

Raymie Nightingale Study Guide

Raymie Nightingale by Kate DiCamillo

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Plot Summary

The following version of this book was used to create this guide: DiCamillo, Kate. *Raymie Nightingale*. Candlewick Press, Somerville, Massachusetts, 2016. Kindle AZW file.

Raymie Clarke's father, Jim, has run away with a young woman. Raymie and her mother are very sad and Raymie believes that their lives will be better if her father will just contact her. She develops a plan toward that end of winning the Little Miss Central Florida Tire pageant, so that her picture will be in the newspaper. Raymie imagines that her father picking up the paper and seeing Raymie's picture will be prompted to pick up the phone and call Raymie.

Raymie begins taking baton-twirling lessons intending to present that as her talent in the pageant. During the first lesson, Raymie meets two other girls, Louisiana Elefante and Beverly Tapinski, who are taking lessons with the same goal in mind. Louisiana is an orphan and she merely wants to win the prize money from the pageant. Beverly is already an accomplished twirler but her mother has pushed her into taking the lessons. She does not want to take lessons or enter the pageant, and she initially plans to sabotage the pageant as a way of getting out of it.

The girls' baton teacher is eccentric and shows little interest or ability in teaching the girls. They are often left on their own and begin to form a friendship. Beverly is reluctant at first. She seems like an angry girl but she is actually just facing the absence of her father who has moved to New York.

Raymie tries to perform a good deed, which is one of the requirements of the pageant. She plans to read a book about Florence Nightingale to residents of a local nursing home. However, one of the residents frightens her into losing her book and running away. When one of her baton lessons is canceled, Raymie convinces Beverly and Louisiana to help her get the book back. They succeed, which gives Louisiana an idea. She convinces Beverly and Raymie to help her try to get her cat back. Louisiana believes Archie the cat is at a local shelter, but Beverly is convinced from the beginning that Archie is actually dead.

The girls break into the building they believe is an animal shelter and discover a dog is the only animal in the building. They rescue the dog and Louisiana calls him Bunny, because of his big ears. Louisiana cannot walk after discovering that Archie is not there. Beverly and Raymie push her in a shopping cart but lose control and the cart crashes into a pond. Raymie knows that this moment is why she took a class in lifesaving. Without a second thought, she jumps into the pond and pulls Louisiana out. She then beats on Louisiana's back until she begins breathing again.

Beverly and Raymie carry Louisiana to the hospital where a nurse rushes to care for her. Raymie finds herself spilling the entire story to another nurse, including that her father has run away. Reporters soon learn about the events and take Raymie's picture,



running a story in the newspaper. Raymie remains at the hospital with Louisiana and she is there when her father calls. As soon as she hears his voice, she realizes that she has nothing to say to him.

Beverly and her mother have a long conversation outside the hospital and they seem to come to an understanding about the pageant. Beverly does not participate. Raymie no longer has a motivation for being in the pageant and she also drops out. Louisiana sings for her talent, and Raymie is not surprised when Louisiana wins, earning the money that is so important to Louisiana and her grandmother.



Chapters 1-6

Summary

As Chapter One opens, three girls are preparing to take baton-twirling lessons. One of them is Raymie Clarke. The girl beside Raymie, later identified as Louisiana Elefante, falls to the ground as if she has fainted. She rouses herself to say, "I'm sorry I betrayed you" to someone named Archie (Location 30). The twirling teacher, Ida Nee, is not patient with Louisiana.

The girls are beginning their twirling lessons on June 5, 1975. Two days earlier, Raymie's father ran away with a younger woman, a dental hygienist. Raymie's mother is very sad over the situation. Raymie is sad also, but she has a plan.

In Chapter Two, Ida Nee tells Louisiana to get up. The third girl, Beverly Tapinski, says she has seen lots of people faint because her father is a police officer. Raymie is upset that the baton-twirling lessons are delayed. She plans to win the Little Miss Central Florida Tire pageant because the winner gets her picture in the newspaper. She believes her father will see the picture and come home.

In Chapter Three, Raymie has the entire scene worked out. She believes her father, Jim Clarke of Jim Clarke Insurance, will pick up the paper and tell his new girlfriend, Lee Ann Dickerson, that he is going to look through the newspaper. He will see the picture and announce that he has changed his mind about everything and is going home, all because Raymie has become famous. She hopes that it will happen that way but understands that it is only "possible" (Location 82).

In Chapter Four, the reader learns the identity of Mrs. Sylvester. She is the receptionist at the Clarke Family Insurance company, owned by Raymie's father. She always has a jar of candy corn on her desk and offers it to everyone. When Raymie told Mrs. Sylvester that she was going to enter the pageant, Mrs. Sylvester said Raymie should learn to twirl a baton for the pageant. She suggested Ida Nee as a teacher.

In Chapter Five, the storyline picks up again at Ida Nee's yard where Louisiana is still on the ground. Ida Nee says she will not allow this kind of behavior but does not do anything. Beverly slaps Louisiana who rouses up. Ida Nee stomps off.

Louisiana introduces herself as a member of the famous performers, the Flying Elefantes. Louisiana asks if either girl has ever been in a situation where they knew "absolutely everything depends on you?" (Location 131). Both know what Louisiana is talking about. Raymie can feel her soul "billowing" with Louisiana's words.

Raymie knows about her soul from her conversations with her neighbor, Mrs. Borkowski, who says most people simply allow their souls to shrivel away. She uses the sound "phhhhtttt" often, which Raymie believes might be the sound of a soul shriveling



up. Right at that moment, in Ida Nee's backyard, Raymie's soul feels full. She thinks again about Louisiana's comment about betrayal and then asks about Archie.

In Chapter Six, Louisiana settles in to tell Raymie and Beverly her story. She begins it like a fairy tale with "Once upon a time" (Location 150). Beverly interrupts, saying Louisiana should just get on with the story. She says they could no longer pay for food for Archie, her cat, and they took him to the Very Friendly Animal Center. Beverly says she has never heard of that place. Louisiana insists they are taking good care of Archie, but she feels that she betrayed him. She plans to win the pageant to have enough money to again take care of Archie.

Beverly shows the girls a knife and says she plans to sabotage the pageant.

Analysis

In the opening chapters, Raymie reveals her plan to get her father to come home. In typical childish fashion, she believes that she can do something to make her father change his mind. She goes so far as to imagine the scene, which includes Lee Ann Dickerson doing something "inappropriate," such as filing her nails in public (Location 77). She also imagines that Lee Ann will be envious of Raymie's success. All of these seem in keeping with the emotions a girl like Raymie would be enduring in this situation. Raymie seems overly optimistic about the situation but she is actually more of a realist than it first appears. As she is going through the scenarios, she admits that she "hopes" it will happen that way. That word, hope, indicates that she knows there is a possibility that she will fail.

Mrs. Sylvester seems to be an incidental character but she is actually an fairly important person in Raymie's life, especially since Raymie has such a limited scope of friendships at this point. Mrs. Sylvester suggests Raymie should learn to twirl a baton for the pageant and she is something of a confidante in Raymie's narrow field of friends. Raymie takes her advice about the baton and she seems to trust Mrs. Sylvester. When Raymie asks Mrs. Sylvester for her feelings about Jim Clarke running away with another woman, Mrs. Sylvester says only that things generally work out for the best. She is probably being diplomatic because he is, after all, her employer, but she also seems to try to steer Raymie away from worrying about something she has no real power to change.

