She was worried but didn't know what they could do. At the betting window Medicine Ed tried to decide which horse he should put his money on Little Spinoza or the Lord of Misrule.

In Chapter 37, the tense changes again from third to second person point of view, from Tommy's perspective. You let Joe Dale Bigg give you Natalie and get you tangled up in the New York money. Now Natalie's son wants to kill you. You are so high and full of energy you no longer need sleep. You can hear the animals talking to you. You've put all



your money on the Mahdi. You believe Mahdi, with Earlie riding him, will win the race over the Lord of Misrule. The devil gets a better gate position but your horse has your lucky number. Tommy believes Maggie, who has gotten the witch's number of nine, has no chance of winning the race. When the race starts Tommy believes the Lord of Misrule is a corpse running around the ring. Misrule is leading with the Mahdi following. Pelter is running third. Earlie uses his stick on the Mahdi and the horse jumps out in front but something happens. He starts to fade. The Lord of Misrule goes down because the Mahdi bumped him. Little Spinoza is knocked down as well. Pelter's rider steers him around the fallen horses and wins the race. The ambulance comes for Little Spinoza. He has broken his leg and is shot.

Analysis

The author offers a good deal of foreshadowing in this section of the novel that the race will not go as anyone intends. Medicine Ed mixes up a goofer powder and administers it to Lord of Misrule but he feels something about the powder is not right. He isn't sure it will work as he intends it to. Foreshadowing also comes as Tommy leads the Mahdi to the post. There seems to be a tiny catch that alters the smoothness of his gait, a sign that he may not be completely well for the race. Deucey tells Medicine Ed at the last minute that she wants to run Spinoza and see what he will do. He warns against it. Even at the betting window Medicine Ed isn't sure which horse he should put his money on.

The author continues to describe the Lord of Misrule in a way that makes him sound low-down and evil. On page 239 she says the "slinky" horse has "a certain junkyard style." Even the way he eats is evil as he is described as "slashing vindictively" (239) at his hay bag. Notice that half the time Medicine Ed refers to the horse as "The Lord of Misery" especially after Joe Dale threatened to hold him personally responsible if anyone but Lord of Misrule won the race. Consider the way Tommy describes the Lord of Misrule as he falls after being bumped by the Mahdi during the race. The horse is described as being "twisted together in haste in the Devil's workshop out of abortionists' black wire hangers and the patent leather raincoats of pimps and whores" (259). To describe a horse as being made of the things used to abort babies leaves no doubt in the reader's mind that Tommy believes the horse is completely and thoroughly evil.

Notice that even the puddle by the back gate of the racetrack is described in terms of death and dying in this section of the novel. Every other puddle has dried up in heat but this one still retained some water. Even that huge puddle is described as having "shrank between hideous cracked lips" (238). To complete the picture of death, a horse's skull has been placed next to the drying up puddle.

Another symbol that appears again in this section of the novel is Joe Dale's car. This time Joe Dale comes to threaten Medicine Ed. Notice the people that Joe Dale chooses to threaten also set him apart from Two-Tie. Two-Tie would generally pick out people who had some influence in the racing business to get to do his dirty work. Joe Dale, however, chooses to threaten an old black groom who has no influence over anyone.



After he's been threatened Medicine Ed feels he has no choice but to go back to his goofer dust to make sure that Lord of Misrule wins the race.

Notice in the short section where Medicine Ed mixes up his goofer power for The Lord of Misrule that the author changes from the past tense to the present tense. This makes the reader feel as if he is right there with Medicine Ed while he's mixing up his powder. Notice also that Medicine Ed worries that he hasn't gotten the formula right in this batch of powder. Medicine Ed sees himself in battle of good versus evil he believes evil has been called down upon him and it is his responsibility to try to keep that evil away if at all possible.

Even as Medicine Ed thinks that he wants to keep the evil away from himself he continues to think of how he can use the race in his advantage to get himself his own home. He knows that from what he will collect from Spinoza running in the race if he bets all the money he has left on the winning horse he will wind up with about \$5,000 in winnings. The money would be exactly the amount of money to buy himself the home he's wanting and keep himself from having to work the rest of his life. Even as he tries to place his bet, however, Medicine Ed is unsure which horse he should put his money on. In fact, the reader never learns which horse Medicine Ed put his money on or if he put his money on any horse at all before the race started.

A number of religious references are made as Medicine Ed mixes up his goofer powder and then again as Tommy watches the beginning of the race. Medicine Ed has long heard Tommy referring to Mahdi as the expected one. In fact Medicine Ed repeats to himself the 35th Psalm of David in order to cover up the strange things that he is hearing Tommy say to his horse while they are in the barn together. Meanwhile, when Medicine Ed mixes up his goofer powder he considers that he might be able to save himself from further work by betting on the winning horse in this race. Even as he considers his own salvation from work Medicine Ed reminds himself that "it say so right in the Bible, a horse never saved nobody. Psalm 33" (244).

Tommy believes that his horse, The Mahdi, is "the expected one, redeemer of this world, your representative, against Lord of Misrule, the knacker from Nebraska, the Devil himself" (256). Tommy believes that Lord of Misrule gets the ideal post position because he is "tight with Racing Secretary Chenille, he runs stall man Smithers, Joe Dale Bigg is one of his pet flunkies, ergo, Lord of Misrule gets the post position, God, echod, ONE, 1" (256). Tommy indicates that even though he knows the Lord of Misrule is the devil, the horse has disguised himself as God for the race. Significant also in Tommy's mind is the fact that Spinoza has the gate position 3. Tommy associates this gate position with the trinity. The trinity is representative of a religious doctrine in which God is described as being God the father, God the son and God the Holy Spirit. For this reason Tommy believes that God likes Spinoza but will not allow him to win the race.

In the theme of twins, Tommy looks around for Maggie before the race begins. He believes that she is cursed because she has taken away his horse, Pelter. Notice that Tommy indicates that Maggie's number 9 is the witch's number. Even though he is



angry with her and believes she has betrayed him Tommy still contends that Maggie isn't a bad witch, just one who has been taken in by the devil.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss Medicine Ed's uncertainty that his goofer powder will work. Why do you think he is so unsure of himself?

Discussion Question 2

Are you surprised at the outcome of the race? Why or why not? What does the end of the race teach you about the nature of sure things?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the symbolism that Tommy sees in the gate numbers that each horse is given.

Vocabulary

mirage, portico, palsied, vindictively, punctual, sedition, viols, amiable



Fourth Race, Chapters 38-40

Summary

In Chapter 38, Maggie was in the winner's circle when Little Spinoza was killed. Medicine Ed was the only one there to witness his death. Tommy led the Mahdi who was blowing blood away to the barn. Alice had to be carried off the track by two valets. Deucey followed to take care of her. Joe Dale watched her in the winner's circle with his arms folded across his chest. Jojo apologized to Maggie. Maggie took Pelter to the testing area knowing that he had bute in his system. She knew she wouldn't get the winners purse because of the drugs. She wasn't as worried about losing her money as she was about getting killed. She wished that she, like Pelter, was drugged. Kidstuff was at the desk in the testing barn. A conversation insinuated Pelter's urine sample might not get sent to the lab. Kidstuff guessed the horse might have been given bute.

In Chapter 39 Medicine Ed listened to Tommy talking to the Mahdi as he put lime in Little Spinoza's stall. He expected Joe Dale to come and kill him. As he worked he noticed a water hose being used around the corner of the barn where there were no horses. When he looked through a crack in the wall he saw the taxi that Two-Tie rode in being hosed out with pinkish water coming over the running boards. Medicine Ed understood what had happened to Two-Tie. He made a promise to God that if he would stop practicing medicine if God would save his life and the lives of others.

In Chapter 40 the Lord of Misrule was already being loaded up for the trip back to Nebraska when Maggie headed back to the barn with Pelter. She saw Medicine Ed working in Little Spinoza's stall and wondered what the loss of the horse meant to him financially. He told her that Tommy had locked himself into the stall with his horse. When Tommy heard Maggie's voice he asked her why she left him. Maggie told Medicine Ed that Tommy had lost his mind and asked what she should do. Medicine Ed told her she didn't have to do anything. She asked him where she could get a van and thought about her Uncle Rudy.

