The Natural

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF BERNARD MALAMUD

Malamud was born in Brooklyn, New York, to Russian Jewish immigrants. He earned a BA from City College of New York and went on to earn his master's degree from Columbia University. He then worked as a teacher and an English professor before achieving success as a writer. Extolled as one of the preeminent mid-Twentieth AmericanJewish authors alongside Saul Bellow and Philip Roth, many of Malamud's eight novels and fifty-five short stories speak to the American Jewish experience, as well as issues related to Jewish immigration and racial identity. Malamud's writing bears the influence of his upbringing during the Great Depression: his characters are often working class or poor, bound to lives of suffering and punishment. His 1966 novel *The Fixer*, about the trial of a Jewish man in Tsarist Russia, won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. Additionally, both *The Fixer* and *The Natural* were adapted as popular films. Malamud met his wife, Ann De Chiara in 1942, and the pair married a few years later. They had two children, Paul and Janna, the latter of which has penned a memoir about Bernard entitled *My Father is a Book*.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Natural is set during the heyday of American baseball. Several prominent baseball stars began their careers in the 1950s, including Jackie Robinson, the first African American to become a professional baseball player. The sport was first broadcast through radio in 1921 and on television in 1939; by the 1950s, baseball was accessible to the nation at large. Though 1950s American culture is traditionally seen as conservative—family-focused and insistent on conformity and strict moral values—American baseball during this era was explosive and energetic, attracting fanatical devotees and making celebrity figures out of its most recognizable players. Torn between moral directives and an unbridled appetite for fame and success, Roy Hobbs symbolizes this division between American society and baseball in the mid-twentieth century.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Malamud is one of several prominent twentieth-century authors to explore baseball in America. Philip Roth, a contemporary of Malamud's, published *The Great American Novel* in 1973, which about a baseball team in New Jersey. Mark Harris wrote a series of baseball novels about a fictional pitcher, Henry Wiggen, including *The Southpaw* (1953) and its well-known sequel, *Bang the Drum Slowly* (1956). George Plimpton's *Out of My League* (1961), a non-fiction book, discusses his own efforts to play professional baseball as an amateur. Malamud has also attracted comparisons to other American Jewish writers of the late modernist period, including Saul Bellow, whose novel *The Adventures of Augie March* (1953) examines the American dream and individual progress in American society, similar to *The Natural*.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *The Natural*
- **When Written:** 1950s
- **Where Written:** Oregon
- **When Published:** 1952
- **Literary Period:** Late Modernism
- **Genre:** Sports novel
- **Setting:** A train from an unidentified city to Chicago; a carnival at a train stop; Chicago; New York City
- **Climax:** Hobbs decides to throw (purposefully lose) the last game of the season for Judge Banner.
- **Antagonist:** Judge Banner, Memo Paris
- **Point of View:** Third-person omniscient

EXTRA CREDIT

Movie Adaptation. In the 1984 film, Roy Hobbs (played by Robert Redford) wins the final game of the season—a significant departure from the novel, in which Hobbs loses the game and resigns himself to a life of dishonor.

Fact and Fiction. In *The Natural*, Malamud draws on a few real events from the history of baseball, including the shooting of Chicago Cubs player Eddie Waitkus by a female fan, Ruth Ann Steinhagen, and the Black Sox Scandal of 1919, in which the Chicago White Sox resolved to "throw" the World Series (or purposefully lose the game in order to earn money from gamblers betting against the team).

PLOT SUMMARY

Roy Hobbs, a nineteen-year-old baseball prodigy, is traveling to Chicago with the scout who discovered him, Sam Simpson, to try out for the Chicago Cubs. On the train, Hobbs and Sam encounter Walter "The Whammer" Whambold, a well-known baseball star, and when the train makes a stop at a carnival, Sam organizes a pitching and hitting competition between Hobbs and the Whammer. Though apparently outmatched, Hobbs wins the competition, attracting the attention of both a

conniving journalist, Max Mercy, and a mysterious, striking young woman also traveling on the train, Harriet Bird. Sam is accidentally hit in the stomach during the competition; weakened, he dies shortly thereafter, insisting that Hobbs continue on with his travels. Hobbs makes it to Chicago, where he receives a call from Harriet inviting him to her hotel room. He accepts and visits her, but upon entering the room, she shoots him in the chest with a silver bullet from a pistol. It is suggested that Harriet is obsessed with killing famous athletes, and Hobbs' demonstrated prowess against the Whammer encouraged her to target him.

Fifteen years later, Hobbs enters the dugout of the New York Knights and introduces himself to the team's manager and coach, Pop Fisher and Red Blow. The team is performing poorly, in part because the team's corrupt, immoral co-owner, Judge Banner, has arranged several bad trades in an attempt to diminish shareholders' confidence in Pop Fisher, thereby allowing Banner to take over the team. Additionally, The Knights' star player, Bump Baily, has become "lazy" and brash. Hobbs promises Pop and Red that he will help restore the Knights' reputation by using his **"Wonderboy" bat**, a bat he carved himself in childhood, to hit impressive home runs.

Hobbs is permitted to pinch-hit for Bump during a crucial game, and to the team's surprise, he performs far better than a rookie, hitting an coveted triple. In a subsequent game, Bump, hoping to outdo Hobbs, runs into the outfield wall in an attempt to catch a fly ball, later dying of his injuries. Hobbs takes over Bump's position on the team and begins to pursue his grieving girlfriend, Memo Paris.

Hobbs struggles with his teammates and Judge Banner, who refuses to pay him a better salary, and begins to hit poorly as a result. Max Mercy, now a famous journalist, pursues Hobbs, whose past he is determined to uncover (having forgotten their encounter on the train years earlier). A fortune teller, Lola, informs Hobbs that he will meet and fall in love with a "dark haired lady," though he dismisses the prediction, choosing to concentrate on his efforts with Memo—who continues to refuse his advances, calling herself a "dead man's girl." During one important game, however, Hobbs spots a dark haired woman, Iris Lemon, in the stands, and her presence seems to inspire him to hit a spectacular home run. Hobbs later meets with Iris and shares a tranquil night with her: she is drawn to and protective of him. Likewise, Hobbs feels comfortable with Iris, even confiding in her about his troubled past. When Hobbs learns that Iris is a grandmother, though, having had a daughter at a young age, he cruelly rejects her.

Hobbs plays well for the remainder of the season, but shortly before the final game, he collapses during a botched sexual encounter with Memo. Told that he must retire for his own health after the last game against the Pirates, Hobbs becomes concerned about his future without baseball and accepts a bribe from Judge Banner to "throw" the last game of the season—that is, purposefully lose the match so that Banner can profit from gamblers who are betting against the Knights. During the game, Hobbs hits a ball into the stands that strikes Iris, who has come to see him again, and destroys Wonderboy on a foul. Iris informs Hobbs that she is pregnant, and he resolves to try to win the game for her and their future child. Ultimately, though, Hobbs strikes out against the Pirates' star pitcher, a prodigy named Herman Youngberry. Desolate about his loss and disgusted with his own immoral actions, Hobbs tears up Banner's bribe check. Memo, in cahoots with Banner, tries to shoot Hobbs but cannot bring herself to. Meanwhile, Mercy discovers Hobbs's past as well as his involvement in the gambling scandal and plans to publish the information. In the end, Hobbs is left to wander the streets of New York alone, utterly ruined.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Roy Hobbs – The protagonist of the novel, Roy Hobbs is introduced as a teenage baseball prodigy traveling by train to Chicago to try out for the Chicago Cubs. The novel reveals little about Hobbs's background, only mentioning that Hobbs's family was fractured and abusive—and that Hobbs grew up in various orphan homes—though his father taught him how to "toss a ball" during the summers. Hobbs's talent as a player is, as the novel's title suggests, "natural," amplified by a bat he carved himself (nicknamed **Wonderboy**), though these skills are hardly enough to make him a star of the sport. He transforms from an innocent, naïve teenager into an embittered, selfish thirty-five-year-old when he returns to baseball years after his near-fatal wounding at the hands of Harriet Bird, a mysterious and sumptuous woman with a twisted penchant for shooting sports stars. Though he gains celebrity status as the strongest player for the New York Knights (a fictional team based on the New York Yankees), Hobbs is unable to overcome the traumas of his past, as well as his own greed and single-minded ambition, to become a healthy, successful, and secure adult. Though he is described as traveling "on the train that never stopped"—constantly "in motion," determined to achieve—he is haunted by dreams of his lost childhood and distracted by the women he pursues, namely Memo Paris and Iris Lemon. Hobbs also suffers from physical injuries: he collapses shortly before the last game of the season and is told that he must retire for his own health, prompting him to agree to a bribe from Judge Banner, the Knights' corrupt co-owner, in order to earn money for his retirement (and the future family life he envisions with Memo). Ultimately, Hobbs is the novel's tragic hero, a character who fails to earn the wealth and glory he originally seemed primed to grasp.

Pop Fisher – The Knights' embittered manager and a former baseball player, infamous for an incident from the end of his

career as a player for the Sox known as "Fisher's Famous Flop," in which he failed to make a crucial home run during the World Series. An inheritance from his mother allowed Pop to buy a half share of the Knights, which he co-owns with Judge Banner, the majority stockholder of the team. However, Pop is plagued by the suspicion that he might be cursed—and that his team's lack of success might be his own fault. Though Pop has a managing contract for life, Judge Banner hopes to push Pop out of his job by making trades that hurt the team's performance and make Pop seem like a poor manager, and the Knights are divided by conflict and strife. Pop has a medical condition, "athlete's foot of the hand," that only seems to get better once Roy Hobbs appears and begins to win games for the Knights: Pop's physical health is directly connected to the team's success, which Hobbs' talents facilitate. In the end, Hobbs betrays Pop's confidence by failing to win the final game of the season—thus simultaneously failing to heal Pop's physical ailments or the team's reputation.

Judge Goodwill Banner – Judge Banner owns the majority of shares in the Knights, which he purchased from Pop's friend Charlie Gulch (presumably under duress). Malicious and immoral, the Judge's actions completely defy his job description—arbiter of justice—since he attempts to cheat Pop Fisher and the Knights for his own financial gain. Though his first name is "Goodwill," he brags about his self-centered, ungenerous behavior, and his misdeeds are well-known to the Knights and its players, who feel powerless to stop the Judge, given his control over the team. Toward the end of the novel, he convinces Hobbs to "throw" the last game of the season (that is, purposefully lose it) to make Pop look like an incompetent manager and so that the Judge can profit off of the gamblers who are betting against the Knights.

Memo Paris – An aloof, shallow woman intent on finding wealth, Memo is Pop Fisher's niece and Hobbs's main love interest. She is originally attached to Bump Baily, whose celebrity status Hobbs usurps when he is signed to the Knights. However, Memo agrees to date Hobbs after Bump's death—and after Hobbs's persistent urging. Memo is conniving and secretive, obsessed with becoming affluent, and she uses her sex appeal to hold power over Hobbs; she also has a tendency to prompt bad luck for the men who pursue her, including both Bump, who dies tragically, and Hobbs, who begins to perform poorly in games after meeting and pursuing her. Eventually, Memo sells out Hobbs by forcing him to agree to a shady deal with Judge Banner. Banner wants Hobbs to purposefully lose ("throw") the last game of the season against the Pirates, thus demonstrating Pop Fisher's weakness as a manager and allowing Banner to take over the team. By choosing a relationship with Memo, Hobbs initiates the chain of events that lead to his own downfall.

Walter "the Whammer" Whambold – The Whammer is the "leading hitter of the American League," whom Hobbs encounters on the train to Chicago at the beginning of the novel. Characteristically arrogant and foolhardy, the Whammer challenges Hobbs to a pitching and hitting competition and loses spectacularly in an episode reminiscent of the scene that ends the novel, in which Hobbs loses the final game of the season to a younger pitching prodigy, Herman Youngberry.

Harriet Bird / The Woman – Harriet is a mysterious, attractive woman Hobbs encounters on the train to Chicago. Though she hardly gives him the time of day at first, she seems impressed by his prowess in the competition against the Whammer, which she witnesses. Hobbs is intrigued by her beauty and odd, rambling commentary, and when she suggests he meets her at her hotel in Chicago, he does so willingly. However, it is there that she shoots him with a silver bullet from a .22 caliber pistol. It is suggested that Harriet has killed other impressive athletes, and that she gains satisfaction from cutting down young sportsmen in their prime. Her violent actions suggest both the damaging consequences of ambition—she only shoots Hobbs *after* he declares himself to be the future "best player" in the sport—and the dangerous power of women in the novel, since Harriet is the first of several women to ensnare Hobbs.

Iris Lemon – Iris turns up in the stadium during one of Hobbs' games, and her presence seems to inspire him to play better, as he hits an impressive home run right after seeing her. Hobbs later pursues Iris, leading to an erotic scene at a lake. Unlike Memo, Iris is kind and empathetic, and Hobbs confides in her about his desires and his past. Though Iris never encountered Hobbs before attending his game, she feels naturally protective of and maternal towards him. When she reveals that she is both a mother and a grandmother, though, Hobbs is repulsed, and he decides to pursue Memo again. Iris's letters to Hobbs, which go unanswered, suggest that she became a mother by "mistake" (possibly as the result of a rape), yet Hobbs is hardly as forgiving and sympathetic to Iris as she is to him. Hobbs hits Iris with a foul ball during the last game of the Knights' season, and though injured, she manages to tell him that she is pregnant with his child. Tragically, though, it is too late for Hobbs to redeem himself and become the upstanding, moral individual Iris would want as her child's father, since he has already agreed to Judge Banner's bribe. Iris is a figure who might save Hobbs from himself, but his poor decisions ensure his own failures, free of her positive influence.

Sam Simpson – Sam is the scout who discovers Hobbs' talent as a high school ballplayer and accompanies him on the train to Chicago. A former star player whose alcoholism has ostensibly cost him his career as a regular scout—he can only work freelance, without a team contract, and is extremely poor as a result—Sam is determined to find a brilliant young player whose success will encourage a team to provide him with regular scout work. Hobbs, then, is his prized possession, and Sam is the only figure in the novel to treat Hobbs with true tenderness and generosity. Sam dies early on in the novel after

getting hit in the chest with a pitch during a contest between Hobbs and the Whammer, leaving Hobbs without guidance later on in his career, though he appears as a ghost at the end of the novel to warn Hobbs not to agree to Judge Banner's crooked deal.

Bump Baily – Bump is the Knights' star player before Hobbs arrives. He is as arrogant as the Whammer and is known for his rude antics off the field with Memo, his girlfriend, Pop, and the other players. Bump instantly becomes competitive with Hobbs, whom he views as a threat, and he begins to play more ferociously in an attempt to outdo Hobbs. However, Bump dies after injuring himself by running into the outfield wall while attempting to catch a pitch during a game (in an effort to outdo Hobbs), and Hobbs takes over his celebrity position on the team. Like the Whammer—and Hobbs at the end of novel—Bump is an example of a failed player, driven to defeat by his own out-of-control ambition.

Red Blow – Red Blow is the Knights' coach. He is deeply critical of the team, especially Bump Baily, whom he calls "lazy," noting to Hobbs that Pop Fisher is too infatuated with Bump's prowess to push him harder as a player. Red Blow is friendly with Hobbs and loyal to Pop, and he fills in some crucial background information about the team's prolonged failure and Pop's "curse."

Gus Sands – The "Supreme Bookie," a baseball gambler who "nets at least ten million a year," Sands is a close friend of Memo and the Judge. Even before the Judge entreats Hobbs to "throw" (purposefully lose) the last game of the season, Sands urges him to consider similar proposals, and he knows how to play off of Hobbs' insecurities—particularly about his own relationship with Memo, which is often strained—to goad him.

Max Mercy – Max Mercy is a journalist who follows the Knights and is intent on discovering Hobbs's past. As a younger journalist, he covered the Whammer and encountered Hobbs on the train to Chicago, but he seems not to remember this meeting until later on in the novel; moreover, Hobbs has kept his history—and his encounter with Harriet Bird—a secret from the public. Max exposes Hobbs's insecurities about his past by confronting him throughout the novel, forcing Hobbs to remember both the trauma of his wounding and his deep desire to transcend his destitute background at any cost.

Eddie – Eddie is a cheerful porter on the train to Chicago, clearly impressed by Hobbs's status as a soon-to-be famous ballplayer. Eddie is the first "fan" Hobbs encounters in his career, and his sycophantic actions toward Hobbs (like calling him "My Hero" and trying to kiss his hand, even just as a playful joke) foreshadow the crazed, obsessive behavior exhibited by the Knights' many fans.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Doc Knobb – A "short and tubby man in a green suit" hired by Pop Fisher to talk to the Knights before their game against the Pirates. Knobb's monologue literally hypnotizes the players, including Hobbs, in an attempt to reconfigure the team's thinking and motivate their success on the field.

Otto P. Zipp – A Knights fan with dwarfism who frequently professes his support for Bump Baily (and is harshly critical of Hobbs), using a "loud horn at the end of a two-foot walking stick" to create ruckus from the bleachers.

Herman Youngberry – A twenty-year-old pitching prodigy for the Pirates who secretly hopes to earn enough money to quit the sport and buy a big farm. He defeats Hobbs during the Pirates' match against the Knights.

Sadie Sutter – An older woman fan ("a girl of sixty-plus") obsessed with Dave Olson.

Clarence Mulligan – The Chicago Cubs agent Hobbs is meant to try out for.

Harry – A bartender who is friends with Sands.

Gloria – A prostitute and Knights fan from Mississippi who is obsessed with Gabby Laslow.

Lola – A fortune-teller in Jersey City who Bump consulted and who tells Hobbs that he will "fall in love with a darkhaired lady," which ostensibly refers to Iris.

Mike Barney – A fan of Hobbs who begs him to "sock a homer" for his sick child.

Chet Schultz – A pitcher for the Knights.

Charlie Gulch – Pop's "old-time partner," the former co-owner of the Knights, compelled by Judge Banner to sell out his portion of the team.

Scotty Carson – The agent who signs Roy Hobbs to the Knights.

Cal Baker – Shortstop for the Knights.

Doc Casey – The Knights' trainer.

Hank Benz – The Knights' third baseman.

Ed Simmons – A pinch hitter for the Knights.

Hank Kelly – Another pinch hitter for the Knights.

Emil Lajong – The Knights' first baseman.

Hinkle and Hill – Regular starters for the Knights.

Dave Olson – Squat catcher for the Knights.

Juan Flores – Center fielder for the Knights.

Gabby Laslow – Right field for the Knights.

McGee – Reliefer for the Knights.

Al Fowler – Southpaw for the Knights.

Allie Stubbs – The Knights' second baseman.

Dizzy – A former utility pitcher and prop man for the Knights who introduces Hobbs to the team.

Earl Wilson – The third base coach.

Dutch Vogelman – The Pirates' pitcher.

Walt Wickitt – The "peerless" Pirates manager.

Stuffy Briggs – The plate umpire for the Knights.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

AMBITION, FAILURE, AND THE AMERICAN DREAM

Baseball prodigy Roy Hobbs's past is only tenuously sketched out in *The Natural*, but the novel suggests that he has come from virtually nothing. Yet *The Natural* is hardly a rags-to-riches novel; it might more accurately be described as a rags-to-rags novel, since Hobbs never successfully transcends his troubled past to become well-adjusted and wealthy. Thus, *The Natural* presents a counterpoint to the myth of the American dream: the notion that even the poorest Americans can become rich and influential through sheer ambition and by working their way up the ranks. Malamud uses Hobbs's narrative progression from promising ambition to failure to argue that though the American dream is motivational and inspiring, it is ultimately illusory.

Initially, Roy Hobbs is hopeful that baseball will provide him with a way to leave behind a childhood of poverty and abuse, and that as the American dream promises, he will be able to work his way up to a comfortable life of affluence. Yet even though baseball is quintessentially American—the modern version of the sport has its origins in America—it does not provide the material wealth and social status Hobbs seeks, suggesting that if even the most American sport cannot propel him toward the American dream, nothing can.

Hobbs's family is destitute; he describes his mother as a "whore" who once drowned a cat in front of him before abandoning the family, and notes that his father "dumped [him] in one orphan home after the other." The only useful skill he learned from his family was baseball (his father taught him how to "toss a ball"), positioning the sport as his only hope for a better life. As a sport that offers significant perks—celebrity, trips to cities for training and try-outs, access to high-class amenities—the young Hobbs is drawn to baseball, which offers him a way out of poverty. However, his low-class status makes it difficult for him to navigate these features, suggesting that true social mobility—transitioning smoothly from poverty to affluence—is impossible. Furthermore, baseball is not as glamorous as Hobbs's first experiences with the sport make it seem. Hobbs is not afforded enough money out of his advance to pay for housing, and rather than benefiting from an appropriate salary, baseball players like Hobbs are forced to rely on the generosity of fans who lavish him with consumer merchandise on his "day," an event meant to celebrate and support baseball's best players. Thus, baseball fails to live up to the fantasies that Hobbs concocts, enchanted by its allure and promises of celebrity, and his desire for the American dream goes unfulfilled.

