

The Higher Power of Lucky Study Guide

The Higher Power of Lucky by Susan Patron

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Plot Summary

"The Higher Power of Lucky," by Susan Patron, is the story of ten-year-old Lucky Trimble who hears a fascinating concept when she eavesdrops on a meeting of members of a twelve-step group. The group is speaking about an elusive mystery called the "Higher Power." Lucky is convinced that once she finds out how to obtain the Higher Power, all her problems will be over.

Lucky's problems are complicated and not the typical ones of a ten-year-old girl. Two years before, Lucky lost her beloved mother, Lucille, when she accidentally stepped on to a power line that had fallen down after a horrific rainstorm. Lucky has never met her father or at least she doesn't think she has. It is a big question mark to her why she has no contact with him. Since she had a close relationship with her mother and no relationship at all with her father - who is still alive - Lucky winds up having a disproportionate anger and misguided resentment against her mother for leaving her. Perhaps her mother really wasn't a very good mother, she muses. After all, she shouldn't have been so careless by going outside after a storm and she shouldn't have married a man who didn't like children.

While Lucky has to struggle with her roller-coaster emotions and must try her best to deal with the adult problems and unexplained events in her life, she fears that she is being faced with yet another abandonment. After her mother died, her father contacted his ex-wife, Brigitte, who lived in France. He was married to Brigitte before he married Lucky's mother but they got divorced because he didn't want any kids and Brigitte did. Lucky's father enlisted Brigitte's help to take care of Lucky. Since he offered to pay her airfare and support her and the child, Brigitte agreed to help him out. She had always wanted to see California anyway.

But time marched on and a suitable foster home could not be found for Lucky. Her father suggested to Brigitte that if she became Lucky's legal guardian that perhaps the foster home phase of the process would go more smoothly. But two years later, Brigitte still remained. However, recent incidents convince Lucky that Brigitte is contemplating returning to France and that means that Lucky will have to leave her home town, Hard Pan, and all her friends and become a ward of the state.

As her emotions and chaotic reasoning get the better of her, Lucky plans to runaway. She figures that by running away, she will either make Brigitte realize that she really loves Lucky and wants to stay with her or she will get Brigitte in big trouble with the police for not taking better care of her. Either way, Lucky will know where Brigitte really stands with her.

Lucky is a smart girl but she is not able to see Brigitte's obvious concern for her. Brigitte loves the little girl and has vowed to "rip" anyone's heart out who would think of harming her. Lucky is able to move on in her life and end her worries when she is finally able to say good-bye to her mother, refuse to focus on her father's behavior, and begin the happy, worry-free life of a ten-year-old with Brigitte.



Chapter 1: Eavesdropping

Chapter 1: Eavesdropping Summary

Ten-year-old Lucky Trimble is eavesdropping while she is supposed to be working. She is listening in on Short Sammy's story again. She'd heard it many time before, but she likes the story - especially certain parts. Lucky has her rickety lawn chair wedged up against the wall behind the dumpster. A hole in the wall allows her to hear the speakers at the meeting. She is supposed to be cleaning up the trash and debris but she wants to listen to Sammy. He is speaking before a group of anonymous people at a twelve-step program at Hard Pan's Found Object Wind Chime Museum and Visitor Center.

Sammy is telling the story about when he hit rock bottom. He had drunk a gallon of rum while listening to Johnny Cash on the radio in his car. He looked over and saw that a rattlesnake was biting his dog, Roy, in the scrotum. Sammy was so frightened that he fell out of the car and broke his tooth, cut his cheek, and got a black eye. After that incident, Sammy decided he would join AA. Sammy's wife took Roy to the vet who administered anti-venom to Roy just in time. The next day his wife left him and took the dog with her. Lucky is always disappointed when Sammy refers to getting to his "Higher Power" because he does not say how he got there! She wants to know how she can get to her Higher Power.

Lucky wonders what she would do if she hit rock bottom. Rock bottom for her would be if her guardian, Brigitte, would quit and go back to France. The difference between a mother and a guardian is that a mother can't quit.

The meeting is breaking up so Lucky hurries to her chores. She wants to keep her job because it is one of the only paying jobs in Hard Pan, California. Her job is to clean up the debris after every 12-step meeting because the drunks don't like to see the beer cans from the gamblers, the smokers don't like to see the cigarette butts from the drinkers, and binge eaters don't like to see the candy wrappers from everybody else.

Lucky has a lot of questions that she'd like to ask. One thing she'd like to ask Sammy was what Roy's scrotum was. It does not sound like the stuff you vomit when you have the flu. But since Sammy never told her directly about Roy's scrotum, she doesn't feel free to ask him about it because then he would know she was eavesdropping.

The oppressive heat wanes a little by the time Lucky gets home. Her home is a series of three small trailers all soldered together. The first one, where Lucky and her dog sleep, is a little shiny aluminum "canned-ham" which is attached to a trailer that consists of the kitchen and dining room which is then attached to Brigitte's bedroom trailer. Lucky wants to find her Higher Power because sometimes she'd like to change everything and on other days she'd like to have the power to make everything stay just the same.



Chapter 1: Eavesdropping Analysis

Lucky wants to find her Higher Power because she thinks it will allow her to change her life. She is fascinated that the anonymous people like Short Sammy have found a way to their Higher Power. She feels that once she could reach that power, she could change her life if she wanted to. Lucky is unhappy about certain aspects of her life, which will be revealed as the story moves on.

Lucky lives with Brigitte, her guardian. She mentions her mother in passing but does not mention her father. It seems as though Lucky is not living under the best conditions. Although she is paid for her work, she is only ten years old and has to clean up after the drunks, smokers, gamblers, and binge eaters following twelve-step meetings. She spends time behind the building near a dumpster. She also sleeps in a "canned ham" trailer with her dog. It seems that Lucky's living and "working" conditions are not the best for a young girl. The question lingers as to how Lucky lost her parents and why she sleeps in a trailer with her dog and how she is treated by her guardian.



Chapters 2 and 3

Chapters 2 and 3 Summary

Chapter 2: Brigitte

Lucky finds her dog HMS Beagle (His Majesty's Ship) on the steps to the kitchen trailer. Since Brigitte's sandals are on the steps that lead to the kitchen trailer, HMS Beagle and Lucky both know that Brigitte is mopping the floor and doesn't want them to walk on it. Later, Lucky peeks in and sees that Brigitte is on the phone. Brigitte tells lucky that she'll hang up soon - she is talking to her mother in Paris.

Lucky thinks to herself that Brigitte's mother is probably working on her plot to get Brigitte to come home to France. She wants all her daughters with her in Paris. Brigitte recently got a package from her mother which contained a yellow tube that looked like toothpaste but it actually contained a mustard that Brigitte loves. It brought tears to Brigitte's eyes because it reminded her of home. Lucky is certain that Brigitte's mother is plotting to get her daughter home even though her mother sends Lucky a kiss over the phone. Since it is so oppressively hot, Brigitte makes a tuna and egg salad for dinner.

Chapter 3: Good and Bad

Lucky thinks about the prospect of Brigitte returning to France. If she could only attain the Higher Power she would be able to pick out the perfect woman to become her mother. In many ways, Lucky looks at herself as the perfect child, although Brigitte probably wouldn't agree. For example, Lucky doesn't want to learn French. It is a difficult language and no matter how hard she tries, she can't reproduce the sounds from the back of her throat that she'd have to in order to speak the language. She did learn how to say Brigitte's name in the French way.

Brigitte became Lucky's guardian when she was eight years old. Lucky's mother, Lucille, stepped on a power line outside during a rainstorm and was electrocuted. Lucky has a good and bad list of traits for mothers. Among the good traits are: not going outside in a bad storm; staying around to take care of your child through age 25; picking a husband who likes kids; and, telling the husband how great the kid is in case something happens to her. The "bad" traits for a mother include: Going out into a rainstorm; not being careful about what you step on outside during a rainstorm; marrying a husband who does not like children; and, divorcing the husband.

