

# **Ninth Key Study Guide**

## **Ninth Key by Meg Cabot**

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## Plot Summary

The Mediator #2: Ninth Key by Meg Cabot is the second installment in her mediator series, whereby the main character, sixteen-year-old Susannah Simon, is forced to navigate the sometimes volatile waters of her teenage life as a spiritual leader of lost souls. Susannah must come to terms with her true identity as a mediator, while seeking some semblance of a normal teenage life. In this popular media coming of age series, the main character gradually crosses the line separating childhood from adulthood, much the same way as her lost souls cross the line between death and the afterlife.

The Ninth Key opens with Susannah meeting with the first and only other mediator she knows, Father Dominic, principal of her new high school. After parts of the high school are destroyed during one of Susannah's mediating experiences, Father Dominic admonishes Susannah for kicking her ghosts' butts to the other side. He would like to see Susannah take a more gentle approach with her spiritual charges.

Two spirits are introduced as they visit Susannah's bedroom. One is a mysterious hysterical woman who asks Susannah to tell Red that he did not kill her. The other is a handsome young ghost named Jesse. The next day at school Susannah finds out that Red is Tad Beaumont's father.

Susannah's father's ghost warns her to stay away from Red Beaumont. Stubborn and independent, Susannah cannot stay away. Susannah operates under false pretenses to get the chance to visit Mr. Red Beaumont. After telling him that she is doing a story for her school newspaper, Susannah visits the Beaumont mansion and delivers the dead woman's message. Susannah gets a bad feeling regarding the Beaumonts. Nevertheless, Susannah finds herself attracted to Tad. Tad takes Susannah out for coffee before driving her home after this first meeting with Mr. Red Beaumont. Susannah experiences her first kiss.

Susannah tells Father Dominic about her meeting with Mr. Red Beaumont; Father Dominic concludes that Mr. Beaumont is a vampire. Susannah thinks the idea ludicrous, but as events unfold, she begins to believe.

During dinner at the Beaumonts, Susannah makes observations, which feed into the vampire scenario. When Tad passes out after his father drugs him, Susannah panics. She stabs Mr. Beaumont in the chest with a wooden pencil. Marcus, Mr. Beaumont's assistant, tells Susannah that Mr. Beaumont suffers vampire delusions.

After some research, Susannah's friend CeeCee tells her that Marcus Beaumont, Mr. Beaumont's brother, began running the business after Mrs. Beaumont died. Before thinking about what she does, Susannah tells Tad about the events that transpired during dinner.

The mysterious female ghost returns and tells Susannah that she gave the wrong Red her message. Feeling depressed, Susannah dresses up in her best designer butt-



kicking outfit to make herself feel better. The sister at school sends her home to change out of her inappropriate attire. As she walks home, Marcus Beaumont abducts her. Before Marcus gets the chance to kill Susannah, she finds a way to escape.

Back at home, Susannah sees a picture of her stepfather's first wife. She is the mysterious female ghost, a lady who died after the family made the decision to pull her off life support. Susannah tells her youngest stepbrother, Doc, or David, also known as Red, his mother's message.



# Chapters One - Three

## Chapters One - Three Summary

The Mediator #2: Ninth Key by Meg Cabot begins with the main character, 16-year-old Susannah Simon, meeting with the principal of Junipero Serra Mission Academy high school, Father Dominic. The two discuss what the Father calls a gift, and what Susannah considers a curse: their shared status as mediators, i.e. guides for the troubled souls of those already dead, yet stuck in the spiritual limbo between life and death. Before meeting Father Dominic, Susannah thought she was the only mediator in the world. The Father admonishes Susannah for engaging in physical battle with her ghosts, telling her that she is to gently guide her ghosts to where they are destined to spiritually rest.

Susannah's mother, a broadcast news reporter, remarried and moved her daughter from New York to California, where the teenage mediator attempts to overcome her secret knowledge that she is a biological freak due to her ability to see and talk to dead people. Suze desires a normal teenage life - a social life, a boyfriend, and many friends.

While attending a pool party, Susannah catches Poison Oak while spying on her stepbrother Dopey, or Brad, as he makes out with a girl. Susannah is also baffled after her friend Kelly gets angry when Susannah refuses to slow dance with a boy whom her friend has a crush on. Later, when Kelly forces Susannah to dance with Tad, Susannah finds she really enjoys herself.

When Father Dominic asks Susannah what has been happening in her life, she refrains from mentioning any of the above.

In Chapter Two, Susannah is awakened from a wonderful date dream by a screaming female spirit at three o'clock the morning after the pool party. The woman pleads with Susannah to give a message to someone named Red that he did not kill her. As soon as Susannah gets comfortable in bed again, a gorgeous male spirit named Jesse, long dead for over one hundred fifty years, visits her. Jesse is Susannah's roommate, for he died in her bedroom back in 1850 and he has never been able to leave.

"I swear, sometimes I am convinced my life is just a series of sketches from America's Funniest Home Videos, minus all the pants-dropping business," says Susannah (p. 21).

Jesse is quite critical of Susannah's mediator skills, much in the same way Father Dominic is. They both attempt to guide Susannah in proper mediation techniques.

In Chapter Three, Susannah asks her friends at school if they know of anyone named Red. The editor of the school newspaper, CeeCee, says that Tad's father, a real estate developer, is named Thaddeus "Red" Beaumont. Susannah can hardly believe how easy it is to figure out who this Red might be. She thinks the dead woman found her



through her connection with Tad at the party. Susannah later deduces that the dead woman may be Tad's mother, after CeeCee tells her that the woman had passed away.

Susannah telephones Beaumont Industries and leaves a message for Mr. Beaumont to call her regarding the article she is writing on the ten most influential people in Salinas County for her school newspaper. Mr. Beaumont never returns her call.