Hobbs's progress toward the American dream is continually hindered, since his unbridled ambition—the quality supposedly needed to achieve the American dream—proves harmful rather than helpful. Cynical and conniving, Hobbs is unkind to his teammates, his love interests, and his team's manager, Pop Fisher. By prioritizing his own wishes and focusing on his career, Hobbs achieves temporary success, becoming the team's strongest player and a celebrity in his own right, but alienates everyone around him in the process. In addition, though Hobbs is driven, he lacks a more meaningful and clear-eyed understanding of his identity and what he wants in life outside of wealth and fame. When he talks to a recent acquaintance named Harriet Bird about what he wants in life, all he can articulate is a vague statement that spotlights his ambition: "I feel that I have got it in me—that I am due for something very big." When Harriet tries to dig deeper, asking if Hobbs craves "some more glorious meaning to his life and activities" that is "over and above earthly things," Hobbs is unable to respond, since he can't see a future for himself beyond a simplistic vision of celebrity and affluence. He often thinks about eschewing his ambitions and returning to a more humble lifestyle—represented by the image of **the boy and his dog**, a reflection of himself in childhood, that appears in his dreams and hallucinations.

As the novel unfolds, Hobbs's single-minded and shallow pursuit of success gets him into trouble and ultimately causes him to fall prey to corruption when he accepts a bribe that destroys his baseball career. Far from allowing him to enter the glorious gates of the American dream, Hobbs's aspirations for wealth and success cost him those very things. Judge Banner, the co-owner of the Knights, denies Hobbs the full salary he deserves even after significant negotiation, and Hobbs finds that achieving fame through baseball fails to carry the weight it is supposed to. Hobbs gambles, battles with journalists who threaten to ruin his reputation, and otherwise struggles to maintain influence within the world of the sport. His performance, though generally strong, becomes erratic at times because of the pressure of his newfound notoriety, and he is persistently plagued by anxiety and insecurities about his future. Toward the end of the novel, Hobbs accepts the Judge's bribe to "throw" (deliberately lose) the final game of the season

in part to earn more money than he otherwise would from his meager salary (and to prove to his love interest, Memo, that he can provide her with an affluent life), but he relinquishes the bribe payment out of guilt. The novel implies that Hobbs's reputation will be publicly maligned in the press by the journalist Max Mercy, who has discovered the bribe. Despite his efforts and ambition, Hobbs never transcends his destitute background, since he leaves behind his career without ever having become truly notable, wealthy, and successful. Ultimately, the American dream eludes Hobbs. Contrary to the myth's telling, hard work and ambition—especially when coupled with insecurity and self-doubt—are not enough to achieve success.

The concept of the American dream is the fiction that motivates young, ambitious Roy Hobbs as he attempts to navigate baseball and American society more broadly. Though Hobbs follows this narrative—working doggedly, even ruthlessly, to achieve his goals—he is unable to maintain the success he initially enjoys as the Knights' breakout player. Thus, Malamud suggests that the American dream is as inspiring as it is ultimately mythical. *The Natural* leaves readers with the bleak conclusion that even "natural" talent and tireless effort cannot always counterweigh poverty, a low-class background, and self-doubt, and that the American dream proves difficult (or nearly impossible) to come by.

BASEBALL AND AMERICAN VICE

Baseball in *The Natural* looks different from how readers might picture it today. Disorganized, low-paying, and unglamorous, American baseball of the mid-twentieth century hardly seems desirable as a career path, and Malamud's descriptions of the game attest to the dishonesty and tyranny of its bosses and players. Throughout the novel, Malamud examines American society through the lens of baseball, a quintessentially American sport, ultimately arguing that both are steeped in cruelty and corruption.

Malamud portrays baseball as an inherently savage game, controlled by vicious players and corrupt managers. Though the game is often understood as a classic American pastime—competitive yet entertaining—*The Natural* depicts the baseball diamond as a battlefield instead, underscoring the prevalence of violence in American life. According to *The Natural*, American society views violence not as gruesome and abhorrent, but as entertainment or spectacle. Baseball for Malamud is a grotesque circus: a "zoo full of oddballs" occupies the Knights' "patched and peeling" stadium stands. Action between the players is often intense and violent—at one point in the novel, Hobbs is described as holding his bat, nicknamed **Wonderboy**, "above his head as if prepared to beat a rattlesnake to death." Bump, Hobbs's rival, is killed on the field by running into a stadium wall, and the players are even cruel to one another off the field—destroying Hobbs's uniform, for example, and mercilessly competing for a top position on the team. Baseball in *The Natural* is not merely a pastime or a career path; it embodies hostility and aggressive masculinity, populated by rapid fans (many of whom harass or even assault the players) and sportsmen intent on destruction and domination. Yet it appeals to American spectators precisely because of its violent vitality, which makes it captivating, even enthralling. By exposing baseball's grotesqueness, Malamud demonstrates just how perverse it is that American society views the sport as entertainment: the novel suggests that fundamentally, baseball is a sport reliant on cruelty and aggression.

In many ways, Malamud's descriptions of baseball correspond to the prevailing mood of 1950s America. The mid-twentieth century in the United States saw the beginning of the Red Scare, a period of widespread fear and vicious accusation, and the violent Korean War. By focusing on the violent aspects of baseball, a sport entrenched in the American collective consciousness, Malamud suggests that violence, too, is ingrained in American culture. This is a nation founded, in many ways, on the principle of domination (conquering territory and native people), and one that thus carries violence and savagery with it, which even seeps into dugouts and playing fields. Capitalism also plays a role in baseball's unscrupulous reputation. Namely, Judge Banner's immoral greed reflects the game's intimate ties to business and the accumulation of wealth, pointing more broadly to American corruption. In emphasizing baseball's centrality to American culture—an object of national obsession—Malamud also emphasizes its ties to American vice, violence, and corruption. In *The Natural*, baseball is a mirror that Malamud holds up to American society, meant to expose its sins and deficiencies. Hobbs's manager, Pop Fisher, warns Hobbs that Judge Banner (whose first name, ironically, is "Goodwill") "will peel the skin off of your behind without you knowing it if you don't watch out." The Judge's dishonest actions—many of which he is able to enact by bending the rules of the judicial system—determine Hobbs's fate and control the game, creating a rigged system in which even a player as talented as Hobbs cannot find success. Similarly, 1950s American society saw the beginnings of extreme wealth inequality (after the national economic boom experienced during World War II) and the rise of corporate culture. With these developments came a rebirth in the financial crime and corruption first experienced in the late nineteenth century. Ultimately, then, Baseball's connection to corruption and greed in the novel can be read as a commentary on America's long-standing offenses: the sport reflects the culture in which it is rooted.

Overall, *The Natural* is a far cry from the sort of jaunty, picaresque novel that many "sports novels" of the 1950s were: cheerful tales of triumph and good sportsmanship. Instead, Malamud uses baseball as a pretense to peel back America's

skin and examine its debauched interior, and its fixation on—and perverse enjoyment of—wealth, greed, and violence.

MYTHOLOGY, HEROISM, AND STARDOM

The Natural refers continually to myths—particularly those involving epic struggles and sacrifice—including the biblical story of David and Goliath and allusions to Arthurian legend (Hobbs's **"Wonderboy" bat** bears a striking resemblance to King Arthur's sword Excalibur, since it is imbued with supernatural powers). By evoking myths—namely those featuring an individual hero like Hobbs, gifted with extraordinary abilities—Malamud elevates Hobbs's narrative to the status of mythology, underscoring the spectacular nature of his talents. In this way, Malamud suggests that Hobbs is a modern-day version of a mythic hero, in much the same way that American society valorizes its sporting legends. Yet Malamud also subverts typical conventions of mythology by creating a narrative in which Hobbs is ultimately fallible: his talents do not make him invincible, and he does not triumph over adversity (as the heroes of these myths usually do). Thus, Malamud suggests that American society's insistence on elevating sports stars to the status of legendary heroes is unreasonable, since these "heroes," too, are mortal.

The novel has been widely compared to the medieval myth of the Fisher King, given its similarity to the legend. Hobbs is meant to represent the knight (known as Percival in some versions of the story) who seeks to heal the Fisher King, a wounded king and bearer of the Holy Grail, who, paralyzed by his injury, is unable to do anything except fish near his castle and wait for rescue. The Knights' team manager Pop Fisher is the obvious parallel to the Fisher King, and the poorly performing Knights baseball team (another clear resemblance to the medieval tale) represent the barren kingdom that Hobbs/Percival must help restore. Indeed, the Knights' territory in New York City is literally barren: Pop notes that the Knights have experienced a "blasted dry season" with "no rains at all," though when Hobbs hits his first home run of the season, it immediately begins to rain. Like the Fisher King, Pop Fisher is an ineffective leader, since the Knights have never won a season of baseball. Hobbs is his "savior"—a wunderkind who might be able to "heal" the downtrodden Pop, revitalizing him (and curing his "athlete's foot of the hand," which gets worse when the Knights perform poorly) by leading the Knights to victory and defending the season pennant, which stands in for the Holy Grail. By suggesting Hobbs's similarity to a mythic knight from Arthurian literature—and creating an obvious parallel between the two narratives—Malamud emphasizes Hobbs's extraordinary talents and positions him as a supernatural hero.

In the novel, Hobbs's breakout success and supernatural skills are also celebrated by fans, who receive him with awe and reverence. His mysterious background (he never reveals his near-fatal wounding as a young player until a journalist uncovers the story) and determined attitude make him the stuff of baseball mythology—a transformation Malamud slyly signals to by alluding to the Fisher King myth.

By referencing the Fisher King myth, though, Malamud also creates an ironic tension between Hobbs's fallibility—his lack of success in "healing" Pop Fisher and the team—and his apparent "mythical" status, satirizing the American tendency to worship sports heroes. In most versions of the legend, the knight is able to heal the Fisher King and restore his kingdom, thus protecting the Grail. Yet Hobbs is never successful in "healing" Pop Fisher as a result of his own egotism and poor decisions. Initially trusting of Pop and eager to work with him to achieve victory, Hobbs quickly becomes disillusioned with Pop's managerial style: his "tough love" approach, which Hobbs, enamored of his own stardom, finds difficult to accept. Hobbs transfers his loyalties to Judge Banner, who hopes to cheat Pop out of his share of the team by causing the Knights to lose the pennant (thus demonstrating Pop's inadequacy as a leader and justifying his firing). Though Hobbs eventually realizes the extent of Judge Banner's corruption, he ends up betraying Pop by acquiescing to Banner's demands. Hobbs begins the last game of the season intent on losing purposefully—to help Banner's case—but resolves to try to win it after reflecting on the immorality of his own actions: Hobbs realizes that Pop is worth the sacrifice, that "he would gladly get down on his knees and kiss the old man's [Pop's] skinny, crooked feet, do anything to get up there this last time." However, Hobbs is defeated by a younger, more talented pitching prodigy, proving that Hobbs's abilities are less extraordinary than the novel's mythic allusions might suggest; in the novel's bleak conclusion, Hobbs is unable to "heal" Pop Fisher and "restore" his "kingdom" (the Knights) by leading the team to victory, thus reminding readers that Hobbs was never really worthy of the heroic status thrust upon him. Malamud's depiction of a sports hero defeated—by both the failure of his abilities and his own immorality—demonstrates the futility of making comparisons between sports stars and the legendary heroes of classic mythology. Unlike the Knight in the myth of the Fisher King, Hobbs is far from heroic, and the "natural talent" he is celebrated for throughout the novel ultimately wears out, replaced by corruption. To extol sports stars—comparing them to mythology—is to overlook their very humanness.

Though the myth of the American dream goes unfulfilled in *The Natural*, allusions to other myths abound in the novel, especially the myth of the Fisher King, which provides the novel with its main conceit. In many ways, Hobbs's story is an updated version of a classic medieval tale of injury and sacrifice. At first, Malamud's use of mythology as an undercurrent in the novel lends weight to Hobbs's talents, suggesting that Hobbs really is a supernatural baseball superstar. As the novel continues to

unfold, however, the Malamud's use of myth actually points to the ineffectuality of viewing sports stars as legendary heroes, since ironically, Hobbs is unable to live up to the expectations created by the mythical undertones of the story.

FEMININITY, STEREOTYPES, AND DESTRUCTION

The Natural's two main female characters are presented as opposites. Iris, the young grandmother Hobbs rejects, is innocent, kind, and maternal, often dressed in white to emphasize her goodness and purity of character. In contrast, Memo, Hobbs's primary love interest, is cruel, shallow, and materialistic, and frequently wears symbolically sinister colors like red or black. In other words, Iris represents the "Madonna" stereotype of femininity—an archetypal figure of purity and salvation—while Memo is the "whore," a figure of sin and deceit. These figures represent distinct paths for Hobbs's life, imbuing Hobbs's choice of a love interest with towering, life-altering significance. While this construction seems to provide women with more power, it can also be seen as a strategy that places extra responsibility on women—exonerating Hobbs, in a way, from the consequences of his decisions. Ultimately, *The Natural* diminishes the role of women and female power by relying on simplistic stereotypes and suggesting their destructive potential for men's lives.

Traditionally, the "whore"—represented by Memo—leads the male protagonist astray, while only the "Madonna," Iris, has the ability to redeem him. In *The Natural*, Hobbs is given a choice between these two figures, though it is implied that he makes the wrong decision. Iris's presence in the baseball stadium instantly heals Hobbs, who is suffering from a batting slump, likely prompted by Memo's bad influence (Pop Fisher warns Hobbs that Memo has a tendency to create bad luck for men who pursue her; indeed, Bump Baily, her previous boyfriend, dies early on in the novel). Inspired by Iris's mysterious appearance in the bleachers, he wins a crucial game. Throughout the novel, Iris is portrayed as a maternal figure who develops feelings of tenderness for Hobbs: she tells him that "she hates to see a hero fail," and remarks that she was inspired to see him play in order to show him that people believe in him—and to help him "regain his power." Iris represents redemption and vitality for Hobbs, but he does not choose her: Hobbs is repulsed by the fact that Iris is a grandmother (having had a daughter as a teenager) and thus rejects her. In choosing to walk away from Iris and all she represents, Hobbs walks away from the Madonna figure who could valorize and redeem him.

In returning to Memo, though, Hobbs is ultimately led down the wrong path, strengthening the connection between Memo and the ruinous whore in the Madonna-whore dichotomy. He becomes corrupt, accepting a bribe that Memo pushes him toward without understanding that her interest in him is purely self-motivated, and only realizes that she has deceived him once it is too late to turn back. Meanwhile, Iris continues to support Hobbs, even though he accidentally injures her with a foul ball before learning that she is pregnant with his child. Hobbs is touched by her devotion and begins to see her a viable partner again. After the game, though, acknowledging that he is ruined, Hobbs realizes that he will not be able to support Iris as a husband and father to her child. By choosing Memo over Iris—and repeatedly rejecting Iris despite her unwavering support of him—Hobbs is led toward ruination, confirming the two characters' opposite symbolic roles.

Malamud's description of women in the novel adheres to a strict binary: women are either saints or sinners, Madonnas or whores, as embodied by Iris and Memo, respectively. The only other woman who is detailed at length is Harriet Bird, who, like Memo, proves dangerous and deceitful. Like Memo's dark clothes, Harriet's sinister nature is symbolized by the black veil she wears to shoot Hobbs, neatly shelving her in the "whore" category. Furthermore, her actions, like Memo's, irrevocably alter the course of Hobbs's life, placing him on a path to corruption and suggesting the destructive impact of women on men's futures.

For Malamud, women are a source of either danger or salvation, and though they hold some power over the narrative—determining Hobbs's fate, pointing him toward redemption or corruption—they are little more than two-dimensional. Iris, Memo, and Harriet are stereotypes, meant to represent female innocence, treachery, and hysteria respectively. Thus, women are more or less sidelined in the narrative, made into simplistic symbols of Hobbs's divided emotions: his lust for pleasure and indulgence (satisfied by Memo, and to a certain extent, Harriet, a woman he finds highly desirable) and his desire for a stable, secure life (satisfied by Iris). Though Memo, Harriet, and Iris represent different paths for Hobbs's life, his encounters with all of them seem to prompt his own collapse: even engaging with Iris results in ruination, since he is driven back to Memo, who provokes his corrupt decisions at the end of the novel. In many ways, these women are implied to be responsible for the dismal outcome of Hobbs's life, though his own misguided actions—such as rebuffing Iris—are arguably just as impactful. By narrowly connecting Hobbs's destiny and devastation to female figures, however, Malamud suggests that Hobbs is only partially responsible for his own downfall, making women a source of reprehensible, destructive power in the novel.

As a novel steeped in 1950s attitudes, *The Natural* hardly deviates from traditional gender roles, since its female characters—depicted in terms of simplistic stereotypes—are only significant for their relationships to Hobbs and how they influence his morality and life choices. Moreover, they are characterized as figures who prompt Hobbs's undoing, drawing him away from a road to success. As a result, the novel confirms

a narrow, patriarchal vision of femininity and female power even as it unsettles other common tropes, like the myth of the American dream.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE "WONDERBOY" BAT

Roy Hobbs's beloved bat, nicknamed "Wonderboy" initially symbolizes his supernatural talent on the baseball field. The bat is given a dramatic origin story—Hobbs carved it himself out of wood from a tree that was split by lightning near his childhood home—which seems to imbue the bat with mythical significance. The bat also seems more like a sacred object than a regular old bat, as it is white but flashes gold in the sun, perhaps gesturing to Zeus's mighty thunderbolts. Furthermore, Hobbs tends to the bat as if it were a sacred religious ritual and keeps it in fine condition, "oiled with sweet oil" and "boned" to prevent chipping. Hobbs treats the instrument with a kind of religious devotion, and it becomes his secret weapon when he uses it again, years after his near-fatal wounding by Harriet Bird, during games for the Knights. The fact that his bat is instrumental in his rise to fame and success even in the wake of a terrible injury further paints Hobbs and his batt as an invincible, supernatural pair.

However, as the novel unfolds, the Wonderboy bat morphs into a symbol of Roy Hobbs's masculinity. Despite its might, Wonderboy is also fragile: during the final game of the season, Hobbs splits the bat in two hitting a foul ball. Like Wonderboy, far more delicate than it originally appears, Hobbs' masculinity is constantly under tension in the novel, since Hobbs is wounded, both physically and emotionally, by women (namely Harriet and Memo). Though powerful, the bat is only so effective in enabling Hobbs' achievement; it is not the symbol of boundless success it originally seems to be. Similarly, Hobbs' natural abilities make him a striking addition to the Knights and a rising star in baseball, yet his own emotional fragility—his inability to cope with past trauma and discover purpose in life beyond greed and ambition for fame—creates faults in his façade of celebrity. In his own writings about *The Natural*, Malamud has pointed out that Wonderboy is a phallic symbol, affirming that the bat is meant to represent Hobbs' masculinity. Far from representing Hobbs' supernatural abilities, as the novel initially reflects, Wonderboy ultimately symbolizes Hobbs' own precarious identity, masculinity, and sense of self.

THE BOY AND HIS DOG

At one point in the novel, Hobbs witnesses what he takes to be an "illusion" in the road: "a boy coming out of the woods, followed by his dog," an image that comes to symbolize Hobbs's longing for his childhood and his feelings of uncertainty surrounding adulthood. Disoriented, Hobbs loses control of the car, and he believes that he may have hit the boy, but when he goes back to check, he finds no body. This image continues to recur in Hobbs' imagination—he sees a similar image, that of a young boy throwing a ball, on the train to Chicago at the beginning of the novel—and he eventually remembers that as a child, he once wandered into the woods to find his lost dog, getting a "scared and lonely feeling that he was impossibly lost." Hobbs' hallucination thus represents his own feeling of "being lost" as an adult: his own inability to figure out what he wants from life, and to grapple with the moral difficulties of being a part of a highly corrupt sport.

The hallucination of the boy and his dog also demonstrates Hobbs's yearning for the simplicity of childhood: Hobbs remembers that once he found his dog, it led him out of the woods, and that this "was good out of good." At times, Hobbs wishes "he had no ambitions—often wondered where they had come from in his life, because he remembered how satisfied he had been as a youngster, and that with the little he had [...] he wished he could have lived longer in his boyhood." Even though his childhood was fraught with challenges, Hobbs remembers that he was once satisfied with few material possessions—he was content to live a simple life with just a loyal dog by his side, surrounded by nature—and he begins to feel disillusioned with his own pursuit of wealth and power as a baseball star. By "running over" the boy and his dog, Hobbs unconsciously defies his own yearning for the simplicity of the past, yet this desire returns to him nonetheless—just as the image of the boy and the dog does. Thus, these imagined figures symbolize Hobbs' uncertainty about his own path in life, serving as a palpable reminder of the purposelessness he begins to experience as he becomes a famous player.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Farrar, Straus and Giroux edition of *The Natural* published in 2003.