Lucky's father was married to a French woman before he married Lucille. They got divorced because he didn't want children. Then he came back to America and met and married Lucille. He still didn't want children - even after Lucky was born. He left and they got a divorce. So after the storm, when Lucky needed a guardian, her father called the woman he used to be married to. She agreed to come to California and look after Lucky. That woman was Brigitte. Brigitte wasn't in love with Lucky's father any longer and didn't



know Lucille but the reason she came was because there was no one else to care for Lucky.

Chapters 2 and 3 Analysis

Chapter 2: Brigitte

Brigitte seems to be nice to Lucky. She cleans the house and makes dinner for her. Brigitte's mother sends Lucky a kiss but Lucky mistrusts her. She thinks her mother is plotting to make Brigitte want to return to France. Lucky must like Brigitte because she doesn't want her to go back to France. Undoubtedly, since Lucky has already lost both parents in some fashion, she could also be worried about being abandoned. If Brigitte left to return to France, who would take care of Lucky?

Chapter 3: Good and Bad

Lucky is very worried that she will be abandoned by Brigitte like she was by her mother. She still experiences anger and hurt from her mother's death. She blames her mother for being careless and being electrocuted. She also blames her mother for not picking a husband who loved kids. Brigitte is Lucky's father's first wife. Lucky doesn't think she loves her father any longer but it is curious why the woman would come all the way from France to care for a child she doesn't know and a child of a man that she divorced. There is no indication at this point in the novel if Lucky or Brigitte have any contact with Lucky's father.



Chapters 4 and 5

Chapters 4 and 5 Summary

Chapter 4: Graffiti

When Lucky is working on her report on the life cycle of an ant, Lincoln calls. He wants to borrow a black marker from her to correct sign. She asks if it he's referring to the population sign for Hard Pan or "Pop. 43." But Lincoln is referring to the traffic sign after that. He tells Lucky to meet him at the sign. Lincoln is always tying knots and regularly receives "Knot News" - the newsletter of the International Guild of Knot Tyers, of which Lincoln is the youngest member.

Before she leaves, she put a little mineral oil on her eyebrows. Brigitte won't let her wear any make-up. Lucky doesn't like her coloring. Everything - hair, skin, and eyes - are all the color of a sandy mushroom. At least the oil makes her eyebrows show up. She wonders if Lincoln will notice her eyebrows but since he is always absorbed in his knot club, she figures that he probably will not. She and HMS Beagle take off to meet Lincoln. Brigitte tells her to be home before the sun goes down.

While waiting for Lincoln at the sign, Lucky spots an ant colony. She feels sorry for ants because they are so small and can be killed easily. However, she admires them for being organized and reliable. They never leave their jobs and going off on tangents like people do. If one ant dies, the other ants don't stand around feeling sad. They just get another ant to do his job. When Lincoln comes, he pets Beag and asks why Lucky's eyebrows are wet. She tells him she is using a new beauty product. She senses he was complimenting her when he tells her that she is all one color.

The sign in question reads, "Slow Children at Play." Lincoln is going to use Lucky's marker to correct the wording. Lucky warns him that it is illegal to write on government property. Lincoln's mother wants him to become President of the United States, but a future opponent could use such an illegal act against him in a race for president. Lincoln's dad is older, looks more like a grandfather. Lincoln doesn't like the sign because it could be interpreted that the children of Hard Pan are dumb. He changes it with the marker to read: "You must drive slow: There are children at play." (p. 24). Lucky thinks Lincoln's actions are presidential. She would go happy to be interviewed on TV when he runs for president and explain the sign-writing episode. She would, however, not mention, the private part—the exchange about her eyebrows.

Chapter 5: Miles

Lucky checks her survival kit backpack. She borrows some nail polish remover and cotton from Brigitte who has gone to get government surplus food at the Captain's house. Lucky uses the nail polish remover and cotton when she captures bugs. She hears a sound like that a pig snorting but knows that it's Miles, making some of his



sound effects. Miles, who is five, wants to know if Brigitte has any extra cookies. Dot, who owns the beauty salon, had given him a sample of banana nut bread earlier, but no cookies. Miles is known for making his way around everyone in town for cookie handouts.

Miles wants Lucky to read his "Are You My Mother?" book. Lucky has read it to him about a "thousand times." She tells him that she will tell him an Olden Days of Hard Pan story. His favorite stories are those about Chesterfield the Burro. Brigitte tells him the story about the time she was his age, five, and took Beag, who was a puppy, down to the dirt road. They come to the old miners' caves where they were still mining silver at the time. She gets a job as a dynamiter because she was small enough to crawl into dangerous holes where no one else could fit. She becomes the top dynamiter for the company. She and Beag live in one of the dugouts nearby and would ride Chesterfield the burro to work everyday.

One day she gets trapped under a timber and told Beag to run and get Chesterfield. The burrow comes back and she and Beag push the timber off Lucky before the fuse she had just lit blows up the dynamite. She quits her job after that but she and Beag and Chesterfield live together in the dugout. Eventually Chesterfield leaves when she gets married and has a baby. But when people are in trouble, she comes back and helps them.

Miles still wants Lucky to read "Are You My Mother?" to him but her "meanness" gland is activated and she refuses. Miles then asks her to tell the story of how Brigitte came to Hard Pan. Just then, Brigitte drives up. Lucky tells Miles to have Brigitte tell him the story.

Chapters 4 and 5 Analysis

Chapter 4: Graffiti

Brigitte is truly loving toward Lucky. It is obvious that she is concerned about her safety when she tells her to be home before dark. Lucky is worried about her appearance when Lincoln wants to meet her which indicates that she might have a crush on him. She is worried that his act of vandalism will prevent him from becoming the President of the United States. But after he changes the sign, she is impressed with how intelligent and quick-thinking he is. In fact, he is presidential. Lincoln doesn't seem to be interested in becoming President but he doesn't want to be known as "slow." Since there are only 43 people in the town of Hard Pan, there probably aren't many children so he feels the sign is insulting to himself and Lucky. Lucky has a crush on him but it's not apparent that the feeling is returned.

Chapter 5: Miles

Like Lucky, perhaps Miles has a "mother" issue, too. He carries a book around with him entitled, "Are You My Mother?" Luck has read it to him "thousands" of times, which might be difficult for her since the subject of "mother" is quite a touchy one for Lucky.



The story that Lucky tells about Chesterfield the Burro who goes off to have a husband and baby is a not so veiled reference to mother and child. And since Chesterfield will come and help those in trouble, Lucky sees this mother figure as heroic and brave—something she wishes her mother was instead of dead.

Miles wants to hear how Brigitte came to live in Hard Pan. If she agrees to tell the story, the reader will understand why Brigitte decided to make such a drastic move and such a huge commitment to a child she didn't know. But that issue remains a mystery for now.



Chapters 6 and 7

Chapters 6 and 7 Summary

Chapter 6: How Brigitte Came

Brigitte returns home with several bags full of food in. The people in town who have a lot of money aren't entitled to the government food. A lot of people in Hard Pan are unemployed or disabled and need help. Brigitte tells Miles that she came to take care of Lucky because she had always wanted to see California. Lucky's father paid for her travel and she flew into Los Angeles. Lucky's father has rented her a car which Brigitte drives through the city out into the desert until she finds Hard Pan.

When she arrives in Hard Pan, Brigitte does not know where Lucky lived since her father was in San Francisco. She notices a house with a glass tower. When she knocks on the door, the Captain answers the door. He has long gray hair and beard and is wearing a big shirt - his pants were tied with a rope and he wore sandals - he looks like someone from the Bible. The Captain is very nice and helps her return her rental car. He takes her to Sammy's water tank. Sammy, a very small man, comes out wearing a big cowboy hat. Lucky is inside the tank house, watching, as Brigitte arrives. She is dressed in a tight-fitting red dress, high-heels and looked way too French and too fancy for Hard Pan. Lucky does not know where her mother is. She thinks that Brigitte is one of Sammy's girlfriends—she has no idea that Brigitte will become her guardian.

Brigitte's initial intention is just to care for Lucky until she can be placed in a foster home. After Brigitte begins staying with Lucky, she often sleeps with her because she misses her mother so. They cannot locate a foster family for Lucky. Lucky's father convinces Brigitte that the process will go much smoother if she will become her legal guardian. Brigitte agrees but Lucky figures only until they can find a foster family for her. Lucky does not want to leave Hard Pan. The population sign will have to be changed from 43 to 42.

