

# **The Lust Lizard of Melancholy Cove Study Guide**

**The Lust Lizard of Melancholy Cove by Christopher  
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## Plot Summary

The town constable of Pine Cove, Theo Crowe kicks a twenty-year drug habit about the time an ancient sea beast, along with the good intentions of the town psychiatrist, stirs the town into a lustful frenzy. Theo and his friends solve the mysteries and send the beast back to the ocean depths, while busting the county Sheriff for running a crack house. By the time the beast leaves, new love is blossoming everywhere in the town.

The novel begins with the death of Bess Leander. Theo feels that something is not quite right about Bess' suicide. His meager investigation consists of collecting Bess' antidepressants and asking Val Riordan, the town psychiatrist about the pills. Sheriff Burton reminds Theo to keep the death out of the news, and Theo obliges at first. Val worries that the statistical rate of suicide and antidepressants could mean many more deaths in town. She decides to switch all of her patients to a placebo, blackmailing the pharmacist to help her. About the same time, a giant beast wakes from his deep ocean slumber. He comes ashore, drawn by the smell of depression, and the sound of his old enemy playing the blues at the bar. When the beast tries to make love to a fuel truck, his gills are burned in the explosion. He disguises himself as a mobile home while he heals and makes friends with the town crazy lady, Molly.

Theo gets busy after the explosion and forgets about his drugs. After the explosion, the townspeople seem much crazier. Then a boy goes missing. Theo finds Bess' widower, Joseph, with a young waitress, which makes him question Bess' suicide even more. The Spider, the county sheriff department information nerd, gives Theo the autopsy report, which makes it clear that Bess did not kill herself. He also warns Theo about the Sheriff. When Theo confronts Joseph, Joseph takes him to the secret crack house on the ranch and confesses to murdering Bess and drug trafficking for the Sheriff. Joseph plans to have the crack crew kill Theo; however, Theo escapes when the crack crew and Joseph are all eaten by the hungry sea beast.

Theo follows the Sheriff to a cave by the beach, where the people have been drawn to the beast. Theo gets trapped in the cave with the beast and the pilgrims. Before the Sheriff's bribed SWAT team can flush them out, the blues guitarist, enemies with the sea beast from fifty years ago, draws the beast out of the cave, with pilgrims hanging on tightly. The beast gets free to go attack his old enemy. The guitarist gives the guitar to the pharmacist, who has a sea creature fetish. The beast eats the pharmacist, clearing Val's reputation. Molly rejects the beast and tells him to go back to the ocean now that he has healed. Theo catches the Sheriff before he can escape, and with the Spider's and all the witnesses' help, puts the Sheriff in jail for life.



# Admitting You Have a Problem, Prologue and Chapters 1-3

## Admitting You Have a Problem, Prologue and Chapters 1-3 Summary

Pine Cove is a small coastal tourist town that gets turned upside down when Bess Leander appears to commit suicide; the town psychiatrist decides to take all her patients off anti-depressants, and an ancient sea beast comes ashore looking for food and love. A wide cast of characters come together to solve the mysteries that develop, while the town constable kicks a twenty-year drug habit and finds out he is a capable law enforcement officer.

In Chapter One, Theo, Pine Cove's constable for the last eight years, goes on the call to investigate Bess Leander's suicide. The Emergency Medical Technicians argue about the woman and her death. Theo reluctantly radios the San Junipero Sheriff's Department. Then he talks with Joseph Leander, the widower left alone with two daughters. Joseph tells Theo that Bess had seen the town psychiatrist, Valerie Riordan, who had prescribed pills that had seemed to be helping. Joseph says that Bess was an obsessive cleaner but not depressed. Theo gets the pills from the medicine cabinet. He sends the head deputy to question Joseph. Theo tells the deputy that there was no note, but it is clearly a suicide. He wants to talk to the psychiatrist. The deputy, John Voss, tells him to stay out of the investigation.

As Theo leaves the Leader's house, he gets a call to break up a fight at the Slug even though it is early morning. He arrives to find Molly Michon, an actress, biting a stranger's leg. Mavis, the bar's owner, stands over Molly with a baseball bat. Theo stops her from hitting Molly and handcuffs Molly. Theo gets Molly off the man. The man does not want to press charges, but Mavis says Molly cannot come back to the bar. Theo puts Molly into his car and drives her home. He asks if she is taking her medication. He offers to have the psychiatrist call in a refill, since he is going to see her anyway. Theo tells Molly to stay home for awhile, except for grocery shopping. He tells her to call the next time she has a problem with someone.

In Chapter Two, an ancient sea beast wakes from a deep sleep and starts his ascent toward Pine Cove, remembering the delicious taste of people. Meanwhile, Mavis hires a man to sing the blues at the bar. Vance comes in and tells everyone about Bess hanging herself. Theo goes to see Val Riordan, the town psychiatrist. When he describes Bess' hanging, Val forms a mental picture of her patient's suicide. She talks broadly about Bess' case and medication, assuring Theo there was no indication that Bess was suicidal. As Theo is leaving, he asks Val to check on Molly. Val resolves to change her ways, fearing that too many more people will die from her lack of involvement with her patients.



In Chapter Three, Theo returns home to find seven messages on his answering machine to call Sheriff Burton. Theo wants to think about what his ex-girlfriends might have told Val about his drug habit or sexual performance. Theo calls Sheriff Burton, who yells at him for removing evidence from the crime scene. Burton insists that Theo return the pills to the Leander's home and to keep the suicide from making the news. Burton reminds Theo not to try to investigate or act like a real law enforcement officer. Theo leaves to return the pills.

Val thinks about the oath she had sworn when she became a doctor. Val thinks about Bess' suicide and feels sure she (Val) needs to change her ways so someone else does not die. She calls Winston Krauss, the pharmacist. He thinks she is calling about Molly, showing that everyone already knows the gossip about the morning's fight. Val instead asks him to replace all her patient's prescriptions with a placebo. Winston objects, but Val persuades him because she threatens to tell people about his secret sexual obsession with marine animals.

## **Admitting You Have a Problem, Prologue and Chapters 1-3 Analysis**

Chapter 1 introduces Theo, who is just playing around in law enforcement. The Sheriff has persuaded him into the elected post. Theo does not like being a cop; however, he feels powerless because of the way the Sheriff treats him and holds his drug use over his head. The powerlessness bothers Theo. The conversations with the EMTs throw doubt on the idea that Bess hanged herself, but at this point in the novel, Theo does not quite realize that there is doubt. His conversation with the detective is full of the conflict between Theo and the Sheriff's department. Chapter 1 also introduces Molly as the town crazy lady. Theo does not know about her fame, but he is attracted to her. He feels like he should not be attracted to her, though, because everyone thinks she is crazy. Theo's discussion with Molly introduces the drug theme, drawing attention to the difference between recreational and pharmaceutical drugs.

In Chapter 2, the sea beast wakes. Mavis wants to hire Catfish to sing the blues because her business at the bar is so poor. Catfish's fingers provide a foreshadowing of his connection to the sea beast with an image of them "waving like tentacles" (Chapter 2, p. 19). Chapter 2 also introduces Val Riordian and her motives. She has only become a doctor to please her father. Her husband left her after bringing her to the small town of Pine Cove. She responds to her anger by her current non-involved, prescription-centered practice. Theo and Val's discussion about the antidepressants adds to the drug theme, again distinguishing between pharmaceuticals and recreational drugs. When she hears the news of Bess' death, she realizes that if the statistics are right, she could end up with two hundred suicides of Pine Cove residents in her care. The thought frightens her so much she decides to do something drastic.

Chapter 3 presents more of the history of how Theo has become constable and the conflict between him and Sheriff Burton. Sheriff Burton does not want to hear anything out of Pine Cove for his own reasons. He does not want Theo to investigate anything.



Theo does not yet realize that he specifically does not want Theo investigating Bess' death. As Val thinks about her medical oath, the reader learns more about Val and her motives, including the way she turned to materialism after her husband rejected her. She convinces herself not to let another patient commit suicide. She uses confidential information about Winston, the pharmacist, and his sea creature fetish (an important plot point) to blackmail him into helping her pay her penance. She resolves to treat her patients with therapy instead of drugs going forward.



# Admitting You Have a Problem, Chapters 4-6

## Admitting You Have a Problem, Chapters 4-6 Summary

In Chapter Four, an artist named Estelle Boyet is the first to feel the effects of the placebo substituted for her antidepressant. Her paintings of the ocean become dark. Estelle goes to the Head of the Slug saloon instead of the group session for widows that Val suggests. At the saloon, she finds many people who are also unknowingly suffering withdrawal from their medication. Theo is stationing himself at the bar, since that is where he is usually needed. Estelle talks with Theo, who comments on the strange goings on in Pine Cove and how busy he has been lately. Estelle surprises herself by staying to listen to the music until closing. Catfish, the bar's new blues guitarist, persists in inviting Estelle out to the beach. At the beach, Catfish is miserable. He admits to only inviting her to the beach because Theo had told him Estelle paints the sea. He serenades Estelle, hoping to get lucky, when fish start flopping onto the beach. Catfish insists that they leave immediately. As they escape, they hear the roar of the sea beast. Catfish leaves his shoes, remembering the sea beast. He promises to tell Estelle when he calms down.

In Chapter Five, the sea beast continues his ascent. He is lured to land by the smell of depression running rampant in Pine Cove. He hears the sound of his enemy and roars in response, as he adapts to being on land for the first time in fifty years. The scene shifts to Gabe Fenton, who is an animal behavior scientist. Gabe's dog Skinner wakes him with his barking at three in the morning. While up, Gabe looks at his computer to watch his tagged rats of Pine Cove. They are moving quickly and all together away from the shore. Gabe knows that something unusual is happening. Gabe calls a seismology lab, wondering if the rats could be predicting an earthquake and feels like a fool as he rules out that possibility. He takes Skinner out to verify the phenomenon. The Sea Beast looses the urge to kill his enemy and sends his signal to have prey waiting for him, quickly eating the creatures assembled on the beach. He hears a rumble that sends him back to thoughts of sex. He sees a Texaco fuel truck, and thinks it is coming on to him. The sea beast makes his move. Meanwhile, Estelle pours Catfish a cup of tea and asks for his promised explanation. She tries to make Catfish go back to the beach, which scares her even more than the beast.