Pre-Game Quotes

As [Roy Hobbs] was looking, there flowed along this bone-white farmhouse with sagging skeletal porch, alone in untold miles of moonlight, and before it this white-faced, long-boned boy whipped with train-whistle yowl a glowing ball to someone hidden under a dark oak, who shot it back without thought, and the kid once more wound and returned. Roy shut his eyes to the sight because if it wasn't real it was a way he sometimes had of observing himself.

Related Characters: Roy Hobbs

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 3

Explanation and Analysis

This early quotation gives a sense of Malamud's rich, rhythmic prose (note the many hyphenated adjectives that he uses in one long sentence alone) and introduces different themes that will characterize baseball in the novel. On one hand, the boy—representing Hobbs as a young boy, playing baseball with his father, who first taught him to throw—is "whipping" "a glowing ball," imbuing baseball with elements of fantasy. On the other, however, the boy is "white-faced" and surrounded by a "bone-white farmhouse" with a "sagging skeletal porch." These images paint baseball as degraded and grotesque, and the novel will continue to flesh out this comparison, providing numerous examples of the way in which America's national pastime has a dangerous relationship to death—many players in the novel die or come close to dying as a result of the game—and self-destruction (evidenced by Hobbs'ss own downfall).

As the train skirted close in, the trees leveled out and he could see within the woodland the only place he had been truly intimate with in his wanderings, a green world shot through with weird light and strange bird cries, muffled in silence that made the privacy so complete his inmost self had no shame of anything he thought there, and it eased the body-shaking beat of his ambitions.

Related Characters: Roy Hobbs

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 16–17

Explanation and Analysis

This passage sets up one of the most prominent symbols in the text: the image of Roy Hobbs as a young boy, growing up in the rural backlands of the American Midwest. Hobbs will become obsessed with this image of himself in youth, surrounded by nature and at peace with himself, viewing it as a symbol of the simpler, more humble lifestyle he often believes would be preferable to his hard-won career in baseball—and the debauched lifestyle that comes with it. Like Pop Fisher and Herman Youngberry, both of whom express desires to return to rural farm life, Hobbs idealizes the bucolic life he used to know, creating a split vision of the American dream. On one hand, the novel's baseball players crave big-city success, fame, and fortune, but many are also drawn to the rugged, pioneer lifestyle that originally characterized American life; Hobbs's challenging career as a baseball player leaves him riddled with anxiety and yearning for nature again.

[B1]Harriet brightened, saying sympathetically, "What will you hope to accomplish, Roy?"

He had already told her but after a minute remarked, "Sometimes when I walk down the street I bet people will say there goes Roy Hobbs, the best there ever was in the game."

She gazed at him with touched and troubled eyes. "Is that all?" […] "Isn't there something over and above earthly things—some more glorious meaning to one's life and activities?"

Related Characters: Harriet Bird / The Woman, Roy Hobbs (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 27

Explanation and Analysis

Hobbs is helplessly confused about what he wants to achieve in life, apart from fame and fortune as the "greatest ever" baseball player. This confusion about his own identity, future, and desires leads him down dangerous paths: he pursues the wrong woman (Memo Paris), gambles recklessly, and alienates others around him by prioritizing his own egotism. Though Hobbs is unaware of it at this point in the novel, Harriet Bird will attempt to murder him after he declares that he will one day become the best baseball player in the nation. Harriet is clearly deranged, obsessed

with male sports stars, but her attempt to kill Hobbs might also be seen as an action that demonstrates just how fragile sports celebrities are—how fallible and mortal they are, despite their superb abilities. Harriet's comments suggest that she thinks that becoming the "greatest ever" sports star is an inadequate purpose for Hobbs's life, and her actions punish Hobbs for this dream. Indeed, the dream does prove simplistic, unrealistic, and unfulfilling: even when Hobbs manages to achieve a temporary degree of fame and wealth, he is unsatisfied, and he is unable to achieve any lasting measure of success as a baseball player.

She pulled the trigger (thrum of bull fiddle). The bullet cut a silver line across the water. He sought with his bare hands to catch it, but it eluded him and, to his horror, bounced into his gut. A twisted dagger of smoke drifted up from the gun barrel. Fallen on one knee he groped for the bullet, sickened as it moved, and fell over as the forest flew upward, and she, making muted noises of triumph and despair, danced on her toes around the stricken hero.

Related Characters: Harriet Bird / The Woman, Roy Hobbs

Related Themes:

Page Number: 34–35

Explanation and Analysis

This passage demonstrates Malamud's adept staging of narrative action. Malamud's prose provides a slow-motion, cinematic depiction of Hobbs's near-fatal wounding (note the "soundtrack" Malamud provides when Harriet pulls the trigger), suggesting the dramatic intensity of this encounter—an encounter that will resonate throughout the entire novel, since Hobbs is unable to move past his own trauma. Additionally, Malamud's subtle reference to "the forest," which flies "upward" as Hobbs falls recalls Hobbs's obsession with nature, which serves as his sanctuary; Harriet's malicious actions puncture the sense of safety that the image of woodlands provides for Hobbs. Harriet is based on a real woman, Ruth Ann Steinhagen, who shot the Cubs player Eddie Waitkus in a hotel room in 1949 (Waitkus, like Hobbs, survived), but she becomes a symbol of female evil in the text, closely paralelled by Memo Paris, who also attempts to kill Hobbs at the end of the novel.

Batter Up! Part 1 Quotes

For his bulk [Roy Hobbs] looked lithe, and he appeared calmer than he felt, for although he was sitting here on this step he was still in motion. He was traveling (on the train that never stopped). His self, his mind, raced on and he felt he hadn't stopped going wherever he was going because he hadn't yet arrived.

Related Characters: Roy Hobbs

Related Themes:

Page Number: 41

Explanation and Analysis

Though Hobbs has left the train to Chicago (the setting where the novel begins) behind—the novel has jumped forward fifteen years—he still feels as if he is moving on a train "that never stopped." This sense of motion represents his own boundless drive and ambition, which he puts into action in order to achieve his long-postponed dream of becoming a baseball star. Yet Hobbs doesn't know exactly where he is going while his "self" and his "mind" are racing. He has no overriding sense of purpose in his life, beyond a simplistic vision of fame and fortune, and he often wonders whether what he is chasing is worth his tireless efforts (indeed, by the end of the novel, his body has nearly worn out from strain). Hobbs's sense of having "inner motion" will continue throughout the novel, though this inward drive will eventually lead to his own self-destruction.

Roy found himself looking around every so often to make sure he was here. He was, all right, yet in all his imagining of how it would be when he finally hit the majors, he had not expected to feel so down in the dumps. It was different than he had thought it would be. So different he almost felt like walking out, jumping back on a train, and going wherever people went when they were running out on something. Maybe for a long rest in one of those towns he had lived in as a kid. Like the place where he had that shaggy mutt that used to scamper through the woods.

Related Characters: Roy Hobbs

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 46

Explanation and Analysis

As Hobbs enters the Knights' locker room for the first time, he feels somewhat disillusioned: though he has wanted to play in the majors for many years, he realizes that he expected a warmer welcome (whereas Pop Fisher, his new coach, has acted dismissively toward him). Once again, Hobbs thinks about returning to a simpler, bucolic lifestyle, imagining an escape to the "woods" where he once lived with a "shaggy mutt." This image (of a younger Hobbs accompanied by his dog) will recur throughout the novel, serving as a reminder of the alternative, more wholesome life Hobbs could choose to live. Ultimately, Hobbs decides not to "run out" on baseball, but he remains conflicted, wondering constantly which version of the American dream might be preferable.

❝ [A] door seemed to open in the mind and this naked redheaded lovely slid out of a momentary flash of light, and the room was dark again [...] when she got into bed with him he almost cried out in pain as her icy hands and feet, in immediate embrace, slashed his hot body [...] he found what he wanted and had it.

Related Characters: Memo Paris, Roy Hobbs

Related Themes:

Page Number: 59

Explanation and Analysis

This is the second appearance of Memo Paris, whom Hobbs spots earlier in the novel when he goes to take over Bump Baily's room in the Midtown Hotel. Memo is Bump's on-again, off-again girlfriend, staying in the room next to Bump's, and she mistakes Hobbs for her boyfriend, setting off a string of events that leads to Hobbs becoming infatuated with her. That her "icy hands and feet" "slash" Hobbs's body foreshadows the vicious behavior Memo will later display toward Hobbs: she proves cold, aloof, and duplicitous. During this brief encounter, it is suggested that Memo satisfies Hobbs's deeply-felt sexual desires, and he spends the rest of the novel trying to win her back (without much luck).

Batter Up! Part 2 Quotes

❝ Staring at the light gleaming on Pop's bald bean, Roy felt himself going off ... way way down, drifting through the tides into golden water as he searched for this lady fish, or mermaid, or whatever you called her [...] Sailing lower into the pale green sea, he sought everywhere for the reddish glint of her scales, until the water became dense and dark green and then everything gradually got so black he lost all sight of where he was.

Related Characters: Pop Fisher, Doc Knobb, Roy Hobbs

Related Themes:

Page Number: 67

Explanation and Analysis

A hypnotist, Doc Knobb, mesmerizes Hobbs and the Knights in order to help them perform better in a game. Knobb lulls Hobbs him into a dream about a mermaid that reflects Hobbs's propensity for chasing women—and his lust for women who elude him, like Memo and the mermaid—as well as his own deep-seated anxieties. Hobbs experiences the sensation of drowning, suggesting that he feels overwhelmed by his life in general; he is plagued by insecurities and indecisiveness about his own desires and future. Hobbs refuses to return to Knobb's hypnosis sessions after this, spooked by his dream. Instead of becoming more relaxed and confident, as the other players have, Hobbs is merely reminded of his own unresolved problems. This dream also foreshadows events that will occur later in the novel. Later, Hobbs will almost drown in a lake with Iris Lemon—this time in reality, not in a dream—though Iris will save him at the last minute, symbolizing her own redemptive powers.

❝ On weekdays the stadium usually looked like a haunted house but over the weekend crowds developed. The place often resembled a zoo full of oddballs, including gamblers, bums, drunks, and some ugly crackpots. Many of them came just to get a laugh out of the bonehead plays. Some, when the boys were losing, cursed and jeered, showering them [...] with rotten cabbages, tomatoes, blackened bananas and occasionally an eggplant.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 70

Explanation and Analysis

Malamud portrays baseball as a grotesque circus, observed by fans who, far from celebrating the players, taunt and discourage the Knights. In the novel, baseball is hardly as glamorous as it is often made out to be, since Malamud exposes the cruelty and violence that underpins dynamics between players, fans, and managers. Baseball thus becomes a metaphor for American society in this era more generally: though American culture in the 1950s is generally perceived as staid and conservative, the 1950s were also a period of intense corruption and disillusionment. By turning to America's most beloved national pastime—baseball—and reinventing it as a grotesque spectacle, Malamud points to the underbelly of American society, revealing the insidiousness of corruption and immorality in all corners of American life.

❝ As Bump ran for it he could feel fear leaking through his stomach, and his legs unwillingly slowed down, but then he had this vision of himself as the league's best outfielder, acknowledged so by fans and players alike [..] Thinking this way he ran harder [...] and with a magnificent twisting jump, he trapped the ball in his iron fingers. Yet the wall continued to advance, and [...] Bump bumped it with a skull-breaking bang.

Related Characters: Bump Baily

Related Themes:

Page Number: 76

Explanation and Analysis

Bump is yet another figure in a string of baseball players in the novel who fail to achieve their dreams of success and elevated status—Bump hopes to become the league's "best outfielder" before he dies of injuries sustained from hitting the outfield wall—and are thus replaced by younger, more talented players. The Whammer and Hobbs also suffer similar defeats, by Hobbs and Herman Youngberry, respectively. Malamud suggests that baseball is an industry that churns out players, affords them temporary success, then replaces them quickly: it is a sort of assembly line or manufacturing plant that treats its players not as individuals but as expendable cogs in a machine (operated by corrupt managers such as Judge Banner). Like the elusive American dream, success in baseball is also elusive, since the odds are stacked against players from the outset.

Batter Up! Part 3 Quotes

❝ When Bump died Memo went wild with grief. Bump, Bump, she wailed, pounding on the wall [...] In her mind she planted kisses all over the corpse and when she kissed his mouthless mouth blew back the breath of life, her womb stirring at the image of his restoration. Yet she saw down a dark corridor that he was laid out dead, gripping in his fingers the glowing ball he had caught.

Related Characters: Bump Baily, Memo Paris

Related Themes:

Page Number: 80

Explanation and Analysis

Memo she is devastated by Bump's death, memorializing her on-again, off-again boyfriend as an icon rather than the flawed individual he was. Like the image of the boy at the beginning of the novel, gripping a "glowing ball," Bump is given mythical status in Memo's imagination, demonstrating the way in which American society mythologizes sports heroes. Ironically, though, Bump—like Hobbs, who is also mythologized, given his own "day" as a celebration in his honor—was a deeply flawed individual who often acted cruel and dismissive toward Memo. Nonetheless, Memo, Bump's former fans, and the media portray Bump as a fallen hero, suggesting the extreme distance between perception and reality—a common theme in the novel, and one that is also relevant to the idea of the American dream.

❝ Even the weather was better, more temperate after the insulting early heat, with just enough rain to keep the grass a bright green and yet not pile up future double headers. Pop soon got into the spirit of winning, lowered the boom on his dismal thoughts, and showed he had a lighter side [...] His hands healed and so did his heart.

Related Characters: Roy Hobbs, Pop Fisher

Related Themes:

Page Number: 87

Explanation and Analysis

The novel alludes heavily to the legend of the Fisher King, in which a knight is tasked with redeeming a barren kingdom ruled by the Fisher King, often portrayed as paralyzed or injured. In moments like this passage, the comparison is

obvious: Hobbs's stellar performance on the baseball diamond brings rain to the Knights' field, and Pop's "athlete's foot of the hands" (a parodic, fictional illness that emphasizes Pop's somewhat pathetic, ridiculous demeanor) heals quickly. Malamud uses the myth to allude to the idea that baseball is given mythical status in American society, but also to provide the novel with structure and specific plot details.

"Pardon the absence of light," the Judge said, almost making [Hobbs] jump. "As a youngster I was frightened of the dark—used to wake up sobbing in it, as if it were water and I were drowning—but you will observe that I have disciplined myself so thoroughly against that fear, that I much prefer a dark to a lit room [...] There is in the darkness a unity, if you will, that cannot be achieved in any other environment, a blending of self with what the self perceives, an exquisite mystical experience."

Related Characters: Judge Goodwill Banner (speaker), Roy Hobbs

Related Themes:

Page Number: 94

Explanation and Analysis

Judge Banner is the antagonist of the novel, a character who defies his status as a judge to behave immorally, exploiting Hobbs and the Knights for his own financial gain. When Hobbs goes to Banner to negotiate his salary, Banner insists on speaking with Hobbs in the dark, a tactic that unsettles Hobbs: Hobbs is drawn to light, evidenced by his pale, shining bat, Wonderboy, and his attraction to Memo's fiery red hair. Additionally, unlike Banner, Hobbs has not yet "disciplined" himself against fear, as his dreams throughout the novel demonstrate—he drowns in one and relives his wounding (by Harriet Bird) in another, always waking up in a state of agitation. Yet it is precisely Hobbs's fear that makes him human, fallible and imperfect, while Judge Banner's own lack of vulnerability—on full display in his words here—makes him cruel and twisted.

Batter Up! Part 4 Quotes

He felt contentment in moving. It rested him by cutting down the inside motion—that which got him nowhere, which was where he was and [Memo] was not, or where his ambitions were and he was chasing after. Sometimes he wished he had no ambitions—often wondered where they had come from in his life, because he remembered how satisfied he had been as a youngster, and that with the little he had—a dog, a stick, an aloneness he loved.

Related Characters: Memo Paris, Roy Hobbs

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 111

Explanation and Analysis

Again, Hobbs's identity and ambition are tied to movement and motion: just as Hobbs is introduced as a thirty-five-year old in the Knights dugout as "traveling (on the train that never stopped)," here he is also described in terms that evoke "inside motion," and again, he is uncertain where exactly his ambitions are leading. Hobbs has begun to feel disillusioned with his own pursuits—of fame, of Memo, of fans' attention—and returns to the image that comforts him most: a tranquil moment from his childhood, when he could be alone with his dog in nature. Despite its many extravagant perks, baseball cannot satisfy Hobbs's most fundamental desire: peace and solitude, which he feels he has been denied, given his traumatic wounding as a teenager.

He felt he had been running for ages, then this blurred black forest slid past him, and as he slowed down, each black tree followed a white, and then all the trees were lit in somber light till the moon burst forth through the leaves and the woods glowed. Out of it appeared this boy and his dog, and Roy in his heart whispered him a confidential message: watch out when you cross the road, kid.

Related Characters: Harriet Bird / The Woman, Memo Paris, Max Mercy, Roy Hobbs

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 122

Explanation and Analysis

As Hobbs tries to evade Max Mercy, who is chasing him through the Midtown Hotel in order to question him about his past, Hobbs again imagines himself as a child with his dog, and he realizes that the image he saw in the road while driving with Memo—a ghostly apparition of a boy and a dog—came from his own memory. Hobbs's past continues to intrude forcefully on the present (especially given Mercy's non-stop questioning about his background), including both this idyllic image of his childhood and his memories of the traumatic encounter with Harriet Bird. Despite his "inside motion," his boundless drive, he is continually pulled into the past, away from his goals and his uncertain future.

Batter Up! Part 5 Quotes

❝❝ [Hobbs] woke in the locker room, stretched out on a bench […] He sat there paralyzed though his innards were in flight […] He longed for a friend, a father, a home to return to—saw himself packing his duds in a suitcase, buying a ticket, and running for a train. Beyond the first station he'd fling Wonderboy out the window.

Related Characters: Iris Lemon, Pop Fisher, Memo Paris, Roy Hobbs

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 133

Explanation and Analysis

After hitting a losing streak, Hobbs feels "paralyzed" and dreams of leaving behind his ambitions in baseball in favor of a simpler life, outside of the big city: disillusioned and lonely, with few people to rely on for support (Memo is disinterested, and Pop, despite his fatherly nature, often gets into squabbles with his star player), Hobbs feels that baseball can no longer satisfy his own longing for comfort and stability. Iris Lemon, whom Hobbs meets in the next chapter, will offer support to Hobbs—whom she believes is a true "hero"—though he will later reject this support. Even as Hobbs yearns for a life away from the glare of the spotlight, he continues to make decisions that limit his own happiness, further "paralyzing" himself.

Batter Up! Part 6 Quotes

❝❝ Half [Iris's] life ago, just out of childhood it seemed […] she had one night alone in the movies met a man twice her age, with whom she had gone walking in the park. Sensing at once what he so unyieldingly desired, she felt instead of fright, amazement at her willingness to respond […] She had all she could do to tear herself away from him, and rushed through the branches, scratching her face and arms in the bargain. But he would not let her go, leading her always into dark places.

Related Characters: Roy Hobbs, Iris Lemon

Related Themes:

Page Number: 144

Explanation and Analysis

Malamud offers few details about the female characters in the novel, though he does briefly flesh out the character of Iris Lemon, including this scene that describes her sexual assault at the hands of an anonymous man—a scene that verifies Iris's "purity," suggesting that she did not become a young mother by choice, and demonstrates her innocence (as opposed to the flirtatious Memo, who sleeps with Hobbs upon first meeting him). Iris is herself wounded by this encounter, just as Hobbs is wounded by the memory of his near-death at the hands of Harriet. Though she hopes to help him heal alongside her, he cruelly rebuffs her, refusing to read letters in which she tries to explain why she became a mother and a grandmother at a young age. Iris's story reveals a darker side to depictions of gender in the novel. In this passage, Malamud acknowledges the traumatic power of sexual assault, though he also relies heavily on the reductive "Madonna"/"whore" stereotypes to characterize women in the novel. Memo and Harriet are "whores," deceptive and debauched, while Iris is the "Madonna," since she is gentle and supportive—and literally a mother.

Batter Up! Part 7 Quotes

❝❝ It later struck him that the picture he had drawn of Memo sitting domestically home wasn't exactly the girl she was. The kind he had in mind, though it bothered him to admit it, was more like Iris seemed to be, only she didn't suit him. Yet he could not help but wonder what was in her letter.