There are several pieces of information in this section that seem almost random, but they come together in the coming chapters. For example, Beverly plans to sabotage the pageant but she does not reveal why until much later. Though Beverly's story is never detailed in the way Raymie's and Louisiana's stories are, readers will soon discover that her determination to sabotage the pageant is her way of reacting to a situation she cannot control.

From the first mention of the Very Friendly Animal Center, Beverly expresses an air of disbelief. She does not come right out and say she believes the center does not exist for



a long time, but her skepticism is already evident. The fact that Beverly does not tell Louisiana that the center is a myth is an important aspect of her character. Though Beverly seems to be a tough, uncaring girl, she really is not.

Discussion Question 1

What is Raymie's plan to get her father to come home? What does this reveal about her character?

Discussion Question 2

Who is Mrs. Borkowski? Who is Mrs. Sylvester? What does it say about Raymie's character that she has two older women she considers friends?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Louisiana plan to win the pageant?

Vocabulary

ridiculous, fluttered, intend, possible, screeching, nonsense, pronouncement, malingerers, deposited, shrivel



Chapters 7-11

Summary

In Chapter Seven, the girls walk together up the driveway. Beverly says she is tired of her mother entering her in pageants, which is why she plans to sabotage the Little Miss Central Florida Tire pageant. Louisiana argues that the winner will get \$1,975 in prize money.

A beat-up station wagon rushes into the drive. Louisiana's grandmother sits so low in the seat that the girls do not see her immediately. She yells at Louisiana to hurry. Louisiana asks Beverly and Raymie to pretend they have not seen her if a woman named Marsha Jean shows up with a clipboard.

In Chapter Eight, Beverly says that Louisiana and her grandmother seem to be running from something, and she suggests they might be criminals. Beverly then talks about criminals, that her father is a police officer, and that she knows how to pick a lock. Beverly then throws her baton in the air and catches it. Raymie, realizing that Beverly already knows how to twirl a baton, asks why she is taking lessons. Beverly does not answer. Beverly then asks Raymie to reveal a secret about herself. Though she does not know why, Raymie tells Beverly about her father. She knows it really is not secret, but it is horrible. Beverly says that sort of thing happens a lot and that it makes her mad. She beats on the ground with her baton. She keeps on beating on the ground while a car pulls up.

In Chapter Nine, Beverly's mother, Rhonda, gets out of the car and yells at Beverly to stop, but Beverly ignores her. She then yells at Raymie to make Beverly stop. Raymie does not move and Rhonda walks over and grabs the baton. She and Beverly both pull on it until Ida Nee yells at them to stop. She says Rhonda, a champion baton twirler, should be able to make Beverly behave. Ida Nee then orders them to leave and to behave when they return. As they pull away, Raymie shouts that she will see Beverly at their next lesson. Beverly responds that she will not ever be back, which hurts Raymie in an unexpected way.

Raymie's mother arrives and says she does not understand why Raymie wants to take baton lessons or why she wanted to take lifesaving classes the previous summer. Raymie's mother then asks the rhetorical question, "What could your father possibly see in that woman?" (Location 283). Raymie does not have an answer.

In Chapter 10, Raymie thinks back to her lifesaving class the previous summer. A man named Mr. Staphopoulos taught the class. He had a homemade drowning dummy named Edgar and Louisiana could pull Edgar from the water each time she tried. One day, Raymie saw Mr. Staphopoulos in the parking lot of a local grocery store. He put his hand on her head and told her good-bye.



In Chapter 11, Raymie is working on the application for the Little Miss Central Florida Tire pageant. She wonders if Beverly and Louisiana are also filling out forms. She is supposed to list her “good deeds” but she cannot think of any. Raymie sees the Mrs. Borkowski is sitting in a chair in the middle of the street and asks her about good deeds. She often cuts Mrs. Borkowski's toenails and wonders if that counts as a good deed. Mrs. Borkowski rambles about a bird stealing a baby but does not answer Raymie's question.

Next, Raymie calls Mrs. Sylvester. She imagines her father's empty desk and is upset when she cannot remember what her father looks like. Mrs. Sylvester asks about Raymie's mother. Raymie says she is sitting in the sunroom, and that she is sad a lot. Mrs. Sylvester offers encouragement. Raymie asks about doing a good deed. Mrs. Sylvester says Raymie should read “a suitable book” to a resident at the Golden Glen, a local nursing home (Location 390). Mrs. Sylvester ends the conversation by saying that everything will work out.

Analysis

Louisiana's grandmother yells at Louisiana to get in the car, shouting that she is certain Marsha Jean is near. The implication is that Marsha Jean is some sort of child services official and that she is on the verge of taking Louisiana away from her grandmother. They recount that fear repeatedly but officials never show up. Louisiana's grandmother later talks about this as a sort of vigilance training. It does seem, however, that their lives are dangerous. Louisiana's grandmother is hardly able to see out of the car because she is so short. The car doors do not close properly and swing open when they turn corners. The reader should remember that the story takes place decades ago when there was not nearly so much emphasis on safety, including seat belts.

Raymie does not really know why she tells Beverly that her father left, but it is an important moment between the girls. Beverly says that it happens all the time, then she presents a scenario, saying that people carry their shoes in their hands as they are sneaking away. Raymie thinks that Beverly is talking about Raymie's father, but she is actually talking about her own. She does not reveal that for some time, but she likely feels an affinity with Raymie from that moment. Raymie does not feel the same connection yet, but their shared pain will connect the girls, making them friends when they have little else in common. That connection will strike home for some readers who will feel empathy for the girls based on their abandonment issues. The author likely used that situation on purpose, knowing it would reach many modern-day readers.

Beverly and her mother, Rhonda, are obviously at odds. When Beverly begins beating the ground with her baton, Rhonda yells at Beverly to stop, but she continues to ignore her mother. Rhonda then, inexplicably, yells at Raymie to make Beverly stop. When Beverly continues, Rhonda makes a rude comment about being responsible for everything. Beverly is Rhonda's daughter, so it seems reasonable that Rhonda should be responsible for her. The very interesting part of their argument comes next, when they literally get into a fight over the baton with both of them pulling on it. That is not the



typical behavior of a mother and daughter and indicates several things about their relationship. Rhonda is not in control, as she should be as the mother. Also, Beverly is openly defiant and knows that her mother is not really going to take any authoritative steps.

The novel includes dialogue that drives the story and gives the reader more information about the characters. For example, Mrs. Sylvester always tells Raymie that the current situation will resolve itself for the best. The fact that she is so kind to Raymie and is always willing to talk indicates a lot about her character. She has also made it clear that Raymie is welcome to call on her, which also gives a deeper look at her character.

Raymie is a good girl in every sense of the word. She is thoughtful and kind, evidenced by the fact that she cuts Mrs. Borkowski's toenails. The elderly woman rambles out stories and Raymie listens. Raymie remembers stories and events that most people would consider insignificant, and those affect her life.

Discussion Question 1

Describe Mrs. Sylvester. What is her role in Raymie's life? Does that role seem believable?

Discussion Question 2

Describe the relationship between Beverly and her mother, Rhonda.

Discussion Question 3

Why does Raymie tell Beverly that Jim left them? What is Beverly's response?