In Chapter Six, Catfish tells his story about his blues partner from fifty years ago. The blues partner, Smiley, wants Catfish to give Smiley the blues so they can make it big as blues musicians, but nothing seems to work. Catfish changes his strategy, hoping to bring on the blues through disappointment. He takes Smiley on a trip to catch the biggest catfish in the Gulf, building up the possibilities on the way. While they are fishing, Catfish snags something and Smiley ties the rope to the car and starts driving off to pull it out. They pull out the biggest catfish either had ever seen, but it screams like a woman. Something from out in the water scares Catfish even more. They drive



off, with the catfish dragging along behind. Finally, they stop and look at it, and see that it is not a catfish. It has legs.

## **Admitting You Have a Problem, Chapters 4-6 Analysis**

Chapter 4 introduces Estelle Boyet, one of the first of Val's patients to feel the effects of the switched medication. She is an artist grieving for her dead husband and afraid of everything. She is running away from conflict and has an ironic meeting with Theo, who is also running away from conflict, at least from the Sheriff's office. The Head of the Slug Saloon, the town bar, is full of images of sadness. Estelle feels tricked when Catfish convinces her to go to the beach. However, Catfish is the one weary of the ocean. He knows to get away when they start seeing strange things by the beach.

The Sea Beast is drawn to Pine Cove by the rampant depression running through the town. He hears the sound of his enemy, which draws him to come ashore. The sea beast can also call his food to him by sending a signal that makes them feel good. Chapter 5 introduces Gabe Fenton, the biologist, and his dog Skinner. Gabe notices his tagged rats behaving strangely, and he is determined to find out why. The sea beast, full of food, forgets about his enemy and thinks about love. He sees the shiny fuel truck, about his size, and thinks it would make a good mate. In Chapter 6, Catfish tells the story of how he enraged the sea beast fifty years ago by catching its young. This chapter presents more of Catfish's character and history.





# Admitting You Have a Problem, Chapters 7-9

## Admitting You Have a Problem, Chapters 7-9 Summary

In Chapter Seven, a truck driver named Al sits in his fuel truck while the truck is pumping fuel into the Texaco's underground tanks. While the sea beast tries to mate with the truck, the truck explodes, killing Al, and sending the sea beast flying. The sea beast retreats to water. Molly, the actress, dumps one pill of her medication down the garbage disposal before she goes outside to practice her Kendra sword routine in the middle of the night. She sees the explosion and later hears something moving in the creek bed. She rushes inside to hide. Theo wakes from the sound of the explosion and gets a phone call about the explosion. Theo arrives on the scene and begins shaking. He has left his habitual marijuana at home in the rush. Theo talks with Robert Masterson, the volunteer fire chief, who recognizes Theo's symptoms of withdrawal. Theo follows the burnt trail made by the sea beast to check it out. He wipes a large, unexplainable footprint from the mud.

Chapter Eight begins with the sea beast, who cannot return to the ocean until his gill trees heal from the burns. He turns into a trailer home and hides at the trailer park. Molly sees the beast crawl out of the creek and turn into a trailer. She questions her sanity and finally decides to go take a look. When she pokes the trailer with her sword, it shrinks back. Then, Molly began to get a wonderful sense of well-being. She watches the windows open like eyes and the door open like a mouth, and she immediately runs into her own trailer to get away. Meanwhile, Estelle and Catfish talk after making love. Estelle sees the fires from the explosion, but Catfish distracts her with more lovemaking.

Mikey, a ten-year-old paperboy comes to the Fly Rod Trailer Court to deliver his papers in Chapter Nine. He is happy to see Molly is home. He decides to practice his pitch to get Molly to subscribe to the paper on the new trailer next door to her. Molly is watching the part in her last movie that ended her career, remembering how the director discarded her when she got her scar. She tries to warn the kid, but he does not move. Molly watches as the sea beast, disguised as a trailer, eats Mikey. Theo has spent the day at the site of the fuel truck explosion without a single hit of pot. He talks to the arson investigator, who believes the accident was just a random mishap that caused the explosion. Vance joins them with the presumed ashes of the truck driver. Then Theo sees Gabe Fenton, who is still trying to figure out what is going on with his tagged rats. Gabe shows Theo his computer data, and explains that ten of the rats moved away from the crowd and headed for the ranchland and back to the shore. Theo does not care about the rats, but invites Gabe for pizza and beer. On the way, he shows Gabe the strange footprint. At the pizza parlor, they discuss the possibilities for a footprint of what Theo thinks was a talon. Gabe assures Theo that what he is suggesting is impossible. Theo lets Gabe know that he is insinuating that the pot is to blame. Theo gets a call about Mikey missing and has to leave to begin the search.



## Admitting You Have a Problem, Chapters 7-9 Analysis

Chapter 7 advances the plot when the sea beast cannot return to the sea until his burned gill trees heal. This chapter shows Molly's eccentricity. She has stopped taking her medication and is working out with a sword in the middle of the night. Theo rushes to the scene of the truck explosion without his usual drug crutch. Robert, the fire chief, offers to help Theo quit his Sneaky Pete addiction. Theo is embarrassed, but he declines. He thinks the footprint he sees in the mud by the creek is a hallucination and stamps out the evidence before anyone else notices.

In Chapter 8, the sea beast shows he can change shape by becoming a mobile home. Molly thinks this is a hallucination. Molly knows what symptoms to look for with her schizophrenia. She analyzes her current condition, complete with her own narrator. This gives us more information about her character, but it also establishes her as a credible witness, although no one in town will believe her. Estelle and Catfish are the first to feel the lustful effects of the sea beast.

Chapter 9 introduces Mikey, the sea beast's first victim, as a nosy little boy. When the sea beast calls its prey, it makes them feel good. This chapter also presents more character development for Molly, explaining why her movie career ended. Theo sees a little of himself in Gabe, who is a little nerdy. Gabe is still trying to figure out what happened with the rats. Theo wants to ask Gabe about the footprint, but not enough of it remains. Theo thinks Gabe wants to blame the drugs when Theo describes what he has seen. Theo has to leave when he finds out that Mikey is missing.



# Admitting You Have a Problem, Chapters 10-12

## Admitting You Have a Problem, Chapters 10-12 Summary

Chapter 10 begins in Val Riordan's office, where she is overwhelmed by her increased load of sex-crazed patients unknowingly taken off their medications. Val catches Chloe, her new receptionist, masturbating in the reception area. Chloe asks Val for help with her excessive sex drive, and is disappointed with the non-prescription advice Val offers instead. Meanwhile, Molly is still watching the disguised trailer. She watches Theo talking to some of her neighbors. She stops him from standing in front of the dragon-trailer (sea beast), noticing the look on his face that matched Mikey's before he was eaten. Theo asks Molly about Mikey, and she lies that she has not seen him. The sea beast seems to wink at her for covering for him. Theo realizes that he has gone a whole day without smoking any pot when Sheriff Burton calls. Burton insists that Theo makes sure no one searches his ranchland for Mikey. Burton thinks Mikey hasn't been missing long enough anyway but agrees to search the ranchland himself.

In Chapter 11, Estelle is finishing all her recent paintings by adding the sea beast. She and Catfish argue about the beast until Catfish finishes his story. Catfish and Smiley want to celebrate their big catch, expecting to get five hundred dollars for it, but no one will give them credit. So they exchange hunks of catfish meat for booze, a bath, and whores. While trying to sleep in the car, Catfish and Smiley are attacked by the Ku Klux Klan. However, they get away when the Klansmen start getting eaten by the mother of the fish they caught. While Smiley is trying to retrieve the remaining fish to collect the reward, he gets eaten as well. Catfish ends up in prison for hitting the man who refused to give Catfish the reward because only the head was left of the giant catfish. After he gets out, he spends the next fifty years on the road. Catfish tells Estelle that he has been telling people about the beast all those years, but no one believed him. Catfish thinks the beast is the mother of the fish he caught, coming to eat him, and that everyone else is safe.

In Chapter 12, Molly is still watching the trailer as well as her old movies when she receives a visit from two ladies, Marge and Katie, who hope to get her signature supporting school prayer. She sees it as a chance to practice her sanity and talk to normal people. As the three women talk about school prayer, Molly offends them while pointing out their hypocrisy. She takes them next door to show them that she has felt the holy spirit. Meanwhile, Theo is encouraged by all the people helping to look for Mikey. He catches Joseph Leander fornicating with a young waitress. Theo gets angry but asks if they have seen Mikey. He decides not to arrest them for indecent exposure and gets on with his missing person case. He regrets not investigating Bess' death more after seeing her widowed husband act in such an inappropriate manner. Molly stands



next to the disguised trailer with the ladies. She sees them feeling the same thing she feels, the good feeling the beast creates. She decides at the last minute to send them away instead of letting them get eaten. When they leave, Molly loses her fear of the trailer, and the beast changes shape as Molly talks to him and names him Steve. Steve puts on the lost puppy act and convinces Molly to take care of him.

## **Admitting You Have a Problem, Chapters 10-12 Analysis**

In Chapter 10, Val assumes that the town's sudden lustful behavior is a side effect of taking everyone off their antidepressants. Val is trying to make things right, but she feels she is going to have to work hard to make up for her past non-involvement. Molly feels sane as she watches the inexplicable dragon trailer. Molly recognizes the look on Theo's face in front of the sea beast as the one Mikey had before getting eaten. Since Theo has treated her well, at least better than most people in town, she does not want him to get eaten. Theo's attraction to Molly is increasing, but he still thinks it is crazy to want her. He is also amazed that he has gone a whole day without pot. He is further amazed at how well he is handling the new responsibilities with the explosion and missing child. Sheriff Burton's secret risks exposure with the disappearance of Mikey. Theo agrees to let Burton search the ranchland himself, but it is starting to be more obvious that Burton is hiding something.

Catfish finishes his story, which brings up issues of race relations as part of Catfish's past. Catfish has been called crazy his whole life trying to tell people his story. Estelle draws attention to the similarities between Catfish's story and Hemmingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*. Estelle clarifies Molly's role as the town crazy lady.