Chapter 7: Tarantula Hawk Wasp

Lucky thinks of ways to stay in Hard Pan and to not have to go live with a foster family. She thinks that if she becomes a world-famous scientist that Brigitte will want to stay on. She wants to make the Found Object Wind Chime Museum and Visitor Center into a real museum that people from far away, even as far away as France, would want to visit. Brigitte could be the hostess and explain to the visitors, in French, that it was her ward, Lucky, who created the scientific display.

Lucky decides to start creating a scientific display while Brigitte is at the post office. As soon as Brigitte leaves, Lucky takes out her collection of bugs and places them on the Formica counter. She stores them in Altoid boxes for safekeeping. She has a hoverfly, two craneflies, a giant tarantula hawk wasp and a baby scorpion. Lucky had written a



detailed description for each insect for the display. For the last part of her description, she warns that the details of how the tarantula hawk wasp stings and attacks it are a little gruesome. She imagines how all the visitors would want to know who made the wonderful display.

Chapters 6 and 7 Analysis

Chapter 6: How Brigitte Came

Brigitte comes originally to help her ex-husband and to see California. For the two years Brigitte has been her guardian, Lucky has feared that when a foster family is found for her that Brigitte will abandon her just like her own mother did. She fears that she will have to leave the town of Hard Pan where she goes to school and has friends. Lucky was not prepared at all about the huge change that was occurring to her life when her mother died - in fact she didn't even know that her mother was dead when Brigitte arrived. Because of the lack of a relationship with her father, she had no one to tell or brace her for the unexpected events. It seems as though her father could have been less a coward and at least talked to the eight year old whose life is being turned upside down at a moment's notice. Despite her father's behavior, Lucky holds the most resentment toward her mother probably because her father is such an unknown in her life.

Chapter 7: Tarantula Hawk Wasp

Lucky is trying to think of ways to make Brigitte like and admire her. She feels that just being herself will not be enough for Brigitte to want to stay. Lucky thinks she has to be bigger, more important than she is. If she becomes important and famous and other people are impressed with her, Brigitte will be impressed and proud of her and will want to continue her role as her guardian.



Chapters 8 and 9

Chapters 8 and 9 Summary

Chapter 8: Snake

Brigitte returns home early and spots the bugs on the counter. Brigitte doesn't like bugs and really doesn't like them on the counter but she doesn't seem to be upset. Lucky sees that Brigitte has a letter from her father in her hands. She recognizes the writing. Every month he sends a check but never a letter with it. Sometimes Lucky asks if her father sent her a letter but the answer is always "no." Brigitte is disappointed that, as usual, he didn't send enough money. Lucky offers to throw in her \$25.56 she saved from her job but Brigitte shrugs her off.

The phone rings. It is Lincoln wanting to meet Lucky at Short Sammy's to see in what unique way he plans to cook the government-issued food. Just then, Lucky hears Brigitte scream. She runs outside and sees that Brigitte is frozen at the sight of a snake in the clothes dryer. Brigitte tells Lucky to get the gray sticky tape and tape the dryer doors shut so the snake can't get out. Brigitte is sure it is a rattlesnake. Lucky forgot that Lincoln is waiting on the phone. She picks the phone up and tells Lincoln about the snake. He tells her that his grandmother had a snake in her dryer and that it crawled in through the outside vent.

After Brigitte has the dryer door taped firmly shut, Lucky climbs on top of the dryer and stomps her foot on it several times. She looks out the window to the back and sees the snake slither away. It is a red racer that eats rats and fights with rattlers. Lucky runs outside to figure out what she could put across the vent to prevent a snake from crawling in. Lucky thinks that Brigitte will think she's a hero.

When Lucky returns inside, Brigitte is looking for her nail polish remover to get the sticky tape residue off the dryer. She is mumbling to herself about California not being civilized and that there are no snakes in dryers in France. It must be fate, Lucky thinks - California is driving Brigitte away - snakes in dryers, not enough money from her father and she hates Lucky's favorite thing - bugs. France is beckoning to Brigitte.

Chapter 9: Short Sammy's

Lucky and HMS Beagle meet Lincoln at Short Sammy's. The house had once been a giant metal water tank. When it sprung too many leaks, Sammy took it over and converted it into a house. It now consists of one big round room and four windows cut into the metal walls. There is one picture on the wall—a picture of Roy's smiling face. The floor is made of flat rocks that are tamped down closely together. Sammy cleans the floor by hosing it off so he doesn't care if food is spilled on it.

Sammy is trying to figure out how to cook the big block of yellow government cheese he had just gotten that day. Sammy had made some chili and tells the kids to help



themselves. He has them dip the chili in snack size bags of Fritos so that there would be no clean-up. Lucky tells them about the snake and that even though the snake was harmless, Brigitte doesn't like any snakes. Lincoln comments that Brigitte is bored and needs something to do. But there are only a few jobs in Hard Pan and none are currently available. Besides, Lucky thinks, Brigitte does have a job—taking care of her. Lincoln likes her French cooking and thinks that she should open a restaurant.

Sammy had been to France years before he hit rock-bottom. He had been to many cafes there and to the Louvre Museum. Lucky asks Sammy if he'd rather live in France or Hard Pan. He takes her over to the window and tells her look out over the small town and then onto the Coso foothills and Coso Range. She gets the message since it is peaceful and gives you the feeling that you can do anything you want to. It dawns on Lucky that Hard Pan and Higher Power both have the initials "HP." Maybe Hard Pan was the Higher Power than Sammy found. She wonders if Brigitte could ever love Hard Pan as much as she does Paris.

Chapters 8 and 9 Analysis

Chapter 8: Snake

Lucky has another reason to fret about Brigitte's possible departure. She is unhappy with not having enough money to live on and to take care of Lucky with. Lucky feels she may have been able to prove her value to Brigitte by chasing the snake away. But since Brigitte is grumbling about California and that there are no snakes in dryers in France, Lucky feels defeated and that Brigitte's departure is just a matter of time.

Even in the face of her heroic act, Brigitte is not impressed enough with Lucky to forget about her beloved France. Even offering to contribute her whole life savings was not enough to make Brigitte feel better about being there.

Chapter 9: Short Sammy's

Lucky feels more insecure when Lincoln comments that Brigitte is bored and needs something to do. She thinks to herself that she has something to do—taking care of her. But it must seem to Lucky that even Lincoln, her best friend, doesn't think she isn't very important and that taking care of her is boring. Short Sammy is content in his metal house and with his life in Hard Pan. He is a man who had hit rock bottom and had come to terms with his place in life. He had to look no further than to his own home town for his Higher Power. Perhaps Lucky will find her Higher Power right at home as well. But it seems doubtful that Hard Pan is a happy place for Brigitte. How could it compare to Paris?



Chapters 10 and 11

Chapters 10 and 11 Summary

Chapter 10: The Urn

Lucky and Lincoln meet early the next morning at the Post Office. She wants to talk to him about an urn she has. Urns are used to hold the ashes of dead people who are cremated. Until her mother died, she didn't know that some people weren't buried. Short Sammy had explained the cremation process to her. Several days after Brigitte arrived, a strange man comes to the house and gives Lucky the urn. She thinks that it is a mistake and tries to give it back but he insists that she keep it. He tells her that the urn holds the remains of her mother and that as next of kin, she can toss them out into the air at the memorial service. She doesn't know what he is talking about.

But even though two years have passed, the urn still disturbs her. Lincoln is busy tying his knots but Lucky finally gets his attention. She asks him what he remembers about her mother's memorial service. He recalls that everyone in town went to the service and that there was a long procession of cars, even some dogs that walked along. It was held at the old abandoned dugouts in the desert. Short Sammy played the guitar and sang "Amazing Grace." He began, "The the air smelled like," but Lincoln does not finish the sentence. Lucky assures him that he can say the word "rain" - it wasn't rain that killed her mother.