Vocabulary

murmur, spangly, sabotage, malevolent, accelerated, assumed, operating, criminals, behold, suspended, pointless, pang, avenging



Chapters 12-16

Summary

In Chapter 12, Raymie wonders what book is “suitable.” She dismisses several and chooses *A Bright and Shining Path: The Life of Florence Nightingale*. Mr. Option, the librarian at school, loaned it to her for Raymie's summer reading. She did not want to read nonfiction, but agreed because she likes Mr. Option.

In Chapter Thirteen, Raymie begins the walk to the Golden Glen Nursing Home. As she tries to work up her courage, she thinks about Mr. Staphopoulos and his lessons in the lifesaving class. During each class, he had the students go through a series of exercises. They were to “flex their toes and isolate their objectives” (Location 419). He taught them this as a means of preparing for what they were facing. The door at the Golden Glen is locked but a woman talks to Raymie over an intercom and allows her inside.

Martha leads the way and Raymie has the sense that she is about to learn something important. She has had that feeling before, but never reached the conclusion she hoped for. Martha introduces Raymie to a woman named Isabelle. She is rude and outspoken, but Martha convinces her to let Raymie read to her.

In Chapter 14, Raymie pushes Isabelle's wheelchair to her room. Raymie stops when she hears a woman shouting, “Take my hand” (Location 482). Isabelle says the woman is Alice Nebbley and that she shouts that all the time. Raymie is afraid and they continue toward Isabelle's room.

In Chapter 15, Isabelle refuses to let Raymie read to her. Raymie can still hear Alice Nebbley's shouts in the distance. Isabelle asks if Raymie can write a letter for her instead. Isabelle dictates a letter to the nursing home management complaining that the janitor often plays Chopin's music on the piano, and that the music is too sad. Raymie then pushes Isabelle to the suggestion box and drops the letter in. Isabelle says Raymie has done a good deed and can leave now. Raymie does not think the letter qualifies as a good deed, but she is also ready for the visit to end. Before she goes, she finds herself telling Isabelle about her father. Isabelle responds only with the words, “I see” (Location 549).

In Chapter 16, Raymie stops by Alice's room, planning to read to her. Alice screams which frightens Raymie so much that she drops her book. Alice continues to yell and Raymie runs outside where she realizes she has to get the book back. Raymie remembers Beverly saying that “Fear is a waste of time” (Location 583). Raymie knows that she cannot conquer her fears but that Beverly could help her get the book back.



Analysis

It is important to see that Raymie has done good deeds but does not recognize them as good deeds. She does not even consider that cutting Mrs. Borkowski's toenails would qualify. She writes a letter of complaint for Isabelle because that is what Isabelle asked of her, but Raymie dismisses Isabelle when she says that is a good deed. Raymie is putting her own definition on the term and does not recognize the small things she does for someone as being important to them.

Raymie takes things to heart. She took lifesaving lessons the previous summer with Mr. Staphopoulos as her teacher. He taught them to take steps toward their ultimate goals, including flexing their toes. He introduced that as a means of helping them focus and Raymie continues to flex her toes whenever she is faced with some new situation that makes her uncomfortable.

There is a powerful piece of imagery as Raymie is preparing to leave Isabelle's room. Raymie tells Isabelle that Jim left his family and Isabelle listens, but only responds with "I see" (Location 549). Just then, sunlight breaks through a curtain and a patch of sunlight appears on the floor of Isabelle's room. Raymie points it out and Isabelle again says, "I see." The image of light breaking through to illuminate the situation symbolizes understanding. That imagery is very traditional and is seen in many pieces of literature. The fact that Raymie does not yet "see" the answers to her problem is irrelevant. Just as the light breaks through into Isabelle's room, the truly important aspects of her life will break through into Raymie's consciousness.

Raymie enters Alice Nebbley's room in yet another attempt to do a good deed, but the reader can make some other assumptions about Raymie's choice. Alice is shouting that she wants someone to hold her hand. Raymie may be feeling that she needs guidance or comfort in this confusing situation regarding her father. Those feelings may be making her more understanding of the needs of others. It may also be that she is simply the kind of caring person who would respond to another person's heartfelt needs.

Discussion Question 1

Describe the good deed Raymie plans to do. What good deed does she do instead?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Raymie go into Alice Nebbley's room? What does this tell readers about Raymie's character?



Discussion Question 3

What lessons did Raymie learn from her lifesaving class? Do they seem to apply to her everyday life?

Vocabulary

diversifying, depressing, isolate, objectives, flexed, fascinating, monotony, frustration, retrieved, prevailed, establishment, mournful



Chapters 17-20

Summary

In Chapter 17, Beverly arrives at Ida Nee's with a bruise on her face. When Raymie asks what happened, Beverly denies that anything happened. Ida Nee joins them and immediately demands that Beverly spit out her gum. Beverly refuses and Ida Nee hits her on the head with the rubber tip of her baton. Beverly still refuses. Ida Nee raises her baton again but Louisiana rushes to grab Ida Nee by the waist, yelling at her to stop hitting Beverly. Beverly spits out the gum and pulls Louisiana away, patting her on the back. Ida Nee again leaves without teaching the girls anything.

In Chapter 18, Raymie has explained to Beverly about the book. Louisiana says the three girls can be the Three Rancheros, and that they can “rescue each other” (Location 647). She says they can rescue Archie from the Very Friendly Animal Center after they get Raymie's book back. Louisiana reveals more about her plan, saying that after she wins the pageant money, she and her grandmother can stop stealing food. Beverly says she knew Louisiana and her grandmother were criminals, but Louisiana objects, saying they are “survivors” (Location 657).

There is a pause in the conversation and the three girls stare out at the lake. It is named for Clara Wingtip, a woman who drowned in the lake and reportedly haunts it. Raymie says people can sometimes hear Clara crying. Louisiana listens for a moment and says she can hear it. Raymie hears it as well.

In Chapter 19, Beverly says that Raymie will get her book back and Louisiana will get her cat back. Beverly asks what she will get for helping them. She then insists that she does not want anything. Raymie considers fairy tales where wishes always turn out badly. She thinks that Beverly might be smart by not making a wish.

Louisiana's grandmother arrives. As she is preparing to leave, Louisiana says she will meet Beverly and Raymie the next day at Golden Glen. Louisiana reveals that her parents were trapeze artists and that they drowned when a ship sank, which is why she never learned to swim. Louisiana says that Marsha Jean wants to put Louisiana in the “county home,” which is apparently an orphanage. After she is gone, Raymie asks Beverly if Louisiana's parents really were famous trapeze artists. Beverly says the story is not true.

Beverly asks Raymie if her father has returned. Raymie feels her soul shrink when she answers that he has not. Beverly says Raymie needs to hear the truth, that sometimes people leave and never return. She then says she will help Raymie get her book back, because that is an easy task to accomplish.

In Chapter 20, Raymie and Louisiana arrive first at Golden Glen. Beverly arrives soon after and her bruise is beginning to turn from black to green. Raymie rings the intercom.



Martha says Isabelle will be happy to have guests. Martha asks Beverly about her bruise and Beverly says she had a fight. Louisiana chatters to Martha. Raymie, fully aware that she did not know any of these people a few days ago, focuses on the task at hand.

Analysis

Raymie's first reaction upon seeing Beverly at the baton-twirling lesson is relief that she is back and she asks Beverly about her plan to never return. Beverly tries not to make an issue of her presence but it is obvious that her mother is responsible for the bruise on her face. Beverly also insists that the bruise is nothing, which is another look at her character's tough girl persona. The abuse should not surprise the reader considering the scene between Beverly and Rhonda from the previous evening but it does seem out of place in this novel.