Medicine Ed told Maggie because Tommy wasn't fit, he wouldn't be allowed to keep his horses especially since he owed money. Maggie tried to sign Pelter over to Medicine Ed to save him. Even though Medicine Ed said he didn't want the horse Maggie knew that he did. Soon a police car came. Medicine Ed told Tommy the cops were there. Tommy called for Maggie asking if she had called to police on him. Medicine Ed told Tommy the other stallmen had called. Tommy kicked his way out of the stall and ran away. Medicine Ed checked the Mahdi. He was dead. Maggie took her chance and walked away. She checked on Pelter one last time. She thought he looked better already since he was owned by Medicine Ed.

Maggie walked toward the river. When her shoe sunk into sand she realized she'd stumbled into the area where the old washed out racetrack was. It was the place where they took the horses when they died until they could be picked up. The old starting gate



and hot walking machine were still there. She found Little Spinoza's body, what she realized she was looking for from the beginning. She ran her hand over the horse. When she felt how dirty and sticky he was she felt she'd sent his ghost a message she hadn't intended to send him.

A voice asked her if she knew how much he hated her. It was Joe Dale sitting in a lawn chair in the weeds. He told her he didn't intend to kill her but did intend to take advantage of her. As Joe Dale walked toward her she saw Tommy also walking toward her. He was holding a pitchfork. Maggie led Joe Dale along, asking why he hated her so much. He suggested that she made accidents and injuries happen but thought she was just lucky. As Joe Dale got closer to Maggie she told him she didn't think he needed to get any closer. When Joe Dale asked Maggie what she was going to use to keep him away Tommy spoke up telling him that he hadn't looked around to see what Maggie had at her disposal.

As Joe Dale tried to sweet talk Tommy, Tommy swung the pitchfork at his face. When Tommy hit him again Joe Dale went down. Maggie warned Tommy that if he killed Joe Dale he would never get out of jail. Tommy told her that since she was leaving him, it really didn't matter. Joe Dale told the two they deserved each other and asked to be taken to the hospital. Tommy told Joe Dale he'd take him to the same hospital Joe Dale took his sick horses. When Joe Dale pointed out to Tommy that he didn't take care of his sick horses very well either Tommy said he had decided to get out of horse racing. Tommy offered to let Maggie come with him but she declined. He walked away to Joe Dale's car. He revved the car's engine and drove toward Joe Dale. Joe Dale flew into the air and was caught on the hot walking machine which turned for just a moment before stopping.

Analysis

In this final section of the novel it appears that Tommy has gone really and truly crazy. He locks himself in the stall with the dying Mahdi. Meanwhile Maggie worries for herself as she tries to decide how to keep Pelter safe and take care of herself at the same time. Medicine Ed also keeps an eye out for Joe Dale's car. He expects the vehicle to come at any moment to kill him. He's not only worried about his own life but also the loss of his money and his horse. He's dumbfounded because the goofer powder didn't work either to keep the bad luck off him or to make Lord of Misrule win.

In this dark part of the novel, the author doesn't try to lighten the mood. The situation has reached a new level of seriousness. Even the puddle by the back gate becomes a symbol of how serious the situation is as it becomes a receptacle for the blood that comes from Two-Tie which D'Ambrisi and Biggy rinse from the taxi. Medicine Ed sees the two cleaning the taxi and assumes correctly that Two-Tie is dead. Medicine Ed actually makes out the best of all the characters because he not only gets a new horse, Pelter, to replace the one he lost, but he no longer has to worry about paying back the money that he owes to Two-Tie.



Meanwhile as Maggie tries to make her getaway she stumbles onto the grounds of the old racetrack that was abandoned because it kept getting washed out by the nearby river. The track is also a half-mile track, almost a twin of Indian Mound Downs. There is even a dilapidated starting gate and hot walking machine there. The abandoned twin track is a symbol of death. The idea of death is stressed when Maggie finds Spinoza's body in the place the racetrack ambulance left the dead horses for the knacker to pick up. It is in this place of death and loneliness that Joe Dale confronts Maggie. Based on what Joe Dale has done to his enemies in the past, the reader can assume Joe Dale plans to kill Maggie or at least hurt her badly. He says all he wants from her is sex.

In what is almost a repeat of Tommy's appearance at Joe Dale's farm, Tommy appears at the abandoned race track. He is holding a pitchfork, a tool that will become to him a symbol of his victory over the devil. Even though Tommy knows that Maggie plans to leave him, he still takes care of Joe Dale for her. He first hits the man with the pitchfork and then hits him with a car throwing his body onto the hot walking machine.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the poetic irony of Joe Dale's body winding up hanging in one of his hot walking machines. Why is it significant that this machine started running for a short while when Joe Dale's body hit it?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Maggie sign Pelter over to Medicine Ed? Do you think this was the best choice she had? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

This is the second time that Tommy has shown up to save Maggie from Joe Dale. How do you think he knew she was in trouble? How did he know where to find her?

Vocabulary

admonished, harrower, embossed, malicious, carbuncle, diligence, irresolutely, daven, lair, pliable, simian, lucidly, euphonious



Results

Summary

In I, Maggie comes to see you occasionally on visiting days. She has taken back her job at the newspaper. She asked how your face got split open. You tried to explain. You had used a scrapbook of her newspaper articles to direct you to a bridge with lions. Across the bridge was a barn full of dying animals he brought back to life. When he drove Joe Dale's car, which he thought was magic, back across the bridge the police were waiting so he drove the car off the bridge. He is happy where he is and believes he is finally a complete person.

In II, Maggie decided that after all she had been lucky. She was lucky Tommy had killed Joe Dale and she hadn't had to do it herself. It was also lucky that Tommy was out of his mind when he killed Joe Dale. For that reason he'd been put in a mental hospital, not in jail. She wondered if she should have seen Tommy's madness coming. She tried to get to know the new Tommy and thought it was interesting that he no longer thought he needed her. If he asked her to leave the hospital early from visiting hours she would go by Indian Mounds Downs and watch the races. Medicine Ed was working for Whirligig Farms. Maggie believed Pelter looked well taken care of. She had gotten none of the five thousand dollar purse she'd won with Pelter. It had gone to pay Tommy's debts.

They had each gotten one thousand dollars out of Spinoza's death. Deucey and Alice had a new horse and had teamed up together. Maggie had gone back to Pichot place. She wondered why she hadn't thought to bring Pelter and Medicine Ed with her. She had plenty of room for both of them.

In III Medicine Ed didn't like Pelter much he thought the horse knew more than a horse should know. He believed Pelter continued to live just to prove he could outlive Medicine Ed. When he saw Maggie he thought how Two-Tie had used Maggie to speed his death. He imagined where Two-Tie might have been dumped. He wondered if Maggie knew he had died for her. Medicine Ed had followed Maggie's lead and had taken to rubbing Pelter. He mentally reminded the horse that people still claimed horses even at \$1,250. He figured there was no where for them to go but down.

Analysis

In this section the stories of all the main characters are wrapped up. There are three sections in this epilogue; one from Tommy's point of view, one from Maggie's point of view and one from Medicine Ed's point of view.

Notice in this section that Tommy admits he's been checking the columns Margaret is writing to see if he can find any secret messages. Apparently he'd been doing this for a while because he indicates that it is her articles that told him where to drive the magic car. Now that he's been put in the mental facility Tommy can no longer glean any



messages from Maggie's articles. He believes it is she and not he that is losing her connection with him.

Maggie credits her luck not only that Joe Dale wound up dead, but also that it was Tommy who killed him and that Tommy was deemed crazy. For this reason Joe Dale is no longer a threat but no one had to go to jail. Maggie and Medicine Ed no longer have to watch their backs for fear that Joe Dale will be coming to take revenge on them.