Lucky tells Lincoln that she was supposed to have spread her ashes in the wind because she was next of kin but she refused to do it that day. She has never told anyone before but she confesses to Lincoln that she has looked into the urn right before the ceremony and sees little white things that she figured must have been bone particles. She reaches in and felt the particles. Then she closes the top snugly and put her arms around the urn and lays down on her bed with it. She opens it again later and a few of her tears fall into the remains and she is glad that they would be there with her mother. The reason she does not spread the ashes that day was because it was her mother - how could she "throw" her mother away?

Brigitte tries to comfort her and tells her she could keep the urn but then frustrated and embarrassed, Lucky shoves the urn into Brigitte's arms and runs off. Lincoln reminds her that it was her father who told everyone to leave her alone. But, Lucky responds, her father wasn't even there. Lincoln tells her that her father was the tall man standing in the back, wearing sunglasses. Lucky is astonished - that was the crematory man - the man who came to her house with the urn. She is puzzled why her father did not tell her who he was.

Lincoln pulls a beautiful knot from his pocket and gives it to Lucky. She had never realized before that moment that Lincoln sees with his heart and is truly an artist. The knot reminds her of her life. She wishes she could untangle the complicated strands of



her life and figure everything out - the urn, her father, Brigitte, her dog and all her friends.

Chapter 11: Smokers Anonymous

On Saturday, Lucky picks the trash up after Friday's Alcoholics Anonymous meeting. She takes her usual place outside the back wall where she can hear the people speaking at the meeting of Smokers Anonymous. The Captain is currently talking about his rock-bottom time. He tells about how he was so addicted that he even smoked in the shower and burned a hole in his bride's wedding dress. After being married for a while, his wife told him to choose between her and smoking. He offered to go to a low-tar cigarette but that wasn't enough for her and she walked out. Even though he had hit near rock bottom but couldn't quit smoking. But he finally he realized he needed help and entered into a 12-step program and ultimately found his Higher Power.

Maybe the Captain will tell Lucky exactly how he found his Higher Power. She is becoming desperate. She needs to find her Higher Power so she can figure out what to do about a guardian who wants to bolt every time there is a snake in the dryer or she hears French music.

Mrs. Prender, Miles' grandmother, addresses the group of ex-smokers. Her doctor told her she'd die if she didn't stop smoking. Even after hearing that warning, she continues to smoke. She smokes a cigarette and coughs so hard that she breaks a rib and then she drops a cigarette on her couch and sets it and her hair on fire. However, she hits rock bottom when her daughter is arrested for selling dope and goes to prison. She has to take in her grandson and raise him. Lucky is shocked to find out that her grandson is Miles! Mrs. Prender tells everyone that her daughter is working in Florida.

Chapters 10 and 11 Analysis

Chapter 10: The Urn

For two years, Lucky has been obsessing about her mother's remains. She was told by a "stranger" who came to the house that the silver urn contained her mother's remains. She didn't understand until she looked into the urn and saw pieces of her mother's bones. After she realized that the ashes were her mother, she could not just throw them away into the wind. She wasn't ready to move on with her life since it was stuck back at that moment. After all, the ashes were all she had left of her mother and, for that matter, either parent.

When she learns from Lincoln that the stranger that come to her house with her mother's remains was her father, she becomes more confused about him. He seemed to be concerned that she got her mother's remains but why didn't he talk to her? It was perplexing.

Lincoln feels sorry for Lucky because he knows she's still hurting and confused about her mother's death. He's even afraid to say the word "rain" so that it doesn't recall bad



memories for her. Lincoln is a very sensitive young boy and doesn't want Lucky to hurt any more than she already does. To make her feel better, he gives her one of his prized knots. To Lucky, the knot represents her life—a life that is complicated and tangled and something that she cannot figure out. The knot is also beautiful—a description which she has not yet connected to her life but perhaps she one day will.

Chapter 11: Smokers Anonymous

Lucky is learning what pain people go through when they hit rock bottom. Lucky thinks she didn't hit her rock bottom when her mother died; rather, she'd hit it if Brigitte were to leave. Perhaps Lucky has not allowed herself to really grieve for her mother; instead, she has focused on whether Brigitte will stay. By doing so, she can avoid thinking about her mother's passing and her father's abandonment of her. She feels that if Brigitte stays, she will avoid hitting her rock bottom and not have to deal with the abandonment of both of her parents. Mrs. Prender's confession about her daughter indicates to Lucky that people some people lie about hitting their rock bottoms because they feel shame about them.



Chapters 12 and 13

Chapters 12 and 13 Summary

Chapter 12: Parsley

Brigitte chops up parsley and puts it on practically everything. In France, there is a special little hand grinder for chopping and sprinkling parsley on food. Her mother sent Brigitte one when she told her how much she missed having one. That evening Lucky breaks one of the spokes on the parsley grinder. Brigitte decides to take it to Dot who has a small pliers that can fix it. Brigitte asks Lucky to look for her car keys in her bedroom. Lucky is worried when she spots Brigitte's suitcase sitting out. Brigitte finds her keys and leaves.

After Brigitte leaves, Lucky opens the suitcase and sitting right there on top of a stack of papers is Brigitte's passport. Lucky is now convinced that Brigitte is leaving. She now realizes that people don't get to use their Higher Power in order to have a special insight in how the world works and why people die and how to keep bad things from happening. Rather, people only got to their Higher Power after horrible things happen.

Lucky is angry. At ten, it's impossible to control your life. It's adults who control your life because they can abandon you—like Lucky's mother did. They can decide they don't want you just like her father. And, they can return to France when they want to. Even carrying a survival kit around with you is no guarantee that you'll survive. But Lucky has a plan to get control of things. She looks at HMS Beagle who wags her tail in agreement. Lucky plans to run away.

Chapter 13: Bisous

Brigitte and her mother are always sending "bious," kisses in English, back and forth. At night, Brigitte always comes in Lucky's room and hold her on her lap. It is a little babyish, but Lucky likes it. When Brigitte hugs her tight, Lucky's heart fills with hope. This night is different. Brigitte is focused on her computer. She tells Lucky to go to bed and that she will check on her later. At the moment, she tells her, she cannot interrupt her lesson.

Lucky thinks to herself that real mothers don't keep secrets about lessons they're taking or about leaving for France. Lucky peeks at Brigitte's laptop screen and sees that Brigitte is working toward an on-line certification for restaurant management from a culinary institute in Paris. That seals it. Brigitte had always wanted to return to France and run a restaurant. Now it seems that Brigitte would soon be living her dream and leaving Lucky.

Lucky goes to her room and cries. She tells Beag that she'll have to give her away because she wouldn't be able to take a dog to an orphanage. To avoid the orphanage, she will have to run away and soon. Brigitte would have to call the police and would get



into a lot of trouble for not taking better care of her. Lucky feels she is getting control of her life. She decides that Brigitte was a bad choice for guardian. She should have been required to take a course on how to be a mother. If they require a certification for running a restaurant, they should require one for being a mother.

Lucky is going to flee to the dugout caves and stay there for about a week. Then, she will sneak back in and hide under the porch of Dot's salon. Brigitte comes into her room to tell her good night but Lucky pretends to be asleep.

Chapters 12 and 13 Analysis

Chapter 12: Parsley

Lucky's worse fears are confirmed. Seeing Brigitte's passport in her suitcase tells her that Brigitte will be abandoning her just like her parents did. She is too fearful to hear the words confirmed and cannot bring herself to ask Brigitte if she is leaving. Just like she avoided dealing with issues about her parents, Lucky is avoiding talking openly about her suspicions with Brigitte. It would be just too much for her to bear.

Many of her feelings of abandonment surface. She is comparing the abandonment of her by all three principals in her life of her mother, her father and now Brigitte. She is angry and hurt and decides she will avoid being abandoned this time by running away.

Chapter 13: Bisous

Lucky has a lot more affection for Brigitte than she admits or even knows. Her heart will be broken if Brigitte leaves. Her anger at the prospect of being abandoned again is displayed by her thoughts that Brigitte wasn't doing a good job as a substitute mother. She will get back at her by running away. Brigitte will get into trouble for not providing appropriate care for her.