Related Characters: Iris Lemon, Memo Paris, Roy Hobbs

Related Themes:

Page Number: 174

Explanation and Analysis

Hobbs begins to realize that Memo's coldness and cruelty would make her an undesirable romantic partner, but he continues to desire her for what she represents: youth, lust, and passion (represented by her flaming red hair). Iris—who is brunette and "solid," less physically striking—is undesirable in comparison, but her supportive personality makes her a far more attractive potential wife. Hobbs, though, is highly superficial, unable to see past surfaces—it takes him almost the entire novel to realize that Memo might not be all that great a woman—and too disgusted by Iris's status as a grandmother to understand that the life he might lead with her would be preferable to one with the shallow, materialistic Memo. Iris and Memo thus represent two different paths for Hobbs's life, as well as his inability at this point to make a wise choice between them.

Batter Up! Part 8 Quotes

❝ [A]s the Judge had talked [Roy Hobbs] recalled an experience he had had when he was a kid. He and his dog were following an old skid road into the heart of a spooky forest when the hound suddenly let out a yelp, ran on ahead, and got lost. It was late in the afternoon and he couldn't stand the thought of leaving the dog there alone all night, so he went into the wood after it. At first he could see daylight between the trees—to this minute he remembered how still the trunks were, as the tree tops circled around in the breeze […] but just at about the time the darkness got so thick he was conscious of having to shove against it as he hallooed for the dog, he got this scared and lonely feeling that he was impossibly lost.

Related Characters: Judge Goodwill Banner, Roy Hobbs

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 201

Explanation and Analysis

As Judge Banner attempts to convince Hobbs to take a bribe to purposefully lose the last game of the season—betraying Pop Fisher and sacrificing his career for a pay-out that will help him to win over Memo—Hobbs thinks back to the moment in his childhood that he has envisioned multiple times throughout the novel, remembering the time that he went to seek out his lost dog in the woods.

Previously, the memory of being alone with his dog in the woods has always seemed like a happy one, but this instance reveals that even this peaceful scene has always concealed a dark side. The feeling of being "impossibly lost" is one that Hobbs continues to experience as an adult as well, confronted here with a difficult decision: he does not know whether to act immorally (in order to marry Memo, whom he deeply desires) or stay true to himself and his ambitions in baseball. Ultimately, Hobbs choses to follow Banner on a path toward corruption, demonstrating how the potential for darkness lurks even within seemingly pure people and ambitions.

Batter Up! Part 10 Quotes

❝ When [Roy Hobbs] hit the street he was exhausted. He had not shaved, and a black beard gripped his face […] He stared into faces of people he passed along the street but nobody recognized him.

"He coulda been a king," a woman remarked to a man.

At the corner near some stores he watched the comings and goings of the night traffic. He felt the insides of him beginning to take off (chug chug choo choo…). Pretty soon they were in fast flight.

Related Characters: Judge Goodwill Banner, Roy Hobbs

Related Themes:

Page Number: 231

Explanation and Analysis

As Hobbs leaves Banner's office, where he has torn up his bribe payment and angrily denounced Banner, Gus Sands, and Memo, he realizes that he has lost everything. He has no way to support Iris Lemon and their unborn child, since his physical weakness (and his embarrassing defeat during the last game of the season) means he has no shot at continuing his baseball career, and Max Mercy has pledged to expose his corruption. Hobbs is no longer a baseball star but an anonymous figure in the street, fallen from grace. Hobbs's "inside motion" persists, urging him to move on, but he has nowhere to go—no home or family to return to. As this "rags-to-rags" (as opposed to "rags-to-riches") story comes to a close, Hobbs returns to the same life he knew before his brief career in baseball—anonymity, poverty, and ignominy.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

PRE-GAME

Roy Hobbs lights a match inside a train car and gazes out the window into darkness. He can't sleep, so he watches the Western landscape streak past his window. As the train speeds past a farmhouse, Roy catches a glimpse of a **boy** in the yard throwing a "glowing ball" to another person in a game of catch.

The beginning of the novel introduces Roy Hobbs, a future baseball star traveling to a try-out in Chicago. Hobbs is struck by the ghostly image of a boy throwing a ball, which may or may not be a hallucination, outside of his train window. This is an image that will recur throughout the novel, signaling Hobbs's obsession with his own lost boyhood, as well as a profound desire he often feels: to sacrifice his ambitions and return to the innocence and simplicity of childhood.

Roy thinks he might be hallucinating, as the sight reminds him of a dream he has often. In the dream, he is standing in a field, clutching a "golden baseball." As he agonizes over whether or not he should throw it, the ball becomes heavier and heavier. By the time he finally decides to throw it, the ball has become impossibly heavy, so Roy decides to hold on to it. However, as soon as he decides this, the ball becomes weightless—"a white rose break[s] out of its hide" and the ball "all but soar[s] off by itself," but Roy can't throw it, since he already decided to keep it.

Hobbs's dream reflects his anxieties about baseball: though he desperately wants to succeed in the game, he is burdened by the weight of his own imagined failure (represented by the "golden baseball," which torments him in the dream). Throughout the novel, Hobbs continues to feel as if he is unable to overcome significant disadvantage to become a sports star.

Back on the train, Roy decides that he will have an early breakfast so as to "make his blunders of ordering and eating more or less in private"—it's unlikely that Sam will be awake yet and thus he won't be there "to tell [Roy] what to do." However, getting dressed proves a challenge in such tight quarters, and it's with great difficulty that Roy finally gets himself into his suit.

Hobbs is naïve and inexperienced because of his poor upbringing. His lower-class status makes it difficult for him to navigate some aspects of playing baseball, including travel and upper-class life (ordering food in the club car, for example). By worsening his anxieties about himself and his own place in the world, Hobbs's background hinders his progress toward his goal of becoming a great baseball player.

Roy fishes his bassoon case out from under his bunk and pries it open but snaps it shut when the porter, Eddie, strolls by. Roy explains to Eddie that the bassoon case doesn't hold an instrument but instead contains "a practical thing" that Roy "made himself." Eddie playfully makes a series of guesses as to the bassoon case's contents, each one more ridiculous than the last. With a laugh, Roy asks how long until they get to Chicago—he is trying out for the Cubs.

Hobbs's bassoon case holds "Wonderboy," a bat imbued with apparent supernatural powers. That Hobbs is hesitant to reveal its identity here suggests its mythical status: Hobbs is highly protective of the item, which represents his own spectacular, "otherworldly" talents in baseball.

Upon hearing this, Eddie bows to Roy in jest and addresses him as "My hero," asking to kiss his hand. Roy is amused, but Eddie makes him a little nervous. He forgot to ask Sam the previous night about how and when he should tip the porter, so he has been trying to avoid Eddie as much as possible. Roy is also nervous about Chicago. He knows that without Sam's help, he'll struggle with "simple things" like riding the subway or asking a stranger for directions.

Eddie's response to Hobbs demonstrates the importance of baseball in American culture, since as soon as he learns that Hobbs is a baseball player, Eddie immediately treats him like a celebrity. Nonetheless, Hobbs continues to feel nervous about his own lack of experience with the different culture and rituals associated with his status as a future baseball star—and as an adult living in a large city, Chicago.

Later, Roy makes his way to the very last car, where sleeping people—including Sam—are strewn about in every direction. The night before, Roy had tried to get Sam to sleep in the nicer train car with the bunk, but Sam only said, "You take the bed, kiddo, you're the one that has to show what you have got on the ball when we pull into the city." Back in the present, Sam, who is a drunk, begins to cry in his sleep, so Roy leaves.

Sam is a character who has failed to achieve the "American dream:" drunk, poor, and suffering, Sam has little to live for. Nonetheless, he puts Hobbs's needs in front of his own, realizing that Hobbs's future celebrity requires special treatment; Hobbs has to be ready to perform when they arrive in Chicago. Malamud suggests that baseball players have the same status in American culture as movie stars, who are also provided with material comforts and find work through auditions.

When the train pulls into a station, Roy watches as Eddie helps the new passenger aboard: a sumptuous woman whose "nyloned legs [make] Roy's pulse dance." Eddie collects the woman's luggage to bring to her compartment, but she tells him that she can carry the hatbox herself. Noticing that the woman has dropped a white rose, Roy hands it to her. The woman's face lights up in recognition, but then falls.

Hobbs is drawn to the mysterious woman, later revealed to be Harriet Bird, whose initial appearance in the novel contradicts her later murderous actions. The white rose she drops here could be seen to symbolize innocence and purity, though Harriet's later behavior is far from "pure." As the first woman to be introduced in the novel, Harriet sets a precedent: women are unfriendly and aloof, since Harriet's rejection of Hobbs frustrates him.

As the woman settles into a seat with a cigarette, Roy agonizes over how to strike up a conversation with her. When she leaves, Roy notices that she left behind the white rose again, so he pockets it and follows her into the dining car. Roy gets seated at a table next to the woman and her hatbox. However, he has no idea how to order and spills water all over the tablecloth, so he hastily tips the waiter and dashes out of the car.

White roses will continue to recur in the novel, associated with different women characters who will hold power over Hobbs's life. By pocketing the rose, Hobbs indicates his infatuation with Harriet, suggesting the influence that she already has over him. Moreover, Hobbs continues to demonstrate his own naivete about living independently, even when it's just for one meal; he is severely limited by his own poor, sheltered background.

The story flashes back to a time when Sam was traveling as a talent scout in search of a great baseball player for the Cubs. One day, Sam got lost on a country road and decided to stop and rest in a pile of hay near an old barn. As he drank deeply from his flask, he saw a baseball game being played by twelve blonde-bearded players. In the flashback, Sam can tell that they are fantastic players: one hits the ball so well the fielder has to run a mile to catch it with his bare hand. The hitters each bat the ball expertly, but the best is the player who executed the bare-handed catch.

This dream-like anecdote makes baseball players seem like mythical creatures akin to gods: Malamud's descriptions imply that the "blonde-bearded" players (physically similar to Greek gods) have supernatural powers, capable of unbelievable acts of athleticism.

Sam wonders if he can "ketch the whole twelve of them" and staggers out onto the field; the players run away immediately, and though Sam is able to hold on to the best one for a moment, he, too, escapes. Sam wakes up on the verge of tears but comforts himself by thinking that he "got someone just as good," Roy, and that life awake is now better than dreaming.

Sam's literal "American dream" is dashed when he is unable to grab hold of any of the god-like players. Hobbs, though, is the talented player who will redeem Sam's career and bring him the success he has been looking for.

Sam's mouth feels dry and his underclothes are dirty. Surprising those around him who see him go that way, he heads to the shower stall in the bathroom a few cars ahead and begins to shower. A trainman tells him that the shower stalls are only for the train crew, and he then goes to the club car—also "out of bounds" for coach travelers like him, though he manages to finagle his way in by claiming that he has a family member on a more expensive sleeper car (actually Hobbs).

Again, Sam's low-class status is evident: after years of working in baseball, he is still unable to move out of poverty. This contrast suggests that despite its glamorous allure, baseball is not a sport that easily affords success and fulfills individuals' expectations of the "American dream."

Sam doesn't find Roy in the club car and decides to head to the bar: he is already in a "fluid state" since the train is "moving through wet territory." He then changes his mind and sits down in the club car to observe the people around him, spotting two men reading a newspaper. Its headline shows that an "All-American Football Ace" and a "West Coast Olympic Athlete" have been shot by an unknown woman with silver bullets from a .22 caliber pistol, both within a 24-hour period.

Sam's craving for alcohol is outdone only by his curiosity about the other people on the train, which leads him to spot a headline with important relevance to the plot. Here, as in other moments, Malamud foreshadows a later event (Harriet's shooting of Hobbs, who becomes her third target), subtly building toward key moments in the text.

Sam listens to two men discussing the shootings, one "short, somewhat popeyed," the other "husky, massive-shouldered," and wearing sunglasses. The husky man (named Whammer) asks the short man (named Max) why he thinks the woman is shooting athletes, and the short man playfully replies that "she may be heading for a baseball player for the third victim." Sam looks up at them and realizes he recognizes them both, then introduces himself to Max, a sportswriter.

Max's playful comments to the Whammer suggest that the idea of a woman murderer is laughable, even unbelievable: that a woman would be able to hold fatal power over sports stars seems ridiculous to the two men. Ironically, the Whammer will later be drawn to Harriet, the woman murderer in question.

Max, "a nervous man" in a pinstriped suit, can sense that Sam is an alcoholic and is put off; Sam tells him that he once played for the St. Louis Browns, and Mercy carefully responds that he thinks he knows his name. Sam is cheerful, but mentioning his baseball career sets his insides "afry." The other man is Walter "the Whammer" Whambold, the "leading hitter of the American League," who is owed $75,000 and is headed East to get the money from his boss. Sam tells him he looks different in street clothes, and the Whammer, with yellow hair, a tie, and socks, grunts in reply; Sam laughs "embarrassedly."

Here, Sam's background is revealed: he used to play baseball, but his career seems to have ended badly, again suggesting that his "American dream`' has gone unfulfilled, despite his best efforts. Additionally, Malamud hints at baseball's corruption by mentioning that the Whammer—though clearly a star player—is owed a substantial amount of money. Sam's surprise at the Whammer's plain appearance also indicates the distance between popular perception of baseball stars and their actual identities: though the Whammer is a legendary player, he is so average-looking in regular life that it takes Sam a few minutes to recognize him.

Sam tells the men that he is traveling with Hobbs and remarks that Mercy might want to "know about him," given his success as a high school player; Hobbs learned to pitch from his father, who was once a semipro, and Sam has been helping him to improve. Mercy laughs and says that "Class D is as far down as I go." Sam is taking Hobbs to Clarence Mulligan of the Cubs for a tryout, anticipating that the Cubs will pay Sam a few thousand dollars—on the condition that he can return to his former career as a "regular scout" signed to the team.

Hobbs's success in the major leagues is not a sure bet, given his unimpressive background: he has no formal training, and Mercy finds him an unlikely prospect. Nonetheless, out of desperation Sam has staked the future of his career on Hobbs—suggesting that he has fallen low enough to put all of his hope into a player as seemingly disadvantaged as Hobbs.

Sam spots Hobbs, who is looking around for the girl with the black hatbox (whose name, Eddie has told him, is Miss Harriet Bird), and goes to grab him. While Sam is gone, Max remarks that Sam was a "terrific" catcher, which he discovered while completing research on "drunks in baseball." Settling with Sam next to Max and the Whammer, Hobbs takes an instant disliking to the sportswriter and the star ballplayer, who are openly rude to Hobbs and Sam. Max and the Whammer leave to play cards in another pair of seats, and Harriet, seated nearby, attracts the Whammer's attention, making Hobbs jealous.

Although Mercy claims that Sam was a "terrific" player, Sam's current status—a desperate drunk, intent on working his way back into the leagues—reveals that baseball is a sport that does not always reward its most talented players; that is, success in the sport does not guarantee success in life. Sam's story also foreshadows Hobbs's own fall from grace later in the novel—caused in part because of the attention he gives to women who prove to be bad influences, as indicated here by the attention he gives to Harriet.

Later on, the Whammer is talking to Harriet about his career, slipping his hands around the back of her seat. Annoyed, Hobbs leaves the club car and goes back to the sleeper, where he feels a "kind of sadness" watching the landscape go by outside the train, realizing that he might never see home again. Watching the forest drift by, Hobbs reminisces on his experiences in nature and "the woodland," a space where he feels free of anxiety—it "ease[s] the body-shaking beat of his ambitions"—and begins to wonder if he made the right decision by coming to Chicago, and whether Sam knows what he is doing or not. Hobbs remembers the white rose in his pockets and decides to get rid of it, but then a "beaten, gold, snow-capped mountain" with a city at its base appears out the window, distracting him.

Harriet's fledgling relationship with the Whammer suggests her attraction to sports stars: again, Malamud foreshadows the near-fatal actions she later takes against Hobbs. Similarly, Hobbs's inability to get rid of the white rose indicates Harriet's influence over Hobbs, even early on in the novel. Hobbs's reflections on nature and childhood demonstrate his anxiety about the path he has chosen—to devote himself to baseball—and the way in which he tends to idealize the brief moments of tranquility he experienced in childhood (usually in nature), often viewing these moments as preferable to his "ambitions" for baseball.

The train comes to a stop and a dozen passengers get off for a half-hour break, including Hobbs, Sam, Harriet, the Whammer, and Max Mercy; Hobbs takes the bassoon case with him. Sam spots a carnival at the outskirts of the city they have stopped in, and the passengers head toward it: Hobbs plays a game throwing baseballs at wooden pins and wins a variety of prizes. A large-bosomed girl in yellow working the game offers to kiss him for every three pin he knocks down. At first, Hobbs works steadily, knocking down many of them, but then the Whammer appears—having won prizes of his own in the batting cage—and trips him up.

The carnival represents Malamud's perception of American baseball: outlandish, brash, and chaotic, it foreshadows the grotesque atmosphere of the Knights' games. The carnival is therefore the natural setting for Hobbs to demonstrate his skills for the first time. That a woman's presence motivates Hobbs to perform affirms the importance of women for Hobbs's own confidence and actions: like Harriet, the "large-bosomed girl in yellow" attracts Hobbs's attention and motivate him to do well.

Sam makes a wager with the Whammer, claiming that Hobbs can strike him out with three pitched balls. Harriet, watching Hobbs and the Whammer (and clutching a kewpie doll the Whammer has won for her) exclaims that she loves "contests of skills." The crowd moves across the train tracks; Sam, serving as the umpire, gets a local boy to bring him a fielder's glove and a catcher's mitt and buttons a washboard Roy won in the wooden pin game under his coat as protection. Sam advises Roy to "throw a couple of warm-ups," but Roy claims that his arm is "loose." Roy takes off his coat, and a local boy comes to grab it; Roy tells him not to "spill the pockets." He then tells Sam that he wishes he hadn't bet money on him. Sam, embarrassed, says they won't take the money if they win, but they'll let it stand if they lose.

Sam's bet sets the scene for a mythical showdown between the Whammer and Hobbs—not unlike David and Goliath's confrontation—and though Hobbs feels uncertain about the competition, he also has confidence in his own abilities (claiming that his arm is "loose" without warming it up). Additionally, Hobbs asks the local boy not to "spill the pockets" of his coats in order to protect Harriet's flower: she clearly continues to hold power over his behavior.

The onlookers walk to the other side of the tracks as Roy and the Whammer gear up for play, though Harriet stands close by, her eyes shining at the sight of the two men. Roy pitches a ball to the Whammer, who looms "gigantic" to Roy, "impassive, unsmiling, dark." The Whammer's "exceptional eyesight" allows him to see the ball spin off of Roy's fingertips as if in slow motion; it reminds him of a white bird. The Whammer strikes out and is surprised by himself: he feels bemused about entering into this strange competition by the "crazy carnival," and the "queer dame" Harriet, though she had been congratulating him five minutes ago, is now "eyeing him coldly for letting one pitch go by." Max, who has agreed to call the pitches, moves back from the scene, and Sam laughingly calls out that his "knees are knockin'," as if he is fearful of Hobbs's abilities.

As the Whammer's abilities begin to falter, he begins to feel uncertain about the competition and himself. Talent in baseball, it seems, can quickly fade, and the Whammer's defeat at the hands of a younger prodigy, Roy, foreshadows Roy's own defeat at the end of the novel by the prodigy Herman Youngberry. That the Whammer pictures the baseball as a "white bird" suggests his own symbolic surrender to his fate: white birds could be seen to represent peace or freedom. Harriet's attention to the players also foreshadows her own bloodthirsty desire for sports celebrities.

Roy pitches again, and the ball looks like a "slow spinning planet looming toward the earth:" the Whammer strikes at it "ferociously" but strikes out again. Sam taunts the Whammer, who asks if Roy is cheating by throwing "spitters." Secretly, though, the Whammer feels relieved, since stress helps him to focus; he then feels momentarily depressed, watching Roy move like a "veteran undertaker of the diamond." For a moment, Sam pities the Whammer and hopes that he won't be "tumbled." As Roy raises his legs to throw the third pitch, he smells the Whammer's blood, feeling angry for the way he insulted Sam. The Whammer lifts his bat to crush the pitch, but he realizes with sadness that the ball is "part of the past"—that he has struck out.

Again, Hobbs's defeat of the Whammer—motivated by his own anger about the Whammer's actions—demonstrates how easily a player's skills can slip away. Malamud's metaphors, including comparisons between Hobbs and an "undertaker," and the baseball and a "slow spinning planet," emphasize the mythological magnitude of the sport, relating it to broad themes of death and outer space.

The crowd is silent in the "violet evening;" the Whammer shouts out that it is "customary" to turn on lights for night games. The ball Roy pitched has hit Sam in the stomach, and despite the washboard, the ball's velocity injures him. Sam is pulled to his feet; the train whistles, and the passengers turn around to get back on the train. Before Hobbs boards, the girl in yellow tries to kiss him. He ducks, and she hits him on the right eye, watched closely by Harriet, whom he deems a "snappy goddess."

Hobbs's victory over the Whammer stuns the crowd gathered to watch them—and literally renders Sam breathless. Yet just as quickly as the game begins, it comes to an end, and the passengers get back on the train: Hobbs's triumph is only fleeting, though it earns him the attention of both the girl in yellow and Harriet, suggesting that women are drawn to his status as a sports star.