In Chapter 12, Molly talks to the ladies Marge and Katie, trying to practice being normal, but she enjoys making them squirm from their hypocrisy. She intensely dislikes the ladies' insincerity. She wants to show them up by taking them to the dragon trailer. When Theo finds Joseph and Betsy in the park, the red flags that originally bothered him at Bess' death come back to him. He decides to do some more investigating after finding Mikey. Molly decides at the last minute keep Marge and Katie from getting eaten and enjoys her feeling of superiority over them, since they seem a little crazy themselves. Molly loses her fear, but the sea beast makes her feel so good that she decides to help him in spite of her reservations. Her comment that Val will prescribe medication in response to the scene adds to the drug theme. She names the sea beast Steve, after the dead goldfish in her freezer.



# Peer Pressure, Chapters 13-15

## Peer Pressure, Chapters 13-15 Summary

The second part of the book and Chapter 13 begin with Jenny Masterson listening to all the conversation at H.P.'s Café as the residents come out to breakfast in record numbers. Many are either talking about the missing Mikey or last night's sexual adventures. Molly comes in, hoping to cash her disability check. Theo talks Jenny into cashing the check, even though Molly has been banned from the café for life. As Molly leaves, she runs into Gabe and asks him a science question. Meanwhile, Theo approaches Val, trying to get more information about Bess Leander. Val refuses to talk about her, but Theo mentions that he caught Joseph having sex with a girl half his age the night before. Jenny overhears and cannot wait to hear Betsy's reaction. Gabe approaches Theo and Val, hoping for an invitation. Gabe shows Val the odd rat behavior on his computer, explaining that he found some of the diverging animals copulating excessively. Gabe and Val talk about animal behavior. Gabe asks if they have seen anything unusual in the last two days. Val cannot answer, but Theo says the town has gone crazy. Jenny agrees. Val leaves, not promising Theo any more information on his pursuit of investigating Bess' death. Val connects with Gabe. Theo wonders if they should test the water, and Gabe agrees to do some basic tests. Theo asks about the diverging rats. There are four missing, which puzzles Gabe. He mentions where he lost track of them, which happens to be the same spot that Mikey was last seen. Gabe asks about Val and mentions that Theo is looking more alert. Jenny overhears Estelle and Catfish arguing about the beast as well. Catfish wants to keep it secret, because he is tired of being called crazy.

In Chapter 14, Molly goes into the hardware store and buys some roofing materials. The men at the counter want to humiliate her because she is a woman and should be helpless in a hardware store. Molly is self-sufficient but ends up getting one of them to offer to help. Theo picks some of his pot plants to use as a bribe. He goes to see the Spider, the information specialist in the San Junipero Sheriff's Department. Theo asks for Bess Leander's autopsy report and advice on the missing Mikey. The Spider tells Theo that Bess' body didn't look like a hanging victim, and that the toxicology report identified no Zoloft in Bess' body. The Spider does not have anything new to offer Theo on finding Mikey. He does advise Theo to keep a low-profile if he pursues further investigation of Bess' death. He warns Theo to watch out for the sheriff. Molly goes to the pharmacy for Neosporin, having to threaten the pharmacy clerks to allow her to buy a whole case.

Chapter 15 begins with Molly treating Steve's wounds with the Neosporin and talking to him. Les, the hardware store clerk, arrives. Molly encourages him to look at the supposed roof damage from inside the trailer. Steve knows Molly has brought this as food for him. Molly flashes Les a view of her bare breasts as Steve eats Les. Estelle has an appointment with Val, where she confesses her relationship with Catfish and her fears that he will leave because of the sea beast. Estelle tells Val she has not been



taking her medication. Val suggests that Catfish and Estelle come together for a session the next day. Estelle has to track Chloe in the bathroom, still masturbating constantly, to make the appointment. Val thinks about Estelle's comments and new love. She gets a call from Theo, who tells her about Bess not taking her antidepressants. Val realizes that her placebo experiment was unnecessary. Theo asks if Bess had a heart condition. Val finally tells Theo some of what Bess had said, about Joseph not being involved in their family life. Theo tells Val that Gabe is interested in her.

## Peer Pressure, Chapters 13-15 Analysis

Chapter 13 introduces Jenny, the gossip-collecting waitress at H.P.'s Café. Theo helping Molly cash her check is good for their friendship. The way Molly acts toward Gabe explains why people in town think she is crazy, but she just says what she thinks and enjoys throwing people off guard. Theo asks Val what she thinks about Joseph and his date from the night before. Gabe understands that something really strange is happening. When Gabe tells Theo and Val about his findings with the rats, Val wonders if the strange rat behavior could have any connections with the strange behavior in her patients, which she assumed is her doing. This chapter lays the groundwork for Val and Gabe to get together. Theo needs both of them to solve the mysteries. As Estelle and Catfish argue about the beast, Catfish wants to keep it secret, because he is tired of being called crazy. Jenny overhears them talking, which is important to the plot.

In Chapter 14, Molly gets a kick out of being called crazy. She is trying to lure the hardware store guys to the trailer park, so she can feed Steve. Theo is disgusted by his drug habit. He cannot understand how he quit so easily and still has some fear about the future. This chapter introduces the Spider. Theo bribes the Spider to help him. He knows something is going on with the Sheriff, and Theo does not want to get in trouble with him. The Spider gives him enough information to move forward on both of his cases. Molly takes the role as crazy lady as if she were acting again, enjoying the effect she has on the pharmacy clerks.

In Chapter 15, Molly is trying to help Steve get better and get something to eat. She appreciates her role as crazy lady in the odd situation. Estelle is worried that now that she has opened herself up to Catfish, he will leave her. Val is trying to treat patients with therapy, so she encourages Estelle and Catfish to come for couples counseling. Estelle's account makes Val aware of the sea beast. Estelle's session with Val also brings up issues of intense feelings. Estelle is worried about losing a part of herself. Val is jealous of Estelle's new love and craves that for herself; however, then she doubts herself thinking she needs to call her own psychiatrist. When Theo gives Val the news about Bess' death, Val is overwhelmed. Val understands that Theo thinks Joseph may have killed Bess and is more cooperative in giving Theo information now that she does not feel responsible for Bess' death. The overriding emotion Val has, however, is excitement that Gabe is interested in her.





# Peer Pressure, Chapters 16-19

## Peer Pressure, Chapters 16-19 Summary

Chapter 16 opens with Mavis despairing about how her business at the Saloon has plummeted. Les' wife calls looking for him. Mavis encourages Catfish to play louder so the customers will drink more. Molly crashes Les' truck into the dumpster behind the saloon. Walking home, she sees Katie and Marge approaching Steve. Molly stops them from getting eaten and sends them home. The sound of Catfish's electric guitar reaches them, which makes Steve angry. Theo goes to see Joseph Leander and blurts out his suspicions that Joseph has killed his wife. Joseph does not admit anything and asks Theo to leave.

In Chapter 17, Molly takes Steve to look for cows for food. While Theo is driving to Molly's place, the Spider calls him to warn him about his interview with Joseph. Sheriff Burton calls as well and threatens Theo for not leaving Bess' case alone. Molly compares the results of Steve eating cows to a scene in one of her movies. Steve cannot stomach the cows and is still hungry. Theo chops down his pot plants and burns them. While he is smashing his bong collection, he hears guns at the ranch. On the ranch, two men are fighting in the methamphetamine lab when one of them senses something strange. He goes to check it out and does not come back. Molly arrives with Steve. The other man screams. Theo hears the scream and ignores Sheriff Burton's warnings (and common sense) to stay off the ranch. Theo brings his gun with bullets, but Joseph arrives before he can leave. Joseph now wants to talk.

Val is struggling to figure out the right thing to do for her patients in Chapter 18. She decides that taking all her patients off antidepressants without knowledge or warning is no better than having put them all on antidepressants without talking more with them in the first place. Val calls Winston at the pharmacy and tells him to stop substituting her patient's drugs with the placebo. He refuses, looking forward to a trip to the Cetacean Research Center on Grand Bahama with the extra money he is making. She cannot blackmail him, because Winston threatens to blow the whistle on Val's unethical practice. While Joseph holds a gun on Theo, Joseph tells Theo the truth about Bess. Joseph has been making deliveries for Sheriff Burton's methamphetamine lab and getting rich off the job. When Bess finds out about it, Joseph uses some foxglove from Bess' garden to brew some deadly tea. He makes her death look like a suicide because the herb is nearly undetectable, unless someone is looking for it. Joseph takes Theo to the lab and uses Theo's handcuffs to lock him to a chair in the lab. Joseph notices the strange house trailer as he goes to find the two men who should be there. Molly tells Steve to turn back into the house trailer before Joseph and Theo see him. Molly gets on Steve's roof, and when Joseph comes out looking for the drug crew, she tells him they went into the trailer. Joseph calls her crazy, and when he will not apologize, she tells Steve to eat him. Steve sends Molly his lust signal, and Chapter 19 is a short view of their inter-species sexual romp, which smashes Theo's Volvo in the process.



## Peer Pressure, Chapters 16-19 Analysis

In Chapter 16, Mavis is sad that her sudden upturn in business seems to be over now that the whole town is having so much sex. Molly covers for Steve by wrecking Les' truck behind the bar. Marge and Katie are drawn to Steve because of the effect he has on depressed people. They interpret the good feeling as religious. Molly keeps Steve from eating them, knowing their disappearance would cause more problems. When Steve hears Catfish playing the electric guitar, he remembers his anger at his enemy. Theo gains confidence in his abilities as constable. Theo, already suspicious of Joseph, notices the new TV in the living room when he goes to ask more questions about Bess. He is inexperienced at this type of law enforcement, he blurts out his accusation. Joseph handles it well, saying he loved his wife.

In Chapter 17, Molly tries to understand why she is helping Steve. The plot advances as she takes him on the ranch to eat cows, and Steve cannot digest the dairy cows. The Spider is trying to protect himself, knowing Theo is getting himself into trouble. Theo realizes that Joseph must have a direct line to the Sheriff, when the Sheriff calls next. The Sheriff threatens Theo, and Theo is starting to think about challenging the Sheriff. He hacks down his pot patch and burns it. Sheriff Burton's hold over him is gone. However, he feels a sense of loss as he gets rid of the evidence of his longterm drug habit. Molly finds the crack house and allows Steve to eat the drug and security crew. Theo's increasing confidence is somewhat misguided, encouraging him to do stupid things. Joseph decides to get rid of Theo.

