

Darkest Hour Study Guide

Darkest Hour by Meg Cabot

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Plot Summary

Darkest Hour is a novel by author Meg Cabot and is fourth in the series of the "The Mediator" novels. In this novel, Susannah, is a 16 year-old girl that is also a mediator. As a mediator, Susannah talks with ghosts to help them resolve the issues they had when they were alive so they can pass on to their next life. Susannah takes readers into the lives of her family and the other people living in the town of Carmel, California while she works as a babysitter at the local hotel resort.

As the story unfolds, the readers learn about the many situations Susannah has found herself in with ghosts in the past. Susannah's encounters also help to unravel the secret disappearance of the 20-year-old Spanish male ghost that haunts Susannah's room. When her stepbrother and stepfather dig up his skeleton while digging the hole for the family hot tub, Susannah realizes that Jesse was in fact murdered by his fiancé and her boyfriend. To make matters worse, the dead fiancé and her husband, Felix Diego, ghosts show up to try to kill Susannah.

In the meantime, one of her charges at the resort is an eight-year-old boy that Susannah realizes is a mediator as well. While mentoring him, the two form a special relationship that leads to Jack performing an exorcism to get rid of Jesse, who Maria convinces Jack is harassing Suze. Suze convinces Father Dominic, the school priest, principal, and fellow mediator, to exorcise her to the afterworld so she can bring Jesse back to Earth.

In the end, Susannah is able to keep the secret from her friends and family members that she is a mediator. In the meantime, she is able stop her own murder and help Jesse return to living in her room as a ghost.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Susannah is a 16-year-old girl that recently moved to northern California with her mother from Brooklyn, because her mother remarried her stepfather, Andy Ackerman. Susannah, who goes by Suze for short, has three step-brothers that she has nicknamed Sleepy, Dopey and Doc. It is Suze's first summer living in California. Her stepfather informs all of the children, except the youngest, they either have to get summer jobs or go to summer school. Doc, the youngest, gets to go to computer camp because he got good grades and is too young to work. Dopey failed two of his classes, so he has to go to summer school. Sleepy and Suze get jobs at Pebble Beach Hotel and Golf Resort. Suze is working as a babysitter and as a lifeguard.

In the morning, before leaving for work, Dopey is helping his father build an addition on the house. Suze notices that he has placed a dirty and rusted metal box on the counter while he drinks out of the OJ carton. When Suze asks what it is, he tells her he found it while he was digging.

When Suze and Sleepy get to work, she finds out she's been assigned to babysit Jack Slater all day. Suze thinks he is the whiniest and most boring kid, but that his older brother Paul is hot and funny.

After the older Slaters leave, Suze convinces Jack to put on his bathing suit so she can teach him to swim, since it's his eighth birthday. While they are walking down to the pool, the ghost of one of the landscapers, Jorge, steps out of the bushes and strikes up a conversation with Suze. Jack screams and runs toward the pool. When Suze finds Jack at the pool, he tells her that he's not like other kids, that he's a freak that can see dead people.

Chapter 1 Analysis

The box Dopey found while digging in the Ackerman's backyard must contain something that affects Suze's summer. Now that Suze knows that Jack Slater also sees dead people, the relationship she has as his babysitter will completely change. It foreshadows Jack and Suze working together to help various ghosts at the hotel to work out their problems in this life so they can move on to the afterlife.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Suze reacts very calmly to Jack's news, which surprises him. Suze explains that she sees dead people too and it's called being a mediator. She explains to Jack that their job is to help them clear up a problem they had on Earth so they can get to heaven. Suze thinks she has only met one other person with the same ability. He is the priest and principal of her private school.

Suze gets Jack to go back so they can talk to Jorge. They find out that his sister has stolen his mother's rosary, which has been saved for his oldest daughter. Suze explains to Jack that all they have to do is get Jorge's sister to return the rosary to Jorge's daughter and Jorge can move on. Suze takes Jack to a phone booth inside the hotel and finds Jorge's sister's number. She calls her, tells her she spoke to her dead brother and that he's mad and wants her to give the rosary to her niece, Teresa. Marisol, the sister, complies and Suze hangs up. Jack is amazed that it was that easy.

Suze takes Jack to the pool. In between teaching him how to swim, he asks her a lot of questions about being a mediator. Not only does he learn how to swim, but Jack starts acting like a normal eight-year-old boy should. When Paul, Jack's older brother sees him swimming, he tells Suze that he's impressed and asked him what she did to Jack. Paul invites Suze to dinner with his family that night, but she refuses because workers are not supposed to mingle with the guests. One of Suze's co-workers, Kim, asks her why she shot Paul down when there is no policy that workers can't date guests. Suze tells her that it's complicated.

Chapter 2 Analysis

Suze infers that the boy she wants to date and has a crush on is a ghost instead of a real, live boy. The ghost that Suze has a crush on is apparently a century and a half old and older than her sixteen years.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

Suze thinks about how she knew when she was in love with Jesse, which is the 150-year-old ghost that lives in her bedroom. It was when she was in the hospital recovering from a beating some other ghosts gave her. Jesse touched her cheek and she swooned.