Medicine Ed has been allowed to keep his Winnebago but seems to not be too sure if he should be happy with Pelter or not. He believes the horse is living just to prove that he can outlive Medicine Ed. Remember in an earlier section of the novel Medicine Ed had thought it silly when Maggie began rubbing the horses with an old sack. He didn't think the activity had any purpose in making the horses feel or run better. Notice in this section that Medicine Ed has started rubbing Pelter in the same way. It is almost a nod to Maggie and a show on Medicine Ed's part that the inexperienced girl isn't completely ignorant.

Discussion Question 1

Do you think Medicine Ed is happy in his new life? Why or why not? Do you think he'll ever find the home for which he's looking?

Discussion Question 2

Do you think Maggie should have seen the signs that Tommy was losing his mind? Was she just too caught up in her own troubles to notice or was she just too inexperienced?

Discussion Question 3

Since Tommy has gone completely crazy he believes he has no more need for his twin. Why do you think he feels complete when he is, in reality, more broken than ever?

Vocabulary

decrepit, perused, ruminated, bastion, caprice, venerable, palisades, stalwart



Characters

Medicine Ed

Medicine Ed is the elderly black groom who works for Gus Zeno at Indian Mound Downs when the story opens. He is one of the main characters in the novel and one of the characters from whose point of view parts of the story are told. Medicine Ed is characterized by a speech pattern in which words are often mispronounced and grammar is used incorrectly. After Gus' death Medicine Ed works for Tommy Hansel even though he doesn't trust the man and thinks he is crazy. Medicine Ed refers to Maggie as the "frizzly hair girl" while Tommy is the "young fool."

Medicine Ed is a groom who appreciates the old ways. He remembers a time when horse racing wasn't as crooked and people treated their horses better. He has worked as a groom for big stakes horses as well as for horses in small time racetracks like Indian Mound Downs. In his seventies he's ready to settle down in his own home. He fears, however, he will have to work for the rest of his life and never have any stability especially after Zeno's death.

One unique characteristic about Medicine Ed is the fact that he knows and practices hoodoo. It is how he got his name. The medicine that Medicine Ed is known for is his goofer powder. Medicine Ed believes this powder will make the horse that he uses it on win. He has learned that the powder also has negative side effects that he has been unable to control. For instance, he used the powder on Broomstick, the only horse he loved. The horse won its race but broke his leg during the van ride home.

During the course of this novel Medicine Ed becomes a horse owner for the first time. He goes in with Maggie and Deucey in ownership of Little Spinoza. Later, after Maggie realizes she has to leave the racetrack for her safety she signs Pelter's foaling papers over to Medicine Ed.

Tommy Hansel aka The Young Fool

Tommy Hansel is a young man who is new to the horse racing business. He hopes to be able to win big money at Indian Mound Downs so he can help bail his stables out of debt. Through the course of the novel Tommy is described as slowly sliding into insanity. He becomes obsessed with his horse the Mahdi and believes the coming race of the Mahdi against The Lord of Misrule is a good versus evil race in which he hopes Mahdi, whom he believes is the redeemer of the racing world, will win against the Lord of Misrule.

Tommy is both affectionate and abusive in his relationship with Maggie. He believes she is his long lost twin, the one whom he was predestined to be with. The reader learns in the epilogue of the novel that Tommy had believed he found secret messages telling him what to do in the recipe columns Maggie had written before she came to work for



him. He uses Maggie's sexual desire for him as a way to control her and combined abuse with sex to humiliate her at the same time that he begs her not to leave him.

In order to try to get Mahdi back after the horse was claimed in a race, Tommy agrees to work with Joe Dale. Joe Dale gets Tommy involved with a woman in New York. This arrangement helps Tommy get Mahdi back but also puts Tommy in debt to Joe Dale. When Joe Dale takes Maggie to his farm and drugs her Tommy came for his girlfriend. He hits Joe Dale in the face when he learns what he has done to Maggie. Later at the close of the novel Tommy beats Joe Dale with a pitchfork and then hits him with a car when Joe Dale tries to take advantage of Maggie at the old abandoned racetrack. Because Tommy is insane at this point he is not held responsible for his crime but instead is sent to a state psychiatric hospital.

Rudy "Two-Tie" Samuels

Rudy Samuels is an elderly gangster type character who has spent his life working the horse races. He has been banned from the tracks but still keeps involved in what is going on at the races by holding poker games at his home. He also has contacts at the track that keep him apprised of what is happening in the races. Two-Tie got his nickname because of the two bow ties that he wears. One of these, a black bow tie, is worn in honor of Lillian, the only woman he believes really loved him.

Although Two-Tie is fundamentally evil, his death is caused by his attempt to protect his niece. For this reason he is a sort of redeemer or guardian angel for Maggie. He works the racetrack in his favor and has enough pull that he can ask for favors from people when he needs them. He keeps a list of things he's done for others so he can draw from it when he needs favors. The difference between Two-Tie and Joe Dale is that Two-Tie tries to be friendly with the people whom he manipulates. He does nice things for people in addition to asking for favors from them. Joe Dale, on the other hand, just makes demands from people and expects them to do what he wants based on fear.

Two-Tie comes to an unfavorable end thanks to D'Ambrisi and Biggy. They get Two-Tie into a taxi where they drive him down an abandoned road. Two-Tie gets in the car because the two thugs have his dog. Knowing that they plan to kill him eventually Two-Tie gets tired of waiting and makes a threatening move on Biggy prompting the man to shoot him. They leave Two-Tie and Elizabeth in the woods. Medicine Ed suspects Two-Tie had been killed by the two when he sees them hosing the taxi cab clean. He wonders if Two-Tie's body will ever be located.

Joe Dale Biggs

Joe Dale Biggs is the leading trainer at Indian Mound Downs. He is the epitome of evil. He doesn't like his horses and runs them cruelly until they are no longer any good for racing. He rarely visits his animals or is seen around the barns. He is most often seen riding in his midnight blue Cadillac with a silver top. Any time this car comes on the



grounds of the race track it can be sure that someone will receive bad news or be threatened.

Biggs tries to get Deucey to take Little Spinoza off his hands but Deucey will not do so because she knows it will put her in debt to Joe Dale. Even though he wanted to get rid of the horse Joe Dale is angered when Deucey, Maggie and Medicine Ed win a race with him. He has Deucey beat up in retaliation and has her other racing horse, Grizzly, killed.

Joe Dale decides he wants to have a sexual relationship with Maggie and arranges to claim Pelter, the horse that Maggie loves, so he will have a way to manipulate her. As soon as she gets to his farm he drugs her so that she can't get away. When he learns that Two-Tie has meddled in his ownership of Pelter, Joe Dale has D'Ambrisi and Biggy kill Two-Tie. Later when Pelter wins the race intended for the Lord of Misrule to win Joe Dale is enraged even though there was no way for the Lord of Misrule to win since he fell on the track. Joe Dale finds Maggie after the race and threatens her. Tommy finds Maggie and Joe Dale and kills Joe Dale. Maggie believes she is lucky that Joe Dale is dead since it means she won't have to live all of her life in fear that Joe Dale will retaliate against her.

Pelter

Pelter is the former stakes winning horse that Maggie loves. Tommy believes that if he loses Pelter he will also lose Maggie. When Pelter was a stakes horse he was known as the Darkeville Stalker. He is said to have been bred in a field when his father, a stud horse, got loose and mated with a field horse. No one had expected much from the offspring of this mating but Pelter had done well. He is known for his long back. As an older horse, Pelter's back is described as being long and lumpy.

In the first claims race that Tommy puts Pelter in Joe Dale arranges for D'Ambrisi to claim Pelter. Joe Dale uses Pelter as a way to get Maggie to come to his farm so he can drug her and try to have his way with her. In an attempt to get away from Joe Dale Maggie climbs up on Pelter's back and tries to ride him away from the man's farm. Two-Tie uses his influence to get Pelter back for Maggie.

Because The Lord of Misrule, the Mahdi and Little Spinoza all fell during the race that had been arranged for The Lord of Misrule to win, Pelter won the race easily. Joe Dale is angry with Maggie. Knowing that she has to give Pelter to someone who will take care of him she signs his papers over to Medicine Ed.