Val is in a difficult position in Chapter 18. She realizes by trying to make things right for her patients, she has made things worse, and now she has Winston and the law to worry about as well. Winston is really looking forward to a trip that will allow him close contact with sea creatures. Joseph tells Theo the truth, expecting that Ignacio will kill him, and that being on the ranch, no one will know. Molly sees Joseph holding a gun on Theo, so she feels justified in feeding Joseph to Steve. When Steve and Molly mate, it changes their relationship. Steve is now attached to Molly.





# Peer Pressure, Chapters 20-22

## Peer Pressure, Chapters 20-22 Summary

In Chapter 20, as Theo tries to escape, he knocks his chair over and ends up with his face in the dirt. Instead of more appropriate responses, he thinks about having sex with Molly. Just then, Molly comes into the shed. She asks Theo where his keys are and retrieves them from the smashed Volvo. She leaves the keys where Theo can unlock himself and leaves. Theo eventually gets free, worrying whether his inappropriate lust is brought on by the bondage or death threats. He cannot find Joseph, Molly or the trailer. He sees the strange animal tracks that he had seen the night of the fire. He borrows Joseph's truck to follow the animal track trail. In the meantime, Gabe is helping the rancher, Jim Beer, evaluate the mess that has become of his cows. Gabe assures Jim that he will run some tests as Theo pulls up. Theo lets Jim know he knows about the drug lab. Jim tells him he made the deal with Sheriff Burton to put the drug lab on his land because he did not want to sell the land to pay the \$3 million he owes his ex-wife. Jim tells Theo that the Sheriff wants Theo to live in his cabin to keep people away from the ranch. Theo rages. Theo realizes that he does not want Jim to turn against him and tell Sheriff Burton. Jim leaves and Theo shows Gabe the animal tracks. Gabe thinks it is a hoax, but a hoax pulled off by someone who knows something about the way animals move. Theo realizes that the animal has eaten the people who are missing (Mikey and Joseph and whoever Joseph was going to see). Gabe tells Theo that Les is also missing. Theo wants Gabe to go with him to see Molly. Not only does Theo have a crush on her, he is convinced that she knows what is going on (or is maybe behind it). Gabe insists on going to get dinner first. Sheriff Burton calls Theo and Theo shoots the phone instead of answering it.

In Chapter 21, Gabe and Theo go to the Fly Rod Trailer Court. A group of church people are standing where the trailer next-door to Molly's was, but it is gone. Theo warns them, knowing this was the last place Mikey was seen. Theo encourages the group to leave. Gabe wants Theo to come along on his date with Val. Steve thinks about the time he was female. As a female, he eats his lovers after lovemaking. However, he has no inclination to eat Molly. Val waits for her date with Gabe. She accepts Theo joining them. Theo tells Val that Joseph killed his wife. He also tells her about the crank lab and the other aspects of the afternoon, except his theories about the giant animal tracks. Gabe tells her about the serotonin levels of the diverging rats. Val says they are depressed. Theo mentions the monster. Val says that one of her patients mentioned a sea monster. Jenny overhears and knows it was Estelle because she heard Estelle and Catfish talking about the monster. They think maybe Molly started the rumors or is somehow behind the hoax. Theo leaves and Val invites Gabe over to her house.

In Chapter 22, Theo goes inside Molly's trailer to wait for her to come home. He falls asleep watching one of her movies. Molly comes in to get fresh clothes and tells Theo he can stay if he wants. Molly tells Theo what she knows about Steve, especially that he is the last one of his species. Theo is worried not just that Molly will get eaten, but that



she could get into trouble for the people who are missing. Molly takes the guns and goes into the bedroom. When she comes back out in the Kendra costume, she sees Theo looking at the scar on her chest. She tells Theo that it ended her stardom. Molly explains why she is with Steve. She wants Theo to promise to leave her and Steve alone. Theo wants Molly to promise Steve will not eat anyone else. Molly leaves. Gabe is at Val's house, feeling out of place with her antiques. Val brings wine and asks Gabe about the sea monster. Gabe presents his arguments for taking the evidence at face value. Val writes it off to Theo's drug use and Estelle and Catfish having artist imaginations. Gabe presents his evolutionary theory of imagination. He says that civilization protects humans' weaknesses like imagination, depression, and near-sightedness. He says that it also makes sense that a predator would have evolved to prey on weaknesses like depression. They talk about the link between depression and libido, and Gabe lets it slip that he has been feeling horny. Val confesses her actions of taking all her patients off their medication without their knowledge. Then she seduces him.

## Peer Pressure, Chapters 20-22 Analysis

In Chapter 20, Molly does not release Theo because she does not want him to see Steve. This chapter goes deeper into the history between Theo and Sheriff Burton. When Theo sees more tracks and his smashed Volvo, he knows he is not hallucinating this time. He thinks he is following the tracks. Theo realizes that Jim telling Sheriff Burton is worse than the situation he is in now. He wants to protect Jim. Another aspect of the drug theme is Jim's perspective. He has never done drugs. He just needs the money the Sheriff gives him so he does not have to sell his grandfather's ranch. Theo is very upset that so much is happening just when he suddenly stops doing drugs. He thinks he is going insane. Gabe thinks the tracks must be a hoax, even though the evidence looks real. He is excited about the brain chemistry data from the rats that ran and the rats that went back to the beach. Theo knows that Molly knows what is happening.

In Chapter 21, Theo is beginning to assert more authority with the people who are drawn to Steve. He knows they are in danger of disappearing like Mikey and Les. This chapter presents more of Steve's history. Steve senses his consciousness evolving and also senses a warning of upcoming trouble. This chapter advances the plot with Theo getting help from Gabe and Val in solving the sea beast mystery. Val is wondering about her date and lowering her standards. She is worried that if there is a murder investigation that her change of her patients' medication could be revealed. She almost confesses out of paranoia. She also does not want to believe the monster story and wants to blame it on Theo's drug use. However she remembers Estelle's comment about the sea monster in their session, and Jenny corroborates the evidence with what she has heard at the café.

In Chapter 22, Theo wants to talk to Molly. He is also attracted to her. While waiting in her trailer, he realizes that she really was a movie star, so maybe she is not so crazy after all. He warns Molly about Steve, but Molly understands the monster. She knows she will not get hurt. Molly offers Theo her medication in response to his frustration



about his position. Molly appreciates the special feeling that Steve gives her. Val realizes that she has sold her integrity for some antiques and a Mercedes. She is worried about going to jail and needs to confess. She feels she can trust Gabe and also wants sex.



# A Higher Power, Chapters 23-25

## A Higher Power, Chapters 23-25 Summary

In Chapter 23, Steve gains self-consciousness and a sense of time. With a sense of time, come memories of his past. While Gabe and Val are making love, Gabe has a revelation about the rat brains. He realizes that the sea beast can attract mammals with low serotonin levels. They talk about Val's dilemma and wonder whether they should warn someone so the Pine Cove residents do not get eaten. Val suggests they go to couples counseling. They first get dressed and find Theo at Molly's house. Gabe excitedly tells Theo their theory about the creature. Theo responds that Molly has been there and he already knows about the creature. Gabe explains the connection between the increased libido in the town and the monster. Val adds that it may be why Theo could quit his addiction so easily. Theo regrets his lack of law enforcement training. They all decide to go find Catfish.

Chapter 24 begins with Sheriff Burton looking for Theo. He is concerned that Joseph and his second shift drug crew are missing and can't find Jim Beer or Theo either. He calls Theo, who immediately disconnects. Sheriff Burton calls the Spider, who tells him where to look for Joseph's girlfriend, Betsy. Sheriff Burton thinks she can help him find Joseph. He heads to the ranch before he can look for Betsy at H.P.'s café when they open in an hour. Sheriff Burton takes the long way to the ranch house to avoid driving his Cadillac through cow trails and nearly runs over a line of people in choir robes. The people tell Sheriff Burton that the Holy Spirit has called them. Sheriff Burton thinks about escaping before he gets caught. Gabe, Val, Theo, and the dog Skinner go to find Catfish, who refuses to help them. Estelle and Catfish fight and Catfish leaves. Steve and Molly go to a cave by the ocean at the ranch. Molly suggests a swim to help him feel better when the choir robe procession reaches the cave and wants to make a sacrifice.

In Chapter 25, Theo, Gabe, and Val go to H.P.'s café to make a plan for stopping the monster. Jenny warns them when Sheriff Burton pulls into the parking lot. They hide in Howard's office, but Sheriff Burton is only looking for Betsy. Jenny tells him about Betsy's inexplicable need to miss work for a spiritual pilgrimage and that she was headed to the Beer Bar Ranch with others. Sheriff Burton leaves. Jenny tells Theo where the Sheriff went and that he asked about Theo as well. Theo wants to follow him and makes Val lend him her car. He tells Gabe and Val to wait at the saloon until he calls. Theo follows Sheriff Burton, with Skinner in the car, and eventually in his lap. The Sheriff notices the Mercedes following him, and puzzles over the possibilities of what has happened. Theo passes the Sheriff, who only sees the dog. At the cave, Molly makes the pilgrims undress, hoping to deter them from going into the cave. It does not work. A man dressed as a Buddhist monk is the first to go into the cave naked.



## A Higher Power, Chapters 23-25 Analysis

In Chapter 23, Steve's dream is a vision of things to come. He realizes there may not be any more creatures of his kind. Val wants to be offended when Gabe has his revelation while they are making love, but she does not allow him to sneak away. Gabe believes the creature is preying on Val's patients, and that Steve, the creature, makes them feel lustful in order to eat them. Theo's response to their enthusiasm and new-found love is sarcasm. Theo has lost his confidence again, feeling unprepared for the sea creature. He does not run to his drugs or hide, again, however. The decision to find Catfish moves the plot along.