Hobbs feels triumphant about his defeat of the Whammer and spends the next leg of the journey talking with Harriet, who, rambling excitedly, compares Hobbs and the Whammer to the myth of David and Goliath. Hobbs reveals that his father left him in orphan homes, though he did teach him "how to toss a ball." Hobbs finds it difficult to talk to Harriet, who is more educated than he is, but eventually he gains confidence and tells her that he will one day "break every record in the book for throwing and hitting." Harriet is disappointed to learn that Hobbs, unlike the Whammer, is not yet a professional player, but she brightens when Hobbs notes that the Whammer, already thirty-three, "won't last much longer," while he, Hobbs, has his whole career in front of him.

Harriet is intent on making Hobbs out to be an up-and-coming sports celebrity, since she intends to target him next in her string of shootings. Despite Harriet's clearly unbalanced behavior, Hobbs feels out of his depth with her—again embarrassed by his own background and lack of education—and fails to grasp her allusions to myths (like David and Goliath), which imbue Hobbs and his actions with mythological status.

Harriet asks Hobbs if there is any "glorious meaning" to his ambitions with baseball—if he has a higher purpose in life—but Hobbs is unable to respond coherently. Haltingly, her eyes "sad," Harriet says that "we are all terribly alone," then trails off. Hobbs feels bad for her, as if she is his mother (whom he calls "that bird"); he is worried that he has bored her with his poor responses. Harriet then asks about his bassoon case, and he tells her that it is a **baseball bat**; she promises to come and see him play, and as the train goes around a bend, he fondles her breast. She screams and reacts strangely, contorting her body like a "twisted tree."

Harriet's unpredictable behavior continues to perplex Hobbs, though he is nonetheless attracted to her. Moreover, Hobbs is unable to articulate what his desires are in life (beyond achieving success in baseball), suggesting that his ambitions are somehow lacking. Harriet's own inability to articulate herself that she too may have some psychological wounds, though Malamud does not provide much explanation for her future vicious behavior; she remains a somewhat one-dimensional character, notable only for her violence and abnormality. Additionally, by comparing Harriet to his mother—whom he seems to think poorly of, though he also pities her, as he does Harriet—Hobbs demonstrates his own reductive thinking about women, whom he views in simplistic terms (as pitiable, for example).

Meanwhile, Max Mercy is asking Sam about Hobbs, his back turned to the Whammer, who is holding a newspaper "in front of his sullen eyes." Sam escapes Mercy's questions and tries to go to sleep in the coach car, where he has a nightmare about being pursued by various characters—Mercy, the conductor (who runs him off of the train into a bog) and a doctor who tells him that there is no bridge over the bog. Sam wrestles with the doctor, refusing to believe him, but soon discovers that the bridge is gone. He falls into the "whirling waters;" a "watchman" throws him a flare, but it is too late. Sam feels a pain in his side "where the knife had stabbed him."

Hobbs attracts Mercy's attention, suggesting his newfound celebrity status—in stark contrast to the Whammer's own embarrassment at his defeat (he holds a newspaper in front of his face, as if to signal that his identity as a star has been stripped away, and he is once more anonymous, a "nobody"). Additionally, Sam's nightmare reflects his own deep-seated fear about his life. He feels that despite desperate efforts—he tries to find a way through the water but is thwarted several times—there is no escape from his own suffering (represented by his imagined death by drowning), a result of his failures in baseball.

Eddie wakes up Hobbs in the midst of his own dreams and tells him that Sam has collapsed. They rush to the coach car, and before Sam succumbs to his injuries from the pitch that hit him during the contest, he tells Hobbs to go to the Stevens Hotel in Chicago and meet the Cubs agent, Clarence Mulligan. Then Sam gives Roy his wallet full of cash. Visibly upset, Roy agrees, and Sam dies.

Before dying, Sam asks Hobbs to carry on what they've started by continuing his journey: Hobbs takes on the status of a character in an epic narrative, tasked with an odyssey.

After leaving the train, Roy takes a taxi to the hotel in Chicago. Watching the streets go by, Hobbs reflects on the crowded, unfamiliar city—wondering how it can possibly be so full of people, and how many of those strangers are dangerous—and feels homesick. Reaching his large, imposing hotel, he feels nervous about entering its "whirling doors" but does so anyway, following the bellhop who has "grabbed his things." Hobbs pays five dollars for a room, though he knows he will give it up when he finds a boarding-house to stay in.

Again, Hobbs wonders about his choices: though the home he has left behind was unstable, he begins to wonder if he was better off living a lower-class, rural life, since he feels overwhelmed by the bustling, unfamiliar city, whose amenities he cannot afford or easily navigate.

In his room on the seventeenth floor, Hobbs looks down on the city and begins to feel invincible: he knows he will go to the try-out and play well. The telephone rings; though he is scared to answer it, he picks it up on the second ring and discovers that it is Harriet, who invites him to her room in the same hotel. He takes his bassoon case with him and walks down to her room, where she greets him wearing a see-through negligée.

Hobbs's confidence picks up once he is in his hotel room: his desire to become a great player is affirmed once he is able to look down on the city, since this position affords him a sense of power. Nonetheless, he quickly leaves his self-reflection behind when Harriet calls him, drawn away from himself to her (as he will be to other women in the novel).

A "great weight" goes off of Hobbs's mind when he sees Harriet. Hobbs watches her put on a black feathered hat with a veil, removing it from a hatbox next to a vase of white roses, and notices that she is holding a "squat, shining pistol"; confused, he asks her what's wrong. She asks him if he will be "the best" player "there ever was in the game." When he responds in the affirmative, she shoots him with the pistol, and the silver bullet lands in his gut. Hobbs tries to catch it but cannot, and he falls on his knees while Harriet dances "on her toes" around him, simultaneously triumphant and despairing; the "forest" around Hobbs flies upward.

Harriet's white roses are revealed to be a disguise, and her black veil, symbolizing mourning, exposes her true intentions—to murder Hobbs, once he confirms that he will be "the best player" in baseball. Again, Harriet's behavior is incomprehensible and ruthless: she is a cartoonish version of a femme fatale, given minimal character development. That Hobbs's last vision is an image of the "forest" is significant, since it indicates his desire to return "home," to the natural surroundings he found comforting in childhood. His desire to become a sports celebrity seems to have drawn him down the wrong path, toward Harriet, even before his career has begun.

BATTER UP! PART 1

The novel cuts to a scene in the New York Knights' dugout, where Pop Fisher is reflecting on his love for farming while watching the Knights play: he decides that he should have been a farmer instead of a "wet nurse to a last place" baseball team. Pop notes to Red Blow that it has been a "dry season" for the Knights, in both senses of the term: the weather has been hot and dry, and the Knights are failing to win games. Pop and Red discuss their players' poor performances, including Bump's, who has been thrown out of the game. They also mention Pop's "bastard partner," who is tight with money, and Pop's physical ailments—he has "athlete's foot" on his hands, which he wears bandaged.

Pop's references to a "dry season" evoke the myth of the Fisher King, in which a knight is tasked with restoring an injured king's barren kingdom. Pop Fisher, whose name also points to the story (and who is injured like the king, evidenced by his "athlete's foot of the hands"), owns the kingdom—the Knights—that must be restored. References to Pop's "bastard partner" suggest the financial corruption to be found in baseball, a theme developed in more depth later in the novel.

Someone in street clothes lugging a valise and a bassoon case enters the dugout and asks for Fisher. The two look at each other: Pop is sixty-five with blue eyes and resembles a "lost banana" in his oversized baseball outfit, while the stranger is "tall, husky" and "dark-bearded," large but "lithe." His mind is racing, and he feels that he hasn't yet "arrived"—that he is still working toward some unspecified goal. The stranger introduces himself as the new left fielder, Roy Hobbs, and hands a letter to Pop describing his contract.

Throughout the novel, Hobbs is associated with a key trope: movement or motion, sometimes symbolized by a train (Hobbs often feels as if he is on a train, akin to the one that allowed him to begin his journey toward professional baseball). Movement represents Hobbs's own persistent drive, his inability to quit striving for more. Introduced as an older man for the first time—years after his encounter with Harriet—Hobbs's drive is as strong as ever, as he attempts to overcome the trauma of his past and achieve greatness.

The letter informs Pop that Hobbs is thirty-four, which Pop claims is too old for baseball; Hobbs tells Pop that he played semipro with the Oomoo Oilers, having recently got back in the game. Pop—lacking confidence in Hobbs's abilities—is upset about Hobbs's presence, and he tells Hobbs that he's been cheated: he should have been paid more than three thousand dollars for his starting pay by Judge Banner, Pop's co-manager.

The odds are stacked against Hobbs from the beginning: his age is an obvious problem, immediately suggesting that despite his passion and unbridled ambition, he might be destined for failure instead of success in the sport. Additionally, Hobbs has already come face-to-face with financial corruption. Banner's cheap tendencies demonstrate that baseball, despite its glamorous allure, may not actually provide wealth and success.

Pop says that he doesn't need a "fielder old enough to be [his] son;" frustrated, Hobbs gets up to leave, but Red takes Pop aside and convinces him to give Hobbs a chance, noting that if the Knights' best scout found him, Hobbs must be worth something. Pop apologizes to Hobbs, but tells him that "thirty-four years for a rookie is starting with one foot in the grave." As Hobbs walks away to go get his uniform, Pop mutters that he "shoulda bought a farm."

Pop is convinced that his own "American dream" will never come to fruition: although Hobbs might be a promising prospect, capable of redeeming the Knights and affording Pop the success he has long been denied, Pop feels that failure is imminent. Like Hobbs, Pop dreams about returning to a simpler life—life on a farm—and eschewing his dreams of glory in baseball.

Hobbs goes into the clubhouse to get a uniform from the prop man, Dizzy, directed there by the trainer. Dizzy tells Hobbs that they've been one man short on the roster ever since one of their players was paralyzed from a fly ball; additionally, another player snapped his spine after stepping on a bat. Dizzy gives Hobbs a hat that is too small and remarks that Hobbs has "some size noggin there." Hobbs tells him that he wears a seven and a half, and Dizzy comes back with a size that fits. As Hobbs tries on the hat, Dizzy asks him why he's crying. Hobbs says he has a cold; Dizzy then asks him to sign for his gear, since Judge Banner insists. He helps Hobbs carry it to his locker, where he warns him not to store booze, since Pop gets upset if players drink. Dizzy also tells Hobbs that no one locks their locker doors.

By recounting the different ways that players have been injured while playing ball, Dizzy alerts Hobbs to just how common failure is in the sport: success, it seems, is elusive or nearly impossible in baseball, given its risks. Hobbs becomes emotional while trying on his uniform, realizing just how far he has been able to make it in his quest to become a professional player. At the same time, Dizzy comments on the size of his head, suggesting that Hobbs's ego is already inflated (he is literally "big-headed"). Dizzy also hints at the Knights' debauchery, suggesting their vice-ridden antics.

As Hobbs changes in the "tomblike quiet" of the locker room, which is empty of other players, he reflects that his first day in the major league is different from what he expected—so different that he feels an urge to walk out and return to one of the towns he lived in as a child, where he had a **dog** and could wander through the woods in peace. Hobbs is caught in the reverie until the dog's yapping wakes him; he realizes that he has actually heard the sound of voices through the door to the trainer's room.

Once again, Hobbs returns to a memory from childhood, a tranquil moment in nature with his dog; he views this past life as the opposite of the flashy, fast-and-loose lifestyle of professional baseball. Hobbs's fixation on this idealized version of his childhood suggests his own inability to transcend his past, since he continually longs to return to this moment; the memory interferes with his perception of his own present, since he imagines the dog's yapping as a real disturbance.

Hobbs overhears players speaking with each other in the trainer's room and hears one "greedy, penetrating, ass-kissing" voice that he recognizes; another voice is telling a story about a prank he pulled on Pop Fisher. The second voice belongs to a player named Bump, who is playing pranks on Pop in an attempt to be released from the failing team. Bump tells another story about arranging to drop a ball from an airplane, which Pop, bragging about his talents as a former player, claimed he would be able to catch; the ball hit him on his head instead. The other voice asks Bump if he is engaged to Pop's niece, Memo, but Bump denies it; the door to the trainer's room opens and Bump and Max Mercy walk out. Hobbs is embarrassed to see Mercy, but Mercy doesn't seem to recognize him; Bump welcomes him to the team crudely.

The players' jokes reveal their utter disregard for Pop and the sport: despite their name, the Knights appear to be a group of immoral, vicious individuals, suggesting baseball's inherent cruelty beneath its glamorous surface. In addition, that Max Mercy doesn't initially recognize Hobbs—whom he encountered on the train fifteen years before—seems to indicate that Hobbs might be able to transcend his troubled past:he might be afforded a fresh start. Yet Mercy pursues Hobbs throughout the rest of the novel, intent on digging into his backstory.

Pop gathers the players for a speech in which he sharply criticizes the team, their behavior, and their poor performances on the field, while Bump hurls insults back at him; Pop leaves the room in tears, sobbing, "Sometimes I could cut my own throat." Hobbs feels ashamed after the speech, and when he meets Pop later, he admits that he has no place to spend the night, having forfeited his bonus cash on outstanding debts. Pop gives him a loan to stay in a hotel and encourages him to ask the married players if they have a spare room, or to look into staying at a boarding-house. Roy gets a room at the Midtown Hotel, where the bellhop tells him that previous Knights players who stayed at the hotel were known for their cruel jokes—including one in which a player died by falling off of the hotel roof.

Again, the Knights' (and particularly Bump's) behavior demonstrates their own savagery. Pop's behavior, too, is callous and angry; the manager and his players seem to be wrapped in a never-ending cycle of aggression. Nonetheless, Pop is kind enough to help Hobbs secure a room, though the hotel where Hobbs lands also serves as evidence of the Knights' viciousness, since it is a site where several past players have performed gruesome pranks.

Before leaving him for the night, Pop urges Hobbs to "behave and give the game all you have got." Red Blow phones Hobbs and invites him to dinner; before he goes to eat, Bump comes to Hobbs's door and asks to trade rooms, since he is inviting a "lady friend" over and feels that there are "too many nosy people" on his floor. Hobbs agrees to exchange rooms, but when he goes to see the room, he encounters a redheaded girl in her underwear who screams and slams the door when she sees him. Hobbs has a splitting headache. Bump's room turns out to be next door to this room. Roy lies down in Bump's bed to soothe his headache.

Pop's remarks to Hobbs imply that Hobbs will be able to get by in the game by the sheer force of his will and ambition (though this is later disproven). Additionally, Hobbs's encounter with the redheaded girl—Memo Paris, who will become his main love interest—reintroduces Hobbs's insatiable sexual desire: from the moment Hobbs spots Memo, nearly naked in her room, he is riveted by her, and his lust leads him down an undesirable path.

After Hobbs and Red have dinner, the two men head to a movie about a love affair between a "city guy" and a "country girl;" Hobbs enjoys it, and as they walk back to the hotel, he thinks about the girl in the black brassiere in the next room. Red tells Hobbs about the team's troubles, noting that Bump is "lazy," though Pop hopes that he will "reform." He also asks Hobbs why he didn't start playing when he was younger. Hobbs is evasive, saying simply that he "flopped;" Red cringes at the term and tells Hobbs about "Fisher's Flop," an incident from the end of Pop's playing career in which he failed to make a crucial home run for his team, the Sox, during the last game of the World Series.

Hobbs compares the girl in the movie with Memo, again suggesting that he is incapable of thinking about women in ways that are not simplistic or reductive: he enjoys the "country girl" stereotype, and compares his attraction to the character to his attraction to Memo. Moreover, Pop is revealed to be yet another character whose failure in baseball has impacted his life severely, driving him away from success: like Sam and the Whammer, Pop is destined for ignominy.

Red tells Hobbs that Pop became infamous for his "flop" and left the game for a time, though he was able to use money from an inheritance to buy a half share of the Knights. Pop believes he has been jinxed since the "flop" and that if he can lead the Knights to victory, he might break the curse—but Judge Banner, who hopes to push Pop out of his job, has been making things difficult for his co-owner, making bad trades that hurt the team but prompt financial gain for Banner.

Pop's desire to break his "jinx"—a term that again evokes the Fisher King myth, in which the kingdom's "jinx" of barrenness must be broken—is complicated by Judge Banner's corruption, which reveals the flawed inner workings of the sport: though Pop is the team's main manager, his judgments are overshadowed by Banner's power and wealth.

Red asks Hobbs to try his best to redeem the team, and Hobbs promises to do so; Red also warns Hobbs that baseball is a notoriously difficult game, and that he should try to save his money in case something goes wrong. However, Hobbs confidently replies that he plans to be in the game "a long time."

Hobbs promises to redeem Pop and the Knights, stepping into the role of the knight tasked with redeeming the Fisher King's kingdom in the Fisher King myth. He also fails to heed Red's warnings about the game's difficulty, brashly asserting his own infallibility as a player: ultimately, Hobbs's overconfidence will be his own undoing.

Back in his room at night, Hobbs feels as if his bed is "in motion," going around in circles. He lies still and lets the "trees, mountains, states" go by, but he feels as if he is headed somewhere he does not want to go; he cannot stop the bed from moving, like a roaring locomotive, and he sees himself walking down a corridor with the bassoon case, knocking on a door, and encountering Harriet, who seems "less and more than human," with her pistol. Harriet cuts him down "in the very flower of his youth," and he sobs into his pillow.

Again, Hobbs is struck by a feeling of being "in motion" on a train: this sense of movement represents his own desire to achieve greatness, though he is not sure where exactly he is headed—and thus, what exactly he wants to achieve, beyond a simplistic vision of success (becoming the "greatest player ever"). Hobbs's dream turns into a nightmare about Harriet: the last time he tried to achieve success, he was "cut down," suggesting that he may fail again by continuing to let ambition drive him.

Hobbs finally quiets down, and the noise of the train fades away. He begins to have a pleasant dream about the girl he saw in the movie with Red, and he imagines her with him in a country field. At one point, a door opens and a naked redheaded woman gets into bed with him. Hobbs thinks he is still dreaming, but he almost screams out in pain when her icy hands and feet touch him, "slashing" his body; in the country field he imagines, he finds "what he wanted and had it."

It is suggested that Memo and Hobbs sleep together accidentally, since Memo mistakes Hobbs for Bump, whose room Hobbs is staying in. That Memo's hands "slash" Hobbs's body foreshadows the negative influence she will have on his life, though in the moment, his desires are fulfilled: he finds "what he wants."

BATTER UP! PART 2

The next morning in the locker room, the Knights are glum and fighting among themselves. When Hobbs enters, though, they look up at him with interest. Hobbs discovers that his teammates have scattered his belongings: his uniform is knotted up, soaking wet, his stockings and socks are slashed, and his other things are smeared with shoe polish; his jock strap, with two red apples in it, is hanging from the ceiling, where his shoes have also been nailed. Hobbs's teammates start laughing, and he smacks Bump in the face with his wet pants. Bump dries himself off and gives Hobbs a cigarette that explodes in his face. The Knights howl with laughter. Allie Stubbs, the second baseman, dances around the room, imitating a "naked nature dancer" playing the trombone. Hobbs then realizes that his bassoon case is missing.

The Knights' cruelty is on full display in this hazing episode: the players' actions toward Hobbs mock his masculinity (putting two "red apples" in his jock strap), demonstrating baseball's close relationship to both vice and inflated masculine ideals.

Hobbs spies Bump with a hacksaw, about to attack his bat, called "**Wonderboy**." Hobbs retrieves the bat, and he and Bump scuffle. Hobbs tells Bump that he doesn't like being pranked, especially after Bump asked him for a favor the night before; Bump says he heard Hobbs "had a swell time." Pop and Doc Casey, the trainer, break up the fight, and Pop tells Hobbs that fighting between players will be punished. Hobbs feels sorry for making trouble because he wanted to ask Bump if he was expecting the redheaded woman in his room.

Bump recognizes that Hobbs's bat—which he guards fiercely throughout the novel—has special powers and attempts to destroy it in order to undermine Hobbs, again demonstrating the cut-throat cruelty of baseball. Moreover, Hobbs's interest in the redheaded woman—who draws his attention away from his squabble with Hobbs—indicates the power women continue to hold over his life, actions, and decisions.

Hobbs goes outside with **Wonderboy** and into the batting cage. The players, including Earl Wilson, Allie Stubbs, Cal Baker, Hank Benz, Emil Lajong, Hinkle, Hill, and McGee, are practicing without much energy, but they perk up when they see Hobbs enter the cage. Fowler, a southpaw Pop has ordered to throw batting practice "for not bearing down in the clutches" the day before, is in a "nasty mood" and throws a ball at Hobbs's head in spite; Roy hits his next three pitches spectacularly well.