Pelter is described as being a clown as well as a good racing horse. Medicine Ed often believes the horse is eyeballing him trying to determine which of them will outlive the other. Medicine Ed believes Pelter has witch eyes and often thinks perhaps the horse is capable of talking.



Margaret “Maggie” Koderer aka the Frizzly Haired Girl

Maggie is the niece of Two-Tie and the employee and lover of Tommy Hansel. She is known for her thick frizzy hair that she wears in pigtails. Even though Maggie has no experience working with horses Tommy takes her on as a groom. She had previously been writing recipe columns for a newspaper. After she realizes that she is not cut out for the racetrack life, Maggie returns to writing her recipe columns.

Maggie is an unusual person to be on the racetrack not only because she has no experience with horses but also because she has a college education. She is described as being pretty and tiny. Her only fault seems to be her frizzy out-of-control hair. In fact, Maggie is sort of an innocent, chosen person. Her uncle, Two-Tie, begins looking out for her once he learns she is at Indian Mound Downs. In a way he symbolically becomes her savior as he uses his gangster influence to try to keep her away from trouble.

Maggie has an unusual relationship with her boyfriend Tommy. He is both loving and abusive to her. Despite his abusive nature, Maggie still has the courage to speak up when she feels Tommy isn't doing as he should with his horses. It is Tommy who convinced her to leave her writing job and work with his horses at the racetrack. She is aware that Tommy thinks she is his missing twin but does not think anything is strange about his belief.

Deucey Gifford

Deucey Gifford is a small town horse owner. She owns one horse, Grizzly, who wins races for her. She is described as being a butch lesbian woman with a buzz cut. Although she loves the horse, Deucey refuses to take Little Spinoza from Joe Dale Biggs when he insists that he wants to give her the horse. She will not take him because she does not want to be beholden to Biggs. Instead of taking the horse for free, Deucey, Medicine Ed and Maggie pitch in together to buy the horse. Deucey hopes that Alice, a girl to whom she is attracted, will beg Deucey to let her ride Little Spinoza. Alice does eventually convince Deucey to let her ride Little Spinoza and the two begin a relationship. After Little Spinoza wins his first race Deucey is beaten up by Joe Dale's thugs because he believes Deucey and the others had gotten the horse to win because they wanted to make him look foolish. Deucey's horse, Grizzly, is also killed as part of the retaliation. When Two-Tie compares his poker companions to dogs he says that Deucey is a retriever who is faithful to the death and never lets go once she realizes she wants something.

Little Spinoza

Little Spinoza is a horse with good breeding but because of his actions it is believed the horse is crazy. Little Spinoza is described as being a small-looking but well proportioned horse. He is a grandson of Speculation, the racing great. Spinoza, however, does not have a good racing record. Sometimes he refuses to come out of the gate at all. Other



times he doesn't run to his full potential. Alice comes up with a way to hypnotize the horse at his races and not wake him up until she is ready to ask him for speed to win the race. Little Spinoza is the horse that kicked Biggy in the head leaving the imprint of his shoe in Biggy's forehead. Spinoza is described as being a baby and acting like a small child. Castration keeps him from being scared of everything but doesn't make him more serious about racing. Little Spinoza falls and breaks his leg during the race against the Lord of Misrule. He has to be put down because of his injury.

The Mahdi

The Mahdi is the horse that Tommy favors. Tommy loses the Mahdi to Gus Zeno in the first claim race in which he enters him. The Mahdi is nearly a twin to Boll Weevil, the red horse that Gus Zeno enters in the same race. Tommy makes a deal with Joe Dale to get the Mahdi back. Tommy becomes more and more obsessed with the horse that he sees as the redeemer. The Mahdi, in fact, is the name given to the promised redeemer for the Islamic people. Tommy believes Mahdi is intended to overcome The Lord of Misrule, whom he sees as a representation of evil.

Biggy

Biggy is the mentally retarded son of Joe Dale Biggs. It is said that Little Spinoza kicked Biggy in the head while a dentist was working on the horse. Ever since that time Biggy has not liked the horse. Biggy only appears in person at two points in the novel. The first time is when his father brings Maggie to the farm to try to take advantage of her. It is Biggy who gets her the soda spiked with the horse tranquilizer. Biggy later comes out on the porch of his father's house and threatens Two-Tie and Hansel with a deer rifle. It is also Biggy who helps D'Ambrisi kidnap Two-Tie who is later shot when Biggy's gun goes off.

D'Ambrisi

Two-Tie describes Breezy D'Ambrisi as a skittish dachshund. D'Ambrisi fits this description because he is scared out of his wits by the threats he receives after he agrees to claim Pelter for Joe Dale. D'Ambrisi is scared because both Two-Tie and Posner have threatened him. D'Ambrisi is put in the uncomfortable position of telling Joe Dale he has to give Pelter back to Maggie. Later, Joe Dale employs D'Ambrisi to pose as Roy, the driver of the taxi that Two-Tie usually rides in so that D'Ambrisi can take Two-Tie off and get rid of him.

Boll Weevil

Boll Weevil is the big, dumb, red horse that Zeno ran in a claiming race against the Mahdi, a big red horse that looked so similar to Boll Weevil that they could pass for twins. After Medicine Ed uses a goofer powder on Boll Weevil he knows the horse will



win but is afraid the horse will die or be injured like all of the other horses on which he has used the powder.

Vernon “Suitcase” Smithers

Suitcase is the stall manager at Indian Mound Downs. The reader first meets him when he gives Maggie a hard time about stalls for her horses. Two-Tie depends on Suitcase to tell him what is happening at the racetrack. Often Suitcase isn't as reliable in giving information to Two-Tie as Two-Tie would like. It is Suitcase whom Two-Tie relies on to set up the race for The Lord of Misrule.

Jojo Wood

Jojo Wood is the jockey who rides Pelter during the race that has been arranged for the Lord of Misrule. After the race is over he apologizes to Maggie for winning the race because he knows how much trouble the win will cause her. Two-Tie describes Jojo as the most common of the racetrack dogs, a beagle mutt. Two-Tie believes that Jojo gets his jobs because he appears to be too dumb to cheat the owners of the horses.

Lord of Misrule

The Lord of Misrule is the horse that Two-Tie asks that a race be arranged for at Indian Mound Downs. The horse is representative of evil and the devil. He is an old, worn out horse who has seen better days. Although he is supposed to have win a race at Indian Mound Downs the Lord of Misrule falls when Mahdi bumps him. His fall allows Pelter to win the race.

Alice Nuzum

Alice Nuzum is the exercise girl at Indian Mound Downs. After Little Spinoza's disastrous race Maggie, Medicine Ed and Deucey decide to let Alice ride Spinoza in his next race. Alice comes up with a way to hypnotize Spinoza so that he doesn't realize where he is in the race until Alice needs him to wake up and give her the speed that she needs to win the race.

Gus Zeno

Gus Zeno is Medicine Ed's boss at the beginning of the novel. Zeno angers Tommy when he claims the Mahdi before the claiming race in which the Mahdi and Boll Weevil ran against each other. Boll Weevil wins the race. Just after Zeno leaves the winner's circle with his horse he falls over and dies.



Grizzly

Grizzly is the fifteen year old horse owned by Deucey. Even though he is old Grizzly wins regular money for Deucey in the races. After Little Spinoza wins a race, Grizzly is killed by Joe Dale in retaliation because he believes the win was intentional to make him look like a fool.

Earlie Beaufait

Earlie Beaufait is the jockey that Maggie, Medicine Ed and Deucey hire to ride Little Spinoza in his first race under their ownership. Little Spinoza acts badly for Earlie, almost injuring him before they even get out of the gate. Because Earlie believes Spinoza has almost killed him intentionally, he beats the horse on the head after the race is finished.

Donald

Donald is Lillian's son. Two-Tie never liked Donald but agrees when Donald asks him to arrange a horse race for him. Two-Tie believes that Donald holds Two-Tie responsible for his mother's death. When the two men do meet before the race Two-Tie sees the hate and anger in Donald's eyes just for a moment before Donald talks to him as a friend.