In Chapter 24, Sheriff Burton is starting to get nervous because he cannot find anyone. His disrespect of the Spider is his fatal flaw, but he is surprised that the Spider knows so much about his drug runnings. Sheriff Burton thinks about killing the Spider but is too afraid of what he knows to fire him. The Sheriff is possessive and protective of his car, avoiding the cow trails so he does not get stuck in the mud. The religiously-depressed people of Pine Cove are making a pilgrimage. This crowd of people is an important aspect of the plot in the upcoming chapters. Sheriff Burton finds this odd scene the stimulus to think about using his escape kit. He senses that his secret is about to come out. Skinner's presentation of the scene when Theo, Gabe, and Val ask Catfish for help provides insights into the emotions. Everyone is a little bit sad and scared. Skinner knows to stay away from the sea beast, and wonders why they are headed that way.

Estelle is mad at Catfish for not helping and for not connecting with her. She accuses him of using his art to escape life. Catfish wants to know why she cares so much. She reveals that she has opened her heart for the first time in a long time. She will not tolerate cowardice. Molly realizes that she and Steve are incompatible long term. Molly she knows that Steve's gill trees are better and it is time for him to leave. Steve himself now feels depressed.

Chapter 25 is full of action to advance the plot. Jenny the waitress is a helper, preventing the Sheriff from finding Theo, even though Theo is focusing on finding Joseph first. Jenny also helps Sheriff Burton because she knows Betsy has gone to the cave for spiritual reasons. Val's attachment to her car is a sign of her materialistic self. Letting Theo borrow the car shows she is able to let go of that materialism, if just a little. This is an important aspect of her turning her psychiatry practice around. Skinner being in the car when Theo follows the Sheriff is another key plot point in the upcoming chapters. Molly making the pilgrims undress before coming into the cave is more of her toying with people. She thinks that only a crazy person would go in naked. Either she is wrong about what sane people do, or the pilgrims are all crazy, which puts her in good company. The Sheriff tries to figure out what has gone wrong with his operation. He thinks maybe the Mexican Mafia is after his business, but that solution has too many holes.



# A Higher Power, Chapters 26-28

## A Higher Power, Chapters 26-28 Summary

In Chapter 26, Gabe and Val wait at the Head of the Slug Saloon, where they find Catfish and meet Howard, one of Mavis's regulars at the Saloon and the owner of H.P.'s Café. Val orders a Bloody Mary and Catfish repeats his refusal to help with the sea beast. Mavis and Howard mention that they had caught a monster themselves. Meanwhile, Theo continues following the Sheriff until the Mercedes gets stuck in the mud. He follows on foot toward the rocks. He nearly slips down the hill when someone cocks a gun behind his head. Molly goes through the clothes of the people to find their money, credit cards, and bottles of anti-depressants. She has another psychotic conversation with herself, realizing that Steve is using her.

Chapter 27 begins with Val hearing Mavis and Howard tell their story about the demon they banished ten years ago. Catfish tells his story about being pursued by the monster after he caught the catfish fifty years ago. Gabe and Val tell their theory about the monster's ability to affect brain chemistry. Val even confesses her crime of swapping the anti-depressants for placebos. Mavis reassures Val because of the spike in business she had and yells at Catfish for not helping. Val and Gabe finally decide to try calling Theo, who has been gone over an hour. Sheriff Burton takes Theo's guns and beats him a little, handcuffing him face down on the ground. The Sheriff threatens him for messing with his drug business and asks where his drug crew and Joseph are. Theo tells him he thinks Joseph is dead but cannot come up with a good explanation. Theo's phone rings, and Sheriff Burton wants him to answer it as if nothing is wrong. However, before they answer, they are surrounded by gunfire, which gets Sheriff Burton away from Theo. Molly helps Theo up, with six naked men helping. Sheriff Burton heads for a crevice near the cave, stopped by the sound of Steve roaring. Molly and the men help Theo to the cave. Sheriff Burton thinks about who to call and finally gets the Spider to make private calls to the eight SWAT guys he was bribing to help him. The Spider tells him it will be another 40 minutes before they arrive. Sheriff Burton calls out to Theo.

Molly answers Theo's phone and tells Gabe that Theo is okay and that Theo will call right back. Theo is put off by the aroused naked men and Molly tells him that Steve has had that affect on them. Molly gets the handcuff key and releases him. He gives her a hug, which makes Steve roar again. Sheriff Burton is yelling, and Molly tells him that the roar was Steve, who ate Joseph. She tells the Sheriff that there are many people in the cave and that she is Kendra. Sheriff Burton asks for terms and Molly toys with him. Steve tries to eat Theo.

In Chapter 28, the Sheriff starts to worry how this will end. The Spider calls him back with the information that his team is on the way, and that there is no other way into the cave. Sheriff Burton asks the Spider about the Kendra reference, and the Spider tells him about Molly's movies, as well as her real name. Molly makes Steve spit out Theo before the bones crunch. Theo and Molly laugh on the ground together after Theo is





safe. Sheriff Burton calls in again, telling Theo about the SWAT team on the way. He wants to buy Theo off, but Theo knows the Sheriff will kill him anyway. Theo tells the Sheriff to make an offer, which confirms Theo's suspicion that the Sheriff will never let him walk away from this. Molly warns Steve to leave or he will get killed. Theo answers his cell phone again and tells Gabe they are at the cave. He confirms Gabe's theory about the creatures affect on brain chemistry. Theo begs Gabe to help, knowing the Sheriff is going to kill them all. Gabe tells Theo that they have already told Mavis and Howard and Catfish about the beast. They think about attacking the Sheriff before the SWAT team arrives, but Molly is out of ammunition. Back at the Saloon, they talk about the tradition of making a religious pilgrimage and sacrifice. Gabe cannot convince anyone but Val to come with him. Mavis loans her car and promises to help keep Val out of jail.

## A Higher Power, Chapters 26-28 Analysis

In Chapter 26, Mavis and her regulars at the bar add to the drug theme and the avoiding life theme, as Howard sits there drinking as he has ever since his encounter with a monster. Theo realizes how unqualified he is for his job, as if he plans to remedy his performance if the situation with the Sheriff somehow turns out in Theo's favor. Theo is seeking danger head on, feeling he really has nothing to lose. Molly's narrator is back, ridiculing her for staying with Steve, when he is just using her to get people to eat. She knows it is time for Steve to go, and she'll need to go back to her medication. She recognizes her weakness in mental health.

In Chapter 27, Val has a major change of heart when she feels ashamed of herself for looking down on the people in Pine Cove. All the stories in the bar help in plot development, as Mavis will find a way to help everyone get what they need or deserve. Mavis wants to help Val because of Mavis' recent increase in business. When Theo and Sheriff Burton confront each other, the Sheriff is feeling desperate, hoping that killing Theo and Molly will take care of his problem. However, Theo feels he has nothing to lose, and that gives him confidence. Molly helps him because she likes him and thinks he likes her as well. When Theo and Molly hug, it makes Steve jealous. Molly cannot allow him to eat Theo, though, since Theo is the only person in Pine Cove who seems to like and respect Molly.

In Chapter 28, the Spider helps the Sheriff by calling in the SWAT team members who are in the Sheriff's pocket, but the Spider displays no loyalty to the Sheriff. The Sheriff is starting to get worried. The Sheriff tells the Spider about Kendra, and the Spider knows the reference. He loves Molly's movies. Molly and Theo connect with relief when Steve spits Theo out. Theo knows the Sheriff is planning to kill him no matter what happens. Steve senses the change in Molly and becomes sad.



# A Higher Power, Chapters 29-31

## A Higher Power, Chapters 29-31 Summary

In Chapter 29, Gabe drives Mavis' car to the ranch. He, Val and Howard decide to drive up to where the SWAT team is waiting. Theo and Molly feel pressured to get the people and Steve out of the cave before Sheriff Burton uses gas grenades on them. Theo calls the Spider and asks for evidence to use against Sheriff Burton. The Spider agrees to turn Sheriff Burton in for a rare copy of one of Molly's movies. The Spider sends media and helicopters to help protect Theo. Molly worries about how they will get Steve out of the cave. Sheridan, the SWAT sergeant, gets Gabe, Howard, and Val out of their car, putting them in handcuffs and locking them in a SWAT truck.

In Chapter 30, Theo hears the SWAT team arrive and gets an idea to save Steve. Mavis gets his call and finds a way to meddle in everyone's affairs. She sends Catfish to the pharmacy. Catfish tells Winston to come to the Saloon, or else he will tell everyone about the money he is making on the placebos. At the ranch, Sheridan and Sheriff Burton talk about their weapons, which do not put Sheriff Burton in a much better position than he was without the SWAT team. Sheriff Burton calls to Theo, who stalls for more time to consider the offer. Sheriff Burton tells Sheridan to kill the man in handcuffs. Gabe's dog Skinner is still waiting in the Mercedes. When Catfish returns to the Saloon, Estelle is waiting for him and tells him about Mavis' plan. Mavis offers Winston his most erotic fantasy. Catfish, Estelle, and Winston leave in Catfish's station wagon, with Mavis' instructions to get to the cave from the back way.

In Chapter 31, Theo has Molly tell all the naked pilgrims to get dressed and hang on to Steve's sides no matter what happens. Theo tells Sheriff Burton that he is going to take the offer. Sheriff Burton and Sheridan accept, hoping to take Theo out without anyone else getting hurt or witnessing. The Spider calls Sheriff Burton, hinting that he has changed loyalties. The line goes dead just as the sound of an electric guitar fills the area. Steve roars, hearing the sound of his enemy. Winston sees Steve, and knows that Mavis has told the truth regarding the fulfillment of his erotic fantasy. Steve storms out of the cave, with all the pilgrims hanging on to his back, including Theo and Molly. Steve heads toward the sound of the guitar. Sheriff Burton wants the SWAT guys to shoot Steve, but with all the people hanging on, they cannot get a clear shot. Catfish gets out of the car and hands his guitar to Winston. Sheriff Burton chases Steve, who gets free of the last of the pilgrims. Molly struggles with Theo and breaks free.

Catfish tries to get Winston to leave, but Winston refuses. Winston accepts the guitar from Catfish and plays a few notes. Catfish and Estelle leave. Molly knocks Sheriff Burton down, who has been shooting at, but missing Steve. Winston waits in amorous expectation as Steve approaches. Steve eats Winston. Sheridan stops Sheriff Burton from shooting Molly. The news helicopters arrive. Sheriff Burton kills Sheridan and runs. Theo and Molly watch Winston in the ocean. Steve looks like he is going to come back





to shore, but Molly throws rocks at him and tells him to leave. Sheriff Burton wrecks his car as he tries to escape. He grabs his escape kit briefcase and takes Val's Mercedes.