Dinner in the Ackerman household is a big deal because Mr. Andy Ackerman, Susannah's stepfather, adores cooking. Before dinner Susannah and her stepbrother Brad, or Dopey, bicker and call each other names. At the dinner table, the boys and Mr. Ackerman grab all the quesadillas and none are left for Susannah and her mother. Susannah excuses herself from the dinner table, going into the kitchen to make a bowl of cereal, while waiting for more quesadillas to be made. In the kitchen by herself, another spirit visits her, and the family dog, Max, slinks into the other room.

## Chapters One - Three Analysis

Susannah's mediator status acts as a metaphor for her coming of age crossover from childhood to adulthood. As a mediator, Susannah helps the dead cross over to their final resting places; as a teenager, Susannah must cross over from childhood to adulthood. Irony is apparent in the fact that a teenage Susannah must lead the lost souls to peace; as a teenager, Susannah must learn to find her own peace, within her own true identity.

Sarcasm and wit define Susannah's demeanor from the outset. She seems wise beyond her sixteen years, and she does not want to waste time putting up with other people's stupidity because of her realization that life on earth is quite short. Her sarcasm, while emanating from partial wisdom, simultaneously acts as a defense mechanism for standing up to her three new stepbrothers, whom she nicknames Sleepy, Dopey and Doc. Susannah explains that she is mean to Jesse because she does not want to fall in love with him. She is mean to the ghosts because she does know what to do with the ones who have no idea why they are stuck in limbo. She prefers the ones who know why they have not crossed over to the other side; she kicks their butt over there.

The notion of teenage angst for Susannah is seen in her knee-jerk reaction to use violence when dealing with emotionally charged situations. Teenage life can be fraught with emotional extremes and much drama; dealing effectively with her emotions will remain a part of Susannah's crossover during her own personal coming of age.

The teenage point of reference for the many experiences they have not yet encountered in their short lives stems from popular culture, i.e. the Nike ad, Calvin Klein one-piece swimsuit, and slow dancing in a romance-novel way. Indeed, the very act of reading Meg Cabot's book further feeds this teen pop culture point of reference.

The first-person style or point of view draws the reader into the story, befriendng the audience through a direct dialogue.



In Chapter Three, a sarcastic, cynical, and suspicious Susannah thinks it is fun to torture her stepbrothers. During her coming of age, she seems to grasp who she is, i.e. she is not a snitch, and she also seems to grasp who she is not. Susannah keeps her mediator identity a secret from most people; she thinks it makes her a very unusual, freakish person and this affects her sense of self-esteem.



# Chapter Four - Five

## Chapter Four - Five Summary

In Chapter four, the ghost of Susannah's father startles her in the kitchen. He has a message for her to stay away from Red Beaumont. Susannah's father's ghost watches over her, warning her about Jesse as well. "When my dad called me Susannah, he meant business," she said (p. 57). Susannah thought that her dad had already moved on. However, something is still keeping him from moving on to the other side.

After her father's ghost disappears, Susannah's mother steps into the kitchen, worriedly asking her daughter whether she said the word, "dad." "Back in New York she used to send me to her therapist, who told her I wasn't a mental case, just a teenager" (p. 59). Susannah thinks she fooled the doctor.

Before bed, Susannah tries to call Red Beaumont at his home. She had gotten Tad's phone number, deviously, from Kelly Prescott's cell phone. Tad answers the phone when Susannah calls, and she hangs up, cursing and berating herself. Tad calls her back, and she says she made a mistake and misdialed. She curses and berates herself a bit more for knowing how to deal with the dead, but not the living. After all, she should have simply asked to speak to Mr. Beaumont.

While sleeping, Susannah is again awakened by a blood-curdling scream.

In Chapter Five, Susannah attempts to heed Father Dom's and Jesse's advice by making her voice soothing to the wailing woman spirit. Susannah tries to get the woman's name. She fails on both accounts. Jesse visits Susannah after the woman leaves, and tells her how her father, Peter Simon, came after him. Appalled and embarrassed by her father's actions, Susannah emphatically tells Jesse that she did not tell her father about Jesse staying in her bedroom. Jesse tells Susannah that he actually likes her father because he cares for Susannah. Jesse warns Susannah to be careful about this distraught, screaming woman who has a message for Red. She is not who Susannah thinks she is.

## Chapter Four - Five Analysis

In Chapter Four, Susannah continues to adjust to her new surroundings and the new people in her home life. As can be typical of a teenager, she is very hard on herself and unforgiving when she makes mistakes. Simultaneously, Susannah is stubborn, steadfast and committed to her own ideas. When her father's spirit warns her to stay away from Red Beaumont, she knows that she cannot. She takes her mission as a mediator seriously, although she does not always embrace her situation.

In Chapter Five, Susannah tries to follow Jesse's and Father Dominic's suggestions when it comes to mediating; she soothes her voice when talking with the distraught





female ghost and she asks the lady's name. Susannah is so sure of herself that she knows who the wailing woman is, and seems to make up her mind to do things her own way. Susannah has a crush of Jesse and does not want him to leave her; after all, Jesse saved her life a couple of times when her mediating experiences got violently out of hand.



# Chapters Six - Eight

## Chapters Six - Eight Summary

In Chapter Six, Susannah asks her stepbrother Sleepy to drive her to the Beaumont mansion. She lies, telling him that she has a story to write, and that she has a return ride home. "Oh my God, I am such a liar. And I can't leave at just one lie, either. Oh, no. I have to pile it on. I am sick, I tell you. Sick" (p. 80).