This is Hobbs's first time batting with Wonderboy in the novel, and unsurprisingly, he performs well, despite Fowler's vengeful behavior; Hobbs proves that he possesses the natural talents he claimed to have, though it is not yet clear whether these talents—which he has demonstrated only in practice—will be enough to help him lead the Knights to victory.

Pop asks Hobbs about his **bat**, and Hobbs tells him that as a child, he carved it out of wood from a tree that was struck by lightning near the river where he lived; he branded the name "Wonderboy" on it himself and keeps its pale white wood "oiled with sweet oil." When Pop asks Hobbs why he didn't get into the game as a teenager, Hobbs is elusive, noting that he "got sidetracked." Pop says that Red will measure and weigh the bat to make sure it meets specifications. Red then asks Pop if they can start Hobbs in the line-up soon.

"Wonderboy" has mythical significance: like King Arthur, who pulled Excalibur from a stone, Hobbs "discovered" Wonderboy—crafting it out of a tree near his childhood home. Wonderboy is a symbol of Hobbs's prowess as a sports star (as well as a phallic symbol, attesting to Hobbs's masculinity). Again, Hobbs is reluctant to reveal why he didn't become a professional player sooner, since he hopes to leave his troubled past behind. Nevertheless, he is persistently plagued by the questions and curiosity of those around him.

Pop sends Hobbs out to left field, where he proves to be a good field player, and Bump—as well as the other players—begin to play with more gusto, encouraged by Hobbs's performance. Though Bump does not typically "exert" himself in practice, he hits Fowler's pitches hard; he runs for and catches long fly balls, including some that end up close to the outfield wall, though he doesn't like to run near the wall as a rule. Pop is pleased with the team's work and tears up.

Even before Hobbs plays a game, his skills seem to improve the Knights' performance, helping to redeem the team (following the Fisher King legend Malamud alludes to). Additionally, Bump's superstition about the outfield wall foreshadows the injuries he sustains by running into the wall at the end of this chapter—again, Malamud subtly develops plot details that will be reintroduced later.

Before Hobbs's first game that day, the team sits around in the locker room, trying to hide their nerves but looking up whenever someone enters the room. Red introduces Hobbs to players Dave Olson, Juan Flores, and Gabby Laslow, and they walk past Bump anxiously performing his pre-game ritual: he is sewing a red thread into a sanitary sock, which Red tells Hobbs is a superstitious practice that Bump believes "keeps him hitting." Pop gives the team a pep talk, reading notes from an old, worn-in notebook, but he doesn't insult the players—like he did in his last pep talk.

The Knights rely on superstition to reassure themselves before games: unlike Hobbs, who consistently attests to his own drive and motivation, the Knights do not depend on their own determination and force of will to succeed, turning to rituals instead. In the novel, Malamud shows that ultimately, both Hobbs's and the Knights' approaches are only marginally successful—baseball is too corrupt, dangerous, and cut-throat a game to afford its players real success, instead creating a never-ending cycle of celebrity players who achieve fame and then burn out quickly, replaced by the next new star (not unlike the Whammer).

A short man in a green suit enters the room. The players arrange their chairs and benches in rows in front of the man, who the catcher, Olson, tells Hobbs is named Doc Knobb. The players seem less nervous around Doc, who begins to give a prolonged, hypnotic oration about relinquishing weakness and visualizing their own success: "If you think you are winners, you will be," he tells the team, asking them to imagine the Pirates, their opponents, as "mortals," "not supermen," to envision themselves as "the sun shining calmly on a blue lake" instead of "a flock of bats flying around in a coffin." Finally, he entreats the team to relax and "sleep."

Doc Knobb is a psychotherapist who works to "relax" the players through mesmerism and autosuggestion. His tactics suggest a parallel between baseball and psychological struggle: the players are encouraged to perform well in the game in order to complete the process of identity construction that Knobb guides them through. This episode is one of several points in which Malamud uses baseball as an allegory: more than just a form of entertainment, baseball symbolizes human conflict more generally.

The Knights begin to look less nervous and are lulled into a sleepy state as Knobb raises his arms and makes wave-like motions with them. Hobbs begins to dream that he is swimming in deep water, searching for a mermaid; there isn't enough light underwater to find her, and he panics and wakes up abruptly. Jarred, Hobbs decides to leave the room, damning Knobb's hypnosis, but Pop tells him that he is supposed to attend the doctor's sessions, per his contract.

Hobbs's dream parallels the nightmare Sam Simpson experiences before his death: that he imagines himself drowning, as Sam did, indicates his own deep-seated fear about himself and his own identity (just as Sam, too, felt fearful about his future and his disappointing lot in life). Again, Hobbs's confidence and ambition are undermined by his own anxiety and uncertainty.

After Hobbs walks out on Doc Knobb's speech, Pop benches Hobbs as punishment, but Hobbs remains steadfast, refusing to attend subsequent hypnosis sessions. Hobbs tells Red that he has "been a long time getting here" and "wants to do it," playing baseball, on his own terms, without Knobb's help; he never joins his team except for batting practice.

By refusing Knobb's hypnosis, Hobbs asserts his own self-reliance and independence, a version of the American Dream: he wants to succeed "on his own terms," though as the novel will later show, Hobbs's ambitions are not ultimately successful.

Hobbs begins to feel weakened while he waits to play, some days feeling so fragile "he could hardly lift **Wonderboy**," but whenever he goes into the batting cage to practice, he performs well, in contrast to his teammates, who are often clumsy and overly reliant on superstition. The Knights become sloppier when they are already losing a game and when they have not been hypnotized by Doc Knobb. Even Red and Pop have rituals: Pop has a rabbit's foot, and Red never changes his clothes during a "winning streak."

Hobbs's bat continues to provide him with supernatural, mythical abilities on the playing field, which contrasts sharply with the Knights' own failures. It's notable that their superstitions are so ineffective; Malamud seems to draw a distinction between this false magic and the true magic of Hobbs's mythic status.

Certain players have superstitious rituals about their fans, too: Emil Lajong does a "flip" whenever he sees "a cross-eyed fan" in the stands, and Olson spits when he spots a woman in a "drab brown-feathered hat." Hobbs is put off by the Knights' fans, who resemble a "zoo full of oddballs," including gamblers, prostitutes, and physically grotesque people, all obsessed with certain players—including Otto Zipp, a dwarf who roots for Bump using a loud horn. One fan, however, stands out to Hobbs: Memo Paris, Pop's niece and Bump's on-again-off-again girlfriend, who has treated him coldly ever since she accidentally got into his bed during his first night at the Midtown Hotel.

Malamud portrays baseball as a grotesque circus, evidenced by "oddball" fans obsessed with different players: in the novel, baseball is not the sort of glamorous spectacle it is often made out to be, but rather something brutal and bizarre. Additionally, Hobbs learns the identity of the redheaded woman who accidentally came into his bed during his first night at the hotel. Though the fans are obsessed with the players, Hobbs is obsessed with Memo, who represents the fulfillment of his deeply-felt lust—a lust he has not been able to satisfy so far, since Harriet shot him (thereby emasculating him) instead of having sex with him.


Hobbs has tried to apologize to Memo, but she blames him for the incident, ignoring his letters and phone calls. Bump finds the situation humorous—he tells Memo that he let Hobbs have his room out of pity, because he was going to spend the night "at the apartment of [his] he cousin from Mobile," and that he wasn't trying to play a prank on her—but Memo refuses to speak to either Bump or Hobbs. Nonetheless, Hobbs's infatuation with Memo deepens, and he resolves to "wait" for her.

Bump has clearly deceived Memo—he was with another woman the night that she entered Hobbs's room—but Hobbs had no way of knowing that Memo had mistaken him for Bump. Memo's cold, cruel behavior toward Hobbs foreshadows the behavior she will consistently display throughout the narrative, adding to the negative portrayal of women in the novel: like Harriet, Memo is presented as callous and one-dimensional.

Pop informs Hobbs that because of his refusal to attend Knobb's sessions, he is going to be sent to a Class B (minor league) team in the Great Lakes. Knobb offers to hypnotize Pop in order to rid him of his abrasive behavior, but Pop takes offense and fires him. Without Knobb's monologues, the Knights perform well, up until a point: Bump fails to make a routine catch, and Pop decides to put Hobbs in as a pinch-hitter for Bump, asking Hobbs to "hit the cover off of the ball." Hobbs faces a pitch and reflects that he is "sick to death of waiting." Using **Wonderboy**, Hobbs hits a homerun, literally knocking the cover off of the ball pitched to him; the bat flashes in the sun.

Again, Wonderboy provides Hobbs with otherworldly powers, allowing him to perform unbelievable feats—hitting the cover off of a baseball—and suggesting Hobbs's mythical status as a breakout star.


As soon as Hobbs makes it to home base, the Knights and their opponents, the Phils, contest the umpire's calling Hobbs safe; it also begins to rain heavily. The game is recorded as a tie, and Pop asks Hobbs to explain why the cover came off of the ball. Hobbs replies that that was what Pop asked him to do. Pop withdraws Hobbs's release, and the next day, during practice for a game against the Redbirds, Hobbs looks "tremendous;" so, too, does Bump, who warns Hobbs to "get out of [his] way." Pop puts Bump back in his usual position—fourth slot in the batting order—but tells him to start hustling or risk resting on the bench.

Keeping with the Fisher King myth, Hobbs's success prompts the Knights' "kingdom"—their baseball field—to become fertile again, since it begins to rain as soon as Hobbs wins the game; Hobbs is on his way to redeeming Pop Fisher and the Knights, though this success prompts competition between Bump and Hobbs.

In the next game, Bump performs admirably but is not satisfied by his own well-executed catches; he chases a hard-hit ball and runs full tilt toward the outfield wall. Bump feels his legs slowing down, then envisions himself as the league's best outfielder, adored by fans, players, and Pop. He catches the ball between his fingers but does not hear Otto Zipp's horn, nor Memo's shrieking, and collides with the wall, severely injuring himself and ending up on the critical list at the hospital.

Though Bump has a superstition to avoid the outfield wall, he runs square into it in an attempt to outdo Hobbs and gain the status he, like Hobbs, desires—success as a great player of the game. Like Sam and the Whammer, Bump becomes a character whose talents and motivation are ultimately inadequate; his ambition backfires and his "American dream" eludes him.

After Bump is hospitalized, the newspapers speculate that Hobbs may have conspired with Pop to tear the cover off of the ball during his spectacular homerun. Max Mercy suggests that **Wonderboy** is "suspicious," but Red Blow insists that the bat is legitimate and quashes Mercy's rumors. Hobbs keeps Wonderboy hidden away when Mercy comes to search the clubhouse.

At times, the novel's mythological structure—its allusion to supernatural events or items, like Wonderboy—chafes against reality: Hobbs's talents are not believed, building conflict in the plot and contributing to his own sense of anxiety about his skills.


Hobbs plays the next game against the Redbirds for Bump. In the stands, Otto Zipp looks "worn and aged," his face "like a pancake with a cherry nose;" Hobbs passes him by without giving him Bump's customary kiss on the head (another one of his superstitions). Hobbs bats and fields successfully; he is adept at judging the way a ball might carry on the wind or bounce on different places on the field, and the fans in the bleachers enjoy his acrobatics. The Redbirds' pitchers try to trip him up with different types of difficult pitches, but Hobbs is unflappable.

Hobbs proves that he is talented even without Wonderboy, as a fielder; still determined to do things "his own way," motivated by his own independent ambition, he refuses to participate in Bump's pre-game ritual (kissing Otto Zipp on the head).

Red says to Pop that Hobbs is a "natural," but Pop says that he mistrusts "bad ball hitters;" Hobbs sometimes swings at poorly-pitched balls, and Pop remarks that hitters like Hobbs often make "some harmful mistakes." Nonetheless, Hobbs earns a record for the number of triples hit in a major league debut, and everyone agrees that the Knights have found "something special." At the end of the game, Hobbs accidentally kills a bird that flies out of a window of an apartment overlooking the stadium by mistaking it for a ball.

Even as Hobbs triumphs on the field, cracks are beginning to emerge in his façade of strength and determination: Pop sees flaws in his hitting style, and by killing a bird by accident—mistaking it for a ball—Hobbs foreshadows his own eventual decline. Though Hobbs feels free at this moment in this career, like the bird as it escapes from the apartment, he, too, will see this sense of freedom crushed.

BATTER UP! PART 3

Bump dies in the hospital, and Memo becomes "wild with grief," dreaming of his dead body and crying non-stop. Pop, who finds her in her bed, is frightened and tries to send her to a doctor, but she refuses. In dreams, she kisses Bump's corpse, and his "mouthless mouth" blows back "the breath of life;" her womb "stirs" at the image. Yet Memo also dreams about his body in a "dark corridor," gripping the "glowing ball" he caught before hitting the wall; she begins to think of him as dead instead of alive, though she continues to see his "shade." Eventually, Memo drags herself out of bed and looks through souvenirs that remind her of him: an autographed baseball, an old kewpie doll he had won for her, and pictures of him as a player.

Though Memo and Bump's relationship was rocky, to say the least, after his death she is unable to forget him: he remains a kind of icon, suggesting his own mythical status as a player and an individual. Ironically, though, Bump had many faults. Malamud seems to be commenting on the American public's tendency to overstate the greatness of sports heroes (who are ultimately as flawed as any other individual). Additionally, it is briefly noted that Bump won a kewpie doll for Memo, just as the Whammer won a similar doll for Harriet during the carnival. Bump's similarity to the Whammer—who is also defeated by Hobbs—is thus emphasized; Malamud also hints subtly at Memo's similarity to Harriet, foreshadowing Memo's later treacherous behavior.

Among these souvenirs, Memo finds pictures of her parents, now deceased; her father's picture is torn up and reminds her of her own "heartbreak," since he "had not been truly hers when he died," and her mother's image is "sadeyed." When it becomes too hot to stay in her room in July, she comes down to the hotel lobby; her hair has turned a "lighter, golden shade," "as though some of the fire had burned out of it."

As with Harriet, Malamud provides just a few details about Memo's past and emotional instability; it is noted that Memo's father was unfaithful to her mother, suggesting that Memo's own callous behavior toward men is a result of this betrayal. Despite Memo's cruelty and aloofness, though, she is still tied to men: her grief over Bump literally changes her physical appearance, demonstrating that even as she holds power over Bump and Hobbs, her identity is also dependent on them—as Harriet's is, too, as a murderer of male athletes. Female characters in the novel seem one-dimensional in part because their relationships to male characters make up their identities.

Hobbs is still struck by Memo, whom he sees from time to time in the Midtown Hotel lobby, where they have both continued to stay: he believes that she wants to be with him, despite her grief for Bump, and hopes that he will have a chance with her once she has stopped mourning. He begins to send her gifts, which she returns to him. Soon, however, she begins to wear white instead of black, and she sometimes glances at Hobbs when he looks at her as she passes in the hotel lobby. Eventually, her "dislike of him" fades.

Hobbs's obsession with Memo deepens, though this seems misguided: it is clear that Memo's interest in Hobbs might not be genuine, but motivated by her own desire to regain the status she had as Bump's girlfriend (and a beneficiary of his fame and wealth).

Not long after Bump's funeral, Pop tells Hobbs not to worry about what happened to Bump, and Hobbs says that he has never felt guilty about the incident—though some say that if Hobbs hadn't joined the team, Bump wouldn't have died. Hobbs reflects that he only once wished for Bump to die—after his accidental night with Memo—and he tells Pop to tell Memo that Bump's death wasn't his doing.

Hobbs feels no guilt or sadness about Bump's death, since it has provided him with an opportunity to become the Knights' star. As Hobbs gains stature on the team, he becomes more cynical and self-centered, and his ambition begins to prove harmful: it prevents him from growing as an individual.

Nonetheless, Bump weighs heavy on Hobbs's mind, and he constantly compares his own performance to Bump's, even as fans begin to praise him. The crowds make "no attempt to separate his identity from Bump's;" whenever Hobbs makes a "hot catch," he hears praise for Bump—"Nice work, Bumpsy"—and feels frustrated. Even Otto Zipp uses his honker to applaud him, as he did for Bump. The newspapers compare Bump and Hobbs for their batting averages, statistics, and even their measurements and stances.

In the public's eye, Hobbs has replaced Bump, again demonstrating the cycle of success that characterizes Malamud's depiction of baseball: players burn out or even die and are easily replaced, creating a system in which no player is capable of anything more than temporary success.

One day, Hobbs notices Memo walk into the lobby of the Midtown Hotel with a newspaper turned to the sports page. He realizes that she has been reading articles that compare Bump with Hobbs, and he begins to feel that the comparisons might be useful—that she might want to initiate a relationship with him because of his similarities to Bump. He begins to play for her, using **Wonderboy**—which flashes gold in the sun, sometimes warranting complaints from pitchers blinded by its glare. (Hobbs rubs some of the shine off with a hambone, but the bat continues to appear brilliant.) Hobbs performs admirably, yet he does not feel satisfied by his accomplishments: only winning Memo, it seems, will bring him true satisfaction.

Wonderboy's golden sheen evokes its status as an item of mythical import, again demonstrating Malamud's tendency to include elements of fantasy in the novel: Wonderboy seems to have power of its own, since Hobbs's efforts to temper its noticeable intensity fall short. Thus, it seems possible that Hobbs's abilities are not entirely his own, but the result of powers outside of himself—which may make his eventual decline inevitable.

Pop and the Knights believe that Hobbs has "beginner's luck," and Hobbs becomes a controversial figure: he does not interact with the team frequently, yet his talents are useful to the Knights, which begin to work their way up the pennant, defeating higher-ranking teams, "like a rusty locomotive pulling out of the roundhouse for the first time in years."

Though Hobbs helps inspire the Knights' success (Malamud uses the metaphor of a train, usually associated with Hobbs's own boundless drive, to explain the Knights' progress), he also alienates himself from the team by putting his own independence first. Though baseball is a team sport, Hobbs's single-minded pursuit of his own goals defeats the purpose of any team cooperation.

Judge Banner looks down on the crowds from his office in the tower he inhabits, positioned above the main entrance of the ball park; at first, he feels uneasy about the team's success, since he believes that their winning streak will make it more difficult for him to push Pop out of his job. Eventually, though, he provides more funds for stadium upkeep, motivated by the wealth to be gained by an increase in game attendance.

The position of Banner's office—directly above the ball park—indicates the power he holds over the Knights, whose fate as a team is firmly under his control. Banner is the corrupt manager who has made it difficult for the team to succeed, demonstrating the prevalence of self-interested, egotistical actors in baseball and, by extension, American society. Though Banner is hidden away from the public in his tower office, his actions make American baseball the dishonest sport it actually is, underneath its glamorous promises of celebrity and thrilling feats of sportsmanship.

New fans visit the team to offer support for the Knights, jeering their opponents (though an old fan, Otto Zipp, does not return, for some unknown reason). The weather clears up around the Knights' field, and Pop's hands heal; cheerful and calm, he begins to treat his players with more gentleness, patience, and respect. Bump is gradually forgotten, and Hobbs becomes a celebrity in his own right, though he refuses to divulge any details of his background to the newspapers. Nonetheless, Memo still rebuffs Hobbs's advances, even when he approaches her at the hotel and admits his feelings for her.

Again, though Hobbs seems to be quickly gaining status as a player—helping to redeem the Knights and Pop, still in keeping with the Fisher King legend (Pop's hands are healing, physically demonstrating that Hobbs has lifted the jinx)—this status is continually challenged: that Otto Zipp, one of the Knights' most loyal fans, refuses to appear at the games demonstrates that Hobbs is still not afforded the respect that Bump (Zipp's preferred player) had. Moreover, Hobbs is still plagued by questions about his past, which keep him from moving forward with his life, and Memo continues to treat him coldly, distracting him from his goals.

Hobbs realizes that he needs to earn more money to attract Memo's attention. A newspaper columnist writes an open letter to Judge Banner demanding that Hobbs's salary be raised, given his popularity, and Hobbs goes to negotiate with Banner, a "massive rumpled figure" smoking a cigar, whose office is extravagant despite his own cheap tendencies as a manager. It is rumored that the Judge never leaves the office, and no photographer has ever entered the room. A motto on the wall reads, "All is not gold that glitters," among other phrases, and the floor is slanted, forcing visitors to sit down rather than stand. Hobbs has been warned about the Judge by Pop, who tells Hobbs that the Judge took advantage of Pop's financial troubles to buy shares of the team—and that Banner has been making deals that harm the team but benefit him, profit-wise.

Banner is an archetypal villain: treacherous and aloof, with an office that puts its visitors in a subservient position—forcing them to sit before Banner. The Judge's identity contradicts his status as an arbiter of the law, despite the moral axioms he displays on his wall. By introducing a character who wreaks havoc on a central part of American culture (baseball) yet purports to be a part of the American legal system (and thus judicious and fair by nature), Malamud suggests that American society is undermined by those tasked to defend it—and that corruption runs deep.