Dinner at the Ackerman house is fast food. As Suze tries to eat it, she asks her stepbrother and stepfather what was in the metal box they found when digging the hole for the new hot tub. They told her it's full of love letters from the 1850s when the house was first built. Suze goes up to her mom and Andy's room after dinner to see the letters. As she starts to read them, she realizes they are love letters to Jesse from another woman.

From doing research on the history of their house with Doc, she knows that Jesse mysteriously disappeared, but in reality he was murdered in her bedroom upstairs. The love letters are from Maria de Silva, which is the cousin who was in an arranged marriage with and was on his way to the ceremony when he disappeared. Jesse and Maria didn't want to marry each other. Maria was in love with another man named Diego, which is the man Suze thinks killed Jesse.

When Suze gets to her room, Jesse is there waiting for her, with her cat, Spike, on his lap. Instead of telling Jesse about finding and reading the letters, she tells him about Jack being a mediator too. Suze tries to call Father Dominic to tell him about Jack, but Sister Ernestine answers the phone and tells Suze he's at a retreat.

Later that night, Suze wakes to a hand over her mouth and a knife to her throat.

Chapter 3 Analysis

Suze is about to find out a lot more about Jesse than she has known before. She might find out information that will help Jesse resolve the issue that is keeping him on Earth so that he can finally move on. Whoever killed Jesse is probably the ghost that has his hand over Suze's mouth and a knife to her throat. He wants to silence Suze and keep her from solving the mystery of Jesse's disappearance.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Suze wakes up to find Maria de Silva Diego threatening her life if her father and brother don't stop digging the hole. Suze recognizes her from the picture in the history book she and Doc looked at in the library. At the time of her death, Maria was married to the Felix Diego. She tells Suze to destroy the letters and not to tell Hector, which is Jesse's real name, anything. After Maria disappears, Suze goes into her bathroom. When she emerges, Jesse is there asking if she's okay.

When Suze gets to work, Caitlin tells her that the Slaters have asked for her for the rest of their vacation. Mrs. Slater thanks Suze for helping Jack and mentions to her that he thinks he sees dead people. Jack is in his swimsuit and ready for Suze to teach him more swimming. She convinces Jack to go into town so she can drop off the letters at the historical society and then promises to take him to the beach.

The man in charge at the historical society is thrilled to receive the letters from Maria. Suze sees a huge painting of Maria in the man's office. He also shows Suze letters from Jesse to Maria. Dr. Clive Clemmings suggests that Jesse ran off because he had cold feet, which Suze staunchly denies, bursts into tears, and then walks out of the historical society.

Chapter 4 Analysis

Suze realizes that Maria wants Andy to stop digging the hole because there is something in the ground Maria is hiding. Suze believes it is Jesse's body and that's why Jesse's ghost has been stuck here. Suze hints that it isn't going to matter what Dr. Clemmings thinks or what his grandfather wrote in the book about Jesse, which hints that they are both wrong.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Suze continues to cry until Jack buys her a Yoo-hoo and Butterfinger from a convenient store as they walk to the beach. They spend the day at the beach and when the sun starts to set, Suze decides she has to get Jack back to the hotel. While Caitlin is flirting with Sleepy, Suze waits in the car to go home. Paul comes to ask her out. When she keeps telling him no, he threatens to tell her boss that she took his brother off hotel property. He also mentions that Suze shouldn't encourage his brother about seeing dead people because he has a mental disorder. When Sleepy gets back to the car and Suze tells him what happened with Paul, Sleepy offers to smooth things over with Caitlin for her because he's going to see her tonight when he gets off from his pizza delivery job.

Suze goes out with her friends Cee Cee and Adam McTavish for dinner that night. When she gets home, she takes a shower and beds down in Doc's room. Suze takes with her an arsenal of weapons and the family dog, Max. Max starts to growl and Suze starts to swing one of the weapons in front of her.

Chapter 5 Analysis

Suze and her stepbrothers are starting to consider each other siblings. Rather than just antagonize each other all the time, they are starting to look out for each other. It will probably end up being Jesse that appears in Doc's room. When he questions her about why she's sleeping in there and why she's swinging weapons, Suze is going to have to come up with a cover story or tell Jesse the truth.



chapter 6

chapter 6 Summary

It's Jesse that appears in Doc's room. When Suze swings at him with the tool, he demands to know what's going on. She finally tells him the whole story and it makes Jesse laugh. She leaves out the part about Maria and her knives, but slips up when she gets angry with Jesse for laughing. After hearing about Maria and her knife, Jesse clutches Suze in his arms. Jesse realizes that Suze knows that he was murdered instead of just going missing on the way to his wedding.