Susannah meets Mr. Beaumont in Chapter Seven and delivers the dead woman's message. "She said for me to tell you," I went on, "that you did not kill her. She doesn't blame you. And she wants you to stop blaming yourself" (p. 93). After Mr. Beaumont's unusual reaction to her message, Susannah's mediator instincts tell her to get out of the mansion. While Mr. Beaumont asks Susannah to get in touch with other dead people he wants to talk to, Susannah tries to escape through windows, which she finds are covered with nailed-down shutters. When Marcus opens the elevator door and finds out that Susannah is perhaps a psychic who delivers the message absolving Mr. Beaumont of killing someone, Marcus quickly escorts Susannah out.

In Chapter Eight, as Marcus leads Susannah out of the mansion, Susannah sees Tad get out of the swimming pool. "He stood next to me, water still dripping from his dark hair like diamonds" (p. 104). Surprised the two teenagers know each other, Marcus leaves Susannah with Tad as her escort. When Tad turns to go inside the house to change out of his bathing suit in order to give Susannah a ride home, Susannah sees something on the back of his neck. The two realize that it is poison oak. "I really felt bad. I mean, I had disfigured the guy. This incredibly sexy, fabulous-looking guy" (p. 106). Tad simply laughs. Susannah eventually joins.

## Chapters Six - Eight Analysis

When Susannah lies in Chapter Six, she finds that one lie turns into another. While she knows this is so wrong, she cannot help but lie to protect her secret life. Susannah is growing up, moving closer to adulthood in that she knows what is right and what is wrong. It is telling that when Susannah enters the elevator in the Beaumont mansion, she cannot tell which direction, up or down, she is traveling. This is a metaphor for Susannah's mediator abilities and her teen hood; she has no idea what she is doing. She ignores the warnings given to her by Jesse's and her father's ghosts.

In Chapter Seven, Susannah is critical of herself and she really thinks something may be wrong with her, not only because she lies so much, but due to the fact that she likes disclosing that she has lied. She likes to see the reactions of others to their newfound knowledge. Susannah always obeys her mediator instincts. It is beneficial to her health. Her instincts foreshadow what may happen in the future with Mr. Beaumont. Susannah



has a very vivid imagination, envisioning Mr. Beaumont is a New Ager, with a sensory deprivation tank and aromatherapy candles in his bedroom.

In Chapter Eight, after realizing she gave poison oak to Tad, on the back of his neck, Susannah is very dramatic and exaggerates the situation by thinking she disfigured him.



# Chapters Nine - Ten

## Chapters Nine - Ten Summary

In Chapter Nine, Susannah tells Father Dominic about her experience at the Beaumont mansion and the ghost of the woman with the message. She now suspects that Mr. Red Beaumont did, indeed, kill the woman. Due to Susannah's information regarding the closed shutters, Mr. Beaumont saying he is sensitive to light, and her perception of him staring at her neck and her cross necklace, Father Dom concludes that Mr. Beaumont is a vampire. While Father Dom is thinking about his conclusion, Susannah thinks about her coffee date with Tad Beaumont. She experiences her first kiss, until she sees the ghost of Jesse sitting in the back seat of Tad's Porsche. As she walks toward the front door of her house, Jesse reprimands Susannah for kissing Tad so passionately. Jesse tells her that her real problem is that she thinks she does not need anyone; she thinks she can handle everything on her own.

Susannah is shocked when Father Dominic says that Mr. Beaumont is a vampire in Chapter Ten. She does not believe in vampires. She says this is getting a little too Stephen King for her. Father Dominic's rationale is that people do not generally believe in ghosts, either; at least, his mind is open to the possibility that vampires do exist. On her way back to class, Susannah meets the ghost of little Timothy Mahern, who died of leukemia when he was nine or ten years old. He asks that Susannah find his cat a new home; each time his mother sees the cat, she is reminded of her dead son, and she cries. Susannah recruits CeeCee to research Thaddeus Beaumont Senior. She recruits Adam to help find Tim's cat Spike. CeeCee discovers, via the Internet, that Mr. Beaumont is the CEO of thirty land development deals, including various cineplexes, strip malls, and health clubs. CeeCee also discovers that multiple murders, or rather, unexplained missing persons have been reported near sites where Beaumont developed land. Some environmentalists who objected to certain Beaumont projects are now missing. CeeCee deduces that the large political contributions made by Beaumont Industries helped to cover up any link between Mr. Beaumont and the missing environmentalists. When Susannah accidentally finds herself expressing to her friends that she has seen one of the missing people, Adam takes them to see CeeCee's Aunt Pru, who happens to be another mediator.

## Chapters Nine - Ten Analysis

True to her age and her personality, in Chapter Nine, Susannah denies that Jesse's ghost speaks the truth about her not needing anyone. She says she needs a boyfriend. Susannah thinks that she knows best.

In Chapter Ten, Susannah receives research information regarding the missing persons. Susannah comes to some erroneous conclusions based upon this information; she is not yet able to think things all the way through. Susannah needs more information and

proof. She needs to slow down and rationalize before she makes accusations which may be grossly false. When Susannah lies, she creates her own false pretenses over which she has the control; when she acts on something based upon faulty information or scanty research, she is acting under another manner of false pretenses. Susannah needs to work on seeking the truth.



# Chapters Eleven - Twelve

## Chapters Eleven - Twelve Summary

In Chapter Eleven, when the trio arrives at Aunt Pru's home, Aunt Pru mentions the ninth key and thinks it is odd. After Adam tells the elder mediator about Susannah's dream of the dead woman, Aunt Pru continues to pull up the ninth key, a tarot card with a picture of an elderly hermit. As Susannah goes to telephone her family to let them know she is on her way and will not miss dinner, the ghost of the "dreamed of" Mrs. Deirdre Fiske, one of the women who disappeared because she stood in the way of Beaumont Industries' development efforts, appears. Mrs. Fiske validates Susannah's suspicion that Red Beaumont killed her. As Adam drops Susannah off at home, she sees the black Beaumont limousine parked at her house.