## A Higher Power, Chapters 29-31 Analysis

In Chapter 29, Gabe, Val, and Howard drive to the ranch in Mavis' bright yellow car, unable to be inconspicuous. Val thinks they are not in danger from the SWAT team, and Howard tries to show her that being smart does not mean she cannot die. Theo wants to confront the Sheriff about the drug lab and put him in jail, but he knows he needs more evidence. He knows how to convince the Spider to help him, as he has always been able to do. The Spider agrees to help him for one of the missing items in his collection of Molly's videos. He sends incriminating evidence and gets the media to go out to the ranch so Theo will not get killed.

In Chapter 30, Theo hears the SWAT team arrive. Molly is upset that the news helicopters are on their way, but Theo tries to reassure her that they will not hurt Steve. Mavis wants to help everyone, and she is savvy enough to get them to do what she wants, which helps wrap up the plot nicely. She knows about Winston's fetish and unwillingness to help Val make things right with the prescriptions. She knows about Catfish's role as the sea beast's enemy. She knows that Estelle loves Catfish and needs help getting him back. She knows Catfish really wants to go back with Estelle. The Sheriff buys time with his offer to Theo, knowing the team does not have enough weapons for the crowd of people in the cave.

Chapter 31 is full of action as the novel's climax. The Spider lets the Sheriff know he is turning him in, without being obvious about it. The Sheriff still thinks he can get out of the mess by killing Theo and Molly. Steve is motivated to get out of the cave finally by the instinctual anger he feels when he hears Catfish's guitar. Winston is willing to lure the beast out to the ocean because he is hoping for an erotic thrill. Sheridan knows the Sheriff is going down, and he wants to make a clean break from the Sheriff and make a deal with the D.A. When he stops the Sheriff from killing Molly, he gets shot, as the Sheriff's desperation increases. It looks like the Sheriff is going to get away, except that he chooses Val's Mercedes when he crashes his car.



# A Higher Power, Chapters 32-33

## A Higher Power, Chapters 32-33 Summary

In Chapter 32, Estelle and Catfish go home together. Theo reels from the excitement, but he is also worried about his job and home. Molly and Theo connect and Molly promises to take her medication to quiet her narrator. Skinner the dog attacks Sheriff Burton and does not let go of his neck until Sheriff Burton stops the car and Theo handcuffs Sheriff Burton. Val and Gabe get out of the SWAT truck. Theo tells Val about Mavis' plan and tells her to keep quiet about her decision to take everyone off their antidepressants. Val, Gabe and Howard give Molly a ride back to town, while Theo deals with the reporters. Theo threatens Sheriff Burton to make him remain silent.

In Chapter 33, life in Pine Cove settles back down to somewhat normal, although with the tracks and eyewitness accounts, the crackpots increase the tourist business. Estelle and Catfish both enjoy commercial success from the art and music they produce. Molly makes money from a surge of interest in her old movies, and Val and Gabe plan marry. Sheriff Burton goes to prison for life. Theo maintains his abstinence from his drug habit and shares his life with Molly. Steve goes back to the depths of the ocean to mourn his lost love until another sea beast approaches him.

## A Higher Power, Chapters 32-33 Analysis

In Chapter 32, Estelle and Catfish are reconciled, and Catfish is ready to face a relationship with her. Theo worries about his job and home. He fears the future without drugs, but he recognizes his strengths, and he and Molly connect. The plot is further wrapped up when Skinner attacks Sheriff Burton, allowing Theo to bring him to justice. Val's crime is cleared when Winston, the only real witness, gets eaten. Theo finally has his confidence when he threatens the Sheriff to stay quiet and deals with the reporters.

Chapter 33 wraps up the drug theme when Theo realizes he has been addicted to pot simply because he is bored. With Molly in his life, he never has to worry about being bored because of her slightly unstable approach to life and the sudden resurgence of interest in her movies. He is confident of his future and abilities as town constable. Val has a new balanced approach to her practice, absolving her of her earlier non-involvement and her unethical decision about the medication of her patients. She is happy now, looking forward to marrying Gabe, which also symbolizes that she has lost some of her materialism and snobbish feeling toward the town. Life also gets back to normal for Steve when a female from his species finds him and they mate.



# Characters

## Theophilus Crowe

Theo is the town constable of Pine Cove. He has a twenty-year long daily marijuana habit, with an extensive bong collection and his own pot victory garden in his back yard. After a drug arrest several years ago, the county Sheriff blackmails Theo into running for (and winning) the town constable position so the Sheriff can manipulate Theo. With the job, Theo gets a cabin just off the Beer Bar Ranch and no questions about his drug habit as long as he keeps a low profile and stays off the ranch. Theo is not really good at anything except empathy and breaking up fights at the Head of the Slug Saloon. He lets Sheriff Burton bully him because he is afraid of him and the possibilities of a drug-free future.

When Bess Leander kills herself, Theo starts asking questions, even though Sheriff Burton threatens him not to do so. Theo backs down, but when a fuel truck explodes at the Texaco, Theo suddenly has more responsibility, more problems in the town, and an inexplicable ability to stop his drugs cold turkey. Theo sees the tracks from the sea beast the night of the explosion and questions it, thinking it is an hallucination. He asks Gabe, the biologist about it, but it has already been covered with mud. Theo looks for Mikey when he goes missing, and the reader realizes that Theo is starting to act like a real cop. As the days pass with more strange events, Theo gains confidence in his ability both to be constable and to stay drug-free.

Theo catches Joseph Leander with a young waitress, which makes Theo question his decision to not investigate Bess' death. He knows he can bribe the Spider with pot but feels disgusted at the hold the drugs have over his (Theo's) life. After he gets information from the Spider, he burns his pot patch and smashes all his drug equipment. He tells Val that Bess' body has no sign of anti-depressants in it according to the toxicology report, and that she did not die from hanging. Theo decides to confront Joseph. When Joseph tells Theo the truth about Bess, Theo also finds out why Sheriff Burton is using him. Theo blunders his way through Joseph's threats, helped by Molly and Steve. Theo sees more tracks and understands what has happened to the missing people. He also understands Molly knows what is happening. Theo is attracted to Molly, not even knowing about her fame. This makes him question himself at first. However, as the mystery with Steve unravels, he decides that having a relationship with a crazy lady is better than the meaningless existence his life has been up to this point.

Feeling he has nothing to lose, because he expects the Sheriff to kill him anyway, he becomes a hero, saving himself, Steve, and all the pilgrims who are drawn to Steve. He ends up showing he is good at being constable. With Molly to keep him from being bored, he has no reason to go back to drugs.



## Valerie Riordan

Val is the psychiatrist in Pine Cove. She becomes a doctor to please her father but is too squeamish to become a surgeon like he is. She prefers the eating disorder patients in her residency. Her husband, a lawyer, brings her to Pine Cove against her wishes. Then he leaves her for another woman and a high profile job. She responds to her rejection by becoming materialistic. She adopts a prescription-centered practice, solving every patient's problems with pills. However, when Bess dies, Val suddenly realizes how uninvolved she has been with her patients. She feels her negligence is to blame for Bess' death, and the guilt bothers her. She decides that taking everyone off their medications unknowingly is better than risking another 200 suicides. She acts rashly on that decision, using her confidential information of the pharmacist's sea creature fetish to make him cooperate with her plan.

When the patients start having withdrawal symptoms from their medications, Val's workload increases. Val assumes that the increase in depression and excess libido is an effect of all her patients going off of their medications. She works hard, trying to pay penance for her past non-involvement. When Estelle tells Val in session about her new love, Catfish, Val is jealous. She wants to fall in love. She questions everything in that desire, even the interest in falling in love. She wants to call her therapist, thinking that desire is irrational. When she and Gabe first go out, she worries whether he is good enough for her. However, she likes him and finds she can trust him. She finds that she is willing to compromise on some of her standards to be with him.

## The sea beast/Steve

The sea beast is an ancient creature, 100 feet long and 25 feet tall. He preys on depressed creatures and human beings and can call prey to come to him with an electric signal that makes the doomed creatures feel good and lustful. He has talon-like front limbs with a thumb to grasp prey, as well as a long tongue that can grab lots of creatures at once. He can change shape. In the past, when he was female, Catfish kills one of his young. He chases Catfish unsuccessfully. He still remembers his old enemy fifty years later after a deep sleep. Steve's overriding needs are food and sex. He tries to mate with a fuel truck and gets burned so badly he cannot return to the ocean until he heals. Steve senses something different about Molly and allows her to treat his burns and find him food. After he has had plenty to eat, he wants sex and has no problem convincing Molly to be with him, although their inter-species relationship is difficult. Steve's attachment to Molly afterward the sex is new to him, having killed his mates after love when he was a female. He knows Molly will protect him, which poses a problem as Molly is trying to save him from getting killed by the SWAT team. He does not want to leave her. Steve's deep memory of his enemy, Catfish, and the sound of his guitar, saves him. The anger drives him out of the cave, and Molly rejects him to get him to go back into the ocean.



## Molly Michon

Molly is the star of "B" grade movies about Kendra the Warrior Babe. When an accident that scars her chest ends her movie career, she is bitter about her rejection. She goes to Pine Cove, but has anger issues that get her banned from places like H.P.'s Café and the bar, and sometimes even lands her in the county mental institution. She is being treated for schizophrenia and knows the symptoms to watch for in case she needs medication. She does not take her medication because of the side effects, but without medication, she has to listen to the narrator in her head judging her. Molly is strong and capable but also eccentric. After the arrival of Steve, she treats being the town crazy lady as if it is another role in a movie, enjoying the reaction people have toward her. Steve makes her feel more special than being in the movies did. However, Molly understands she cannot stay with Steve. She likes Theo because he has always been nice to her, even in difficult circumstances when the other townspeople would like to lock her away for her fits. She also appreciates that Theo likes her without knowing that she is an actress.

## Sheriff John Burton

Sheriff Burton is in his 16th year as county sheriff. He uses Theo to make sure Pine Cove stays quiet. Theo can use his drugs without getting into trouble and does not have to do except break up fights at the bar. He is a right-wing politician who enjoys his power. He starts the crack house on Jim Beer's ranch, paying off Jim and using Theo (unbeknown to Theo) to stay off the ranch. He saves his money and is always ready to escape. He does not have friends, as the SWAT commander, the Spider, and Theo all turn on him in the end.