Roland Hickok

Roland Hickok was the trainer who took a liking to Tommy Hansel. It was from this man that Hansel had gotten Pelter, the former stakes winner. Many of the people who work at Indian Mound Downs are impressed that Hickok sold Pelter to Tommy since they know that Hickok would not have sold his favorite horse to just anyone.

Lillian

Lillian was the girl whom Two-Tie believed really loved him. He did not marry her because she had lied to a newspaper reporter and said she was already his wife. He thought she was trying to get the better of him by spreading this lie so he let her leave him when he refused to get married. She died several years later of cancer.

Elizabeth

Elizabeth is Two-Tie's elderly German Shepherd. Elizabeth betrays Two-Tie when she gets in the taxi cab with D'Ambrisi and Biggy. Although Two-Tie knows the men mean to cause him harm he gets in the car with them because they have his dog.



Kidstuff

Kidstuff is the blacksmith who works at Indian Mound Downs. He helps Maggie avoid being charged with doping during the race in which she gave Pelter bute to improve his performance.

Natalie

Natalie is the woman with whom Tommy is having an affair when he tells Maggie that he is going to see about a horse.

Standish Chenille

Standish Chenille is the racing secretary at Indian Mound Downs. He is rarely seen at the racetrack but makes an appearance the day that The Lord of Misrule arrives.

Haslipp

Haslipp is the vet who works for the racetrack. He is the one who castrates Little Spinoza.

Symbols and Symbolism

Hot-Walking Machine

Medicine Ed believes the hot-walking machine represents the lost soul of Indian Mound Downs. He indicates how the machine blocks the back entrance of the racetrack keeping anyone from leaving through the gate. There are two hot walking machines of importance in the novel. In the final chapter of the book Maggie finds the abandoned, washed out track where another hot walking machine had been dumped. When Tommy hits Joe Dale with a car, Joe Dale is thrown into the machine and dies. Eerily, the machine works for a moment before quitting.

The Winnebago

The crushed-in Winnebago that Zeno lets Medicine Ed keep at the racetrack is a symbol of Ed's home and the good life he has with Zeno. After Zeno died Medicine Ed was forced to move the Winnebago off racetrack grounds. Tommy Hansel moved it for him and paid his rent at a trailer park so Medicine Ed could keep the Winnebago. It is because of this move on Tommy's part that Medicine Ed agrees to work for him.

Horse Goofer Dust

This horse goofer dust represents Medicine Ed's voodoo background. When Medicine Ed uses this dust on a horse the horse wins its race but never races again. It is this dust that Medicine Ed blames for the death of his favorite horse, Broomstick.

Blue Car

This midnight blue colored car with a silver top is a symbol of Joe Dale Biggs. When he comes to the racetrack he is usually riding in this car. After Joe Dale dies and Tommy takes the car, he believes the car is magic.

Black Bow Tie

This black bow tie is a symbol of Two-Tie. He wears it out of respect for Lillian, the one woman whom he believed really loved him.



Red Flannel Bag

This red flannel bag represents Medicine Ed's attempt to protect himself from the trouble that he believes is coming. Medicine Ed keeps the bag in his pocket during the race in which Little Spinoza runs and rubs it often between his fingers.

A Bowling Club Stick Pin

To Tommy Hansel this bowling club stick pin is a magic pin even though in reality it is just a cheap pin he found in the trailer in which he lives with Maggie.

The Lord of Misrule

The horse, the Lord of Misrule, is a symbol of the devil.

The Mahdi

The horse, the Mahdi, is a symbol of the redeemer. In the Islam faith the Mahdi is the prophesied redeemer who will rid the world from evil.

Bute

Bute is a symbol of the illegal activity in racing. It is a drug given to horses to make them run faster. Medicine Ed calls it a fast luck oil.

The Monkey

Maggie believes this monkey that she sees in a pet store is representative of her. The monkey grabs hold of her and hangs on so tightly that she has to tear her blouse to get away from it. Maggie believes if she can get on Pelter after Joe Dale drugged her that she will hold onto Pelter just as that monkey held onto her so that she can get away.

A Pitchfork

This pitchfork is a symbol of the craziness and evil that has taken over Tommy. Tommy believes the pitchfork is a symbol of his victory over the forces of darkness. When Tommy finds Maggie and Joe Dale Biggs, he carries this pitchfork to threaten Biggs.



Settings

Indian Mound Downs

Indian Mound Downs is the half-mile racetrack at which most of the action in this novel takes place.

Charles Town

Charles Town is the town where Maggie lived and worked at the newspaper before she began working for Tommy. She returns to Charles Town after Tommy is put in the psychiatric hospital.

T. Hansel Stables

T. Hansel Stables is the name of the stables owned by Tommy. It is at these stables that Maggie gets her first lessons in caring for horses. These stables are located in Charles Town.

Carbonport

Carbonport is the town where Two-Tie lives with his dog, Elizabeth.

Horseman's Motel Trailer Park

After Zeno died Tommy Hansel arranged for Ed's Winnebago to be taken to this trailer park. Tommy and Maggie also had a trailer at this park.

The State Hospital

Tommy is admitted to the state psychiatric hospital when he drives Joe Dale's car off a bridge after he kills Joe Dale. Maggie visits Tommy at the state hospital but he sometimes asks her to leave before visiting hours are even over.

Woods Near a Landfill

It is in the woods near a landfill that D'Ambrisi and Biggy dump Two-Tie's body after they shoot him.



Themes and Motifs

Good Versus Evil

This story is very much about good versus evil as the innocent Maggie gets caught up in the crooked and dangerous life of horse racing. The contest between good and evil comes to a head when the Lord of Misrule, an old worn out horse, is brought to Indian Mound Downs for a race weighted in his favor. The old groom Medicine Ed also struggles with good versus evil as he tries to decide if he should use his hoodoo knowledge to ensure the Lord of Misrule's race will go as expected.

In this story Maggie is the character who is closest to being a "good" character. She is in no way a saint but she stumbles into the cheating and lying that is horse racing completely unaware of what she is getting herself into. By the time that she realizes how much danger she is in at the racetrack it is almost too late for her to save herself. Lucky for Maggie she has her uncle, Two-Tie, looking out for her best interests. He uses his pull to get her out of some dangerous situations and helps to make her racetrack experience more favorable. In fact Two-Tie is killed because he went against Joe Dale when Joe Dale had Maggie's horse claimed so that he would have a way to manipulate Maggie.

Also working in Maggie's favor is her boyfriend Tommy Hansel who becomes more and more crazy as the story progresses. It is Tommy who catches Pelter after he got free at Joe Dale's farm. When he learns that Joe Dale drugged Maggie Tommy punches Joe Dale in the face. Later when Joe Dale confronts Maggie alone at an abandoned racetrack Tommy shows up and kills Joe Dale because he senses the man intends to do Maggie harm.

The plot of the novel works up to a fixed race in which the old beat up horse the Lord of Misrule was supposed to win. Two-Tie had arranged the race for the son of his ex-girlfriend. Both Two-Tie and Joe Dale spread the word that the Lord of Misrule was supposed to win that race. Because the race was fixed from the beginning the race represents the worst side of racing. Those betting on that particular horse believed their bets were a sure thing. Even though Tommy is described as being crazy, he is not completely out of line when he believes that Lord of Misrule represents evil and the devil. He also believes that horse has gotten the ideal starting gate position not because he drew that number but because it was arranged for him to have the best possible spot. Ultimately Tommy believes that his horse, Mahdi, whom he believes is the chosen one will win the race.

A final point in the discussion of good versus evil is Medicine Ed's use of hoodoo magic in trying to influence the races. Even though he intends his magic only to help him out or to keep evil away, it seems the more he uses it the more drastic the ill effects of the medicine are. As he mixes up the powder that he believes will ensure that Lord of Misrule will win the race Medicine Ed battles with his own conscious whether he should



use the medicine or not. In the past the horses on whom he has used the powder had died soon after they've won their races. Medicine Ed isn't sure if it is fair to Lord of Misrule to bring his life to an end in order to protect himself. Medicine Ed also hopes he will profit if the Lord of Misrule wins and wonders if it is right to profit at the expense of a life. In the end it is Medicine Ed who is most affected by the goofer powder since his horse has to be killed when it breaks its leg in the race and he loses all his money that he bet on the race.