The time setting for the novel is again important to the reader during the first chapter of this section. These are all apparently middle-class families in the early 1970s when few people talked about child abuse. In today's society, Beverly's mother would have been held accountable for the abuse but in those days, few people would intervene or call the authorities.

Louisiana makes a very important statement in Chapter 18 when she suggests that the three girls can "rescue each other" (Location 647). The word rescue indicates that all three girls are struggling in some way and that they each need some sort of help. At this point, Raymie has asked for help getting her book back and Louisiana has asked for help getting her cat back, but Beverly has not asked for anything. She will not ask for help at all during the novel, but she does need help. She and her mother are struggling with their relationship, probably because Beverly's father has left them. She has not yet even told Raymie and Louisiana that her father is gone, but they will become the catalyst for Beverly's change toward accepting the situation and working on a better relationship with her mother.

Louisiana reveals that she and her grandmother steal food. She says they do so because they are survivors, which is obviously something that her grandmother has said to her. While it may be that this is another situation in which her grandmother is trying to make something interesting happen in their lives, it seems more likely that they actually are struggling at a very basic level.

The lake named for Clara Wingtip is near Ida Nee's house and Raymie has heard the stories of a woman who drowned there. When she says that people believe they can hear Clara crying, Louisiana says she can hear it. Raymie does not respond but she can hear it as well. Obviously, the two girls are not actually hearing Clara cry, but the fact that they believe they do is symbolic of their willingness to listen to others as they express their pain. That idea is repeated with Alice Nebbley, the woman in the nursing home.



Raymie thinks about the fact that she has only recently met Beverly, Louisiana, and Martha, but she is quickly accepting their presence in her life. Martha meets them when they go inside the Golden Glen, and Raymie thinks that she looks very welcoming. This tendency to become quickly attached to people may seem like an extreme response to her father's abandonment, but it seems more likely that it is just part of Raymie's character.

Discussion Question 1

What does it mean that Louisiana and Raymie can hear Clara crying?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Louisiana want the three girls to be the Three Rancheros?

Discussion Question 3

What is wrong with Beverly when she arrives for their second baton lesson?

Vocabulary

randomly, glittered, swayed, dispensed, questionable, murky, disbelief, extremely, forgiving, dizziness



Chapters 21-26

Summary

In Chapter 21, Martha leaves the girls, saying she has to go back to her desk. She invites them to go on to Isabelle's room. Beverly is "terrifying polite" with her replies to Martha (Location 770). The girls begin down the hall and hear Alice Nebbley screaming "Take my hand" (Location 776). Louisiana grabs Raymie's hand, which Raymie finds reassuring. Beverly goes right inside the room. The room is dark but Raymie sees Beverly's shape bend down. Beverly then announces that the book is not there. Alice screams again, saying she cannot withstand the pain. Louisiana rushes away to find help. Beverly reaches out and takes Alice's hand, then begins humming to her. Alice stops screaming.

Louisiana rushes back, saying she found Raymie's book in the janitor's office. She saw a yellow bird in a cage in the janitor's office. She says she does not believe birds should be caged, and she set it free. In her haste to get away, she forgot to pick up Raymie's book. They hear a scream and the sound of someone running down the hall.

In Chapter 22, a bird comes flying down the hallway with the janitor running after it. Raymie's first impression is that he does not look like he would play the piano, as Isabelle had complained. He also does not look like the kind of person who would have a bird. While he is away, the girls enter the office and see the book. Raymie feels sad when she sees the birdcage's open door. She wonders if her mother is just sitting somewhere being sad and if her father has already forgotten he has a daughter. Raymie pauses for so long that Louisiana rushes inside and grabs Raymie's book. They hear someone yell again and agree that they need to leave.

In Chapter 23, the three girls make it outside. Louisiana points out that neither Raymie nor Beverly wanted her to join them, but that she was the one who located the book. She says that freeing the bird was an "extra good deed" (Location 847). Just then, Louisiana's grandmother arrives in their beat-up car, screaming that they have to hurry because Marsha Jean is near. She yells for all three girls to get in the car. Beverly walks over to the car and tells Raymie, in a very calm voice, that they have to hurry. They get in and the door flies open again as Louisiana's grandmother drives away.

In Chapter 24, Louisiana says that her grandmother always gets away from Marsha Jean. Beverly "snorted" in response (Location 876). Then Beverly smiled and Raymie thought it was the first real smile she had seen from Beverly. Raymie knows that Louisiana's grandmother is driving too fast and that she should be worried, but she just feels intense happiness. Louisiana says she is also incredibly happy and she begins to sing in a beautiful voice that catches Raymie by surprise.

Louisiana's song, Raindrops Keep Falling on my Head, makes Raymie think about one night when she saw her father sitting at the kitchen table with his head in his hands. She



left the room without disturbing him but now knows she should have said something. Those thoughts make her sad just as they arrive at Louisiana's house. It is a ramshackle house at the end of a gravel drive.

In Chapter 25, Louisiana's grandmother says that Louisiana talks incessantly about her best friend, Raymie. She then sends Louisiana to the house to get the can opener. After Louisiana is outside, her grandmother produces the can opener. Raymie asks if Louisiana's parents really were famous trapeze artists. Louisiana's grandmother raises her eyebrows, one at a time. Raymie then asks if Marsha Jean is real. Louisiana's grandmother says she is "the ghost of what's to come," and a means of making Louisiana vigilant (Location 941). The grandmother says she will not always be available to protect Louisiana, and asks Raymie and Beverly to step in if that time comes. Raymie believes that is a huge request, especially since she is not certain how to even protect herself.

In Chapter 26, the girls and Louisiana's grandmother eat tuna and drink water out of small paper cups. Louisiana says the chandelier in the kitchen is pretty, but that the electricity does not work at the moment. Louisiana says that she misses Archie and cries until Beverly whispers something to her. Beverly says aloud that her father is a police officer. Louisiana's grandmother asks where he works and Beverly said he is in New York City. Raymie is dumbfounded at learning that Beverly's father has left his family. Beverly says she is going to live there as soon as she is old enough, and that she has already tried to run away. Beverly then becomes rude, saying she is stuck with "doing stupid things" with "you people" (Location 984). When Beverly leaves the room, Louisiana suggests that Beverly is heartbroken. Raymie feels "her soul shrink" (Location 987).

Analysis

The author uses the term "terrifyingly polite" to describe Beverly's conversations with Martha (Location 770). That term conjures images of Beverly from Raymie's perspective. All Raymie knows about Beverly at this point is that she professes to never feel fear and that she openly fights with her mother. The bruise on Beverly's face adds another level of roughness to Beverly's image. Raymie might be concerned that Beverly is going to do something rude to Martha at any moment. The use of the word "terrifyingly" could feel like foreshadowing, but the idea that she is going to dramatically change does not come to pass.

Beverly has many facets and it now seems that her rough acts are just for show. No one expects her to comfort Alice Nebbley or to show any compassion for the woman, but she does. Not only does she hold Alice's hand, she hums to her. Beverly is one of the main characters to show empathy and sympathy, which is one of the book's themes.

The book is filled with imagery designed to provoke specific feelings for the reader. Raymie feels sad when she sees the birdcage's open door, and it prompts her to think about several people in her life, including her father. She imagines that he is at a diner



with his new girlfriend and that his father is not thinking about her at all. She then makes the leap to imagine that he has already forgotten her. That thought makes her incredibly sad and indicates the depth of her feelings of loss.