Jesse tells her that the fact that his body hasn't been found is not the reason he's been hanging around. Suze starts to cry again. Jesse promises her that he isn't going anywhere, even if they do find his body. He convinces Suze to go back to her room and sits up reading to keep Maria from attacking her in the middle of the night again. The next morning, when Suze wakes up and sees Jesse reading, she doesn't realize it will be the last time she sees him.

chapter 6 Analysis

Jesse knows precisely why he is still hanging around. He knows that it has nothing to do with his body being found, but he's not sharing the real reason with Suze. Since Suze mentions never seeing Jess again, it implies that Jesse does go away because whatever is causing him to linger on Earth is resolved and he is able to pass over to the other side. Jesse leaving will also allow Suze to move on to dating and liking real, live boys of her own age because she will no longer have Jesse distracting her from moving on to having a normal relationship.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

While Suze has the OJ container in her hand, Dopy walks in the kitchen and swipes it away. As he starts to pour the contents into his mouth, hundreds of black beetles come out instead of OJ. Sleepy and Andy come running into the kitchen because of Suze's screaming. They kill the bugs and clean up the mess. Sleepy and Suze are late to work, but they don't get in trouble because Caitlin likes Sleepy. When Suze goes to pick up Jack, she finds out Paul is spending the day with them too. Jack tries to talk to Suze about being a mediator, but when she pretends not to know what he's talking about, he finally gives up and starts to play with the other kids at the pool.

After lunch, two police officers come to talk to Suze. They tell her that Dr. Clive Clemmings died of a heart attack at his desk and the miniature portrait of Jesse she was looking at the day before is missing. Paul comes and gets her out of the questioning, saying she's a minor and that her rights haven't been read to her. When Suze asks Paul why he saved her, he says someone told him you catch more flies with honey than with vinegar.

Chapter 7 Analysis

Maria is continuing to haunt Suze in various ways. It infers that it is Maria that stole the portrait of Jesse from the historical society in an attempt to frame Suze for the theft. The "someone" who is talking to Paul might just be a ghost as well. It is Jesse. It foreshadows that Paul shares Suze and Jack's ability as a mediator.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Suze goes out with Paul for a burger after work. When she gets home, there are police cars at her house. Andy stops Suze before she makes it to the hole filled with people and caution taped strung around it. She watches as they lift a body bag on a stretcher out of the hole. Andy and Dopey tell her it is a skeleton. A handkerchief with Maria de Silva's initials flutters from the stretcher and hits the ground. Suze notices it is the same one Jesse used to dry her tears the night before.

Suze throws up and her mother insists on putting her to bed. Her mom tells her that the police are treating it like a homicide, but since he still had his spurs on, they assume it's a very old murder. A little while later, Doc calls Suze on the phone to assure her that Jesse's soul and the skeleton they found are not one anymore. Doc is so in tune that he knows about Suze's ability. After she hangs up, Spike comes in her window and jumps on her bed. He butts her hand. Suze knows then that Jesse isn't coming back because Spike hates her. She calls Father Dominic for advice. She tells Father D everything. Father D tells her that she has to reveal her ability to her mother and get her family out of the house because they are all in danger. She asks Father D about the graves of de Silvas and Diegos in the graveyard. Suze tells Father D, who is planning on driving home, that she will do what he says but she is lying.

Chapter 8 Analysis

The handkerchief with the skeleton seems to indicate that it is Jesse's skeleton. The fact that the skeleton is wearing spurs suggests it might not be Jesse. It foreshadows Suze is going to go to the graveyard and summon the ghost of Maria or Felix Diego to try to get to the bottom of what happened to Jesse.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

Suze dresses in her ghostbusting gear and sneaks out of the house to head to the graveyard. When she gets out of the house, Maria appears. While they are talking, Maria says the same line that Paul used about catching flies with honey. Maria admits to killing Dr. Clive Clemmings and stealing the portrait of Jesse to frame Suze. Maria also reveals that Jesse tried to break off their engagement when he found out about Maria and Felix Diego, which Maria says would have shamed her and her family. Suze starts to beat up Maria by ramming her head and face over and over again into the roof tiles. Felix Diego shows up and takes over for Maria. He picks Suze up, throws her off the roof into the hot tub hole and she loses consciousness.

Chapter 9 Analysis

Maria de Silva has been talking to Paul Slater. Maria infers that she isn't done trying to frame Suze yet for the theft of the portrait. Maria getting very angry when Suze brings up Maria's father suggests that Diego and Maria might be responsible for his death too.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

Suze thinks about all of the times she has gotten attacked by and in fights with a ghost, but has never died. It's right before dawn when Suze wakes up in the hole with a concussion, drags herself out of the hole and walks into the house. Dopey tries to wake Suze for work but can't so she wakes up on her own at 8. Father Dominic calls, says he's back in town and says he knows she didn't tell her family but that she must. Jack calls on the other line asking why she isn't at work and then the ghost of Sr. Clive Clemmings appears on her bed.

As they talk, Dr. Clemmings and Suze realize that Maria de Silva killed him by causing him to have a heart attack from seeing her as a ghost. Suze says she wants to keep Dr. Clemmings from revealing the truth about Jesse's desk because Dr. Clemmings was saying that his death merited further investigation into his Dictaphone when Maria appeared to him.

Suze suggests that the sudden death of his grandfather was because of Maria too. Andy knocks on Suze's door and Father Dominic comes in. Suze hugs him, which is unusual behavior for her. Father Dominic tells Suze that Diego a de Silva were devout so he thinks if he blesses the house they should be fine. Then he notices the bruise on her forehead from her fall. As he insists on taking her to the hospital, Jack calls on the phone again. He tells Suze that Maria told him that Hector was bothering her so Jack exorcised him for her.