Banner was "impoverished" before he became a judge, and he uses his power in New York City to run sideline activities. Hobbs asks Banner for forty-five thousand dollars a year, and Banner responds by telling Hobbs the story of "Olaf Jespersen," a farmer he knew from childhood, who traded a beloved cow, Sieglinde, for another cow from a neighbor. Sieglinde collapses on the way to the trade, and Olaf suffers a heart attack from shock; the cow recovers, but Olaf never does, becoming a "doddering cripple." The moral of the story is to "be satisfied with what you have," but Hobbs pushes back on Banner's moralizing. He drops his price to thirty-five thousand, put off by Banner's insistence on negotiating in the dark—he blows out a match casting light, noting that he prefers a "dark to a lit room"—and his discourses on good and evil.

Banner's moralizing—including the story of Olaf Jespersen and Sieglinde—is at odds with his own corrupt practices, and by negotiating in the dark, he puts Hobbs at a disadvantage, confusing and disorienting him in order to prevent him from getting his way (the salary he desires).

Hobbs drops his price to twenty-five thousand; in the dark, he isn't sure that Banner is "there anymore" but then realizes that he can "smell him," and that Banner would still be in his office if Hobbs came back later. Banner refuses the proposal, criticizing Hobbs's tendency to bet on horse races, and dropping a pamphlet about "The Curse of Venereal Disease" onto his desk. When Hobbs drops his price again, to fifteen thousand, Banner asks him to fulfill the obligations of his contract and charges Hobbs for the destruction of his uniform earlier in the season. Hobbs refuses to pay the bill—ripping it and the pamphlet up—and leaves Banner's office.

Again, Banner's villainous behavior is on full display: like evil itself, he is stealthy and insidious, and his presence thus impacts Hobbs even when Hobbs cannot see him in the dark (he smells him instead). Banner's pamphlet about the "curse of venereal disease" could be seen as a reference to Hobbs's own lifestyle—his obsession with women and sex—and therefore further reinforces Banner's role as a representative of American vice. He is able to understand his players' darkest secrets and use them to his advantage, gathering harmful information about Hobbs.

Mercy confronts Hobbs as he leaves Banner's office, but Hobbs refuses to tell him anything about his background, even after Mercy offers him five thousand dollars in cash for articles about his past life. Max convinces Hobbs to come with him to a night club; on the way, he mentions that he thinks he has seen Hobbs before, but Hobbs deflects. At the night club, where "half-naked girls" are "chased by masked devils with tin pitchforks," Mercy and Hobbs meet with a bookie with a glass eye, Gus Sands, who has come to the club with Memo. Hobbs dislikes Sands immediately, feeling that he "belongs in the dark with the Judge."

Mercy's questions continue to drag Hobbs away from his career in the present and back toward the troubles of his past: Hobbs is unable to transcend his background, even as he attempts to throw Mercy (another ironic name, since Max shows Hobbs no "mercy" at all) off his trail. Additionally, Hobbs's encounter in the nightclub with Sands thrusts him deeper into the vice-ridden underbelly of baseball, which he just encountered in Banner's office. The presence of "half-naked girls" chased by "masked devils" could also be seen as an allusion to Hobbs's own behavior (his pursuit of Memo) as he descends into the chaos of an immoral, decadent lifestyle—one filled with partying, drinking, gambling, and chasing women.

Sands describes his betting strategies—he bets "on anybody or anything"—and makes a bet with Hobbs that he will get four hits in the next game. Hobbs and Sands also bet about the names of drinks being served across the bar, and Gus guesses correctly; Hobbs loses, to his dismay, since he is hoping to impress Memo. Gus loses another bet, about how much money Roy has in his wallet, but wins the next one—about a number Roy is thinking of. Ultimately, Hobbs owes Gus six hundred dollars.

Hobbs loses Gus's bet, the first of many losses to come: clearly, Hobbs is out of his depth, spiraling toward debauchery in an attempt to earn Memo's attention. Hobbs's strong performance on the baseball field is undermined by his behavior off the field.

Hobbs promises to get the money for Sands and comes back to the table with a white tablecloth, which turns different colors, and puts it over Gus's head. He grabs Gus's nose and pulls it, and silver dollars fall out of the cloth; Hobbs then pulls a dead herring out of Max's face and a duck egg from Memo's bosom, among other items (a long salami, more silver, a white bunny, a pig's tail). Memo laughs uproariously, and Max records the events in his black notebook; Gus's one eye looks around "for a way out."

Again, Malamud injects fantastical elements into this scene, suggesting that Hobbs might have the same kind of magical powers that Wonderboy possesses. Later, though, it is revealed that Hobbs was having fun with a magic kit left beyond by a nightclub performer. Nonetheless, this episode emphasizes Hobbs's abilities as a performer —the baseball field is a kind of theater as well, especially given Malamud's descriptions of the sport as a spectacle.

BATTER UP! PART 4

Two weeks later, Hobbs is making a speech in front of a "sellout crowd" in Knights Field, claiming that he will do his best "to be the greatest there ever was in the game." Hobbs is being honored with his own "Roy Hobbs Day," a celebration put on by fans who became outraged by the claims Max Mercy made in an article about Hobbs's negative experiences negotiating with Banner. Cars drive onto the field, stuffed with consumer goods—food, appliances, and other items—for Hobbs to take away. Hobbs hopes he has not jinxed himself by saying that he will become the "greatest" player, since the phrase could "tempt the wrath of some mighty powerful ghosts."

In spite of Banner's corruption and unjust behavior, Hobbs is briefly redeemed by his fans, who show their support for him by showering him in consumer goods (Malamud based the concept of "Roy Hobbs Day" on real events that were hosted for baseball players during this era). This display motivates Hobbs, who seems determined to prove that he is worthy of these gestures; ironically, though, what Hobbs does with these new items is never mentioned, suggesting that material possessions are not enough for Hobbs—he is always dissatisfied, constantly striving for more achievements.

Among the gifts given to Hobbs is a check for thirty-six hundred dollars, provided "because everyone thought the Judge," who watches the proceedings from his tower, "was too cheap to live." Otto Zipp has given Hobbs a pack of "dull razor blades" with a card that reads: "Here, cut your throat," but Hobbs doesn't take it to heart. Hobbs drives around the field in his new Mercedes-Benz and stops before Memo's box to ask if she will go out with him; she agrees.

Zipp's threatening "gift" foreshadows the way in which Hobbs's fans will later turn against him (when he loses his winning streak), contributing to his downfall. Additionally, that Memo agrees to go out with Hobbs after his "day" indicates her own shallow pursuit of wealth: conniving and superficial, Memo sees that Hobbs might be able to offer her a comfortable life.

Later, Memo and Hobbs are driving together to Jones Beach on Long Island, stopping on the way for steaks; night falls, but Hobbs feels that he is making little progress with Memo. It is a confusing situation, since he has "already had" her, yet cannot "have her" now because he has had her in the past. At the same time, Hobbs feels "contentment in moving," which offsets his own "inside motion"—his anxiety about his future. Hobbs reflects that he sometimes wishes he had no ambitions at all—including his ambition to pursue Memo—and thinks that life was simpler in childhood.

Hobbs feels disillusioned about his pursuit of Memo and wonders why he is trying so hard to earn her attention. This disillusionment wraps into the ambivalence he already feels about his career and his goals in baseball, which he offsets by "moving"—whether that means driving (i.e., physically moving) or simply striving to achieve, working doggedly in each baseball game. Nonetheless, Hobbs still feels nostalgia for a simpler time in his life—childhood—and wishes to return to the past, continuing to doubt the value of his own ambition.

Hobbs has a strange suspicion that he is being followed, but the mirror doesn't show anyone behind them; he remembers, though, that a black sedan had been trailing them down from the city and begins to watch for it. Memo asks to stop at a stream on the way to the beach to go wading; they find one between two towns, but the water is polluted, so wading is not allowed. Memo suggests they watch the water from the bridge and lights a cigarette. Hobbs mentions that he thinks he got enough during his "day" to "furnish a house," and Memo responds by remarking that Bump was "coming up for a Day just before he died."

Hobbs's suspicion that he and Memo are being followed reflects his own anxiety about himself and his actions: he is unsure whether or not he is doing the right thing by pursuing Memo. This scene parallels a later scene in the novel, between Hobbs and Iris; whereas Hobbs and Iris jump into the lake they drive to, Hobbs and Memo do not, suggesting that Hobbs and Iris are a stronger pair—they are willing to take risks together, while Hobbs and Memo are somewhat awkward together, only observing the water. Nevertheless, Hobbs still chooses to pursue Memo, which leads him to make more misguided decisions.

Annoyed, Hobbs asks Memo what Bump had that he doesn't. Memo tells Hobbs that Bump was "carefree and full of life," and that unlike Hobbs, Bump played ball spontaneously—it was exciting to see him run after a fly ball when he put his mind to it—and without exerting the kind of effort that Hobbs does. Hobbs asks about Sands, whom Memo says is like a "daddy" to her, and she asks him about the magic tricks he performed at the night club. Hobbs admits that he used props from a magic act laid out backstage to pull off the pranks.

Memo confirms what has already been suggested about Hobbs: what makes Hobbs a fantastic player is his energy, drive, and determination, though these are all traits that can be exhausted. Hobbs may not be a total "natural" after all, but merely an extremely hard worker—and what's more, this may not be enough to guarantee him success. Additionally, Hobbs reveals how he pulled off the magic tricks at the club with Sands—suggesting that he is capable of making his abilities seem "magical" and "natural," though they are not actually so. Memo's remark that Sands is a "daddy" to her also suggests that she is in cahoots with Sands, who Hobbs believes is connected to Banner—foreshadowing Memo's later betrayal of Hobbs (for Banner's own purposes).

Memo discusses her own life, noting to Hobbs that after her father left her family, she went to Hollywood as a nineteen-year-old to became an actress—encouraged by her success as a beauty pageant contestant—but failed to become famous. Afterwards, she came to New York and "had some more bad times" after her mother died. Memo feels that now that Bump is dead, she will never be happy again; sometimes in the morning she never wants to wake up.

Memo is orphaned and deeply unhappy, and she is thus intent on making her way in the world any way that she can—including by deceiving Hobbs, which she later does. Despite this tragic backstory, Memo is hardly a sympathetic character: that her only dream is to become an actress serves as evidence of her superficial nature, and she seems to contribute to her own unhappiness by prioritizing her own greed and surrounding herself with suspect people (including Bump and Sands).

Memo asks Hobbs about himself, noting that Max Mercy says he is "sort of a mystery." Hobbs cannot bring himself to confide in Memo about his own past, only telling her that he has had some tough times; he is afraid to tell her about what happened in the years after that "first time," when everything he tried "somehow went to pot." Instead, Hobbs tells Memo that he knows he will get "where he is going"—that he will become "the champ" and find success—and kisses her. Hobbs tries to fondle Memo's breast, but she starts crying, telling him that it is injured.

Whereas Hobbs will later confide completely in Iris—telling her all about his troubled past—he is unable to do so with Memo, again suggesting that they are an incompatible pair (though he will continue to pursue her). Memo is clearly put off by Hobbs's advances, but Hobbs seems oblivious to this.

Hobbs and Memo get back into their car, with Memo in the driver's seat. Hobbs asks her to put on the lights, but she says that she "likes it dark." Hobbs thinks that Memo needs to drive to work through "whatever she has got on her mind." He also realizes that though he is tired of Memo, he desires her "more than ever." Suddenly, he sees an apparition of a **young boy followed by a dog** in the road and Memo swerves, but the car hits something; Memo insists that it was just "something on the road," but Hobbs thinks it was the boy and the dog. Memo tells Hobbs that they can't go back to check if they hit anything because they are being followed by the cops: Hobbs looks back and sees that the black car is speeding after them.

Memo notes that she prefers the darkness, foreshadowing her connection to Judge Banner (who also "likes it dark")—though Hobbs is still unaware of her true nature. Additionally, Hobbs sees an image in the road that he has already confronted before: it is himself as a child, followed by his faithful dog and representing his own desire to forego his ambitions and thirst for fame and wealth, returning instead to the idyllic simplicity of childhood. Hobbs's past appears—literally—to haunt him, dragging him away from the present. He also spots the black car that supposedly has been chasing them, worsening his own paranoia.

Hobbs starts driving the car and turns it around, steering it toward the fog coming off of the Sound; the black car loses track of them. He doesn't see anything in the road where he spotted the **boy and his dog** before. Distracted, Hobbs runs his car into a tree, sustaining a black eye. Memo bruises her already-injured breast.

Hobbs is distracted by the reappearance of his past life in the form of the spectral image of the boy and his dog—so distracted that he runs his car off the road, demonstrating the destructive power of his own buried past.

Pop discovers Memo and Hobbs in the hotel the next morning and is angered that Hobbs has injured himself in the car crash. Hobbs assures him that nothing is wrong with his eye, declaring that he will "die a natural death"—that nothing will kill him "before his time." Pop is "pacified," but tells Hobbs to take care of himself. Pop also warns Hobbs to avoid Memo, noting that she is a bad influence on the men around her. Hobbs tells Pop that he loves her, and though she doesn't feel the same way, he thinks she will someday. Pop hands Hobbs a check for two thousand dollars to make up for the salary the Judge cheated him out of, but Hobbs gives it back to him; the two men struggle to express their feelings of gratitude toward each other.

Despite his anxiety, paranoia, and desire to return to the past—thus giving up his hard-won career—Hobbs boldly claims to Pop that he is invincible, though as the end of the novel will reveal, this overconfidence is baseless: Hobbs is all too mortal. His flawed nature is shown here by the fact that he ignores Pop's warnings about Memo (though they prove to be correct) and forgets the kindness that Pop shows him in this moment by betraying Pop later on in the novel.

Intent on finding out why Hobbs has returned to the hotel with an injury, Max Mercy pursues Hobbs as he goes up to his hotel room, and Hobbs tries to avoid him; as he runs through the hotel, he imagines he is back in the "blurred black forest," where he spots the **boy and his dog**, broken and bleeding in the middle of a road. He decides that they must have been a hallucination, since there was no sign of blood on the car's bumper or fender; Memo said she only screamed when Hobbs spotted the boy because she saw that they were being chased by cops in the rearview mirror. Hobbs thwarts Max by entering his room before the journalist can take a picture of him.

Hobbs realizes that the image of the boy and the dog could not have been real, but he fails to see the significance of this image as a haunting apparition representing his own past—even as Mercy pursues him in order to glean details about this past. Thus, Hobbs remains oblivious about his psychological wounds, betraying the fact that he has not yet come to terms with his past trauma.

BATTER UP! PART 5

Hobbs plays well at the game that day, despite his injury, and leads the Knights to a second-place position in the league. After the game, Hobbs meets Memo, who lies to him about her breast injury, telling him that she has been to the doctor (though he is sure she has not). Hobbs feels restless and bitter about Memo, yet he continues to dream about her, imagining her breast bruised green—but still desirable.

Hobbs cannot stop himself from trying to pursue Memo, even though he realizes that she is not truthful or loyal; he continues to see her as the pinnacle of success, a status marker for his life as a baseball celebrity, despite numerous red flags and even negative emotions toward her.

At the next game, Hobbs plays badly, entering into a severe batting slump; he becomes obsessed with finding out if he caused a hit-and-run accident during the night on Long Island, but he cannot find any mention of a similar incident in the newspapers. Even with **Wonderboy**, Hobbs continues to bat poorly, and he becomes worried about his own abilities. Red tells Hobbs that he needs to "relax" to play better, while Pop urges him to stop hitting "bad," or poorly pitched, balls and to consider bunting balls to get on base. Hobbs proves to be a bad bunter, however, and refuses to give up Wonderboy, which Pop speculates might be contributing to his slump.

As Hobbs becomes distracted by various pursuits—Memo, figuring out whether the boy and the dog were real (failing to realize that they represent a version of himself from the past)—he falls into a batting slump. Both Wonderboy and his own skills fail him, foreshadowing his later, and ultimate, defeat.

Memo and Hobbs rarely see each other during this period, though when they meet briefly, she suggests that he consult a fortune-teller in Jersey City, Lola, whom Bump used to visit during his own slumps. The fortune-teller once told Bump that he would be left money by someone, and his father died and left him property shortly thereafter. Lola, "a fat woman of fifty," tells Hobbs that he will "meet and fall in love with a darkhaired lady," but is unable to reveal anything more about his future.

According to the fortune-teller—another one of the Knights' superstitions, which they rely on instead of their own skills and training—Hobbs's future is tied to a woman, again demonstrating the powerful impact of women on Hobbs's life and actions.

Disappointed with his visit to Lola, Hobbs tries a few superstitious practices "to see how they would work;" his teammates revive their own superstitions as well. Nonetheless, the team continues to lose games, and many of Hobbs's teammates blame him wholeheartedly; the Knights' fans also lose confidence in the players and start to heckle Hobbs when he is up to bat. Even Pop becomes hostile toward Hobbs and benches him until he promises to give up **Wonderboy**.

Hobbs's downward spiral continues, and his stubbornness does not help: he resolutely refuses to give up Wonderboy (though Pop encourages him to), thus further alienating himself from Pop and the rest of the team. Hobbs's headstrong determination begins to prove harmful, inhibiting his own success. This series of changes also reveals that the mythic power of Hobbs and Wonderboy may have been illusory all along.


Hobbs wakes up in the locker room after being benched and is "paralyzed" by longing—for a "friend, a father, a home to return to." He imagines getting on a train and throwing **Wonderboy** out of the window after the first stop; years later, as an old man returning to the city, he would look in the mud to see if it was still there. In the train that he imagines, Hobbs feels safe, and he laughs out loud; he then gets up from the locker room bench, wraps Wonderboy in flannel, and wanders through the streets of New York, disoriented and doubtful.

Once again, Hobbs dreams of returning "home," feeling trapped and isolated by his own ambition; he imagines the release he might feel upon giving up Wonderboy and even briefly envisions himself as an old man who has chosen to live away from the city—away from a world of vice and excess. Nonetheless, Hobbs does not surrender Wonderboy: his dreams of becoming the greatest ever player in baseball are still too powerful.

Hobbs returns to his hotel, and in the hallway, he feels a "driblet" of fear, afraid to enter his room. The telephone inside rings, and he opens the door; something moves in the corner of the room, and when he turns on the light and walks into the bathroom, he hallucinates Bump's face in the mirror. His own face returns, and he feels "an oppressive sadness" about his future.

Hobbs's fear of entering his hotel room brings back memories of his encounter with Harriet (she phoned him shortly before shooting him, which makes the telephone ringing in his room seem strange and eerie). This fear combines with his own anxiety about living in Bump's shadow—he sees Bump's face instead of his own—and leaves him nervous and uncertain about his own future: Hobbs is slowly self-destructing, unable to figure out how to move past his traumas and forward in life.


The Knights travel to Chicago for a game against the Cubs, and Pop cracks down on the team, insisting that they follow strict rules about conduct. Pop has invited Memo to the game, assuming that Hobbs has decided to stay away from her; Memo declines the invite. On their way to a hotel in a cab, Red notices that a black Cadillac is following the cab in which he, Pop, and Hobbs are riding. Pop explains that the Cadillac belongs to a private eye he hired to watch Hobbs, and that the detective was supposed to stop working a week before.

Pop's hiring of a private eye to follow Hobbs suggests his suspicions about Hobbs's behavior: by hanging out at clubs, gambling, and paying more attention to Memo, Hobbs is becoming susceptible to vice, distracting him from the sport and contributing to his slump.


When the men reach their hotel, a "frantic"-looking man, Mike Barney, runs up to them and asks Hobbs if he will win the Knights' next game for his sick child, who idolizes Hobbs. Hobbs is bewildered and "bitterly" responds that he is hitting poorly. Ultimately, though, promises to do the best that he can.

Mike Barney views Hobbs, a famous sports star, as a superhero with mythic status. Ironically, though, Hobbs is deeply flawed, and it seems impossible that he might heal Barney's child by performing well in the game.

During the game, Hobbs—still benched by Pop—thinks about the "kid in the hospital," imagining the triumphant feeling of healing the boy by "clobbering a lone one into the stands" during the game. For some reason, he feels better in his body than he has in a while, and he feels that things might go well for him if he were able to play. Hobbs spots a young black-haired woman in the stands and is intrigued by her; she wears a red dress and a white flower on her bosom, and she seems to be craning her neck to look at him in the dugout.

For once, Hobbs is motivated by something outside of himself: the prospect of healing Mike Barney's child makes him feel more confident in his abilities, though he is again distracted by a woman. This time, though, it is not Memo but Iris, who proves to be a good omen for Hobbs.


The Cubs and the Knights are tied. Hobbs feels that he wants to help Mike Barney's boy, but that he won't be able to hit well without **Wonderboy**. Begrudgingly, Pop asks Hobbs to go play with "any decent stick." Hobbs refuses. In the stands, the woman in the red dress rises; she bows her head to the dugout, as if trying to "communicate something she couldn't express," but Hobbs doesn't notice her. The game proceeds poorly, and Mike Barney, watching in the stands, does "exercises of grief," disturbing Hobbs, who places Wonderboy on the bench and stands before Pop. Pop allows him to bat with Wonderboy.