Louisiana has been talking about Raymie since they met, indicating that Raymie has quickly become an important person in her life. That is probably why Louisiana's grandmother asks Raymie and Beverly to keep an eye on Louisiana if her grandmother becomes unable to do so. Louisiana's grandmother reveals some important information in the few minutes she is alone with Beverly and Raymie, and she does so as if she is talking to adults rather than children the same age as Louisiana. She makes it clear that Louisiana's parents were not famous trapeze artists. Likely, they died or left when Louisiana was very young and her grandmother has perpetrated that story to give Louisiana something to hold onto. She also reveals the truth about Marsha Jean – which most readers will already suspect by this point. Marsha Jean is a figment of Granny's imagination but it seems that she is grooming Louisiana to stay away from child services people if she became a true orphan without her grandmother as a guardian.

Discussion Question 1

What does Louisiana's grandmother reveal about Louisiana? What does she ask Raymie and Beverly to do?

Discussion Question 2

How does Beverly reveal the truth about her father? What does she do as soon as she makes the revelation? What does this imply about her true feelings?

Discussion Question 3

Describe the scene in the Golden Glen Nursing Home. What aspects of the scene are most surprising? Why?

Vocabulary

gruesome, sequined, dread, directive, emitted, cacophony, mechanical, wily, technically, humble, abode, sleight



Chapters 27-30

Summary

In Chapter 27, Louisiana's grandmother drives them home, much slower than she had driven them away from the Golden Glen. Beverly does not speak. Raymie feels sad. Louisiana reminds Raymie that the Three Rancheros still have another task. Raymie's mother meets her at the door and announces that Mrs. Borkowski has died.

In Chapter 28, Raymie's mother says Mrs. Borkowski had a heart attack. Raymie calls Mrs. Sylvester and imagines the jar of candy corn, "as if it held a light instead of candy corn" (Location 1021). The idea comforts her but she still cannot talk. Mrs. Sylvester realizes it is Raymie and assures her that her father will come back. Raymie becomes even sadder when she realizes that Mrs. Sylvester does not even know that Mrs. Borkowski is dead. Mrs. Sylvester continues to soothe Raymie, saying that things will be alright.

Raymie and her mother drive to the Finch Auditorium where Mrs. Borkowski's memorial service is being held. Raymie takes the Florence Nightingale book with her.

In Chapter 29, Raymie feels lonely while listening to people talk at the memorial service then she hears Louisiana's voice. Raymie had been considering the floor tiles, remembering that someone once told her it was bad luck to step on the white tiles. When she rushes toward Louisiana, she pays no attention to the tiles because she knows "bad things happen" regardless of whether she is careful about which tiles she walks on (Location 1084).

In Chapter 30, Louisiana pats Raymie's back and says, "I'm sorry for your loss" (Location 1089). She says those words hold the power to convey the true feelings toward someone who is grieving. Raymie sees that Louisiana's grandmother is wearing a huge fur coat even though it is summer, and that she is stealing food from the refreshment table. Raymie and Louisiana go behind a curtain and Louisiana invites Raymie to talk about Mrs. Borkowski, though she does not get her name right.

Louisiana tells Raymie that she is always hungry, which is why she has to win the pageant. Raymie tells Louisiana that her father left. Louisiana repeats the phrase, "I'm sorry for your loss" (Location 1132).

As they are talking, Louisiana's grandmother begins to talk loudly and it is obvious that someone has confronted her about taking food. Louisiana tells Raymie that they are together as friends, and that they will be there for each other. She then leaves by the emergency exit, reminding Raymie not to tell Marsha Jean that Louisiana has been there. The alarm sounds from the moment Louisiana opens the door. Raymie examines her emotions and feels a "tiny spark" that means her soul is "glowing" (Location 1154).



Analysis

Raymie is hurt over Mrs. Borkowski's death, partly because she feels that she is enduring her pain all alone. She tries to tell her mother about a theory Mrs. Borkowski had regarding the way the sky would look from the bottom of a deep hole, but her mother does not understand and is not interested in trying to hear Raymie's true emotions. Raymie's mother is, at this point, struggling through emotional turmoil herself because her husband has abandoned the family, which partly explains her attitude on this topic. But she has never been very understanding of Mrs. Borkowski and has made it clear that she believes the woman was abnormal.

Raymie's first instinct upon learning about Mrs. Borkowski's death is to call Mrs. Sylvester. She is so upset that she cannot speak but Mrs. Sylvester soon realizes it must be Raymie. There are some pieces of information about the characters in that conversation. First, Raymie turns to Mrs. Sylvester for comfort instead of her own mother, which indicates that she knows Mrs. Sylvester will offer comfort but does not expect it from her mother. Next, Mrs. Sylvester knows it is Raymie, even though Raymie is so upset that she cannot talk. That indicates that Mrs. Sylvester has welcomed Raymie's calls in the past and fully expects Raymie to confide in her.

Louisiana is the one who steps in and talks to Raymie about Mrs. Borkowski's death. She also tells Louisiana that they will always be there for each other, indicating that she has established a strong attachment to Raymie. Raymie feels similarly about Louisiana, and it is obviously that the two have begun a long-term friendship. There is an interesting aspect to the girls' lives in that they did not know each other before they began taking baton-twirling lessons. They are probably roughly the same age but have not met in school. There is no explanation.

Louisiana initially said that she needed to win the contest to use the prize money to feed Archie, but she reveals at Mrs. Borkowski's memorial service that they need the money for food for themselves. The fact that Louisiana's grandmother is stealing food from the memorial service and that they have no electricity at home are indications that Louisiana is not exaggerating. Raymie tells Louisiana her reasons for wanting to win the contest. The girls' characters are seen in the fact that Louisiana believes Raymie has a good plan and does not try to persuade Raymie to drop out of the competition. Raymie eventually does drop out, and she is glad when Louisiana wins. Both girls have the best interests of the other at heart, even when those interests conflict.

The author depends on literary terms and imagery throughout the novel, often using the images to portray bigger emotions. One example is seen when Raymie and Louisiana go behind the curtain during the memorial service. Raymie notices that the curtains give off a "galaxy" of dust. She considers that each speck of dust might hold an entire world filled with people who are struggling to understand their lives, just like Raymie. She becomes sad at that thought because she ultimately wants there to be hope that she will make sense of the events in her life. While the idea of an entire world existing on a



speck of dust is borrowed from another piece of literature, its impact on Raymie is unique.

Discussion Question 1

Describe Raymie's feelings over Mrs. Borkowski's death. Why is Louisiana's presence so comforting to Raymie at the memorial service?

Discussion Question 2

What is the home situation for Louisiana and her grandmother?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Raymie call Mrs. Sylvester after she learns that Mrs. Borkowski is dead? Why does Mrs. Sylvester assume that it is Raymie calling? What does she say to Raymie in an effort to comfort her?

Vocabulary

objectives, gigantic, conjured, slightly, terrible, auditorium, galaxy, celebrating, gathering, particular, prostrate, grief



Chapters 31-34

Summary

In Chapter 31, Raymie discovers that everyday events continue to happen, even when someone important in her life has died. The next day, the three girls show up for baton lessons. When Ida Nee does not show up, they go to her house. Beverly easily opens the locked door to the office. Louisiana is amazed at all the trophies. Beverly points out one that her mother, Rhonda, won and says only some of the trophies are Ida Nee's. At Raymie's amazed comment about Beverly's mother, Beverly responds that her mother was once a baton twirler and beauty pageant winner, but is just a sales clerk now. Louisiana wants to continue searching for Ida Nee. Beverly puts her hand on Raymie's back, gently pushing her to "Just keep moving" (Location 1218). Raymie goes through the door.