Chapter 10 Analysis

Suze is going through the standard stages of grief. She was very sad when she first realized Jesse was gone, but when she realizes what Maria has done, she got really mad. Upon seeing Father Dominic, she is starting to feel some compassion and empathy, which is not typical for Suze. It seems as if Maria has been appearing to more mediators than Suze, but has also been appearing to Jack to try to get him to "help" Suze by getting rid of Jesse.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

Jack describes an exorcism to Suze, where Maria helped him to get rid of "that hector guy" who Maria said was being really mean to Suze. Suze is in shock as she hangs up the phone. When she hangs up, Father Dominic asks who Jack is and Suze explains about Jack being a mediator too and his exorcism of Jesse. Father Dominic tries to convince Suze that Jesse is a better place, which enrages Suze. Andy comes in to see what the yelling is about and Father Dominic says Suze has asked him to bless the house. Andy goes to Father D's car to retrieve his Bible for him. Suze tells Father D that they have to bring Jesse back and that Father D has to exorcise her so she can save Jesse.

Chapter 11 Analysis

Ironically, the same hands that killed Jesse are the same ones responsible for having him exorcised. Father D is going to refuse to exorcise Suze. She might attempt to have Jack exorcise her instead.



Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

As Father Dominic drives Suze to the newspaper office, he lectures her on how he can't perform an exorcism on her. Cee Cee Wells is interning at the paper for the summer. Suze finds her inside and tells her the whole story about the skeleton in her backyard and the history of Jesse, Maria and Felix. Suze tells Cee Cee she has to run the story tomorrow, but Cee Cee says the paper will want to wait until they have an official statement from the coroner. Suze leaves and tells Father D that she's going to stay and help Cee Cee write the story. When he leaves, Suze sneaks out of the back of the building and heads toward the resort where she works.

Chapter 12 Analysis

Suze is trying to get the story printed so she can expose the truth of Maria, Jesse and Felix Diego. She thinks if more people know the truth it might prohibit Maria and Felix from attacking her again. Suze is heading to the resort to get Jack to exorcise her since Father D refuses to do it.



Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

Suze makes her way to the Slater suite. She convinces Caitlin to let her babysit Jack for the rest of the afternoon. She explains to Jack who Jesse and Maria really are. She also gives him a notecard with Portuguese on it, while she writes symbols in chicken blood on the bathroom floor and lights the candles she bought for the exorcism. She ties a rope around her waist so she can find her way back and tells Jack to tug on the rope if she's gone longer than 30 minutes. As she lies down to start the exorcism, someone bangs on the suite door.

Chapter 13 Analysis

As predicted, Suze is trying to get Jack to perform her exorcism. The person banging on the suite door to stop her is Father Dominic.



Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

Father D makes Suze and Jack clean up the bathroom and then sits with them talking about being a mediator until Jack's parents return to the suite with Paul. Suze introduces Father D as the priest and principal of her school, and her ride to see Jack. Paul asks Suze out but she says she has other plans. Father D drops her off at her house and says he'll pick her up close to midnight so they can perform the exorcism correctly in the mission, a house of the Lord.

While Suze is eating takeout with her mom and Andy, Cee Cee calls to say the story is going to run in the Sunday edition of the paper. She says the story will reach 35,000 people and that the coroner tentatively said that it is a male between the age of 20 and 25. The coroner also says the cause of death is asphyxiation because of a broken bone in the neck.

Suze arrives at the Mission and sees that Father D has set everything up. Father D lectures her that she has to allow Jesse to make his own decision about coming back, if Suze is able to find Jesse. He also warns her about trying to use her feminine wiles to convince Jesse to come back.

Chapter 14 Analysis

Suze infers that the look Paul is giving her as she leaves with Father D has nothing to do with her turning him down for a date. This suggests again that Paul is a mediator too and knows what Suze is up to with the exorcism. Father D knows that Suze is in love with Jesse, but he doesn't condone it.



Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary

Suze's spirit emerges out of her body and she see herself lying on the Mission floor. Father Dom says she has 30 minutes and gives her his watch so she can tell time. Suze climbs into the hole in the ceiling, but before she can go, Jack runs into the Mission dragging the rope he insists Suze has to take with her. When Suze continues into the hole, all she sees is darkness and fog. She calls Jesse's name and a gladiator appears. He says he's the gatekeeper, but when Suze says she's a mediator and describes Jesse, he allows her to pass.

As she walks into the darkness, a corridor appears. Jesse starts walking toward her. At first, he thinks Suze is dead. Then, she explains why she's there. They follow the rope back to the hole, but when they get there the end of the rope that should be dangling into the Mission is frayed and looks like it's been cut with a knife.

Chapter 15 Analysis

Maria has found Suze. She knows that if Suze doesn't retrun to her body that she will die. It is Maria and her knife that have cut the rope which is not prohibiting Suze from returning to the Mission and rejoining her soul with her body.