Though Hobbs doesn't notice Iris the second time, her presence serves as a subtle impetus for Hobbs, seeming to inspire him to ask Pop to play with Wonderboy. Even when he isn't aware of their influence on him, Hobbs'ss life and actions are connected to the women characters who surround him.

Hobbs goes to bat and strikes out twice. The woman in the stands rises for the third time, and a photographer takes a picture of her; she is around thirty, perhaps older, and is "built solid." She refuses to give the photographer her name or explain why she is standing. Hobbs steals a look at her and begins to feel that she is standing for him. He bats for the third time and succeeds, hitting a spectacular home run. The woman puts on her gloves and leaves while Hobbs circles the bases.

In comparison to the ethereal, elusive Memo—whose very name suggests memory and evokes her own lack of substance—Iris is "solid," loyal and steadfast. Hobbs realizes that she is supporting him, and his luck turns around immediately (again suggesting the influence of women on his life).

BATTER UP! PART 6

The novel cuts to the perspective of a woman, Iris, waiting on Michigan Avenue in Chicago, thinking about the man she is about to meet, and reflecting on an experience she had as a young woman, in which a "man twice her age" sexually assaulted her in a park at night. Hobbs drives up and greets Iris Lemon, whose picture he found in the papers after his win against the Cubs: she is the woman from the stands, and he resolved to call her after his victory. Though the two are somewhat disappointed by each other's physical appearances at first, they nonetheless initiate conversation. Hobbs thinks about Memo, whom he considers "remote, even unreal," feeling grateful for Iris's support by contrast. Eventually, they drive to the lake and get out of the car.

This scene parallels an earlier scene between Hobbs and Memo, though Iris is Memo's opposite: even before Hobbs comes to know Iris, he finds her supportive and kind, though his own superficial attitudes about women make him critical of her appearance. As with the other female characters in the novel, only a few details are revealed about Iris's life and background, and these details are not fleshed out: the relevance of Iris's sexual assault is never made entirely clear, though it is suggested that she became a young mother because of the rape.

Hobbs asks Iris why she decided to stand up for him in the stands, and she eventually explains that she "hates to see a hero fail" because there are so few heroes in the world. Iris hoped to help Hobbs regain his confidence—overcoming his "jinx"—and though Hobbs struggles to open up at first, he begins to confide in her about his past, remarking that his life didn't turn out like he expected it to. At one point, he thinks he hears a train sound and jumps up, alarmed. Iris asks Hobbs if he is afraid of death, and Hobbs tells her about his encounter with Harriet; he explains that this is his "shame in life," since he is convinced that he will always be defeated "in sight of his goal," as he was by Harriet fifteen years ago.

Iris is clearly a maternal figure for Hobbs, since she offers support for him; this makes her the opposite of both Memo and Harriet, who are vicious and sexually attractive (whereas Hobbs initially feels repulsed by Iris's appearance). While talking with Iris, Hobbs hears the sound of a train, representing his traumatic past—the train journey that brought him to Chicago, where he almost died. His reaction again indicates that his past will continue to follow him around, no matter where he goes or whom he is with.

Iris and Hobbs discuss suffering and past trauma: Iris promises she will never hurt Hobbs and tells him that "suffering is what brings us toward happiness." Hobbs responds by saying that he is tired of suffering. Iris admits that she is thirty-three, and Hobbs asks her why she has never been married; she evades the question. Hobbs gets into the lake, and Iris strips alongside him, though she refuses to kiss him once they are in the water.

Whereas Iris wants to help Hobbs overcome the suffering he has experienced, Hobbs views things more simplistically: he simply wants to rid himself of all suffering without properly acknowledging what he has experienced. Iris might help Hobbs to transcend his past, but Hobbs seems stuck in his old ways still—treating Iris like a sexual object, despite her obvious discomfort.

Hobbs stays underwater for too long, hoping to "touch the bottom" of the lake. "A sense of abandonment" grips Iris, who reflects that she stood up because Hobbs is a "man whose life she wanted to share." Iris pulls him out of the water, and they sit by the lake to dry off. When they begin to have sex, Iris admits to Hobbs that she is both a mother and a grandmother, shocking him.

Despite Hobbs's flaws, Iris is drawn to him and feels protective of him: like Memo and Harriet, her identity is inextricably tied to Hobbs. Moreover, Iris's embarrassment at sharing that she is a mother and a grandmother reflects the gender politics of the era: Iris is an object of ridicule because of her status as a young mother, despite the suggestion that her pregnancy was the result of being raped.

BATTER UP! PART 7

The novel then cuts to a dining car where Hobbs and other Knights players are playing pranks on Red Blow, Pop, and their teammates. The Knights, led by Hobbs, are celebrating a string of victories, and Hobbs is hungry for more—quite literally, since he is eating an enormous amount of food each day. Hobbs wonders whether to open the letter from Iris he has been carrying around. He feels that he cannot be with her, since he is too young to be a grandfather himself, and his thoughts begin to return to Memo, who turns up in his hotel in Boston the next day; she seems to have changed since he last saw her. Though he feels uncertain about Memo's trustworthiness, Hobbs still desires her, but she continues to insist that she is too unwell to have sex with him.

By choosing Memo, Hobbs rejects the stable path he might have known with Iris, who has the ability to redeem him (by helping him to overcome the traumas of his past): Hobbs's own misogynistic feelings toward Iris, whom he views as less desirable than Memo—despite her preferable personality traits—lead him toward ruin, since Memo will continue to prove untrustworthy.

In the meantime, the Knights have worked their way back up the pennant after Hobbs's slump, and when they return home for a game against the Reds, their fans crowd the stadium. The city is whipped up into a frenzy over their hometown heroes, though Hobbs feels unenthusiastic about the fans, remembering that they turned against him violently during his slump. Hobbs becomes a more aggressive hitter and outfielder, hunting each ball and hit, and the press extols his talents—except for Mercy, who continues to try to discover details about Hobbs's past. Mercy finds an image of Hobbs dressed as a sideshow clown, but few readers believe that the clown is Hobbs. Hobbs is late for dinner plans with Pop, Red, and Max, but when Max gets into a fight with the waiter, he turns out to be Hobbs in disguise, playing yet another prank.

Hobbs begins to feel more uncertain about himself than ever, despite his talents on the field: Mercy, intent on uncovering his past, portrays him as a clown in the press. The brief episode in which Hobbs disguises himself as a waiter to fool Pop, Red, and Mercy suggests that Hobbs has become a master of disguise: he is adept at hiding his past identity, though the pressure of maintaining this façade will prove more and more challenging as the novel proceeds.

That same night, Hobbs goes to find Memo in her room; Gus is with her, making Hobbs feel uncomfortable about their relationship. Roy, Memo, and Gus shoot crap, and Roy ends up winning; Gus and Hobbs spar verbally, though Hobbs is pacified when Memo kisses him.

Determined to pursue Memo, Hobbs continues to fall deeper and deeper into a dissolute lifestyle, encouraged by the gambler Sands.


The Reds defeat the Knights, prompting Knights fans to speculate that they will lose the pennant altogether. Yet the Knights defeat the Pirates—a favored team—in an initial game and take two more wins thereafter. Hobbs is losing energy, but he continues to hit well; eventually, the Knights end up in a favorable position, poised to enter the final stage of the pennant for the World Series. At the same time, Hobbs is still yearning for Memo, imagining the life they might have together as husband and wife, though he knows that Memo is not domestic—and that Iris would be more suitable as a wife.

Hobbs is barely hanging on to his success, since he is distracted by his obsession with Memo. He realizes that Memo is a poor fit for his domestic desires, especially compared to Iris, but he cannot bring himself to stop pursuing her, even as he seems to realize that he is being led down the wrong path.


Memo comes over to Hobbs's room to celebrate his recent wins, then invites him to a party for the Knights in her room (thrown without Pop's permission). Hobbs eats the catered food greedily, and his desire for Memo (with whom he has still not had sex) increases. Memo asks Hobbs about his mother, and he admits that he didn't love her, since she didn't love anybody, not even her own son; he contemplates Iris's letter again, but pushes her out of his mind by thinking that "fat girls write fat letters." Red urges Hobbs, who continues to eat and drink heavily, to take care of himself. Hobbs goes to Memo's room and finds her naked in bed, but as he approaches her, he experiences a sharp pain and collapses suddenly, feeling as if he has been sucked into a toilet.

Hobbs collapses just as he is about to consummate his relationship with Memo—mirroring his collapse earlier in the novel at the hands of Harriet Bird, with whom he seemed poised to have sex, too. Again, Malamud draws a parallel between Memo and Harriet, suggesting that Memo, like Harriet, will lead to Hobbs's downfall, and reveals more details about Hobbs's problematic relationship with women, including his mother and Iris.

BATTER UP! PART 8

A doctor at a maternity hospital with which Judge Banner has arranged a "money-saving contract" examines Hobbs, surprised by his scarred body. Unconscious, Hobbs experiences great pain and dizzying hallucinations; he returns to consciousness and is told by the specialist doctor that he can play in the Monday playoff against the Pirates, which will determine the second entrant in the World Series against the Yankees, but that after, he will not be able to play baseball again, since his fragile heart could give out. Hobbs is devastated, and he wonders if he might be able to prove the doctor wrong; he even sneaks out of the hospital to practice at Knights Field, but he collapses again and is sent back to the hospital.

Even faced with dire medical news, Hobbs is determined to prove his doctor wrong and lead the Knights to victory—perhaps at the cost of his own health and future. Thus ambition, to Hobbs, has become more important than any other quality in life, and his decline seems imminent. Moreover, it is ironic that Hobbs is treated at a maternity hospital, given his complicated relationship with maternal figures (Iris and his mother). Hobbs is "reborn" in the hospital, given a second chance at life, but he will quickly squander this opportunity in order to continue playing baseball.

Later, Hobbs dreams that he is searching for Sam Simpson in a snowstorm. Sitting at a table playing solitaire, Sam tells him vaguely, "Don't do it," and Hobbs swears that he "didn't do it." Sam orders him to take his advice, and Hobbs says he won't, asking Sam if they can go "back home." Sam says that they can't, since it's "snowin' baseballs" outside.

Sam's shaman-like presence in Hobbs's dream alerts him that he will have to make a difficult moral decision. Additionally, Hobbs's insistence that he "didn't do it" suggests that he feels guilty about actions he has taken in the past: Hobbs is faced with a choice between continuing his immoral, dissolute lifestyle and making better-informed (but less ambitious) decisions.

When Hobbs comes to, he asks the specialist to promise not to tell anyone about his condition, and he sinks into a deep depression; he does not know how he will make a living without baseball, and he wonders how he might be able to satisfy Memo without any money. Memo enters his room as he is recovering, wearing a black dress, and complains that Pop has been terrible to her. She tells Hobbs that she wants "to get away" from her life. Hobbs asks Memo if she will marry him—promising that he will take care of her—and she tells him that she is afraid to be poor, since she is sick of living on her own and having to be frugal with her own money.

Hobbs sees his future crumbling before him, since he has never envisioned a life for himself without baseball; nonetheless, he still feels motivated to pursue Memo, even as it becomes abundantly clear that she is only after him for his fame and wealth (since she expresses no empathy for his weakened condition).

Hobbs tells Memo about his plan to quit baseball and invest in a business, but she says that she would rather have him invest in a large company, and that he needs more money to do so. Memo reveals that Judge Banner has sent her to Hobbs to ask him to agree to a deal: Banner wants Hobbs to "drop" the playoff, or purposefully lose it, so that Pop Fisher will be forced out of his job and Banner can take over the team (a player on the opposing team, working with Banner, will ensure that the team plays well against the Knights).

Memo's true motives are finally revealed: she and Banner are working together to further their own greed-driven ambitions. Hobbs has been implicated in a corrupt system beyond his control, and he is forced to make a crucial decision—recalling the warning Hobbs received from Sam in his dream earlier.

Banner later visits Hobbs and increases the amount of money he wants to offer him as a bribe. The Judge lectures Hobbs, relating a story in which he let a boy accused of a crime walk free, only to see the boy commit parricide (killing his father). He also tells Hobbs another story, in which a "paralytic" rose from his wheelchair in a court room to attack the physician who swindled him after the Judge gave him a lesser sentence. These stories demonstrate the folly of "moral" behavior, since the Judge's efforts in both cases to act righteously were rendered moot. Some good, the Judge argues, might come out of Hobbs accepting the bribe.

Once again, the judge's "moralizing" only serves to confirm his corrupt intentions and points to the irony of his position as a judge (a supposedly non-biased position). Banner seems to be arguing that his role as a mediator of justice is insignificant, since individuals in American society will act according to their own interests, no matter the punishment or consequences (as the individuals in his stories do). Thus, Banner implicitly affirms that baseball's corruption is only a microcosm of a larger problem: American corruption in general, which the Judge portrays as inevitable and unavoidable.

Hobbs suddenly recalls a moment from his childhood when he wandered into the woods to find **his lost dog**, remembering the loneliness he felt. Before leaving, the Judge offers to increase Hobbs's salary for the next season and threatens Hobbs by suggesting that Memo might leave him for Sands. Hobbs agrees to the deal. Hobbs reads Iris's letter about her child and grandchild: she writes that her love for her child outweighed the difficulties she faced in becoming a young mother, but Hobbs is unmoved and throws the letter against the wall.

Pressured and anxious about accepting the bribe, Hobbs thinks again of his childhood: one last attempt to distance himself from the troubles of his present, in which his dreams seem to be moving further and further out of reach. Ultimately, Hobbs feels too attached to Memo (and worried that she might leave him), and he decides to choose her over Iris—and over his own moral compass.

BATTER UP! PART 9

The morning of the final game against the Pirates arrives, and the fans on each side begin to riot: the Knights' fans are nervous to know if Hobbs has returned to play in this crucial match. Hobbs shows up at the game; he has refused to tell Mercy or any other journalists about what happened at Memo's party. Pop apologizes to Hobbs for benching him earlier in the season and blames Memo for Hobbs's continued bad luck, encouraging Hobbs to try his best in the game and relating a story about a rookie third baseman who succumbed to injuries and quit baseball. Pop tells Hobbs that he will be satisfied if they win this final game, even if they don't end up winning the World Series, and that he himself will quit baseball immediately afterwards. Hobbs resolves to try his best.

Pop can see what Hobbs cannot: that Memo is disloyal and a negative influence on Hobbs. As Pop warns Hobbs against Memo—and relates a story, about the rookie third baseman, that suggests how dangerous baseball can be, especially in Hobbs's fragile state—Hobbs begins to wonder if he has made the right decision, and he feels guilty about betraying Pop, who believes that he will be redeemed if the Knights win this final game.

Hobbs goes up to bat, but he is distracted by thoughts of Memo, as well as a memory in which his mother "drowned the black tom cat in the tub;" Iris, too, weighs on his mind, and Roy strikes out. The game progresses slowly, with neither team scoring in either the third or fourth inning, and when Roy goes up to bat again, he feels pained and exhausted. He manages to get to first base, and he begins to think about quitting the deal with the Judge, though he is not sure how he will admit this refusal to Memo. When he goes up to bat again in the next inning, Hobbs feels revitalized, and he realizes that he regrets agreeing to Banner's bribe.

Despite Pop's warnings, Hobbs still prioritizes Memo, viewing marriage with her as the ultimate goal—something that might replace his goals of becoming a baseball star, since it is nearly certain that he will never be able to play again. Yet here Hobbs seemed poised on the threshold of a revelation, ready to redeem himself and eschew his unrealistic, foolhardy desires, which have led him to compromise his morals.

When Otto Zipp mocks him from the stands, Hobbs sends a foul ball in his direction; Hobbs notices a dark-haired woman in a white dress in the stands nearby. Unable to hold his swing, his next foul ball goes toward Otto, hits him in the skull, and is deflected up to hit the woman in the face. She collapses. Hobbs follows the crowd toward her, realizing that it is Iris. When he carries her into the clubhouse, she tells him that he must win for "their boy"—revealing that she is pregnant with his child. Hobbs feels a sudden disgust for Memo, and he kisses Iris. She thinks that he looks like the man who assaulted her in the park many years ago, but she believes that "this will be different," and silently calls on Roy to protect her.

Hobbs is moved by Iris's devotion and by her revelation that he is the father of her unborn child: her news gives him a new purpose in life, far more important than a vacuous life of excess and debauchery with Memo. Nonetheless, he has already made his decision by agreeing to the bribe in order to win Memo's favor—demonstrating the power women hold over his own decisions. The fact that she finds him similar to the man who assaulted her suggests that he, too, is corrupted, and that he will not ultimately be able to protect her as she wishes.

Hobbs goes back out to bat again and ends up cracking **Wonderboy** in two on a foul ball. Fowler, another Knights player, says that he knows what Hobbs has been up to—that he is striking out on purpose—but in a change of heart, Hobbs seems to have resolved to win the game instead. Hobbs begins to feel confident that the team will succeed, but Pop is losing hope: his hitters keep getting struck out. Pop entreats Roy to "murder" the ball, and Hobbs goes out to hit again; Vogelman, the Pirates' pitcher, is overstressed, made nervous by Hobbs's "burning eyes," and he passes out.

Wonderboy proves fallible—no longer the mythic, magical symbol of power it seemed to be earlier in the novel—leaving Hobbs to rely on his "natural" talents in this final, crucial moment. Hobbs is filled with ruthless drive (evidenced by his "burning eyes," which intimidate the Pirates' pitcher), though it is not clear if this will be enough to reverse the corrupt course of action he has already set out upon.

A twenty-year-old pitcher, Herman Youngberry, is brought in to replace Vogelman. Youngberry wants to be a farmer, and he plans to earn only enough money in baseball to buy a large farm and quit the sport forever. Youngberry is a brilliant pitcher, and Hobbs is struck out: Bump's "form" glows red on the outfield wall where he was injured, and the crowd in the stands vanishes suddenly.

Ultimately, Hobbs's talents fall short when he is up against the younger, more talented prodigy Herman Youngberry: Hobbs has failed to achieve his dreams of success and fame—which he has only ever experienced temporarily—and he has sold himself out along the way. Like Bump, whose image on the outfield wall serves as a reminder of his defeat, Hobbs has been easily replaced (by Youngberry), sacrificed to a system in which success is nearly impossible to come by, given the sport's corruption and cut-throat politics.

BATTER UP! PART 10

At night after the game, Hobbs drags **Wonderboy** onto left field and buries it there. He goes back into the clubhouse, changes into his street clothes, and finds his money from Judge Banner. Hobbs then goes up to see the Judge, who is accompanied by Memo and Gus. Hobbs punches Gus when he tries to congratulate him, then calls Memo a "whore;" he returns the money to the Judge, who raises a revolver. Hobbs drops the gun into a trashcan and assaults Banner, leaving him moaning on the floor. Memo shoots at Hobbs as he goes to leave, but as he approaches her, she is unable to fire again, aiming the gun into her mouth instead. Hobbs takes the gun, gets rid of its bullets, and leaves her behind.

Hobbs has failed to become the mythical figure of redemption he originally seemed to be—failing to save the Knights and Pop Fisher—but this final scene demonstrates the extent to which he recognizes his own errors of judgment. He refuses to take the bribe money and rebuffs Memo. Like Harriet, Memo tries to shoot Hobbs, but Hobbs calmly prevents her from firing her gun, demonstrating a new sense of mastery over female power. Nonetheless, it is too late for his life to turn around: Hobbs has finally gained real confidence, prioritizing morality and taking charge of his own choices, but he can never play baseball again, and his acceptance of Banner's bribe has ruined his reputation.

Destitute, exhausted, and unrecognizable to the crowd of city-goers, Hobbs wanders through New York. A boy hands Hobbs a newspaper. Max Mercy has published a column about the scandal, as well as a picture of Hobbs shot down by Harriet; Hobbs will be excluded from the sport in the future because of his involvement with Banner's corruption. The boy says to Hobbs, "Say it ain't true, Roy," and Hobbs bursts into tears.

Hobbs's past is finally revealed, and he becomes one more anonymous city-goer, stripped of all celebrity status. Though once a great star, he is exposed as utterly fallible (as he has been throughout the novel), and he returns to the same life he knew before his career in baseball: a life of poverty and anonymity.

HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Krolewski, Sara. "*The Natural*." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 21 May 2019. Web. 21 Apr 2020.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Krolewski, Sara. "*The Natural*." LitCharts LLC, May 21, 2019. Retrieved April 21, 2020. https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-natural.

To cite any of the quotes from *The Natural* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

Malamud, Bernard. The Natural. Farrar, Straus and Giroux. 2003.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Malamud, Bernard. The Natural. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. 2003.