Belief in Luck and Superstition

The men and women who work the racetrack are very serious believers in luck and often follow superstition to try to keep their luck good. Each character has his or her own take on luck and how much good luck they are allowed. Of all the characters Medicine Ed is the one most tied to luck and superstition as he practices hoodoo to try to bring good luck his way.

There are a variety of objects in the book that characters believe bring them luck. This is especially true for Tommy. He believes that Maggie has brought him good luck. He also believes that he has gotten luck from Pelter and that if he ever loses Pelter he will lose his good luck. When he goes to race Mahdi against Lord of Misrule Tommy wears a stick pin that he believes was left by St. James as a symbol of good luck. In reality the pin was just a bowling club pin Tommy found in the trailer.

Just as there are things that some characters believe bring them luck there are things that others believe will ruin their luck. Medicine Ed, for instance, refers to the money that Maggie made when she bet on Boll Weevil as unlucky money. He worries briefly that Maggie using this unlucky money to help buy Spinoza might taint their luck with the horse. Medicine Ed also notes that when Maggie walks backward in front of him and the horse he is walking as she tries to talk to him that her actions will bring them bad luck.

Each character has his or her own idea about luck. On page 22 Tommy believes that luck comes because he calls it. On page 159 Maggie believes luck is something that one has to stay plugged into to keep a constant supply coming. In contrast, Deucey doesn't believe she has enough luck to be successful as the owner of two horses. She almost believes she had it coming when her older horse, Grizzly, turned up dead in his stall.

In addition to his belief in luck and superstition Medicine Ed also practices hoodoo to enhance his luck. The problem with Medicine Ed's use of hoodoo is that the goofer powder for which he is known ensures the horse he uses it on will win its race but also results in that horse's death soon after the powder is used. The only race in which the horse on which Medicine Ed used his powder didn't win was the one in which the Lord of Misrule ran.

This race should teach those who believe in luck and superstition a valuable lesson. Almost everything, including the results of horse races are out of human's control. There



was no amount of luck or goofer dust that could keep the Lord of Misrule from falling when Mahdi bumped into him.

The Racetrack Lifestyle

One of the things the reader will learn a good deal about in this novel is the way people live who work at a racetrack. This style of life doesn't end with where the people live but also extends to how they act and treat each other. The reader also learns how much seedy and crooked activities take place in racing both on the track and off.

First the reader learns that people who work at the racetrack have a very transient lifestyle. They often travel from track to track winning money when and where they can. Some grooms and even horse owners live in the barns with their horses. Medicine Ed believes he is lucky to have a crushed in Winnebago that he can call home. He still dreams for a real home. Maggie and Tommy also live in a trailer, a home that Maggie refers to as a twenty-foot lunchbox.

When Maggie first arrives at Indian Mound Downs, Deucey quickly reads her story. She recognizes right away that Maggie and Tommy have come to make quick money. Although it seems that Deucey would want to stay away from the two she, along with Medicine Ed, become friends with the inexperienced girl. Deucey warns Maggie that Vernon will give her stalls that are spread all over the racing complex. She tells Maggie this is done so Maggie won't be able to keep her eye on all of her horses at the same time. This gives the other owners a chance to check out her horses without Maggie knowing about it.

While Medicine Ed and Deucey at least put up with Maggie, Maggie soon learns that a good deal of blackmailing goes on at the track. After the first race, for instance, Maggie sees Deucey crying and leading Little Spinoza next to a blue car. She later learns that Joe Dale Bigg, the lead trainer at the track, is trying to get Deucey to take his horse. Deucey, however, refuses to take the horse because she doesn't want to be indebted to Joe Dale. Remember that even though Joe Dale pressured Deucey to take Little Spinoza when Little Spinoza won his first race in Deucey's ownership Joe Dale had Deucey beaten and then killed her other racing horse in retaliation.

The crookedness of the racetrack is another aspect of racetrack life that the reader will learn about in this book. Those with power try to use their power to influence races and make people money. Joe Dale, for instance, threatens Medicine Ed that no one had better try to win the race against Lord of Misrule. Two-Tie puts out the word that even though Pelter has been entered in a claiming race no one should claim him. Even though it is illegal, horses are doped with bute, a medication known to make them run faster. Judges who test for doping are paid off not to find dope in horses' tests.



The Need for a Home

In this story Medicine Ed and Little Spinoza are at one point in similar situations because neither one of them has a home. Medicine Ed connects with the horse because no one seems to want him. Meanwhile Medicine Ed schemes and plans how he can get himself a home. In his old age he wants to feel settled for the first time in his life.

Because Spinoza has such a good bloodline, Medicine Ed is surprised that there is no one willing to give the horse a home. Joe Dale doesn't want him because he believes the horse is crazy. His son, Biggy, is also coming back home to live and Joe Dale knows Biggy doesn't get along with the horse. Joe Dale has tried to make Deucey take Little Spinoza but Deucey refuses to take the horse as a gift. She will only buy him fair and square. Medicine Ed finally goes in as partners with Deucey and Maggie to own the horse. Later, Medicine Ed notes how good Little Spinoza looks after he has been in the care of his three owners for a good while. The horse seems younger and Medicine Ed believes it is because of the good care he's gotten as well as the horse's sense that he has a home and a family. Medicine Ed may be jealous of the horse because he wishes he had his own home and family.

Medicine Ed realizes it is his own fault he has moved out of contact with his family and lost his family home. He quit school and went into the racing business at a young age even though he was encouraged not to do so. Now that he is in his seventies he is regretting his decision. He schemes and uses his goofer powder in order to help himself get a home of his own but his plans seem to always blow up in his face. First his boss, Gus Zeno dies, and then he loses his job with Tommy when Tommy goes crazy. Despite his bad luck Medicine Ed always has something working in his favor and a new opportunity pops up when he needs one.

Medicine Ed had picked out the home that he wants for himself. It is a trailer with a green-striped awning in an old trailer park for black people. The trailer had a graveled yard with a palm tree. Medicine Ed compares the idea of having a home to finally having some security and stability for once in his life. He wants to live where he doesn't have to worry about having the old battered Winnebago taken away from him. He believes if he had a home he wouldn't have to be dependent on other people for his livelihood anymore. He idealizes his home as affording him the ability to stop working and have some peace.

Religious References

Oddly for a book about luck, superstition, hoodoo and racing there are also a good deal of religious references in the novel. Most of these references are made in the sections of the book that focus on Medicine Ed and Tommy. Both see their roles in the fight against good and evil. Medicine Ed refers to Biblical passages and songs while Tommy focuses on religious symbolism.



Medicine Ed's focus on religion comes from his background in church as a child. As Alice sings to Little Spinoza to hypnotize him during his second race Medicine Ed is transported back in time by the song that Alice is singing to the horse. He recognizes it as one that his mother once sang to him. He hears her voice telling him he will understand better why Spinoza is losing the race by such a wide margin. He believes it is her voice that is a sign of good fortune that prompts Spinoza to begin really running and win the race.

As Medicine Ed becomes more stressed about the position in which he has been placed concerning the race the Lord of Misrule is to run he refers more and more to the Bible. He's already recognized the horse as the devil, just as Tommy later calls the horse. When he hears Tommy mumbling to Mahdi, Medicine Ed recites Bible passages trying to cover up what Tommy is saying. Later, when he's mixing up the goofer powder that he believes he needs to use on the Lord of Misrule he reminds himself that the Bible says that a horse has never saved anybody. Every time he spreads the goofer powder Medicine Ed prays to God to bless the action of the powder.

Perhaps the strongest religious references come from Tommy, the one character who becomes more and more crazy as the story progresses. He equates the race between the Lord of Misrule and the Mahdi as a competition between good and evil. He believes the Lord of Misrule is not a real horse but instead the reincarnation of the devil. Meanwhile Tommy believes the Mahdi is the redeemer. Tommy is right in his belief. In the Islamic religion the Mahdi is the name of the promised redeemer. Tommy believes that the Mahdi will win the race against the Lord of Misrule proving to him that good can prevail over evil.