Chapter 16

Chapter 16 Summary

With only eight minutes left, Suze and Jesse search for the hole in the ground to get back into the basilica. When they look back, all of the fog and hall and doorways that were once there are gone. Then, they see a figure striding toward them that turns out to be Paul Slater. Paul tries to tell Suze she could come and go any time up here, just like he does. He tries to stop her from finding the hole, but Jesse attacks Paul. Jack appears and leads them to the hole with a rope wrapped around his waist. He says that Maria's in the church with Father D.

Jesse and Jack push Suze through the hole and she reunites with her body. The Virgin Mary statue is thrown on her by Maria. Suze gets up and fights with Maria. She breaks her neck, but ghosts heal and she'll be up shortly. Jack comes through the hole and is trying to wake up Father D. While Father D comes to, Suze hears a crash in the church, which she assumes is Diego.

Suze finds Jesse beating the crap out of Felix Diego. Jack says he wishes they could exorcise Maria as her neck starts to snap back into place and Suze says they should try. Suze chants until the hole opens and swirls come down and whisk Maria up. Diego tries to grab his wife, but the swirls take him up into the hole too. Suze offers for Jesse to go to before the hole closes, but Jesse chooses to stay.

Chapter 16 Analysis

It is revealed that Paul is a mediator too. It seems as if there are good and evil mediators. It appears as if Paul is an evil mediator. Since he mentioned that he can come and go when he wants, Jesse tackling him doesn't suggest that Paul won't be able to make it back to Earth, however.



Chapter 17

Chapter 17 Summary

Suze calls the police to tell them that Father D was knocked on the head because he caught looters in the church. Suze tries to get Jack to talk about Paul, but Jack says he doesn't want to talk about. Suze knows now that Paul was in cahoots with Maria and Diego. They drop Jack off in a cab and then Jesse and Suze walk the two miles from the hotel to her house.

When Suze gets home, nobody even notices she snuck out. Spike is very excited to see Jesse. Suze sleeps for the next two days. Her mom wants to take her to the hospital, but she assures her she's just tired, and they have to drive to camp to pick up Doc. At the breakfast table, Sleepy tells her not to worry about her job, that he smoothed everything over with Caitlin for the two days of work Suze missed. He hands her an envelope from the Slaters because they had to check out early. There is a thank letter from Mrs. Slater with a tip check for \$200. There is also a letter from Jack and the miniature portrait of Jesse from the historical society.

Suze also finds a slip of paper from Paul, saying that he guesses it wasn't meant to be, for now. She reads the article Cee Cee wrote in the paper about the skeleton, Dr. Clemmings's research and the de Silva-Diego clan.

When Suze gets back to her room, she finds Jesse there. He says they need to talk. She tries to avoid talking, but Jesse steps forward and kisses her on the lips.

Chapter 17 Analysis

It foreshadows that Jesse chooses to stay because he is in love with Suze too. Jack mentions in his letter that he'll never be scared again, which implies that he was scared of his brother Paul and not just the ghosts that Jack was seeing. Paul's note indicates that he plans on paying back Suze at some point in the future. It seems as if Jesse did come back to Earth and stay because of his feelings for Suze.



Characters

Susannah

Susannah Simon is a 16-year-old girl that attends Junipero Serra Mission Academy in Carmel, California. Susannah is the only daughter of her mother and biological father. Her biological father is deceased. He died when she was six, but his ghost still appears to Suze on occasion. Her mother is remarried to a man, Andy Ackerman, who has three sons and so Susannah now has three new stepbrothers.

Susannah is a mediator. A mediator is someone that sees and talks to ghosts to help them make the transition from their life on earth to wherever it is they go when they die. Her ability is a secret. The only person that knows about it is the priest and principal of her school, Father Dominic, who is also a mediator. The only other person that knows is an eight-year-old boy, Jack Slater, that Suze discovers is a mediator too.

Susannah lived in Brooklyn, New York prior to moving to Carmel with her mother. In Brooklyn, Susannah's best friend is Gina. Since she is new to Carmel, Susannah is still building her social circle of friends, but she does have two new best friends, Cee Cee and Adam McTavish.

Father Dominic

Father Dominic is the priest and principal of Susannah's school. Father Dominic is a mediator also, so he shares Susannah's ability to see and talk with ghosts. Father Dominic acts as a mentor to Susannah. Throughout the novel, Father Dominic tries to teach Susannah how to take a softer and more sensitive approach in helping ghosts to pass over to the other side.

Because Father Dominic is the only person that knows about Susannah's ability, he is also Susannah's confidante. She is able to confide things in Father Dominic that she cannot share with anyone else. Father D is the one that performs Suze's exorcism so that she can go to the afterworld to save Jesse.

When Father D finds out that Jack is a mediator, he also suggests Suze should act as Jack's mentor. While Father D helps to shape Jack, he thinks it is helpful that Suze, who is closer to Jack's age, also help.

Hector

Hector "Jesse" de Silva is the ghost that occupies Susannah's room at her home in Carmel, California. Jesse lived in the house in the 1850s when it was owned by his father, who was a rancher. Jesse is Hispanic so he also speaks Spanish, in addition to English.