Inside, Chapter Twelve opens with Red Beaumont and his son visiting Susannah's mother. The two stopped by the house on their way home to invite Susannah for dinner. Susannah drops her cat bag and supplies off in her bedroom and bumps into Jesse. She asks Jesse to contact Father Dominic if she is not back by midnight; she is nervous about the evening she has ahead of her.

## Chapters Eleven - Twelve Analysis

In Chapter Eleven, when Aunt Pru gives the trio lemonade, she forgets to put in the sugar. This action is premonitory for Susannah because mediators who channel spirits experience periods of forgetfulness. Later in Chapter Eleven, Susannah almost forgets her own phone number. Susannah is a keen observer regarding her friend CeeCee and the reasons why she cannot stand her Aunt Pru. Susannah sees the physical resemblance of aunt and niece and decides that CeeCee will look like her aunt when she gets older. The ninth key, or old-man-in-the-cave, Tarot card symbolizes the darkness in which Susannah must live; she is forced to keep her mediating life a secret from her family and friends.

In Chapter Twelve, Susannah brings her ghost-busting tools with her to dinner with Tad and his Dad. One of these tools is a pencil, thinking she may need to stake a vampire in the heart. This action is considered a foreshadowing of possible events to come. Susannah gets into trouble as she attempts to keep her mediator abilities a secret from her mother. If she does not go to dinner with the Beaumonts, Mr. Beaumont will surely tell her mother that she can talk to the dead, and that she went over to his house on false pretenses. Also, to keep her mother proud of her, Susannah finds she must carry on with dating Tad and having dinner with him and his father. Susannah wants her mother to be happy and to continue thinking that everything has turned around for her. On the other side of the country, back on the East Coast in New York, Susannah got into trouble with the law, performed poorly in school and saw a therapist.



# Chapters Thirteen - Fourteen

## Chapters Thirteen - Fourteen Summary

At the Beaumont mansion, in Chapter Thirteen, Mr. Beaumont does not eat dinner; he drinks a glass of red wine and sits with Tad and Susannah. After dinner, dessert and coffee, Tad passes out. When it is apparent that Tad's own father drugged him, Susannah tries to attack Mr. Beaumont with a clogged Mace canister. Susannah pulls the pencil from her bag, and stabs Mr. Beaumont in the chest. She thinks she has killed her boyfriend's father.

"How unpopular was that going to make me?" (p. 173) Susannah asks, in Chapter Fourteen, about her killing Tad's father. "Oh, God, why had I let Father Dom put that stupid vampire idea into my head? What kind of idiot believes in vampires? I must have been out of my mind." (p.175) When Marcus walks into the room, he confirms that Mr. Beaumont thinks he is a vampire who has killed dozens of people. While Marcus eases Susannah's worries, Susannah cannot help but wonder what really happened to the missing environmentalists. Marcus threatens to press charges for assault against Susannah and to tell her mother about the prank if she does not keep quiet about what happened this evening.

## Chapters Thirteen - Fourteen Analysis

In Chapter Thirteen, Susannah continues to operate her mission under false pretenses. These are not the pretenses which she controls; however, these are the pretenses that her friends and she have come up with after making the wrong conclusions with the information they have discovered. Susannah's vivid imagination runs away with her on many occasions, i.e. the red wine could be blood, and the special diet may include the missing persons. Susannah reaches an adult conclusion when she realizes she and Tad do not have a lot in common, except for kissing; she also realizes that with school, homework and her mediating, she does not have a lot of time for a boyfriend. Susannah's childlike ideas and fright remain in full force, as she is scared that Mr. Beaumont is a vampire. The very thought begins the process of seeing all clues as pointing toward this conclusion, i.e. his pointy incisors, his red wine is blood, and the missing persons are his meals.

In Chapter Fourteen, Susannah worries about childlike fears, such as how popular she will be in school after all this, and what her mother will think of her killer daughter. She used to worry about her mom being mad about her mediator skills. That pales in comparison to murder. Marcus blames Susannah's little prank about her dream on Mr. Beaumont suffering one of his fixation episodes. Marcus seems well-versed in turning around the blame and making Susannah feel like the bad guy. Susannah reminds herself that she is not the one who thinks she is a vampire and she is not the one who caused a bunch of people who got in the way of development efforts to disappear.



# Chapters Fifteen - Sixteen

## Chapters Fifteen - Sixteen Summary

When Susannah gets home in Chapter Fifteen, she gets a phone call from Father Dominic regarding Jesse; he is very angry. Call waiting brings CeeCee on the line with information that after Mrs. Beaumont's death from advanced breast cancer, Mr. Beaumont retreated within himself, and Marcus Beaumont, his brother, began running the businesses. Finally, Susannah takes a call from Tad and she spills the beans regarding the activity that evening.

After Susannah falls asleep in Chapter Sixteen, she is awakened by Spike and Jesse. When Susannah realizes she thinks she is falling in love with Jesse, and right as she thinks he is going to kiss her, the shrieking female ghost returns. As Susannah remains selfish and childlike in that she wants Jesse to stay around, i.e. she does not want to figure out what is keeping him in limbo so that she can help him get to the other side, so too, does Jesse remain what keeps Susannah from growing up. In essence, they each hold each other back from their eventual destinations. The mysterious woman tells Susannah she told the wrong Red that he did not kill her.

## Chapters Fifteen - Sixteen Analysis

In Chapter Fifteen, Susannah is quick to emotionally react and retaliate when she thinks Tad thinks she is boring; she tells him that his dad drugged him, his dad thinks he is a vampire, and maybe Tad should ask his Uncle Marcus about where his comes from.