Lucky doesn't really want to leave her friends and her home town. She plans on "sneaking" back in after she's gone a week. She really wants to stay in her little town and not make the town officials have to show one less person on its population sign. Lucky's has jumped to a lot of conclusions about Brigitte's plans without talking to her. She does not allow herself to think positively and entertain the idea that Brigitte's plans of running a restaurant could be realized right there in Hard Pan.



Chapters 14 and 15

Chapters 14 and 15 Summary

Chapter 14: The First Sign

On Monday, Lucky experiences Three Signs indicating that it is the perfect day for running away. She tells Beag that they'll run away when she gets home from school. She rides in the back of the bus to school with Lincoln and Miles. Miles pulls out his "Are You My Mother?" book and Lincoln is making a new knot out of yellow twine. The first sign that this day would be perfect for running away is when she spots the road sign that indicates a section of the highway had been adopted by Sammy Desoto, Short Sammy. Lucky thinks to herself that when she grows up, she will adopt a lot of roads.

Chapter 15: The Second Sign and the Third Sign

In class, Mrs. McBeams read a story about Charles Darwin and Lucky realizes how much they are alike. They are both scientists and they both collect bugs. Mrs. McBeam discusses how polar bears are the same color as their environment and how it helps them blend in to their background and sneak up on their prey. It hits Lucky then that she is the same color as the desert and will blend in when she runs away to the dugouts. It is the Second Sign or her ability to blend in with the Mojave Desert that it is the perfect day to run away. Just when Lucky is thinking she couldn't bear to wait for three-thirty to come, the principal comes in the room and announces that the kids in the outlying areas would be going home early to get in front of a dust storm that is brewing. It is the Third Sign.

On the way home on the bus, Miles is worried about Chesterfield the burro and her baby being out in the dust storm. Lucky assures him that they will be okay because burros take care of each other. Miles takes out his book and begins reading it again from memory. Lucky is tempted to tell Lincoln that she is running away but she thinks it could ruin her plans. She keeps her secret to herself.

Chapters 14 and 15 Analysis

Chapter 14: The First Sign

Miles' attachment to his book, "Are You My Mother?" has more meaning now that is apparent that Miles was taken from his mother when she went to jail. Lucky comments that she will adopt a lot highway sections when she is an adult. The underlying meaning of her comment involves her feelings about the adoption of children - specifically her.

Chapter 15: The Second Sign and the Third Sign



Although the things that Lucky is interpreting as "signs" that she should run away, are her own fabrications, Lucky is looking for some kind of support for her plans. She feels she has no one to talk to—she is even afraid to tell Lincoln, her best friend. She fears he will tell Brigitte about her plans and she will be stopped. Besides, they are best friends and she knows that her running away will hurt him. Both Miles and Lucky are relating to Chesterfield and her baby. Lucky admires the burros for "being there" for each other unlike humans. Miles is worried that the mother burro will be lost in the dust storm—just as his mother is "lost" somewhere.



Chapters 16 and 17

Chapters 16 and 17 Summary

Chapter 16: Getting Ready to Run Away

Since Lucky gets home early and Brigitte is at the Captain's house, she decides to run away immediately. But first thing Lucky checks her survival kit. She is bringing many items with her including empty Altoid boxes for more specimens; pencil and notebook to describe specimens; the knot that Lincoln had given her; and, a bottle of Gatorade to name just a few. From the fridge, she takes two hard-boiled eggs, carrots and the government-issue cheese. She gets Fig Newtons and Beag's kibbles from the pantry. Ready to leave, she thought of another item she wanted to take - her mother' urn. She piles everything into her backpack and a plastic shopping bag.

Miles comes and stops her departure. He pulls out his book and shows Lucky how his grandmother fixed it by taping the spine. Lucky is angry and feels her meanness gland being activated. She tells Miles that the book is wrecked. He responds that the book is still good inside. He wants Lucky to read it to him again - he likes the part at the end when the bird finds his mother. Lucky is growing more angry and tells Miles that the bird is an idiot and doesn't even know that his mother is in jail! Miles, with tears in his eyes, tells Lucky that his mother is not in jail. Lucky, feeling very mean, tells him that she is in jail - she heard it right from his own grandmother. He throws his book down and runs out.

Lucky decides to try on Brigitte's red silk dress. She runs to her closet, throes her own clothes to the floor and slips into the dress. It makes her feel beautiful and sophisticated. As she dances around in front of the mirror, a sudden flash of Lincoln comes to her mind. She dismisses it, not understanding why she thought of him just then. She thinks of stealing Brigitte's passport but it would be better if Brigitte wants to stay because she loves Lucky not because she's stuck.

Mrs. Prender calls looking for Miles. Lucky lies and tells her she hasn't seen him. Then Lincoln calls about Miles, telling her that everyone's looking for him. She thinks it will be the last time she ever talks to Lincoln. She tells him that he is the best artist she ever knew.

Chapter 17: HMS Beagle Disobeys

Lucky is worried about Miles and knows she should help look for him. It was kind of her fault that he ran away but it was really his mother's fault because she's in jail. But Lucky doesn't have time to look for him because she has to run away. She's kind of annoyed—she doesn't want the drama of her running away to be minimized because Miles is missing—she wants the glory for running away all to herself. Lucky gets her bags



together and stuffs Miles' book into her one of them. The wind is really blowing as she and Beag run down the steps and walk toward the Mojave.

It is tough going in the desert with the howling wind and blowing sand. Between the strong wind and the weight of the heavy bags she is carrying, she falls over. Beag takes off down the road - even her dog is abandoning her. She thinks that she is heading in the direction of the dugouts but she can't see very well. At one point, Beag stubbornly sits down and refuses to go any further. She makes it to one of the dugouts and put her bags down. She's worried about Beag and calls for her. Her dog comes trotting over but tries to lead her away. Finally, she follows the dog to a pile of rags. She sees a small sneaker sticking out of it.

Chapters 16 and 17 Analysis

Chapter 16: Getting Ready to Run Away

Lucky takes her anger and frustration out on Miles. She is subconsciously annoyed that his mother abandoned him but she doesn't want to be compared to him in any way because her mother died and his mother is in jail. Dying is more noble than going to prison. She wants to get Miles out of her sight and is purposely mean to him because she feels angry and because he is delaying her departure and may mess everything up. She lies about seeing him when people call looking for him. She is staying focused on running away. She wants nothing to sabotage her plans.

Lucky puts on Brigitte's dress so that she'll feel close to her because she's really afraid to run away and she wants part of someone she cares about with her. She thinks of Lincoln when she feels pretty because she has feelings for him.

Chapter 17: HMS Beagle Disobeys

Lucky has successfully run away from home and found the dugouts to hide in. It seems as though she will have a companion with her whether she wanted him or not. She sees a small sneaker sticking out of the pile of rags that HMS Beagle has found - it's probably the missing Miles. The dog is trying to lookout for both kids and will probably urge Lucky do the right thing and help the missing boy.



Chapters 18 and 19

Chapters 18 and 19 Summary

Chapter 18: Cholla Burr

At first Lucky doesn't want to help Miles but her conscious as well as her dog pester her and she decides to help him. Miles is scared. He thought a coyote was sniffing him but it was Beag. He tells Lucky that he was counting on he mother burro to rescue him. Miles has a large cholla burr in his foot so Lucky has to carry him piggyback to the dugout. Lucky can't pull the burr out because the needles would stick her hand. She looks in her bags but can't find anything to use to pull the burr out with. Miles tells Lucky that she looks pretty and more grown up in her red dress. She spots Brigitte's parsley chopper that she had brought along as a keepsake. She angles the tool under the burr and flips it out.

Chapter 19: Eggs and Beans

Miles begins crying. To take his mind off his problems, Lucky tells him it's time to eat. She says they will have hard boiled eggs and beans. He'd prefer scrambled eggs but she points out that there is no stove and no fridge. She brought a can of beans with her but realizes she forgot to bring a can opener. She finds an old screwdriver in the dugout and manages to get the lid off the beans. She tells Miles that just like old miners, they will eat beans out of the can. HMS Beagle has some kibbles but looks around on the floor for more morsels of food. Just then a bug flies in Lucky's ear. She screams—it hurts and is biting her.