Jesse's death is a historical mystery. He was on his way to his wedding ceremony when he went missing. Everyone assumes he was killed, but doesn't really know what happened to him. Susannah believes Jesse is stuck in her room and on Earth because he has unresolved issues about his death. She is trying to help him work through these issues throughout the novel.

When Jesse's skeleton is found in the backyard, Jesse disappears. Suze thinks this is because the mystery of his death is solved, but she later finds out that Maria convinced Jack to exorcise Jesse, so Jesse is sent to the afterworld.

Brad

Brad "Dopey" Ackerman is one of Susannah's stepbrothers. He is the second oldest of Andy's sons. His real name is Brad. Dopey is Susannah's age so he is about 16 too. Dopey has an on-again-off-again relationship with Debbie Mancuso. Dopey is attending summer school because he failed two classes during the regular school year. Dopey is the one helping Andy dig the hole for the hot tub. It's Dopey's shovel that strikes the skull of Jesse's skull.

Jake

Sleepy is the nickname for Susannah's oldest stepbrother. He is 18 years old. His real name is Jake. He has his own vehicle. He works as a pizza delivery boy at night, but he works as a lifeguard at the same hotel resort Suze works at during the day.

Sleepy is also dating Suze's boss, Caitlin, sleepy drives Suze back and forth to work at the resort. He also helps to get Suze out of trouble with Caitlin a few times throughout the novel.

David

David "Doc" Ackerman is Susannah's youngest stepbrother. He is 12 years old, but he is also a genius. He has red hair and is away at computer camp for the summer. While she has never told Doc that she is a mediator, he knows that she sees ghosts, so it is an unspoken secret between them.

Paul Slater

Paul Slater is the older brother of Jack Slater, who is a boy Suze babysits for at the resort. Paul is very handsome and Suze thinks he's attractive. He keeps asking Suze out, but she resists for awhile because Suze is in love with Jesse. Suze does go out with Paul a few times.



When Paul finds out Suze is a mediator and she's encouraging Jack with his ability, Paul acts as if Jack is crazy. In the end, Paul is in cahoots with the two ghosts that are trying to kill Suze because Paul is a mediator too.

Jack Slater

Jack Slater is an eight-year-old boy that Suze babysits for at the resort. At first, everyone thinks Jack is a whiner and strange. He never likes to go outside. One day, Suze finds out that Jack is a mediator too, which is why he's scared to go outside. Jack looks up to Suze as his mentor, but also as someone who teaches him how to be a normal kid.

Jack is responsible for exorcising Jesse. Maria de Silva convinces Jack that Jesse is bothering and trying to kill Suze, so Jack does it to save her. In the end, Jack helps Father D to exorcise Suze and helps to bring Jess back.

Maria de Silva

Maria de Silva is a cousin of Jesse's she is the woman he was supposed to marry when Jesse disappeared. Maria was in love with Felix Diego, so she conspired with Felix to kill Jesse so that she could marry Felix instead. Maria's ghost comes back to threaten Suze and her family to keep their murderess secret.

Cee Cee

Cee Cee is one of Susannah's best friends in Carmel. She is very intelligent and somewhat of a nerd. When Susannah needs help getting the de Silva story into the newspaper, she turns to Cee Cee, who is interning at the local paper for the summer. Susannah also lets the reader know that Cee Cee has a crush on their friend Adam. Cee Cee is albino and so she tries to stay out of the sun and often covers her skin to protect it.

Adam McTavish

Adam is another of Susannah's best friends in Carmel. Adam is away visiting his grandparents for most of the summer. He returns and goes out to dinner with Cee Cee and Suze.

Mrs. Simon-Ackerman

Mrs. Simon-Ackerman is Suze's mom. She is an investigative journalist that works on a morning news show. She goes to bed early and gets up early to get to the studio in time for the show.

Felix Diego

Felix Diego is Maria's husband. They have 11 children together. Now, he is a ghost, like Maria, that is trying to kill Suze. When he was a live, he was a slave trader and is responsible for murdering Jesse.



Objects/Places

Carmel, California

Carmel is the city in California where the novel takes place. Susannah and her mother have just moved to Carmel because her mother remarries Andy Ackerman. The entire novel unfolds at different locations around Carmel.

Pebble Beach Hotel and Golf Resort

Pebble Beach Hotel and Golf Resort is where Sleepy and Suze have jobs for the summer. It is also where Suze discovers that Jack is a mediator too. Suze first discovers Jack is a mediator when they are walking toward the pool and they run into a landscaper that died of a heart attack a few weeks before.

Junipero Serra Mission Academy

Junipero Serra Mission Academy is the private Catholic school Susannah attends. It is also the school where Father Dominic is the principal. While school is out for the summer, Father Dominic takes Suze to the Mission on the property to perform the exorcism.

Susannah's Room

Susannah's room is haunted by a ghost by the name of Jesse. The family dog, Max, won't go into Susannah's room because he senses Jesse's presence. It is in Susannah's room that Maria de Silva first holds a knife to Suze's neck and threatens her life if she doesn't get Andy to stop digging the hole for the hot tub in the backyard.