Notice Tommy's interest in the gate placings and how he connects these placings to religious imagery. He believes the Lord of Misrule had gotten the first gate position, representing God because mortals cater to evil. Tommy thinks that Lord of Misrule is pretending to be righteous even though his is the devil. Tommy also focuses on the gate position that Spinoza is given. He connects this third gate position with the number three, a number that represents the Holy trinity. He believes this means that God likes Spinoza but doesn't ensure that horse will win. Tommy's own horse, Mahdi gets the seventh gate position. Not only does Tommy consider the number seven to be a lucky number but the number seven is also a significant number in the Bible because it indicates completeness.



Styles

Point of View

This story is told from the viewpoint of a third person narrator. The narrator is not involved in the action of the story but records the thoughts and actions of certain characters. Different parts of the story focus on different characters. The main characters who are of focus in the story are Maggie, Medicine Ed, Tommy and Two-Tie. The narrator knows and reports on the thoughts, actions and emotions of these three characters. The narrator has less insight into the thoughts and emotions of the other characters. He is able only to describe the actions of these characters and report on what they have to say.

Notice most of the story is told from the third person point of view. Maggie, Medicine Ed and Two-Tie's sections of the novel are all told from the third person point of view. In Tommy's sections of the novel, however, the second person point of view is used. The author may use the second person point of view in Tommy's sections of the novel not only to make his sections stand out from the others but also to make the reader feel more involved with Tommy and his plans, almost as if the reader is being put in Tommy's place.

Language and Meaning

The language of this novel is unique because the author distinguishes each of the characters by the way they speak. Maggie, Tommy and Two-Tie, for instance, speak in proper English with little use of slang or mispronunciations. The people who actually inhabit the racetrack and work with the horses are very different in their speech patterns. The character with the most unique speech is Medicine Ed. He says "cunjure" instead of "conjure" and "sho is" instead of "sure is." Ed's speech is that of the uneducated. He confuses learning and teaching remembering to himself the time when Madame Eulalie "learned him doctoring" (244) instead of "taught him doctoring." Ed isn't the only one with bad grammar and pronunciation. Vernon is almost as bad as Ed. He uses "sumpm" for "something" and "Sadday" for Saturday.

In contrast, Two-Tie prides himself as a gentleman and as a result his speech is proper if not elegant. "I'm sorry to say the kid has temporarily tied himself up in other business" (127) Two-Tie says at one point. "Margaret, my dear, are you ill?" (200-201) he asks Maggie when he sees her lying on the ground at Joe Dale's. Notice he calls her by her full name, not her nickname. Two-Tie, however, is not beyond a slip in his flawless pronunciation. As he talks to Vernon about Thanksgiving and learns Vernon's wife is hurt and can't cook he orders Vernon to "tell Estelle not to do nutting or buy nutting" (126) where he shortens the word "nothing" to "nutting." For the most part Maggie's speech is grammatically correct and she pronounces words correctly, as one would expect from a college educated woman who has worked as a writer.



Structure

This 286-page novel is divided into four large sections. The part of the story included in each of these sections focuses on a particular horse race as well as the events that led up to and/or the events that resulted from that race. The four sections are titled First Race, Second Race, Third Race and Fourth Race. The First Race deals with the race won by Boll Weevil while the section dedicated to the Second Race actually contains information about two races. These races include the one in which Little Spinoza lost so badly and the race that Little Spinoza won. The race in which Pelter wins and is claimed by Joe Dale and D'Ambrisi is the focus of Race Three even though this section deals entirely with the results of Pelter being claimed. The actual race is never described. The final section, Race Four, is dedicated to the race created for The Lord of Misrule. The author has been building up to this race since the beginning of the novel. It is in this section that the novel climaxes with the race, in which The Lord of Misrule was supposed to win, being won by Pelter. These sections of the novel are divided into a total of 40 chapters. There is also an epilogue entitled "Results." This epilogue is divided into three sections that describe how each of the three main characters — Maggie, Medicine Ed and Tommy — fared after Joe Dale was killed.

The story is told in a linear timeline beginning with the day that Maggie shows up at Indian Mound Downs requesting stalls for Tommy's four horses. It ends with the death of Joe Dale Bigg on the night that The Lord of Misrule ran at the racetrack in a special race intended to be a moneymaker for that horse's owners. For the most part the story is told in the past tense. There are some sections, like Chapter 5 for instance, which is told in the present tense. None of the other sections narrated from Tommy's point of view are told in the present tense so it is assumed that the author uses this tense, as well as the second person point of view, to try to pull the reader completely into the moment between Tommy and Maggie.

One of the interesting aspects of this novel is that the author chooses not to use quotation marks around words spoken directly by the characters. In some cases this can make it difficult for the reader to determine if a passage is being said out loud by a character or if the passage is part of their thoughts. It can also make it difficult to determine who is speaking in some of the conversations. Often these sections of dialogue are presented just as if the reader were listening to a conversation between two people with no text other than the conversation. An example of this can be found at the beginning of Chapter 17. The conversation between Two-Tie and Vernon is almost completely uninterrupted by any side notes, descriptions or even references to who is speaking for almost two pages. In fact, the majority of this chapter is composed of uninterrupted conversation as the reader is left to draw for himself what is important out of the conversation.



Quotes

Doing it all for some handsome deadbeat horseman who works her to death while he rolls high. I seen a million like her, Deucey said.”

-- Deucey (First Race, Chapter 1 paragraph 34)

Importance: When Deucey first sees Maggie, she correctly guesses the situation that has brought Maggie to the horse racing business. She realizes that Maggie and Tommy are hoping to make fast money.

Shipping into Indian Mound Downs was the logical culmination of Tommy Hansel’s science of running them where they belonged. He planned to steal with these horses, who were all better than they looked on paper. It was slumming and flim flam, yes, but a sure thing.”

-- Narrator (First Race, Chapter 2 paragraph 2)

Importance: Maggie knows that Tommy intends to run his horses at this small racetrack and bet big on them so he can make a good deal of money off bets. Tommy isn’t the only horseman who is playing this type of game with his horses. His plan to get rich quick off the horses is one example of the way the horse racing business isn’t exactly always honest.

Soon as he heard the name of the horse Zeno was running, he knew what he must do. He must ride his lucky money on Mr Boll Weevil, who had beckoned to him — and somehow he felt he had to touch his lucky money just then. They it is, nemmind if it look strange — he stumbled into the trailer.”

-- Narrator (First Race, Chapter 4 paragraph 1)

Importance: When Medicine Ed learns the name of the horse that Zeno is running is named Boll Weevil he believes it is fate that he should bet his lucky money on this horse. He gets his feeling based on a song that had been going through his mind about a boll weevil needing a home. Medicine Ed thinks he’ll be able to get the money he needs to buy his own home by betting on Boll Weevil.

Come to find out if you asked by powerful means for more than the animal had to give, you could not manage the results. Every time he had cast the powder the horse had won, but won for the last time.”

-- Narrator (First Race, Chapter 4 paragraph 4)

Importance: Medicine Ed knows how to make a hoodoo goofer powder that can determine which horse will win a race but he has learned that the powder also has unfavorable results because the horses on whom he has used the powder in the past have never won another race.

For he liked the frizzly hair girl a little better now. Old Deucey had spied into the heart of this young woman and seen there slavery of the man-woman kind.”



-- Narrator (First Race, Chapter 9 paragraph 7)

Importance: Medicine Ed has gained respect for Maggie because he sees her strength despite the chains that Tommy Hansel has tried to put on her.

Wasn't no big win and free money that Mr Boll Weevil was singing to him about. It was the passing of Gus Zeno. And it wasn't no new home for Medicine Ed he was bragging on, no down payment on a little mobile home with a green stripe awning and a palm tree behind the track in Hallandale. It was the end of the good home he do have. It was goodbye to the easy life he know now."

-- Narrator (First Race, Chapter 9 paragraph 23)

Importance: Medicine Ed realizes too late that he has misinterpreted the message that Boll Weevil was trying to give him. He'd thought it was a promise he'd be able to buy his own home, not a warning that he was in danger of losing the good job and home he did have.