In Chapter Sixteen, Susannah first feels depressed because she thinks Jesse would not hang out with her if he were alive; she is too boring, according to the thought placed in her head by Tad and his prior telephone call. Wanting something to the contrary to believe, she feels better when Jesse states that he would, indeed, hang out with her. Susannah thinks she is falling in love with the ghost of Jesse.





# Chapter Seventeen - Eighteen

## Chapter Seventeen - Eighteen Summary

The next morning, in Chapter Seventeen, Susannah still feels depressed because she got the wrong Red, the message is still undelivered, and the romantic mood between herself and Jesse was ruined. Susannah pretends that she does not care and she dresses up in her best butt-kicking outfit, a designer miniskirt, tights, Batgirl boots, sweater, and leather jacket. When Dopey makes fun of her, she punches him in the stomach. When Susannah gets to school, Sister Ernestine sends her home to change out of her inappropriate attire. As Susannah walks home, Marcus Beaumont abducts her. Susannah beats up Marcus's two thugs. Marcus grabs her himself. Marcus tells her that she will not go missing. Her corpse will be found very quickly.

In Chapter Eighteen, Susannah is escorted back to the Beaumont mansion. Marcus informs her that she will drown.

## Chapter Seventeen - Eighteen Analysis

In Chapter Seventeen, Susannah feels emotional and she feels threatened. When feeling cornered and trapped the way she does, Susannah needs to release her emotions in the only way she seems to know how at this point in time, with violence.

In Chapter Eighteen, Susannah continues to call Tad her boyfriend. When Marcus implies that he will kill Tad, Susannah's protective instincts kick in.



# Chapters Nineteen - Twenty

## Chapters Nineteen - Twenty Summary

In Chapter Nineteen, Susannah discovers that Marcus's plan includes putting Tad and herself out to sea, after concocting a story that the teenagers took out the yacht to go jet-skiing, did not wear their life jackets and drowned in the choppy waters. Marcus leaves Susannah in Mr. Beaumont's office for five minutes so she can change into a swimsuit. Susannah concocts her own plan, as Tad lay unconscious. As Marcus returns to the office, Susannah slams a desk chair into the fish aquarium glass.

In Chapter Twenty, Jesse appears after Susannah calls him. At the last minute, Susannah rips an accent light from the bottom of the aquarium tank, pulls out the light bulb, and throws the cord into the water where Marcus is standing, holding a gun.

## Chapters Nineteen - Twenty Analysis

In Chapter Nineteen, Susannah's fight or flight mechanism kicks in and she plans her escape.

In Chapter Twenty, Susannah realizes that she can call upon her ghosts simply by thinking about them; she summons Jesse. Also in Chapter Twenty, Susannah defends herself in a most impressive way to Jesse. This makes Susannah feel proud and more grown up because she does not need to rely on Jesse to save her.



# Chapter Twenty-one

## Chapter Twenty-one Summary

In Chapter Twenty-one, Jesse uses his super powers to get the shutters off the windows, after fire erupts in the room behind the fish aquarium. As Marcus Beaumont begins to regain consciousness and as his thugs' voices get louder in the elevator shaft, Susannah and Jesse throw an unconscious Tad from the window into the pool below. Susannah follows. When Susannah looks up at the window from which she leaps, she sees Mrs. Deirdre Fiske.

## Chapter Twenty-one Analysis

In Chapter Twenty-one, Jesse is impressed with Susannah's actions; Susannah feels proud to obtain Jesse's approval. This time Susannah does not need to be saved by Jesse, entirely. Instead, she saves herself and she wins Jesse's approval.



# Chapter Twenty-Two

## Chapter Twenty-Two Summary

Marcus mysteriously disappears. After the police drop Susannah off at home, her mother and stepfather ground her for being at the Beaumont's home when she should have been in school. Due to Susannah's cooperation during the firemen's investigation, her mother tells her that her friend Gina from Brooklyn will be coming to visit. Susannah sees the newly-hung pictures in their living room; she realizes that her stepfather's first wife is the mysterious woman who wants her to deliver a message to Red. Susannah realizes that Red is her stepbrother, Doc, or David.

## Chapter Twenty-Two Analysis

Susannah feels she needs to lie to her parents again. "I mean, were they really going to believe that Tad's uncle Marcus had been trying to kill me because I knew too much about a bunch of murders he'd committed for the sake of urban sprawl?" (p. 261) This can perhaps be seen as the fact that Susannah has a life of her own. She does not need to tell her parents everything about herself. She is growing up.



# Chapter Twenty-three

## Chapter Twenty-three Summary

Jesse tells Susannah that her intervention had a rallying effect on the souls of the people that Marcus Beaumont killed, i.e. bedevilment. The souls will punish Marcus until he dies.

Susannah tells her stepbrother, Doc, or David, that his mother loves him very much and that he is not responsible for her death. Doc cries; Susannah's eyes water. Tad phones, telling Susannah that his father is going through detoxification because someone was giving him hallucinatory drugs, which caused him to think he was a vampire. Tad is going away to live with his aunt in San Francisco.

Susannah reads Gina's letter while talking to Tad on the phone. Gina sends The Ninth Key Tarot card in her letter. The Ninth Key Tarot card's description reads, "the Hermit guides the souls of the dead past the temptation of illusory fires by the roadside, so that they may go straight to their higher goal" (p. 285). Dopey, or Brad, knocks on Susannah's bedroom door, announces dinner, sees Spike the cat and says that Susannah is so busted.

## Chapter Twenty-three Analysis

Susannah plans to treat Jesse the way she treats her stepbrothers now; this, she thinks, will ensure that she does not fall in love with him. Susannah not only protects others in her life, she protects herself. Susannah's mediator abilities are advancing, as she is now able to summon her ghosts by simply thinking about them. Susannah still portrays a tough exterior; she does not cry. The scene with her stepbrother Red makes her more tender, putting her in a more protective role, which she embraces.