Mission

Father Dom sets up for the exorcism inside of the Mission. He does this in the middle of the night, so that nobody walks in on him performing the exorcism. The Mission is where the portal opens for Suze to go up and find Jesse. It is also where the fighting commences when Jesse, Suze and Jack return from the afterworld and encounter Maria and Felix.

Miniature Portrait

While visiting the historical society, the curator shows Suze a miniature portrait of Hector "Jesse" de Silva. After the curator's death, the receptionist notices the portrait is



missing. This sends the police to the resort to question Suze. The portrait is returned to her in a letter from the Slaters.

Cigar Box of Letters

The first thing Andy digs up when digging the hole for the hot tub is an old tin cigar box. Inside the cigar box are old letters from Maria de Silva to Jesse. Suze takes the box of letters as a donation to the historical society.

Knife

Maria de Silva likes knives. She seems to have a collection of them. Maria holds a knife to Suze's throat threatening her. Maria also uses one of her knives to cut the rope that is supposed to lead Suze back to the Mission from the afterworld.

Rope

Suze uses a piece of rope to tie around her waist during the exorcism Jack is about to perform. She tells Jack to pull on it if she is gone longer than 30 minutes. When Father D interrupts the exorcism and ends up performing his own, later at the Mission, Jack brings the piece of rope for Suze to use. This is the same rope that Maria cuts so that Suze cannot find her way back to Earth.

Books

Jesse is an avid reader. He is always reading textbooks and books that he can find in the Ackerman house. He garners information from the books that he expects Suze to explain and discuss with him later.



Themes

Good versus Evil

The primary plot throughout the entire novel is that of good versus evil. While it is presented in a light-hearted manner, Susannah struggles with the state of mind of the ghosts and people she deals with in the novel. For example, the ghost of a Maria de Silva and Felix Diego are on the evil side.

By the end, Susannah struggles with whether or not Paul Slater is good or evil. When he confirms Susannah's suspicions about being a mediator, this solidifies evilness for Susannah. The fact that Paul never tried to help Jack, who was struggling with seeing ghosts, also makes it seem to Suze as if Paul is on the evil side.

Finally, Susannah struggles with good and evil once again when she is exorcised. Since Suze is not dead, she is not sure what will happen to her body and her soul when they become two. She also doesn't know where the exorcism of Jesse has sent him, so she isn't sure what she will encounter when she enters the afterworld in search of Jesse.

Coming of Age

One of the other primary themes that run throughout the novel is growing up and coming of age, even against adversity, such as having a parent die or being a mediator for ghosts. Susannah struggles with the fact that her coming of age includes the ability to see and speak with ghosts. Susannah deals with the responsibilities in life of having this ability by trying to help both the dead and living resolve unresolved issues they have with each other.

Susannah also faces the rite of passage of having her first true love. Unfortunately, the person Suze is in love with is a ghost that haunts her room. Susannah experiences her first kiss with Jesse at the end of the novel, which indicates that Jesse might be in love with her too. The problem is that Susannah doesn't know how a relationship can work between a living person and a ghost.

Family

Family is another central theme throughout the entire novel. This is because the storyline is about the lives of this particular family—the coming together of Susannah and her mother with Andy, her new stepfather and her three stepbrothers—merging the Simons with the Ackermans.

While every family has their trials and tribulations, Susannah's family has its own family dynamics that are the same and that are different from those of other families. In the end though, they are a family and they will get through it together, one way or the other.

Suze is learning to live with her two new stepbrothers. She is also starting to realize some of the benefits of having them around.



Style

Point of View

The novel is written in the first-person point of view. The narrator of the novel is also the main character of the novel, Susannah, or Suze. The narrator is telling the story as it unfolds, but she also switches back to some past events in her life to provide the reader with some perspective.

The point of view of this novel is an intimate point of view that allows a reader to connect closely with the main character, who also happens to be the narrator of the story. The point of view also allows the author to inject her own opinions into the narration and to expand on the events taking place to her, the members of her family and the people of the town without having to move out of character or interrupt the flow of the narration. Hence the point of view works well with this novel and the author's writing style.

Setting

The novel is set primarily in Carmel, California. The author never states the specific year or time period, but it seems to be in the 21st century. The setting of this novel is important because it is about the mysterious occurrences in this particular town that sets the scene for the entire plot of the novel. The main character of the novel is a teenage girl that works to help ghosts resolve unresolved matters with the living so the ghosts can continue on to their afterlife.

The setting of this novel works well with the plot. At first, the reader is not aware of Suze's ability or that there are other mediators in the story line. However, as events unfold, one secret after the next is either explained or inferred.

Language and Meaning

The language of this novel is modern. The language of the novel is not formal and appears to be set in modern times, such as the '21st century. The language is educated, strong and descriptive enough that it creates a flow that leaves the reader impressed with the words as much as the plot when the novel ends.

The language of the novel is appropriate to the plot because it is accurate to the characters in the novel and the education level of the writer. The novel is not in love with its own words, but it is descriptive enough that the reader finds enjoyment in the words as well as the plot. The language is not difficult to understand and everything is clear in its context. Hence the language of the novel fits well with the plot of the novel.