Chapters 18 and 19 Analysis

Chapter 18: Cholla Burr

Lucky does the right thing and rescues Miles. Since Miles was known to be missing, perhaps Lucky will have a chance to really be a hero and impress Brigitte by saving him. Being with Miles, Lucky's plans to runaway may not be successful. Miles was hoping that Chesterfield the burro would save him. He is still hopeful that his mother will return to him.

Chapter 19: Eggs and Beans

Everything is going fine until it isn't going fine. Lucky is bitten in the inner ear by a stinging or biting bug. It could be a serious injury. She screamed and probably scared Miles who is already scared. She might need help getting the bug out of her ear.



Chapters 20 and 21

Chapters 20 and 21 Summary

Chapter 20: A Good Book

For some reason, Lucky had always worried about a bug crawling in her ear. She would purposely wear a clump of hair over her ear to guard against an unwanted pest crawling down into her ear. The bug is moving around in her ear—it is the worst pain she has ever felt. She has some mineral oil in her bag which she pours into her ear to drown the bug.

Miles runs off, telling her he'll go for help. She tries to lure him back by offering him a Fig Newton. He hesitates but thinks he should go get help. She convinces Miles to get his book out of her bag and read it to her. The tiny moth that was in Lucky's ear finally slides out and Lucky feels better. Miles asks why his mother is in jail. Lucky tells him because she did something wrong. He replies that it's better that she's in jail rather than just staying away. Lucky tries to make him feel better by telling him that his mother would be proud of him. They hear footsteps and see that Lincoln is approaching.

Chapter 21: Amazing Grace

Lincoln tells Lucky and Miles that everyone is worried about them and looking for them. They'll be out to the dugouts soon because Miles' grandmother remembers him always talking about a burro out in the desert. Lincoln takes the hard-boiled egg that Miles offers him which makes Lucky think it's funny how some things work out just perfectly. Just like the moon, it's just the perfect size and the perfect distance away from earth. Lincoln sees Short Sammy's Cadillac, Brigitte's Jeep, Mrs. Prender's VW and the Captain's van. The kids can hear the them shouting for "Lucky" and "Miles."

Miles runs out to meet them. Lucky thinks they might think she kidnapped him and she'd wind up in a juvenile school for bad kids. Everyone is hugging Miles. Lucky hears Brigitte calling her. Lucky steps out with the urn and thanks everyone for coming to her mother's memorial. Tears brims in Brigitte's eyes as she stands back and allows Lucky to proceed. Short Sammy begins singing Amazing Grace and then everyone else joins in. Lucky opens the urn and flings her mother's remains into the evening breeze which carries them out to the desert.

Chapters 20 and 21 Analysis

Chapter 20: A Good Book

Lucky panics not only because a bug flew in her ear but also because Miles walks off to get help. Despite everything that's gone on, she still wants to "run away" so that Brigitte feels bad and realizes she loves Lucky. Miles is still hurting from the news that his



mother is in jail. Lucky feels bad that she told him about his mother but Miles copes with the news by saying that it's better that his mother can't come to see him because she's in jail rather than just wanting not to see him—unlike Lucky's father who doesn't want anything to do with her.

Chapter 21: Amazing Grace

Lucky did what she subconsciously planned to do—finally have the memorial service for her mother. But she waited until the time that she was ready to have it. Brigitte is happy to see Lucky and is not upset about her dress. By throwing her mother's remains into the breeze, Lucky is letting go of her anger and pain over her mother's death and is signaling that she is ready to move on with her life. Her mother will be fine. After all, Short Sammy showed her how peaceful the desert was.



Chapters 22 and 23

Chapters 22 and 23 Summary

Chapter 22: Bonne Nuit

After a long shower, Lucky sits on Brigitte's lap. Brigitte's arms wrap around her. Brigitte tells Lucky that she had her papers gathered together so that she could show it to the judge in order to legally adopt her. She took the course on-line so she could open a cafe in Hard Pan. Brigitte tells Lucky that if anyone ever tried to hurt her she would rip their heart out. Tears come to Lucky's eyes. In French, she tells Brigitte good night - "Bonne nuit, Brigitte."

Chapter 23: By and By

Lucky still had her job at the Museum but there is a lot less debris from the meetings now that Brigitte's cafe is open. After Lucky plugs up the whole that opened onto the meeting room, she could not hear a sound.

Chapters 22 and 23 Analysis

Chapter 22: Bonne Nuit

To say that things turned out much better than Lucky could have imagined would be an understatement. She has never fantasized about Brigitte adopting her. Perhaps she has now learned that if she had openly talked to Brigitte about her fears, then she could have saved herself a lot of pain and worry.

Chapter 23: By and By

Lucky learns to not eavesdrop. She might hear things that she doesn't understand and that can make her worry.



Characters

Lucky Trimble

Lucky Trimble is a ten-year-old little girl who feels like she has the weight of the world on her shoulders. She does have more problems than the average little girl and internalizes a lot of the fears and uncertainties she has about her life thus far. Two years before the story begins, Lucky had lost her mother. She had gone outside after a rainstorm and stepped on a power line that has collapsed after a rainstorm. Lucky doesn't know her father since he left her mother before she was born. Her father didn't want children even though he had one on the way. Lucky doesn't understand her father's attitude and she has anger and resentment toward the mother who abandoned her.

After her mother passed away, Lucky's father contacted his first wife, Brigitte, who lives in France. He asked her to come to America to take care of Lucky until an appropriate foster home could be found for her. Brigitte was married to Lucky's father before he married her mother. They divorced for the same reason—he didn't want children and Brigitte did. Although her stay was supposed to be only temporary, two years later—when the story begins—Brigitte is still in Hard Pad, California, taking care of Lucky. Several events and her own chaotic thinking lead Lucky to believe that Brigitte will soon be leaving and returning to France.

Lucky is desperate over her situation which is all brought to a head when she runs away. In the end, she learns to let go of her mother and the anger surrounding her death, accept her father's rejection and relax and enjoy being a ten-year-old with Brigitte who plans to adopt her.

Brigitte

After Lucky's mother passed away, her father contacted his first wife, Brigitte, who lived in Paris, France. He convinced her to travel to the United States and tend to his daughter until an appropriate foster family could be found for her. When the story begins, it has been two years since Brigitte came to take care of Lucky. She has become her legal guardian while the search for adoptive or foster parents presumably continues.

Lucky has grown to love Brigitte as a parent and fears that Brigitte will abandon her and return to her beloved France. Brigitte often talks on the phone with her mother in France which Lucky takes as a part of a grand plan to lure Brigitte away from her. Brigitte has some adjustment issues in her new home having come from the cosmopolitan city of Paris, France, to the tiny desert town of Hard Pan, CA. One day she is frightened by a snake that found its way into the clothes dryer. She declares that in France there are never snakes in dryers and that California is uncivilized!



As is the habit in France, Brigitte sprinkles chopped parsley on almost every dish. Her mother sends her a parsley chopper which is an item unique to France. She also sends her daughter a tube of French mustard that made Brigitte homesick and brought her to tears, which is part of Brigitte's mother's plot to take her away, at least in Lucky's mind.

Although it is obvious that Brigitte loves Lucky - every night at bedtime Brigitte hugs Lucky tightly as she sits on her lap - it doesn't stop Lucky from obsessing about Brigitte someday abandoning her and returning to France. But unknown to Lucky, Brigitte had plans all along to legally adopt her and open a new cafe in Hard Pan, that would feature French cooking.

Lincoln

Lincoln is Lucky's best friend. His favorite hobby is tying knots since he's the youngest member of the International Guild of Knot Tyers. Lincoln's mother wants her son to be President of the United States one day. That's probably why she named him Lincoln Clinton Carter Kennedy.

Miles

Miles is Lucky's five-year-old friend. He always wants Lucky to read him his favorite book, "Are You My Mother?" He is being raised by his grandmother because his mother is in prison.

Short Sammy

Short Sammy is a resident of Hard Pan and a recovering alcoholic. He lives in a converted water tank and found his Higher Power right in his home town of Hard Pan, CA.