## Catfish Jefferson

Catfish Jefferson is a blues guitar singer who has been on the road his whole life. In his youth, he tries to help his partner get the blues. He catches Steve's baby, thinking it is a catfish. He tells everyone about the strange creature, but they think he is just a crazy black man. He does not like being called crazy. Steve eats Catfish's friend, and Catfish spends the next fifty years running (with a little time in prison). Catfish wants to keep up his reputation as a lady's man. He is persistent enough to win Estelle; however, he would rather leave Estelle than face Steve. With Mavis' intervention, Catfish ends up staying with Estelle and helping Steve get back to where he belongs.

## Estelle Boyet

Estelle is an artist who makes her living selling seascapes of the Pine Cove shore life. After her husband dies, she leaves her job in the Los Angeles school district as an art teacher to retire in Pine Cove. She fears everything, especially being alone in life. When Catfish wins her heart, she gains courage.



## Gabe Fenton

Gabe has a PhD in animal behavior. He tags rats and studies their behavior. He is excited about the possibilities when he sees the mass exodus from Pine Cove. He is enthusiastic when he shares his findings with his one friend, Theo. He is attracted to Val but is somewhat backwards about romance. Theo helps him along in his romance with Val. Gabe helps Theo in solving the mystery regarding the animal tracks, although he thinks it is a hoax until he sees the smashed Volvo and mutilated cows.

## Mavis Sand

Mavis owns the Head of the Slug Saloon. After much plastic surgery and body part replacement, she has a somewhat jaded view of life. However, she is a problem-solver and is the character who puts all the pieces together to come up with a solution that will help the characters she wants to help and get rid of the characters who need to go away. She wants to help Val because the act of taking everyone off medication increases Mavis' business more than anything else she has tried. By giving Winston his erotic sea creature fantasy, Mavis helps make Val's crime as if it never happened. She also gets Catfish and Estelle back together when Catfish just wants to keep running.

## The Spider

The Spider's name is Irving Nailsworth. He is the third highest ranking officer on San Junipero's Sheriff Department's staff, even though he never works out in the field. He is a nerd who has made himself technologically indispensable. He knows everything that goes on in his area. He turns on Sheriff Burton because of the negative remarks the Sheriff makes about him. He provides evidence to the District Attorney's office to make sure the Sheriff goes to jail a long time. He helps Theo because Theo brings him pot. However, he also offers help independently of the bribes, indicating that he likes Theo for more than the bribe.

## Joseph Leander

Joseph Leander is married to Bess and a whipped man by the look of things. Bess thinks he is a salesman and not very involved with the family. He is actually a driver for the Sheriff's methamphetamine lab and is putting away lots of money. He is having an affair with Betsy, the waitress, but Bess does not know about it. When she follows him, suspicious about an affair, she finds out about his real job. Joseph kills her, using foxglove from her own garden to silence her. He makes it look like she hung herself. He acts ashamed about her antidepressants, but it is a cover for his murder.



## **Bess Leander**

Bess Leander is a woman with a cleaning obsession. She visits Val, knowing she is making her family crazy. She is ashamed of the antidepressants and does not take them. She suspects Joseph of an affair and finds out about his illegal job instead. He uses her prized garden against her by killing her with foxglove tea.

## **Winston Krauss**

Winston is the pharmacist at the Pine Cove Drug and Gift store. He is sexually attracted to marine animals. He is one of Val's patients. She uses his fetish as incentive, along with promises of the money he will make, to convince him to do something illegal and unethical. He does not want to switch the medication with placebos. However, once he starts, he does not want to stop, because he makes enough money for a special trip to swim with dolphins. Mavis has no trouble convincing him to go to the beach with Estelle and Catfish to seek out his greatest sexual fantasy. Steve eats Winston, thinking it is his old enemy.

## **Vance McNally**

Vance is one of the Emergency Medical Technicians.

## **Mike**

Mike is one of the Emergency Medical Technicians.

## **John Voss**

John is the detective for the San Junipero Sheriff's Department. He warns Theo to stay out of the investigation of Bess' death.

## **Al**

Al is a fuel truck driver for Texaco. He is waiting in his truck when the sea beast tries to mate with it. Al dies in the explosion.

## **Robert Masterson**

Robert is the volunteer fire chief and owner of Brine's Bait, Tackle, and Fine Wines. He is a recovered alcoholic and sympathizes with Theo. He is married to Jenny.





## **Mikey Plotznik**

Mikey is a ten-year-old paper boy, known as the collector. He hopes to catch Molly Michon naked on film. He is Steve's first victim in Pine Cove.

## **Chloe**

Chloe is Val's 21-year-old receptionist. Val hires Chloe to help with her increased patient load. Chloe is a recovering bulimic with Goth looks.

## **Katie Marshall**

Katie is a member of the Coalition for a Moral Society, trying to convince Molly to support school prayer, but only on her narrow-minded terms. She dresses like her friend Marge.

## **Marge Whitfield**

Marge is a member of the Coalition for a Moral Society, trying to convince Molly to support school prayer, but only on her narrow-minded terms. She dresses like her friend Katie and acts a little like a robot.

## **Jenny Masterson**

Jenny is Robert's wife, who goes back to her work as a waitress instead of working with her husband. She collects gossip at her job at H.P.'s Café.

## **Les**

Les is a Pine Cove Hardware Store Clerk. He is condescending toward the women who come into the store, hoping to humiliate and humble them. He comes to help Molly roof her neighbor's trailer but becomes Steve's lunch.

## **Ignacio**

Ignacio is one of crew working Sheriff Burton's methamphetamine lab. He is 20 and full of his own success with goals of being the next Mexican mafia godfather. He is the drug lab's security, and Joseph wants him to kill Theo. Instead, Steve eats Ignacio.





## **Miguel**

Miguel is one of crew working Sheriff Burton's methamphetamine lab. He is more down-to-earth than his partner. He sends his money to his wife to buy their own ranch. Miguel also becomes a meal for Steve.

## **Jim Beer**

Jim is a rancher with a sad life. His wife leaves him, taking half of everything he owns. He allows Sheriff Burton to use his ranch for the drug lab in exchange for payments toward the 3 million that Jim owes his wife. He does not want to sell his grandfather's ranch or any part of it.

## **Sergeant Rich Sheridan**

Sheridan is a cop in Sheriff Burton's pocket. He is in charge of the SWAT team operation that comes to the cave to help Sheriff Burton. Sheriff Burton shoots Sheridan when Sheridan tries to talk sense into the Sheriff. Sheridan senses correctly that the incident will be on the news.



## Objects/Places

### Head of the Slug Saloon

The Head of the Slug Saloon is the bar in Pine Cove. Mavis Sand is the owner. It is a dark and dreary place, but people are always there, even starting early in the morning with the regulars.

### Diablo Canyon Nuclear Power Plant

The Diablo Canyon Nuclear Power Plant has a very small leak, which is corrected before anyone but the sea beast notices.

### Fly Rod Trailer Court

The Fly Rod Trailer Court is the mobile home park where Molly Michon lives. The sea beast disguises himself as a trailer next door to Molly.

### The Volvo

The Volvo is Theo's car. Steve crushes it when Steve and Molly make love.

### H.P.'s Café

H.P.'s Café is one of the town restaurants where the locals eat most often. It is the place where Theo first met Molly, after she attacked the espresso machine. That incident causes Howard, the café's owner, to ban Molly from the restaurant.

### Pine Cove Drug and Gift

The Pine Cove Drug and Gift is Pine Cove's only pharmacy.

### Sneaky Pete

Sneaky Pete is Theo's smokeless drug pipe, which he takes everywhere, usually smoking it on the job.

### Pine Cove Hardware Store Clerks

Frank, Bert, and Les are the condescending clerks at the hardware store.



## **Mercedes**

Val drives a Mercedes. It represents the life for which she sold her integrity.

## **The Banana**

The Banana is Mavis' 1956 Cadillac convertible, which Gabe drives to the ranch to try to help Theo.

## **Broadsword**

Molly brandishes her broadsword as a symbol of her days as a famous B movie star. She uses it to work out in the middle of the night, and it becomes a tool in the novel's climax.



# Themes

## Drugs

Drugs are a persistent theme in the novel. Theo is a long-time drug addict. He grows his own marijuana in his garden in his back yard to maintain his daily habit. The Sheriff uses this weakness to gain control over Theo. He agrees to keep Theo's drug use a secret, or at least keep him from being prosecuted for it, but he has expectations from Theo in return. Theo has to end his habit in order to confront the Sheriff. The irony is that the Sheriff's crime is also drug-related, although there is no indication in the novel that the Sheriff uses the drugs he is manufacturing. He is just using the business to get rich. Theo's drug use is well-known throughout Pine Cove as the other characters respond to him, sometimes with sympathy, as in Robert Masterson offering to help him get through any withdrawals. Other characters are harsher, such as Val blaming Theo's report of the sea beast as a drug-induced hallucination.

Another aspect of the drug theme is the comparison and contrast between recreational drugs and prescription medicine. Theo asks Val about Bess' medication as if it is a recreational drug. He says, "Could someone O.D. on it or something? I heard somewhere that people do crazy things sometimes on these drugs." (Chapter 2, p. 24.) Val responds that Zoloft is not recreational. She is really warning him not to take Zoloft. Her action to remove all of her patients from anti-depressants implies the connection to other drugs, as if no one should ever take any type of drug, recreational or pharmaceutical. Catfish makes a comment that Prozac, if it had been invented sooner, would have prevented the development of blues music. "Just a lot of happy people with no soul." (Chapter 15, p. 144) Catfish's comment (reported by Estelle) paints a very bleak picture of the effects of that type of medication. Molly corrects Theo concerning her medication, distinguishing the difference between drugs and useful medication. However, Molly stops taking her pills because of the side effects, just as Val wants her patients to stop their antidepressants. Molly knows that her pills help her sanity by quieting the narrator inside her head, but for most of the novel, she prefers craziness to the side effects.