With her newly found knowledge of the meaning of the Ninth Key Tarot card, Susannah holds the key to a closer understanding of who she is. She is a mediator and she is a hermit, meaning that she is close to being alone in her world as a spiritual guide. It can seem like a lonely existence. She cannot be that normal teenager, which she thinks she wants to be. Here, the question arises, "What is normal in a teenager's world?"



# Characters

## Susannah Simon

Susannah Simon is the sixteen-year-old main character of Meg Cabot's *The Mediator #2: Ninth Key*. Susannah lives a secret life as a mediator and a guide to the lost souls who have not been able to cross over to the other side after death. As a teenager, Susannah has another secret which she keeps, unbeknownst to herself at the moment; it is who she will become as she crosses over to adulthood. Her status as a mediator acts as a metaphor for her teenage life.

Sarcasm and wit continue to define Susannah's personality. She seems wise beyond her years in her ability to analyze who she is now and how she should change in order to do the right things. Her sarcasm, while emanating from partial wisdom, simultaneously acts as a defense mechanism. This is most likely a personality trait which will not change as she grows up.

Susannah suffers teenage angst, which is revealed by her tendency toward physical violence. Sometimes, when she does not know what to do with her emotions which build up inside her, she punches her brother, beats up thugs, or kicks ghosts' butts over to the other side. Susannah makes real progress in controlling these episodes toward the end of the novel. She uses her intellect to figure out a way to escape from Marcus, rather than attempting physical violence.

The denouement also proves that Susannah is grownup enough to protect her own self. She does not always need to depend on Jesse for her survival. Susannah is gradually gaining her independence, which is further proof that she moves toward adulthood.

## Jesse

Jesse is the handsome one-hundred-fifty-year-old ghost who lives in Susannah's bedroom. He is her protector until the last chapter of the novel, when she hatches an impressive escape plan of her own. Susannah thinks she is falling in love with Jesse; in order to protect herself, she plans to be mean to him. Susannah is torn between helping Jesse get to the other side and having him stay with her. Susannah remains selfish in a childlike way when it comes to keeping Jesse in her life. In essence, Jesse and Susannah stand in the way of each other crossing over to where they need to be. Jesse also plays a role in helping to guide Susannah in her novice mediation efforts; most likely, Susannah will not be able to help Jesse get to the other side until she has grown up some more.



## **Thaddeus Red Beaumont**

Mr. Beaumont is a real estate developer who owns Beaumont Industries, Inc. After his wife dies of advanced ovarian cancer, his health declines, and his brother Marcus steps in to run the business. Mr. Beaumont experiences episodes when his ideas are not based in reality. He thinks he is a vampire who is responsible for the killings of certain people. Susannah must investigate the truth behind Mr. Beaumont and his family.

## **Marcus Beaumont**

Marcus Beaumont is Thaddeus Beaumont's evil brother, who lets nothing stand in his way when it comes to developing land and building and maintaining a booming business. Susannah discovers that Marcus has murdered the missing environmentalists and she lets Jesse take care of justice. Marcus will experience bedevilment by the spirits of the people he killed until he eventually dies himself.

## **Tad Beaumont**

Tad is the drop-dead gorgeous son of Thaddeus and nephew to Marcus Beaumont. He is also a living love interest of Susannah's until she grows up a little, recognizing that she does not have that much in common with him.

## **Father Dominic**

Father Dominic is the Principal of Mission Academy School and the only other mediator Susannah knows. He acts as a guide for her in her mediation efforts. He plays a role in helping Susannah tame her wild and violent tactics.

## **Dopey, or Brad Ackerman**

Brad Ackerman, nicknamed Dopey by Susannah, is her sixteen-year-old stepbrother. Dopey and Susannah wage a ferocious war against each other with Susannah making fun of Dopey for making out with Debbie Mancuso at the pool party. Susannah nicknames Brad Dopey because she thinks that he is the stupidest person in their high school class.

## **Doc, or David Ackerman**

David Ackerman, nicknamed Doc by Susannah, is her twelve-year-old stepbrother. Doc is highly intelligent and Susannah has much respect for him, if only at first for his ability to help her with her homework. Susannah learns to feel love for her younger stepbrother, acting as his protector when she delivers the message to him from his mother. Doc is the real Red.



## **Sleepy Ackerman**

Sleepy Ackerman is Susannah's oldest stepbrother. He is a senior in high school and Susannah uses him for rides as he owns a car.

## **CeeCee**

CeeCee is the editor of the school newspaper, friends with Susannah, and an avid researcher. CeeCee provides the bulk of the research behind Susannah's adventure regarding the news stories on the missing environmentalists, the death of Mrs. Beaumont, and Mr. Thaddeus Beaumont's decline in health. CeeCee also has an Aunt Pru who is a mediator.

## **Adam**

Adam is a close friend of CeeCees. He also owns a car and people use him for rides.

## **Aunt Pru**

Aunt Pru belongs to CeeCee and she is a mediator who continues to pull the Ninth Key Tarot card from her deck when CeeCee, Adam, and Susannah visit her regarding the dead lady dream of Susannah's.

## **Peter Simon**

Peter Simon is the ghost of Susannah's father. He watches over Susannah, attempting to guide and warn her of the possible dangers ahead.





# Objects/Places

## Susannah's Bedroom

Susannah's bedroom is the cold spot for paranormal activity. Her ghosts more often than not visit her in her bedroom in the middle of the night.

## The Ninth Key

The Ninth Key is the symbol for Susannah's mediator status. A hermit, an old man in a cave, is pictured on the Tarot card, further symbolizing the isolation of her existence and the secret she feels that she must keep at this point in time.