The Captain

The Captain is a recovering smoker. He was so addicted to his habit that he even smoked in the shower. He hit rock bottom when his wife left him after giving him an ultimatum of either her or smoking.

Lucille Trimble

When Lucky was eight years old, her mother, Lucille Trimble, stepped on a collapsed power line after a storm and was electrocuted. Lucky was given the remains of her mother in a silver urn.



Mr. Trimble

Mr. Trimble was married to Brigitte before he married Lucky's mother. When Lucille Trimble died, he arranged for Brigitte to take care of her until they could find a foster family for her. Mr. Trimble never had any contact with his daughter because he didn't want children.

Chesterfield, the Burro

Miles liked to hear the stories that Lucky made up about Chesterfield, the burro, who lived in the Mojave Desert with her husband and baby. When Miles ran away to the desert, he was certain that Chesterfield would save him.

Mrs. Prender

Mrs. Prender was Miles' grandmother. She was raising him because his mother was sent to prison on drug charges. Miles wasn't sure where his mother was until Lucky, in a moment of anger, let it slip.



Objects/Places

Hard Pan, CA

The story of Lucky Trimble in "The Higher Power of Lucky" takes place in a small town on the edge of the desert in California. Hard Pan, CA that has a population of 43.

Mojave Desert

Lucky lives in Hard Pan, CA, on the edge of the Mojave Desert. When she runs away, she decides to hide in the dugouts in the desert.

Lucky's Trailer

Lucky and Brigitte live in three small trailers that are soldered together. The small aluminum one that is referred to as the "canned ham" trailer is where Lucky and her dog sleep. The middle trailer is where the dining room and kitchen area. And, the third small trailer contains Brigitte's bedroom.

Short Sammy's House

Short Sammy's house was converted from an old water tank. The house consists of only one large room and four windows cut out in the metal walls.

The Silver Urn

After her mother dies, Lucky's father gives her a silver urn that contains the remains of her mother. She holds on to it for several years before she feels comfortable about tossing them out into the desert breeze.

Found Object Wind Chime Museum and Visitor Center

Lucky works at the Found Object Wind Chime Museum and Visitor Center, cleaning up debris after meetings. She fantasizes about building a display at the museum that would showcase her bug collection.

The Dugouts

When Lucky and Miles run away from home, they wind up in the old abandoned dugouts in the Mojave Desert that were used in olden times by silver miners.

France

Brigitte, Lucky's guardian, is from Paris, France. Lucky spends many hours worrying that Brigitte plans to eventually return to France and leave her a ward of the state.

Los Angeles

When Brigitte comes to America, she flies into Los Angeles. One of Lucky's big worries in life is that she'll be abandoned by Brigitte, her guardian, and be placed in a Los Angeles orphanage.

Lucky's Survival Back Pack

Lucky carries her "survival back pack" around with her all the time. It has important items in it like Altoid tins where she can store insect specimens, mineral for glistening her eyebrows and pencils and notebooks so she can write descriptions of the insects she captures.



Themes

Abandonment

The dominant theme in "The Higher Power of Lucky" is that of abandonment. Lucky Trimble, the 12-year-old protagonist, lost her mother, Lucille, when she accidentally stepped on to a power line that had fallen down after a horrific rainstorm. Lucky's father had abandoned her and her mother before she was born. He did not want children and having one on the way didn't change his mind. As the story unfolds, the reader learns that Mr. Trimble was married to Brigitte before he was married to Lucille. He and Brigitte got a divorce because Brigitte wanted children and he didn't. At least he was consistent but his serial abandonment is another example of this theme.

Miles is Lucky's five-year-old friend who is subconsciously looking for his mother. His favorite book is "Are You My Mother?" His mother is in prison and he is being raised by his grandmother. He loves to hear Lucky tell stories about Chesterfield the burro who lives in the desert with her husband and baby burro. She will do anything to defend her baby. Lucky made up the story about the heroic burro and ideal mother and Miles eats it up.

After being abandoned by her mother because of death and abandoned by her father because he doesn't want to live with children, Lucky faces another possible abandonment - at least in her mind. She fears that Brigitte who moved from France to Hard Pan, CA, to tend to her until a proper foster family can be located for her will eventually want to return to her homeland. The story is based around the fears that Lucky has over this potential abandonment told against the backdrop of the other heartaches that she's had in her young life.

Communication

Throughout the story of "The Higher Power of Lucky," there are obvious lapses in communication that ultimately catch up with the characters and cause many heartaches and misunderstandings. Had good communication been practiced in these instances, a good amount of emotional pain could have been prevented. For example, the ten-year-old protagonist, Lucky, goes through unnecessary anguish for the major part of the story because she "thinks" that she will become a ward of the state. This assumption is based upon her "thinking" that her guardian, Brigitte, will soon be leaving her permanently.

Although Brigitte is a wonderful caretaker for Lucky and has plans to legally adopt her, she does not let Lucky in on her plans. Lucky happens to see that Brigitte was taking a restaurant management course on line which Lucky interpreted as another sign that Brigitte was going back to France. Had Brigitte communicated her plans to legally adopt Lucky and open a cafe in Hard Pan, it would have saved the little girl a lot of anxiety. On



her list of things bad mothers do, Lucky included keeping secrets. When adults keep secrets, they teach their children to do the same thing.

Five-year-old Miles is searching for answers about his mother. He is constantly asking Lucky to read his favorite book, "Are You My Mother?" to him. He's been told by his grandmother who is raising him that his mother is in Florida working. When the truth emerges in a spat with Lucky that his mother is in fact in prison, he is crushed. Had he been told the truth in a gentle and straight forward way by his grandmother, hearing elsewhere would not have been as stressful. He must have sensed that his grandmother wasn't leveling with him because he wasn't satisfied with her answer and kept searching for more. Although she was trying to protect him, keeping the truth from him hurt him more in the long run. Had he known where she really was, he could have asked the questions about her that he needed answers.

As a contrast to the lack of communication is the under story of the twelve-step program members who meet and tell all. By hitting "rock bottom", they learned the hard way that the only way to a happy and successful life is to be open and honest.

Chaotic Thinking

Lucky worried about being abandoned from the time her mother died to the start of her story as told in "The Higher Power of Lucky." She looked for any sign that her guardian, Brigitte, would be leaving her. Lucky was always jealous and resentful when Brigitte was on the phone with her mother who lived in France. She was sure that her mother's sole purpose for calling her daughter was part of a grand plan to lure her home. When her mother sent Brigitte a tube of special French mustard and a parsley chopper, Lucky didn't take them as thoughtful gifts from home; rather, it was a diabolical plot to spirit Brigitte away from her.

Lucky was sure the end was near when Brigitte found a snake in the clothes dryer. It was a harmless snake that they chased off, but Brigitte was understandably frightened when she opened the door and found it lying there. In the aftermath, Brigitte was frazzled, declaring that there are never snakes in dryers in France and that California was uncivilized! Brigitte's reaction told Lucky that her days were numbered before she would be placed in an Los Angeles orphanage.

Incidents like these confirmed Lucky's suspicions that Brigitte would soon be leaving and she, Lucky, would become an orphan and a ward of the state. The coup de grace occurred, however, when Lucky found Brigitte's suitcase laying out along with her passport. Lucky was certain that Brigitte would be leaving her. Lucky was a smart child and her brain grasped bits of information and retained and processed them. If she would have known what Brigitte had in mind, she could have saved herself a lot of worries and relaxed. Brigitte's only plans for the future were to begin proceedings to legally adopt Lucky.

At the story's conclusion, Lucky realizes that eavesdropping and learning only partial accounts of issues and then jumping to conclusions creates a lot of unreliable conjecture and unnecessary despair.



Style

Point of View

"The Higher Power of Lucky," by Susan Patron, is told in the third-person perspective. The reader is allied with the thoughts and feelings of Lucky Trimble, the ten-year-old protagonist of the story. The first few chapters quickly inform the reader of the emotional precipice on which Lucky is precariously balanced. Lucky is burdened with adult-size problems and has far more worries on her mind than a child her age should ever have.