In Chapter 32, the three girls go in Ida Nee's house and find her asleep on the couch, holding her baton. She sleeps through their arrival and Louisiana calling out to her. Beverly takes Ida Nee's baton, repeating the word "sabotage" as the girls leave the house.

In Chapter 33, Louisiana says it is time to rescue Archie. Beverly says again that the Very Friendly Animal Center is not real and that Louisiana does not understand reality. Louisiana becomes angry. She says the reality is that she is an orphan, that Beverly's father lives in New York and Beverly cannot go to him, and that Raymie's father has run away and may not come back. She says all those things are real, but that the three girls are friends, which is also reality. She ends by saying that friends do things for each other. At that moment, Raymie knows that she will not enter the pageant after all, and that she feels the need to protect Louisiana. Raymie says she will help Louisiana get the cat back. Beverly says that seems to be their plan.

In Chapter 34, Louisiana leads the way to the building where her grandmother left Archie. The woman behind the counter says they keep no record of cats before they are put down. Louisiana does not understand. Outside, Beverly says Archie is dead. Louisiana goes back inside and beats on the receptionist's desk with her baton, shouting that she wants Archie back. She becomes so upset that Beverly and Raymie can tell she is going to faint. When she does, they carry her outside. They wonder what to do for a moment. Raymie, thinking about Mrs. Sylvester's jar of candy corn, suggests they go to her father's office.

Analysis

Beverly's instruction to Raymie to "Just keep moving" is deeper than it appears (Location 1218). Raymie is struggling through many aspects of her life, including the death of her friend and her father's absence. Beverly tries to appear uncaring, but she is



actually a very sympathetic girl who seems to instinctively know what other people need at a given time.

There are many trophies in Ida Nee's office, but Beverly quickly points out that not all of them were won by Ida Nee. Beverly is obviously scornful of the trophies and all they represent. She points out that her mother won some of them and now her mother is nothing more than a sales clerk. Louisiana's reaction, typically, is that they must be worth a lot of money. Her mind is always on money, which is an integral part of her character. However, Beverly quickly makes it clear that the trophies are worthless except as mementos.

Louisiana's reaction to Beverly's statement about reality reminds the reader that Louisiana has a difficult life. She points out that Beverly and Raymie have problems in their lives, but she begins by saying that her parents are dead. She is an orphan, which is a constant reality in Louisiana's world. That may be a necessary reminder for Beverly and Raymie to understand how much Louisiana needs their support.

The scene at the animal place is chaotic. The only sign identifies it as Building 10 but Louisiana is certain this is where her grandmother left Archie. There is a horrible howling from inside the building, which sets the scene for Louisiana's meltdown. Louisiana seems timid most of the time, but she rushes back into the building, filled with fury that she was lied to.

The reader will likely believe, as Beverly and Raymie do, that Archie the cat really is dead. The author leads the reader to continue believing that for some time. This is one of the instances of misdirection. Readers who expect all the problems of the novel to be resolved will be disappointed with the outcome, but Archie the cat will miraculously show up, unharmed.

Louisiana's health is an issue throughout the novel. Sometimes, she says she has "swampy" lungs as a means of explaining her condition. Raymie repeatedly notes that Louisiana audibly wheezes when she breathes. The illness is not defined in medical terms but seems to also be the reason Louisiana sometimes faints. Beverly and Raymie literally carry her when she passes out and accommodate her illness, including pushing her in a buggy when she says she is too upset to walk.

Discussion Question 1

What does Beverly do and say when the girls break in to Ida Nee's office?

Discussion Question 2

What does Louisiana say when Beverly tries to talk her out of going to rescue Archie?



Discussion Question 3

What happens when the girls go to the building Louisiana identifies as the Very Friendly Animal Center?

Vocabulary

inexplicably, desperately, shrugged, surveyed, jiggled, glinted, illuminate, inarguable, reverberating, heralding



Chapters 35-38

Summary

In Chapter 35, the girls arrive at the insurance office. Mrs. Sylvester is taken aback by the fact they are wet. Raymie explains that they carried Louisiana through a sprinkler to wake her up enough to walk. Louisiana asks for candy corn and Mrs. Sylvester gives her the jar. Beverly opens the door to Jim Clarke's personal office and Raymie joins her. Beverly asks if Jim has called Raymie. Raymie says he has not and Beverly seems unsurprised. Raymie asks how Beverly got the bruise. Beverly says her mother hit her because she shoplifted. Beverly says she wants to live on her own. Raymie announces that she is not going to enter the contest. Beverly announces that she will not sabotage it either. Beverly then says that she feels sad for Louisiana because of the situation with the cat. Raymie feels the weight of everything she knows, feels, and has seen.

In Chapter 36, the three girls start back toward Ida Nee's house. Louisiana sings until Raymie tells her to stop. Louisiana then announces that the people are trying to keep Archie and that the three of them have to return that night to get the cat. Beverly says Louisiana needs to accept that Archie is dead. Beverly also argues that the Three Rancheros is not a real group but Raymie sides with Louisiana, saying they are all there and they are all friends.

They come within sight of Ida Nee's house and see that she is talking to the police about her missing baton, and that Raymie's mother and Beverly's mother are there. Beverly says she left the baton at the insurance office, and that they girls just have to stick to their story – that Ida Nee did not come to teach them and they left together. Just then, Louisiana's grandmother grabs Raymie from her hiding place in a bush. She says she has a plan and Raymie is happy to know that someone has a plan.

In Chapter 37, Louisiana's grandmother has decided that Louisiana should not go home with her because of the recent proximity to the police. Her alternative is for Louisiana to spend the night at Raymie's house. The three girls decide that Beverly will meet them at midnight and the three will go rescue Archie. The scene picks up after all the commotion has died down. Raymie's mother calls it “a tempest in a teapot” (Location 1487).

At Raymie's house, Louisiana calls Raymie's mother “Mrs. Nightingale” and reveals that she believes Raymie's last name is Nightingale. Louisiana asks if she plans to have anything for dinner and suggests meatloaf. Raymie's mother sighs, but makes meatloaf and is surprised at how much Louisiana eats. Louisiana tries to begin conversation at the dinner table but Mrs. Clarke is mostly silent.

The girls go to Raymie's room after dinner and Louisiana asks if Raymie's father kissed her good-night before he left. Raymie wants to stop thinking about anything related to her father. Louisiana says her grandmother always kisses her good-night, and gives her



one kiss each for the people who are missing from her life – her parents and her grandfather.

Louisiana suggests they take turns reading from the Florence Nightingale book. She opens it to the middle and begins to read, saying that method means the reader never knows what is coming next. She says her grandmother reads that way as a means of keeping Louisiana vigilant.

In Chapter 38, Raymie wakes and finds that Beverly has not arrived. She thinks back over the rest of the evening with Louisiana. Louisiana had said that Florence Nightingale “helps those who have fallen on the battlefield of life,” using her “magic globe” to light her way (Location 1535). Next, Louisiana says the people Florence Nightingale helped no longer “wish for things that are gone” (Location 1537). Raymie objects, saying she does not think it is a magic globe nor that the book includes those sentences, but Louisiana's words have struck a chord with her. Louisiana says she sometimes reads the words she imagines instead of the written words and Raymie tells her to continue.