## Brooklyn, New York

Susannah's former home and best friend is located in Brooklyn, New York.

## Carmel, California

Susannah's new home is located in Carmel, California. This town is synonymous with the major adjustments Susannah will need to make.

## Beaumont Mansion

The Beaumont mansion is a symbol of the great wealth amassed by illegal and heinous acts such as murder.

## Poison Oak

The Poison Oak is a symbol that things are not always as they may appear on the surface. Everyone tells Susannah about the wonderful palm trees in northern California. However, no one mentioned the Poison Oak. This is a telling detail in that everyone tells Susannah the good things about California while neglecting to mention the negative.

## The Mediators

The Mediators guide the lost souls of people who have died on to their final resting places. Susannah's mediator status acts as a metaphor for her coming of age journey, whereby she is gradually crossing over from childhood to adulthood.



## **Nicknames**

Susannah gives her stepbrothers nicknames - Sleepy, Dopey and Doc - which tie into what she really thinks of them. The nicknames she chooses hail from the Snow White fairy tale, which is telling due to the fact that Susannah does not yet feel like the life she is living is real.

## **Designer Clothes, Shoes and Accessories**

Almost every teenager desires designer clothes, shoes and accessories. These symbolize first the pop culture point of reference to which most teens relate. Second, these can symbolize one of the ways that teenagers deal with peer pressure and a superficial sense of self-esteem.

## **Pop Culture**

Popular culture, taught through the various forms of media, is a point of reference to which many teenagers subscribe to find out how they think an ideal life should be lived.

## **Junipero Serra Mission Academy high school**

This is Susannah's new high school, where she meets Father Dominic, the principal, who is another mediator.



# Themes

## Coming of Age

In this popular media coming of age series, the main character gradually moves toward crossing the line separating childhood from adulthood, much the same way as her lost souls cross the line between death and the afterlife. As Susannah struggles to understand the reasons why some of her ghosts have not crossed over, she also struggles with her own trials and tribulations as she works to cross over into adulthood. Her mediator status acts as a metaphor for Susannah's true coming of age journey.

In the beginning of the novel, Susannah is quick to react with violence, sarcasm, and attitude. On the advice of both Father Dominic and her handsome ghost friend Jesse, Susannah makes an effort to guide her spiritual charges more gently, with kinder words and a softer approach. Susannah slowly gains the ability to listen to the reason of her elders. She is also slowly gaining the ability to temper her emotions.

Susannah is able to point the finger of self-analysis at her own self. For instance, Susannah lies and she admits that she even likes to see the reactions of others when she tells them she has lied to them. During her self-analysis, she realizes that she is sick. She needs to stop lying. She realizes that after she tells one lie, on more occasions than not, she needs to tell another lie on top of the original, and on and on.

Regarding the pop culture points of reference that Susannah relates to, in this novel, she begins to differentiate between television and reality. For example, she says that Mr. Beaumont did not crumble into ash after she stabbed him with the wooden pencil. Susannah really did believe that a wooden stake of some sort to the heart of a vampire would kill it, an idea grown from the imagination of the creators of popular media.

Finally, through Susannah's interaction with Doc, or David, she feels the role of protector for her younger stepbrother. Susannah moves away from a selfish, childish attitude to a more loving and protective adult role.

## Teenage Angst

Susannah has a good psychological handle on why she gets angry and why she lashes out. At the beginning of this novel and throughout, Susannah's knee-jerk reaction is to use physical violence when dealing with emotionally charged situations. For instance, she punches her stepbrother Dopey in the stomach when he makes fun of her clothing. While Susannah knows it is wrong to use violence, she is not yet able to control her emotions and feelings. This is a work in progress.

Irony arises as Susannah heeds the advice of both Father Dominic and Jesse regarding her being gentler with the spirits over which she is in charge. Susannah enjoys some success in being nicer to her spirits; the irony comes into play when she cannot be as



nice to live human beings as she is with her spirits. This makes Susannah feel rather depressed because she says she gets along better with the dead than the living.

There is a difference between Susannah's kicking the Beaumont thugs' butts and punching her brother in the stomach, for instance. During the Beaumont situation, Susannah experiences the fight or flight phenomenon, where the body and mind seek to protect itself in times on danger. This is a normal reaction.

Teenage life can be fraught with emotional extremes and much drama. Dealing effectively with her emotions is an important part of Susannah's crossover during her own personal coming of age.

## Pop Culture

The teenage point of reference for the many experiences they have not yet encountered in their short lives stems from popular culture, i.e. the Nike ad, Calvin Klein one-piece swimsuit, and slow dancing in a romance-novel way. Indeed, the very act of reading Meg Cabot's book further feeds this teen pop culture point of reference.

When pop culture plays such a large role in a teenager's life, this can prevent one's true identity from becoming fully attainable. In essence, popular culture can inhibit growth instead of lend to it. Susannah is very well soaked in popular culture, from designer clothing, shoes and accessories, to TV shows, movies, and advertisements.

While it is unclear in this installment how popular culture will affect Susannah's coming of age crossover, the reader does see the main character reject some of the lessons she has learned on TV when she realizes that vampires do not exist. One thing is certain - Susannah will be forced to unlearn some of these creative lessons learned from pop culture.



# Style

## Point of View

The Mediator #2: Ninth Key is written from a first-person point of view as the main character, Susannah Simon, has a direct dialogue with the reader. This first-person style draws the reader into the story, and essentially befriends whoever reads the novel. The point of view falls directly in line with what matters to the teenage Susannah, having an engaging personality that attracts many friends, including a boyfriend.

Susannah's sarcastic and witty personality comes easily through this type of point of view, as she speaks to the reader as if talking to a friend. The reader is given the chance to get to know the intimate details of Susannah's life; the author allows the reader to know Susannah's thoughts and opinions as well as know what actions take place in the current time and space.