By understanding Lucky's back story - the loss of her mother in an accident and the abandonment of her father because he doesn't want children in his life - it is easy to accept that Lucky would be worried that the legal guardian, Brigitte, whom she has grown to love, will also leave her. Her quick mind assimilates enough intelligence to convince her that Brigitte's return to France and thus her new status of state ward, is imminent.

The reader learns through the keen and imaginative mind of Lucky how an intelligent girl can hear enough bits and pieces of information to formulate an entire misguided scenario from them. Her emotions lead her down the road to chaotic thinking that convince her that her world is about to be turned upside down.

Author Patron is an award-winning writer of children's books, including "Maybe Yes, Maybe No, Maybe Maybe," which won a School Library Journal Best Book of the Year.. In her acknowledgments section of this book, she thanks, among others, a doctor for his pediatric advice in writing the book, which is an indication that she wanted to create a positive and healthy story about a serious issue that many children face.

Setting

"The Higher Power of Lucky" is set in the quaint and tiny town of Hard Pan, California, which is located on the edge of the Mojave Desert. Coming into the town, a roadside sign indicates that the population of Hard Pan is 43. The sign is used a few times as a symbol of Lucky's fears. She doesn't want to go to an orphanage in Los Angeles and be forced to imagine the sign being changed to: "Hard Pan, CA, Population 42."

Several interesting locations in Hard Pan are featured in the story. Lucky has a job cleaning up after meetings of twelve-step program groups which are held at Hard Pan's Found Object Wind Chime Museum. One day, Lucky and her best friend Lincoln visit Short Sammy who lives in a converted water tank. His home has only one room which has four windows cut out in the metal walls and a floor of tamped down pebbles that Short Sammy cleans by hosing it off.

Lucky and her guardian, Brigitte, live in a trailer home that consists of three distinct segments. The first section is a small, shiny aluminum "canned-ham" trailer where



Lucky and her dog sleep. That section is soldered to a larger trailer where the kitchen and dining room are located. The final section, Brigitte's bedroom, is another smaller trailer that is soldered to the kitchen/dining room.

Although none of the story takes place in France, it is an important element of the story. Brigitte is from France and much of Lucky's worries center around whether or not Brigitte will leave her and return to her homeland.

Language and Meaning

"The Higher Power of Lucky" is a serious story about the death of a parent, the estrangement from another parent, and a child's fears of being abandoned by a caretaker. The somber subject matter is softened with the charming and endearing banter between the children in the story and the fanciful imaginations of Lucky Trimble, the protagonist and victim of two much tragedy in her ten-year-old life.

Lucky is portrayed as a bright child whose vivid imagination will take her far in life but also pushes her into an emotional quandary that has no real basis. The humor that is injected throughout the story helps to soften the seriousness of the subject matter. Lucky compares herself to Charles Darwin because they're both scientists and they both collected bugs in their time. Lucky makes up lists about what it means to be a good mother and a bad mother. A good mother never goes outside in a rainstorm and steps on power lines and, following that logic, a bad mother does. A good mother makes sure the husband she marries likes children.

The two other children who complete the trio of youngsters are given strong characterizations. Miles is a five-year-old boy who always wants someone to read his favorite book to him, "Are You My Mother?" Miles is grasping for answers about his missing mother. He traipses around the neighborhood looking for answers and emotional support and for as many cookies as anyone will give him.

Lincoln who is also ten years old is destined to be the President of the United States if his mother has her way. Lucky thinks Lincoln acts presidential when he takes a marker and corrects a road sign that reads, "Slow Children at Play," to "Please Drive Slow: Children Are at Play." He didn't want anyone to think the children of Hard Pan are "slow" or dumb. Lincoln's favorite hobby is knot-tying. Knowing that Lucky is a little down in the dumps, he gives her one of his prize knots. The author uses symbolism when Lucky compares her "knotted up" life to the knot and wishing she could figure out how to untangle both.

Structure

"The Higher Power of Lucky" by Susan Patron, is separated into twenty-three short to medium chapters with titles and are also numbered. The story unfolds as ten-year-old Lucky, the protagonist, is eavesdropping on a twelve-step program meeting. At this event, she hears about the mysterious "Higher Power," which if she can find it will solve

all her problems. The first several chapters establishes the premise of the story which is that Lucky's mother is dead, that her father does not want to live with her and that she is cared for by a guardian. The crisis that Lucky faces or thinks she is facing is that her guardian may be leaving her and she may be placed in a foster home or orphanage.

The middle chapters of the book describe her fears and worries about her uncertain future. The last portion of the book covers the actions that she takes in trying to avoid another abandonment in her young life.

The chapters are made more interesting by the tasteful black and white illustrations by Matt Phelan which accompany most of the chapters.

In an acknowledgment section that follows the story, author Patron thanks many supporters and contributors for their help in writing the book. Among these supporters are a physician who provided pediatric advice and friends and colleagues at the Los Angeles Public Library which Patron considers her second home.



Quotes

"They had to hurry, but she had to hurry slowly, in order not to make a sound." (Chapter 1, p. 5).

"The recovering alcoholics hated to see or smell beer cans left by the recovering smokers and gamblers; the recovering smokers could not stand cigarette butts left by the recovering drunks; and, the recovering over-eaters hated to see candy wrappers left by the recovering drinkers, smokers, and gamblers."(Chapter 1, p. 6).

"Probably the old mother was right now working on her plot to make Brigitte so sad and lonely that she would go back to France and stop being Lucky's Guardian." (Chapter 2, p. 11).

"It is wrong to have snakes in dryers! This is not something that would ever happen in France. California is not a civilized country!" (Chapter 8, p. 54).

"The sky arched up forever, nothing but a sheet of blue, hiding zillions of stars and planets and galaxies that were up there all the time, even when you couldn't see them. It was kind of peaceful and so gigantic." (Chapter 9, p. 61).

"Someone had explained that people like to give the ashes back to the earth, that it was a way for there mother to become part of the desert and always be near Lucky." (Chapter 10, p. 66).

"He [the Captain] said how he was addicted so bad to cigarettes that he even smoked in the shower. He smoked from the first moment he opened his eyes in the morning until he fell asleep at night." (Chapter 11, p. 71).

"But the passport was enough. The only reason people need a passport is when they travel from one country to another country. Now she realized what was going on." (Chapter 11, p. 79).

"The dress felt like a pile of feathers, almost too light and silky to touch. It made Lucky feel she should wash her hands. It was a dress you would wear only for something very important, like coming to California to become someone's guardian." (Chapter 16, p. 101).

"The feel of the air, soft and nearly still, was something you usually wouldn't even



notice. But now, after the dust storm, it felt like a kindness, a special thoughtful anonymous gift." (Chapter 21, p. 127).

"People on Earth were very, very lucky to have their exact moon. They could have gotten a little puny moon like some of the other planets, and that would have totally messed up the oceans and the tides. Or their moon could have been too close or too far away." (Chapter 21, p. 127).

"For some reason, Brigitte said, 'You know if anyone ever hurt you I would rip their heart out.'" (Chapter 22, p. 132).



Topics for Discussion

How does Lucky learn about the Higher Power? What does she think she will be able to do if she attains her Higher Power? What would have to happen for Lucky to think that she reached her rock bottom?

What happened to Lucky's mother? Why doesn't her father live with her? What relationship does Brigitte have with Lucky's father?

What is Lucky afraid of throughout most of the story? What confirms some of her fears? What could she have done to avoid a lot of her worries?

What does Lincoln's mother want him to be? What is Lincoln's favorite hobby? What does the gift that Lincoln gives to Lucky represent to her?

What does Brigitte find in the dryer? Why does Lucky think it might be an opportunity to show Brigitte that she is a hero? Why does the thing in the dryer make Brigitte think of France?

Why does Miles always want Lucky to read his book to him? Why is Miles fascinated with the story of Chesterfield the burrow and her baby? Where is Miles' mother? How did Lucky find out where Miles' mother was?

What are the Three Signs that tells Lucky that it was the perfect day to run away? What person almost ruins Lucky's escape plans? Why do Lucky's meanness glands come out when Miles stops by when she's getting ready to run away?