Structure

The novel consists of 17 chapters. Each chapter is anywhere from two to 20 pages long. The chapters tell the story both in exposition and dialogue. The author is the narrator and main character of the book, so it seems as if she is injecting her own voice throughout the novel—as if she has become Susannah. This allows the author to provide her own opinions of the events surrounding the setting of the novel, as well as the actions taking place within the plot, but from the eyes and words of Susannah.

The novel contains one main plot and several subplots. The main plot follows good versus evil between the characters in the novel. The subplots involve coming of age and the trials and tribulations of the family.



Quotes

"Because when I go outside, I see dead people" (Chapter 1, p. 11).

"Well, yeah," I said. "He probably has something he needs us to do for him. He kicked off kind of suddenly, and there may be stuff, you know, he left unfinished. He came up to us because he wants our help" (Chapter 2, p. 13).

"So what was in that box you guys dug up" (Chapter 3, p. 20).

"When my stepfather finds Hector de Silva's rotting corpse" (Chapter 4, p. 37).

"Well, that's too bad. It's especially too bad considering the fact that now I guess I'm going to have to tell your supervisor about how you took my little brother off hotel property today without my parents' permission" (Chapter 5, p. 39).

"Susannah, I have been dead for a hundred and fifty years. I think I know what I am talking about. And I can assure you, this mystery about my death you speak of ... that is not why I, as you put it, am hanging around here" (Chapter 6, p. 49).

"I'm very sorry Dr. Clemmings is dead, but I swear I don't know what happened to him, or that painting, either. Bye" (Chapter 7, p. 56).

"Sure. Most of us, anyway. I mean, unless we get it right the first time. But that hardly ever happens. See, what's going on with Jesse is that his karma is all messed up, and he got bumped off the path to nirvana. He just needs to find his way back into the body he's supposed to get after, you know, his last one, and then he'll be fine" (Chapter 8, p. 60).

"As if I, Maria de Silva, would allow myself to be so humiliated. He sought to return my letters and asked for his own and his ring back. He could not, he said, marry me, after what he had heard about me and Diego. As if he did not know to whom he was speaking! As if he did not know he was speaking to a de Silva" (Chapter 9, p. 69).

"Well, as I was saying, I was examining the letters you brought me. Ever since you left my office the other day, I've been thinking about what you said ... about Hector de Silva, I mean. It does seem a bit unlikely that a fellow who wrote so lovingly of his family would



simply walk out on them without a word. And the fact that you found Maria's letters buried in the yard of what was once a well-known boarding-house...Well, I must say, upon further consideration, the whole thing struck me as extremely odd. I'd picked up my dictaphone and was just making a few notes for Mrs. Lambert to type up later when I suddenly felt...well, a chill. As if someone had turned the air-conditioning up very high. Although I can assure you Mrs. Lambert knows better than that. Some of our artifacts must be kept in highly controlled atmospheric climates, and she would never" (Chapter 10, p. 76).

"He exorcised Jesse, Father D. Maria de Silva tricked him into doing it. She told Jack that Jesse had been b-bothering me, and that he'd b-be doing me a favor, getting rid of him"
(Chapter 11, p. 83).

"And not a minute later or, Susannah, I'm telling you right now, I will telephone your parents and tell them everything" (Chapter 12, p. 93).

"Just reel me back in if I'm gone more than half an hour, all right" (Chapter 13 p. 98).

"We are going to perform a decent Christian exorcism, or none at all" (Chapter 14, p. 99).

"Because I am the gatekeeper. I do not joke. Go now" (Chapter 15, p. 110).

"Yes. I told you that you should have left well enough alone with Jack. He'll never be one of us, you know" (Chapter 16, p. 117).

"We don't have to talk" (Chapter 17, p. 130).



Topics for Discussion

Who is Susannah Simon? Why does she feel like she is an outsider in her own family? What does Susannah recall about her childhood? What is Susannah's biggest demon that haunts her throughout her life? Why is this important? How does it change her life?

Discuss the relationship between Susannah and Jesse. Are they really in love? Is there love, guilt or a sense of obligation in their relationship? How does Susannah feel about Jesse? How does Jesse feel about Susannah? Why does Susannah think Jesse has a crush on her? What does she do about it?

How does Susannah feel when she discovers Jack is a mediator? How does this affect Susannah? How does Jack react to being a mediator? Why does Jack think ghosts are visiting him before Suze explains?

Who is Jesse? Why does he promise Susannah that he isn't going anywhere? Why does there seem to be a strain in the relationship between Susannah and Jesse at times? Why does Jesse return to Earth with Susannah? What happens to Jesse?

Who is Paul Slater? Why does he continuously try to ask Susannah out the novel? Why do you think he doesn't tell his brother that he is a mediator too? What do you think happens to Paul?

Who is Maria de Silva? Do you think she is responsible for Jesse's death? Why do think she threatens Suze? What do you think happens to Maria?

Discuss the ability Father Dominic, Jack Susannah have as mediators. What impact does it have on the characters of the novel? How does it motivate them or hold them back? Why is the mediation an issue to the characters? Does it have anything to do with way that relationships develop and evolve? What impact does it have on the overall desire to expose the truth?