The novel also includes many other drug references for various characters. For example, Vance wants Theo and his friends to snort his remains if he ends up like Al, the truck driver. Steve's effect on his would-be victims makes them act as if they are on drugs. Steve's color-changing skin also resembles a drug hallucination.

## Mental Health

Different aspects of mental health present another major theme in the novel. The title renames Pine Cove to "Melancholy Cove" because so many residents are depressed. Sadness and depression represent big business, both for Mavis, the bar owner, and Val, the psychiatrist. Val churns out diagnoses and prescriptions for the town's mental issues



without even spending a whole hour with them (as in Bess' case). She calls it her "policy of a 'pill for every problem.'" (Chapter 3, p. 33.) Val also treats the slightest variance in her own emotions as a sign her mental health is lacking. She wants treatment for wanting to fall in love.

Everyone in Pine Cove knows Molly is crazy. Molly has earned this reputation by doing things like attack the espresso machine at a restaurant and bite the leg of strangers for coming on to her. She treats the town's expectation of her as a license to do whatever she pleases. She can work out with a sword at two in the morning, or buy a whole case of Neosporin. Another character might have to explain these kinds of actions, but for Molly, it is just part of her role as town crazy lady. However, she constantly checks her sanity, watching for the bad parts of her psychosis. She wants to grab one of her pills when she sees Steve crawl out of the creek and turn into a trailer.

Theo makes several comments that support the mental health theme. He tells Molly that he is even crazier than her, although Molly's response is that he is just neurotic, while she is psychotic. When Gabe and Val tell Theo their theory about the nature of Steve's predatory sense and ability to affect neurotransmitters, Theo responds with sarcasm that they could open a successful drug treatment center, if they are willing to lose half of the patients as Steve's diet.

## Avoiding Life

Another theme in the novel involves the characters who avoid life through drinking, drugs, or other distractions. Theo spends his adulthood avoiding life. His typical response to problems is to curl into a ball and worry. When he conquers his drug addiction, he has the opposite response to dealing with Sheriff Burton. Howard, the owner of H.P.'s Café has been sitting in the bar drinking for ten years after confronting a monster. He even abuses things like Nyquil and wants to have an old-fashioned laudanum habit to avoid the problems of life. Mavis thinks of her regulars at the bar that they are "keeping a laser focus on the green felt lest they get a glimpse of their lives," (the green felt being the billiards table). (Chapter 26, p. 239.)

Estelle and Catfish are artists who use their imagination to escape life. Estelle says, "There's nothing noble in using your art to escape life." (Chapter 24, p. 225.) Catfish uses his music to escape his woes brought on by the sea beast in his youth. He even tries to encourage his friend Smiley to get the blues, so he can become a better musician by escaping his woes. Val uses her materialism to escape the hard facts of her life that her father is disappointed in her and her husband has left her. In the end, Theo and Val recover from their habit of avoiding life. Catfish and Estelle embrace life and use it successfully as fuel for their imaginary endeavors.



# Style

## Point of View

The novel uses a third person omniscient point of view that focuses on different characters at different times. The narrator is objective and reliable, reporting the actions, thoughts and emotions of one character at a time. However, throughout the course of the novel, many characters are used as the narrator. This broad approach to storytelling presents a rich tapestry effect that is necessary for a story about what happens to a whole town that it is invaded by a predator drawn to depression.

The narrator goes into detail of the thoughts and emotions of Theo, Val, and Molly, providing a deeper level of characterization for these characters. Steve, the sea beast, also serves as the focus for the narration at times, providing a thorough look at his character as well as his past. When the focus is on Catfish, the reader gets not only a view of his character but also a view of the sea beast's past and motives. There are other examples of characters providing insight into a different character. For example, Gabe's dog Skinner becomes the narrator a few times. His dog thoughts provide more information about Gabe's character. The novel includes quite a bit of dialog and interaction between the characters as well, as they work together to solve the problems of the sea beast and Sheriff Burton's drug lab.

## Setting

The novel is set in the small fictional town of Pine Cove. Pine Cove is on the coast in California, close enough to Los Angeles and San Francisco to attract a healthy tourist business in the summer. However, it is a fairly small town when it comes to resident services. For example, there is only one place in town to fill prescriptions and only one choice for a hardware store. Several different locations in the town serve as settings for different scenes. The Head of the Slug Saloon is the bar where the sad, and later lustful, residents come to drink and tell stories. It is also where Theo's talent for mediation is best put to use. H.P.'s Café is the restaurant preferred by locals, where Jenny can collect her gossip and help put the pieces of the plot together. The trailer park is where Molly lives and Steve hides, disguised as a trailer for a while. Theo lives in a cabin just off the Beer Bar Ranch, where Jim Beer has sold out to the Sheriff to allow the Sheriff to build the house to run the drug production. Theo has never walked down the road toward the ranch before the events in the novel, under threat from the Sheriff. The cave is on the ranch. It is the setting of a previous event in Pine Cove, with Theo referring to it as the old mushroom farm.

## Language and Meaning

The language of the novel is contemporary and straightforward, although it incorporates use of an extensive vocabulary. The word choice is not difficult, however, and



contributes to a colorful and entertaining novel. The characters use modern everyday language that characterizes them to be like real, everyday people. The use of language categorizes the characters into different levels of education, with Val, Gabe, and Howard in the upper echelons of society, and using matching language, and Catfish in the lowest, as the uneducated black man from the South. The writing is balanced between small passages of narration and exposition with natural dialogue. The effect makes the novel a quick and engaging read.

## Structure

The novel includes thirty-three short chapters, plus a Prologue. The chapters are divided into three fairly equal parts. Each part is introduced with a quote. The first two parts include quotes from Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, contributing to the themes of mental health and drug use. The third part begins with a quote from Revelations, drawing attention to the effect Steve has on the depressed people. The titles of the parts are "Admitting You Have a Problem," "Peer Pressure," and "A Higher Power." These titles contribute to the drug theme and Theo's ability to end his addiction, mirroring programs for alcohol and narcotics recovery.

The plots involve many different intertwining events. Many characters go through changes as the novel progresses. Val learns to find balance and not to hide from life in her materialism and superiority. Theo quits doing drugs and finds the courage to face the fearful future. Molly comes to terms with her rage over her career ending. The different character developments and different intertwining events help to solve the mystery of Bess' death, which leads to solving the bigger mystery of the Sheriff's control over Theo's life.



## Quotes

"No one understands. Everyone takes a piece of you, then there's nothing left for you. Even the meds take a piece of you. Do you have any idea what I'm talking about here?" (Chapter 1, p. 15)

"Theo looked at her. 'I have such a mind-numbing fear of the future that the only way I can function at all is with equal amounts of denial and drugs.'" (Chapter 1, p. 15)

"There it was. In the past, that would have been the answer. Increase the Prozac to eighty milligrams, about four times the dose for the average depressed patient, and let the side effect of reduced libido do the work." (Chapter 10, p. 88)

"The problem with being nuts, she thought, is that you don't always feel as if you're nuts. Sometimes, in fact, you feel perfectly sane, and there just happens to be a trailer-shaped dragon crouching in the lot next door." (Chapter 10, p. 89)

"It was one thing to be hired because you're thought to be a fool, it's quite another to live up to the reputation." (Chapter 12, p. 108-109)

"'I'm a psychiatrist, not a psychologist. Our discipline has moved more toward physiological causes for behavior over the last thirty years, or hadn't you heard?'" (Chapter 13, p. 124)

"Anything to address the responsibility of driving an entire town crazy. But perhaps by driving them a little crazy, she could save some of them from self-destruction: not a bad reason for going to work." (Chapter 13, p. 126)

"Boy, sometimes it just pays to be a nutcase, she thought. That sort of thing might bother a sane person." (Chapter 14, p. 141)

"Like many artists, Estelle lived in an atmosphere of chaotic funk, taken by observers to be artistic charm, but in fact no more than a civilized way of dealing with the relative poverty and uncertainty of cannibalizing one's imagination for money." (Chapter 15, p. 142)

"'Opium is the religion of the addict.'" (Chapter 17, p. 164)

"'A neurotic is someone who thinks something is wrong with him, but everyone else thinks he is normal; a psychotic thinks she is normal, but everyone else thinks something's wrong with her.'" (Chapter 22, p. 202)

"'But if fear and imagination make you more highly evolved, then someone with paranoid delusions would be ruling the world.'" (Chapter 22, p. 206)

"'If I haven't been preying on depressed people, what have I been doing?'" (Chapter 22, p. 207)





"I have no home, no job, no car, there's probably a warrant out for my arrest, and you want me to be excited over the fact that we have a monster in town that makes you horny so he can eat you?" (Chapter 23, p. 218)

"People have been loving vengeful gods for thousands of years. Who's to say it isn't the vengeance that inspires that love? Perhaps, as Dr. Fenton has pointed out, there is some symbiotic relationship between the hunting habits of this creature and the brain chemistry of its prey. Perhaps it inspires love as well as sexual stimulation. That feeling needn't be reciprocal, you know. He could be as oblivious to his worshipers as any other god. He takes the sacrifices as his due, with no responsibility on his part." (Chapter 28, p. 265)



## Topics for Discussion

Val admits to preying on depressed people. How are she and Steve alike? How are they different?

Discuss the issues of race relations that come up in how Mavis treats Catfish, as well as in Catfish's story.

One third of the population of Pine Cove is on anti-depressants. Discuss the town's attitudes toward mental illness and depression. How does Joseph use this in his favor to hide his murder?

Molly interprets Theo's fear of the future as a sign of mental illness. Explain whether Theo's thoughts and actions are sane or not.

Joseph and Jim Beer both support Sheriff Burton's drug lab, but neither partakes of drugs. How do they justify their actions? Do they condone drug use? Is this hypocrisy? Give other examples of hypocrisy in the novel.

Discuss how Sheriff Burton uses Theo and controls him. How does this reinforce Theo's fear and cowardice? How does breaking this cycle influence Theo's future?

Discuss the town's increase in libido. Val assumes it is a side effect of the antidepressant withdrawal. Steve affects his prey with an increase in lust. What is the difference between this effect and the intent of the antidepressants?

Katie and Marge have a conversation with Molly about school prayer. Later, many people gravitate toward Steve for religious reasons. Discuss the novel's commentary on religion.

Compare and contrast recreational and pharmaceutical drugs presented in the novel.