This first-person narrative ties into the teenage coming of age novel; the "I" voice reflects the selfishness of a child, whereby the child thinks more of him or herself than others. In other words, the story is all about Susannah. Finally, the first-person point of view works well with mystery novels because the details of the mystery are disclosed to the audience at the same time as they are disclosed to the main character.

## Setting

All of the action occurs in the small town of Carmel, California, on the west coast, although references are made to Brooklyn, New York, on the east coast, because Susannah and her mother lived there before moving to California only two weeks before the beginning of the novel.

The story opens in Junipero Serra Mission Academy high school's principal's office, with Susannah being admonished by Father Dominic, for being too rough on her ghosts. Most of the following action takes place at the Beaumont Mansion, at the high school, and in Susannah's bedroom at the Ackerman household. Susannah's bedroom is the spot for paranormal activity, whereby her spirits visit her at their own will. Later in the novel, Susannah gains the ability to summon her spirits by her own will anywhere she may be. She does this with Mrs. Deirdre Fiske at Aunt Pru's home and Jesse at the Beaumont mansion.

The day Marcus Beaumont abducts Susannah is a rainy, cloudy day as Susannah walks home from her high school. A portion of the action takes place in the street in front of her high school and inside the black limousine.



## Language and Meaning

As the narrator is a sixteen-year-old sarcastic and witty mediator, the language is easy to understand. The language includes some slang and range in tone from casual to funny and dramatic. The main character Susannah speaks to the reader directly, telling all of her thoughts, emotions, and opinions.

She says, "I really felt bad. I mean, I had disfigured the guy. This incredibly sexy, fabulous-looking guy" (p. 106). After realizing that she gave poison oak to Tad, on the back of his neck, Susannah is very dramatic and exaggerates the situation by thinking that she disfigured him.

Susannah is not only dramatic, she is also very honest about herself. Her keen sense of self is apparent as she discusses the reasons for her sarcastic and sometimes mean voice. She says she acts this way because of her lack of knowledge over what to do with some of her spirits; she is frustrated. Although, at the end of the novel, Susannah recognizes that she may be getting better at this mediating business.

Susannah's language changes at the end of the book when Dopey knocks on her bedroom door, calling her to dinner. Susannah is softer and she stops herself when she begins to call her stepbrother Dopey. She instead calls him by his real name, Brad. Her stepbrother, on the other hand, finds Spike the cat in her room, and tells her that she is so busted.

## Structure

This novel is comprised of twenty-three chapters with each approximately ten to twenty pages in length without any chapter names. The fact that there are no chapter names gives no foreshadowing to the reader over what may transpire in each of the chapters. As Susannah does not know how her life will unfold, it is appropriate for the author to exclude chapter names.

The plot of the novel is straightforward with no subplots. However, a case may be made for a parallel existing between Susannah's mediator business and her coming of age. As the majority of the action occurs within Susannah's mediating, it is more accurate to call this element a metaphor than a parallel. Susannah seems to overcome her knee-jerk reaction to get into fights with her spirits. Although, she does not yet overcome her desire to punch her stepbrother when she is feeling emotionally overcharged. The teenage mediator learns to listen to her elders, both dead and alive, as she moves toward adulthood and into a somewhat comfortable zone in her mediating. Susannah hones her ability for self-analysis further in this installment, especially in regard to voicing falsehoods. Finally, Susannah learns to take care of herself, without the help of Jesse.

The novel's pace is generally rapid, straight and to the point, similar to Susannah's teenage dialogue and first-person account of the events. Susannah drifts off into a

reverie occasionally, usually when she chooses not to listen to whoever is speaking to her at the moment. Sometimes, Susannah simply ignores the other person entirely.



## Quotes

"We have a responsibility to give aid and solace to those unfortunate souls who are suffering in the void between the living and the dead" (p. 1).

"An insidious growth that, given time, would consume every inch of my once smooth, unblemished skin, covering it with red, scaly bumps. That oozed, by the way" (p. 2).

"She said it the way the Wicked Witch of the West said it to the winged monkeys when she sent them out to kill Dorothy and her little dog, too" (p. 14).

"And when my instincts tell me to do something, I usually obey. I have often found it beneficial to my health" (p. 94).

"They made the person in it look all distorted - kind of like Mr. Beaumont's face with the light from the aquarium all over it" (p. 103).

"He didn't, I noticed after a while, crumble into dust the way vampires on TV did. Nor did he burst into flames as vampires in the movies often do. Instead, he just lay there" (p. 171-172).

"What on earth had I just done" (p. 195).

"Oh my God," I cried, slapping my hands over my ears as she let loose like some kind of smoke detector. "What's the matter" (p. 203).

"Of course, usually I'm fighting ghosts, and not live human beings" (p. 216).

"A couple of thickset frat boys who looked as if they were more used to pounding brewskies than people, they were out to impress the boss in a big way" (p. 216).

"Your evident fear of me was a dead giveaway. Because then there was no question that you knew more than was good for you" (p. 223).

" 'You,' Dopey said, 'are...so...busted'" (p. 287).





## Topics for Discussion

Explain how the mediating experience is a metaphor for Susannah's coming of age experience. Give concrete examples.

Describe some telling details of how Susannah is wise beyond her years.

Why does Susannah use sarcasm?

Discuss how false pretenses play a role in Susannah's attempts to perform her mediating duties. What about the false or incomplete information Susannah receives about the Beaumonts? How does this become so twisted that she cannot find the truth, until the very end?

How is Susannah still like a child at the end of the novel? How is she more like an adult?

Discuss how Susannah gets a handle on her teenage angst.

Give some examples of how the author used irony within the novel.