Louisiana continues to read and Raymie falls asleep. She dreams that Mrs. Borkowski is walking away, carrying a suitcase. She calls out and Mrs. Borkowski stops, opened the suitcase, and pulls out a cat that Raymie immediately recognizes as Archie. Mrs. Borkowski then walks away and Raymie knows Louisiana will be happy to find Archie.

Raymie remembers all this, standing by her window with the realization that Beverly is not coming. Louisiana wakes and suggests they go alone, but Raymie points out Beverly is the only one who knows how to pick a lock. Louisiana says they will have to try anyway. Just then, Raymie sees a flash of light. Her first thought is that “Florence Nightingale had arrived carrying her great magical globe” (Location 1583). Instead, it is Beverly, carrying a flashlight. She shines the light on her own face and she is smiling.

Analysis

Louisiana's grandmother suggests Louisiana should spend the night with Raymie, saying that it would be better if she did not come home because of their close encounter with the police at Ida Nee's house. Her grandmother does not actually believe they are in any danger, which prompts the reader to question her motives. She may feel certain that Raymie's mother will feed the girls a good meal, and sees that as an opportunity for Louisiana to have a full stomach, at least for one night. That theory is borne out by Louisiana's question of what they were having for dinner and suggesting that she loves meatloaf. She eats a lot of food, including green beans, which seems to indicate that she is in need of more food than she is currently getting.

Raymie's mother says that Ida Nee made a scene over something trivial. She uses the idiom “a tempest in a teapot” (Location 1487). The saying simply means that the situation was greatly exaggerated but was a minor incident. The phrase is also an example of alliteration, which is seen only a few times in this novel.



Louisiana reveals that she thought Raymie's last name was Nightingale, like Florence Nightingale from Raymie's book. She does not explain why she came up with that idea and Raymie does not ask her. The cover of Raymie's book depicts Florence Nightingale carrying a lantern as she lights up the path in front of her. The symbolism is clear – that Louisiana sees Raymie as the person who lights up her world and who has the power to change her world for the better. That symbolism continues as Beverly arrives at Raymie's house in Chapter 39, but this time it is Raymie who is aware that Beverly has the power to help them.

Louisiana's made up version of the Florence Nightingale book takes information from the girls' current situations. Louisiana uses the term “battlefield of life” (Location 1535), which symbolizes the difficult situations each girl is facing. Though Louisiana's situation is more dire, she recognizes Raymie's pain. The remainder of Louisiana's story can also be applied to the girls. The words about Florence Nightingale makes people stop wishing for things they can not have are prophetic because Raymie has just decided that her father is not coming home and that she just wants to stop thinking about him. She has not revealed that to Louisiana yet. It is possible that Louisiana realizes Raymie will go through this phase because Louisiana has also endured loss.

It seems obvious that Louisiana's grandmother is not able to care for Louisiana's physical needs. Louisiana is often hungry and they are literally stealing canned tuna to feed themselves. While her methods seem sporadic and unorthodox, she does seem to be doing her best to meet Louisiana's emotional needs. Louisiana talks about the fact that her grandmother reads to her and kisses her every night.

Discussion Question 1

Describe the conversation between Beverly and Raymie while they are at the Clarke Family Insurance office. What revelations do the girls make during that brief talk?

Discussion Question 2

What are some of the details Louisiana pretends to read from the Florence Nightingale book? How do those apply to Louisiana and Raymie?

Discussion Question 3

What is the significance of Louisiana's belief that Raymie's last name is Nightingale? What is the significance of Raymie's comparison of Beverly and Florence Nightingale?

Vocabulary

complicated, lingered, extended, aerial, panicking, concocted, methodically, rescue, twined



Chapters 39-44

Summary

In Chapter 39, Beverly reveals that she is late because she took time to throw the trophies from Ida Nee's office into the lake. She points out again that not all of them were Ida Nee's. Louisiana is upset, saying that Ida Nee will certainly stop giving her baton lessons now. Beverly says that Louisiana's singing will certainly win the contest. Raymie agrees.

The girls set out. When they near the Golden Glen, Raymie hears piano music and thinks it is beautiful but sad. Just then, Raymie spots the yellow bird on a branch outside the nursing home window. Raymie says the bird "looked like the answer to everything" (Location 1618). The janitor comes to the window and whistles. The bird is silent for a moment, but then responds. The girls lie down, hiding. Raymie looks at the moon and is filled with a sudden happiness. She hopes her father is dreaming about her without consciously planning to do so. The janitor says he is aware "you" are there, and the girls run away.

They soon have to rest because Louisiana cannot catch her breath. Louisiana wheezes out that she loves the bird. Raymie agrees. Beverly puts the flashlight on her own face and also agrees. Raymie's happiness increases.

In Chapter 40, Louisiana says Archie does not behave well and that they need a shopping cart from the grocery store to carry him. After a brief discussion, they take a cart.

Beverly points out the Belknap Tower, saying her mother dislikes working there, but that her mother does not seem to like anything. Raymie asks if Beverly has been to the top. She says she visits it often and that she used to hope she could see her dad in New York City from there. She says it was ridiculous, but that she was too young to know better. Raymie imagines what she might see if she was at the top. Beverly invites Raymie to join her sometime and Raymie accepts. The conversation is ended when the girls reach Building 10.

In Chapter 41, the girls notice that the building, which Louisiana still believes is the Very Friendly Animal Center, seems to look sad and "guilty." In just a few seconds' time, Beverly opens the door with a pocketknife. Raymie first says she cannot bear to go inside but Louisiana insists they remain together. Raymie realizes they have a duty, as the Three Rancheros, to protect each other. Almost as soon as they are inside, they hear a horrific howling. Raymie asks someone to hold her hand.

In Chapter 42, Louisiana takes one of Raymie's hands and Raymie holds Beverly's hand with her other. There is another door but Raymie finds she cannot let go of Beverly's hand until Beverly convinces her to hold the flashlight. But Louisiana turns the



knob and finds the door is not locked at all. Beverly takes the flashlight back. They find lots of empty cages. Raymie knows she will never forget how horrible those empty cages look. Louisiana speaks to Archie, saying she is sorry. Beverly shines the light around the room, and finds the source of the howling.

In Chapter 43, the girls realize that a dog has been howling. It has a long body and long ears, and one eye is swollen closed. Beverly opens the cage and the dog comes out. Louisiana, referring to the dog's ears, decides to call him Bunny. Outside, Louisiana again insists that Archie is alive, but now does not know what to do next in her search for him. Louisiana says she is “too sad to walk” and Beverly picks her up, putting her in the shopping cart (Location 1739). Raymie puts Bunny in the cart with Louisiana. Louisiana says she feels “hollow.” Raymie agrees. Louisiana then wonders what will happen to the girls. Neither Raymie nor Beverly answers.

In Chapter 44, Raymie suggests Beverly break into the Belknap Tower so the girls can climb to the top. Beverly says she could get them in, but that there is no reason to. Beverly and Raymie have to work together to push the cart up the hill. Raymie knows the community and that Swip Memorial Hospital is on the other side of the hill along with Swip Pond. The pond had originated as a sink hole until Mable Swip donated the property to the city, along with money for some improvements such as lights. Mrs. Sylvester goes to the pond each day to feed the swans.