Deucey, who didn't scare, so scared of a man in a dark Cadillac she was crying. His calm, insistent, fake-reasonable voice — New York, not West Virginia — scared Maggie too."

-- Narrator (First Race, Chapter 10 paragraph 12)

Importance: Maggie begins to realize there are things she should fear at the racetrack when she sees first hand how scared Deucey, who doesn't scare easily, is of the man who drives the blue car.

And by the way, Vernon. This young lady doesn't know me from a hole in the ground. The families wasn't close in recent years. Don't mention my name. It's not that kind of thing."

-- Narrator (Second Race, Chapter 11 paragraph 74)

Importance: When Two-Tie asks Vernon to look after Maggie for him he warns Vernon not to tell Maggie who is helping her out because she does not know who he is.

Young woman, it is a price on everything. Every change make some other change that you can't see."

-- Medicine Ed (Race Two, Chapter 12 paragraph 19)

Importance: Medicine Ed gives Maggie this advice when she asks him how to go about caring for horses. She tends to overdo her treatment of the horses. Medicine Ed warns her that any change she makes in a horse's care will affect some other aspect of that horse. What he doesn't realize is that his advice is appropriate for all situations in life.

I tell you a secret, horse racing is not no science. Some of em tries to make it a science, with the drugs and the chemicals and that, but ma' fact it's more like a religion. It's a clouded thing. You can't see through it."

-- Medicine Ed (Race Two, Chapter 12 paragraph 25)



Importance: Medicine Ed explains to Maggie that horse racing is no science but is instead more like religion. This is one of the instances in the novel where the characters refer to religion to explain or describe some aspect of the novel.

No — it was before that — already when Earlie took hold of him at the half he lost interest, I saw it, Maggie said.”

-- Maggie (Chapter 18 paragraph 39)

Importance: When Maggie, Deucey and Medicine Ed try to determine the point at which Little Spinoza lost interest in the race Maggie speaks up saying she believes it was even before Earlie tried to force the horse to run that he gave up on the race.

I want that horse back that Zeno claimed from me. The Mahdi. He's in for two grand on Saturday night.”

-- Tommy (Chapter 19 paragraph 26)

Importance: Tommy shows his obsession with the Mahdi when he begins to tell others that he wants to buy the horse back.

Joe Dale Bigg believed more than it was there to believe in. He believed it have all been one big plan, and which was to make him look like a fool.”

-- Narrator (Chapter 20 paragraph 25)

Importance: Medicine Ed realizes that although Little Spinoza's win is a surprise to his three owners, Joe Dale Bigg thought it had been planned in order to make him look foolish for selling the horse. This quote also is an example of the unique speech patterns that characterizes Medicine Ed.

Inside his pocket piece used to be anvil dust and a thumbnail of blue Getaway Goofer Powder, dressed with a drop of Jockey Club fast luck oil he order in from Lucky Heart Curios, Memphis, Tennessee. Every dimestore conjure in South Carolina had the same. But now it's a strong Leave Alone powder in there too. He has the scooped-up going-away tracks of all three of them white bosses at the Mound who like to scheme and get in your bidness, and can't be satisfied, and want it back, what anymany little bit of anything you finally lay hold of. This speckle stuff give him keepaway power over the stallman, Suitcase Smithers, and Racing Secretary Chenille, and the leading trainer, Joe Dale Bigg. And just in case, his boss Tommy is in there too.”

-- Narrator (Chapter 20 paragraph 27)

Importance: Medicine Ed uses this hoodoo concoction in an attempt to keep trouble from coming his way.

Don't get in that dark window automobile with that gangster, you know he has hurt people, Medicine Ed try to say into her, but she ain't listening.”

-- Medicine Ed (Chapter 24 paragraph 31)



Importance: When Medicine Ed sees that Joe Dale Bigg is successfully convincing Maggie to get in his car with him Ed tries to send Maggie a telepathic message warning her to stay away from that man.

He was still smiling but watching her carefully. All at once she understood that he had given her some drug and was waiting for it to show.”

-- Narrator (Chapter 27 paragraph 14)

Importance: As soon as they are in his office Joe Dale Bigg gives Maggie a soda that is laced with horse tranquilizers. The drug makes her easy prey for the big man because it leaves her with no strength to get away from him or defend herself.

Listen carefully, my dear. Lord of Misrule, he whispered loudly. Lord of Misrule, Margaret. Memorize that name.”

-- Two-Tie (Chapter 27 paragraph 68)

Importance: Two-Tie tries to ensure that Maggie gets in on the money he plans to flow in from the Lord of Misrule by hinting to her that if she bets on that horse she will get the money she needs.

The Irish boyfriends fast and strong, he ain't a coward, and he can take care of himself, Two-Tie thought. He was impressed. On the other hand he knew, with hot dizzy certainty, that there would be no end of trouble now.”

-- Narrator (Chapter 28 paragraph 59)

Importance: Two-Tie is happy to learn the Maggie's boyfriend is able to take care of himself but knows that because Tommy has been so rash in hitting both Biggy and Joe Dale that there will be trouble because they will feel the need to retaliate.

I'm getting out of here as soon as I can. I don't know exactly what's going on, but a girl like me — I can't be playing around with gangsters. I keep thinking I'm in a movie and then I realize I could get killed.”

-- Maggie (Chapter 29 paragraph 5)

Importance: Maggie is planning on leaving the racetrack life as soon as she can but is afraid to tell Tommy because she thinks she will push him over the edge when she tells him she is leaving.

The young fool's reason have clouded, what it is. Ever since he come back with Pelter from Joe Dale Bigg's farm, he be wandering in his mind.”

-- Narrator (Fourth Race, Chapter 31 paragraph 2)

Importance: Medicine Ed worries about his boss, Tommy Hansel, because he realizes that Tommy is losing his mind. He pinpoints the beginning of Tommy's demise as the day that Tommy went to Bigg's farm to get Pelter.



The boy didn't have to come here to play his hole card, that was clear, so why did he? Keep away from that race, Two-Tie advised himself out loud. It was a funny feeling he had."

-- Narrator (Fourth Race, Chapter 32 paragraph 8)

Importance: Two-Tie tries to figure out why he has such a strange feeling about the race created for the Lord of Misrule. He believes it is strange that the son of his former girlfriend came to Indian Mound Downs in order to have his horse win a race since it has become apparent to Two-Tie that Donald didn't need money from the race.

He couldn't believe that such inconsequential lowlifes like these two would be the ones to take him out. But they had Elizabeth. He got in the car."

-- Narrator (Fourth Race, Chapter 32 paragraph 12)

Importance: Even before Two-Tie gets in the car with Biggy and D'Ambrisi he knows that he will not emerge alive.

I'm holding you responsible to stop it or let me know. You hear what I say?"

-- Joe Dale Bigg (Fourth Race, Chapter 34 paragraph 22)

Importance: Joe Dale tries to take over Two-Tie's role as race track gangster when he threatens Medicine Ed telling him that he is responsible to stop Tommy from trying to win the race against the Lord of Misrule or let Joe Dale know if Tommy insists on trying to win the race.

Harm is coming, it ain't his fault, but still he is doctoring so that hurt, when it come, it will go on others and not on him."

-- Narrator (Fourth Race, Chapter 34 paragraph 27)

Importance: Because Medicine Ed knows that trouble is coming he uses his hoodoo knowledge to try to keep the trouble from settling on him and instead going to other people.

He whisper all night to that red horse, the one he lost to Zeno, and which he claim back, and which he think is going to win that race for him."

-- Narrator (Fourth Race, Chapter 34 paragraph 28)

Importance: Medicine Ed realizes Tommy is continuing to lose his mind as he spends his days talking to the Mahdi.

He was insane, he thought people were trying to destroy him, to suck out his guts, but, she noted, in the rare event that someone was trying to destroy you, to suck out your guts, insanity was a goodly metaphysics."

-- Narrator (Fourth Race, Chapter 40 paragraph 74)

Importance: Maggie considers that Tommy's insanity isn't really based on irrational thoughts since people really were trying to harm him.