As the girls top the hill, the cart suddenly races away. Raymie is not certain what happened, but says it was as if the cart was snatched away. The cart rushes toward the pond and Raymie and Beverly run after it. They hear Louisiana say that she does not know how to swim. Raymie imagines Mrs. Borkowski's voice telling her to run.

Analysis

Beverly says that she had often climbed to the top of Belknap Tower in the hope of being able to see her father in New York. She then says that she was too young to know that it was a ridiculous idea. This indicates that Beverly has gone through some stages of acceptance regarding her father's absence, though she is still working through the anger. Her comment that her mother does not like anything is an indication that Beverly's anger may be manifested, at least partly, by her mother's anger over her husband's abandonment.

There is an instance of personification in Chapter 41 which is intended as foreshadowing. Raymie notes that Building 10, which Louisiana calls the Very Friendly Animal Center, is “morose, and also slightly guilty, as if it had done something terrible and had hunkered itself down in the ground hoping that no one would notice” (Location 1678). The choice of words seems deliberate, intending to make the reader expect the worst possible outcome from the coming scenes.

When Raymie is afraid, she asks for someone to “take my hand” (Location 1697). Those are the exact words Alice Nebbley yelled in the nursing home. The statement is



symbolic of Raymie's desperation to have her friends reassure her, just as Alice Nebbley had shown a level of desperation with her screams. This time, Louisiana is the first to reach out, holding Raymie's hand, but Beverly does not object and also holds Raymie's hand.

The author turns again to the impact of imagery when the girls go inside the room at Building 10. There, they find many empty cages. The implication is obvious: The cages were filled with animals that have been killed. That image makes Louisiana accept that Archie is dead after all. She apologizes to him. She has always felt guilty for having abandoned him, but now her guilt is multiplied. Raymie never knew Archie and really has no reason to be upset on his behalf, but she feels upset because of her friendship with Louisiana. Even more than that, she understands that all those cages are symbolic of animals that died because no one wanted them.

There is a piece of foreshadowing at the end of Chapter 42 when Beverly finds the source of the howling. The implication is that she has found Archie, but that is not the case. Young readers may still be expecting all the pieces of the story to reach happy conclusions, but may come to believe that Archie really is dead after the scene at Building 10.

At the end of Chapter 43, Louisiana is very sad. She says she wonders "what will become of us" (Location 1748). She is asking about their future but does not say exactly what she means. It seems likely that she is referring to their long-term future, and what their lives will be like in the years to come, but she may also be wondering about the coming days, including the pageant and the fate of Archie. It is left for the reader to decide.

Beverly talks about going to the top of the Belknap Tower in the hope that she would see her father from there. Later, she says there is no reason to climb the tower now. The tower symbolizes Beverly's hope that she would find her father, and her decision not to climb it indicates her changing attitude. That seems like acceptance but it borders on depression. Beverly is a strong character and it seems unlikely she will brood very long, but she is struggling through her emotions as she tries to come to terms with the long-term situation of her life.

Louisiana had told Raymie and Beverly that she never learned to swim because her parents drowned. At the time, the information seemed like one in a series of disjointed pieces of information, but when it becomes apparent that Louisiana is about to go into Swip Pond, that information becomes important. Considering that Louisiana already has issues with fluid in her lungs, the situation becomes even more serious.

Discussion Question 1

What is Louisiana's attitude about Archie once they are outside Building 10? Does she have any reason to believe this?



Discussion Question 2

What is the significance of the Belknap Tower?

Discussion Question 3

Describe the images inside Building 10. Why do the cages affect the girls so deeply?

Vocabulary

insubstantial, hunkered, cavern, wavered, despair, balking, eerie, resigned, howl, donated



Chapters 45-51

Summary

In Chapter 45, Beverly runs ahead of Raymie, who is also running. Louisiana, Bunny, and the cart fly into the pond. Beverly stops at the edge of the pond. Raymie can hear Mrs. Borkowski's voice saying that Raymie knows what to do. She remembers Mr. Staphopoulos teaching her to flex her toes as a means of focusing, and she dives into the pond.

In Chapter 46, Bunny swims out of the pond. Raymie comes up for air and Beverly shouts a question. Raymie does not waste the breath to answer, but dives again. She finds the shopping cart but it is empty. Raymie finds Louisiana on her next dive and begins pulling her toward the surface. She has many thoughts. She feels that Louisiana is heavier than Edgar the Drowning Dummy, but is also lighter. She feels that saving someone is a simple matter. She feels that she understands everything. She even wishes she had been around to save Clara Wingtip from drowning. She imagines that she really is "Raymie Nightingale, coming to the rescue" (Location 1817).

In Chapter 47, Louisiana is out of the water but she is not breathing. Beverly is crying, "which was almost as terrifying as Louisiana not breathing" (Location 1819). Raymie follows Mr. Staphopoulos's instructions, turning Louisiana's head and pounding on her back. Louisiana finally speaks in a "hopeful voice" (Location 1828). Beverly says they should take her to the hospital, and they pick her up. By now, they know the best way to carry her. Beverly is still crying. Bunny follows.

In Chapter 48, a nurse named Marcelline is outside the hospital. She takes Louisiana from them. Beverly takes a seat on the curb and tells Raymie to go on inside. A nurse named Ruthie meets her and asks why she is wet. Raymie tries to figure out how to tell her what happened. She explains about the pageant and her father leaving with another woman. Ruthie calls him a "skunk," a word she repeats many times. Ruthie puts her sweater around Raymie and Raymie begins to cry as Ruthie telephones Mrs. Clarke. Ruthie says that Raymie is at the hospital and is safe, then says she knows that Mr. Clarke left them. They talk for a moment before Ruthie repeats that Mr. Clarke is a skunk, then says that Raymie is waiting for her mother.

In Chapter 49, Mrs. Clarke arrives and hugs Raymie. Rhonda arrives and sits with Beverly. Bunny the dog sits between them. A reporter arrives and interviews Raymie. Raymie refuses to go home and is allowed to sleep on a cot in Louisiana's room. Raymie woke just as Archie the cat came walking down the hall, jumped onto Louisiana's bed, and went to sleep. Louisiana wakes later to find her grandmother asleep in the chair beside her bed. She is pleased that "Raymie Nightingale" is there. She reminds Raymie of how they saved Bunny the dog. Ruthie arrives and asks how the cat got into the hospital. Louisiana explains, including that Archie's presence is a "miracle," but Ruthie says that cats just do things like that.



In Chapter 50, another important thing happens in the hospital. Ruthie comes into the room with news that Raymie has a telephone call. It is her father. He says Raymie's name and she calls him "dad." He says he saw the story and Raymie's photograph in the newspaper, and wanted to check on her. Raymie is silent and her father is silent. Ruthie takes the phone and says Raymie needs to rest, pointing out that Raymie had saved Louisiana's life. She hangs up and again calls Mr. Clarke a skunk. Ruthie then directs Raymie back to bed. Later, she was not certain the phone call was real, but knows that other things are real, such as the feel of Ruthie's hand on her back and the sight of Louisiana and her cat.

In Chapter 51, Raymie does not participate in the pageant but she is in the audience when Louisiana wins. Raymie's mother is there along with Beverly, her mother, Ida Nee, Mrs. Sylvester, and Ruthie.

After Louisiana wins, the three girls go to the top of Belknap Tower. Louisiana is afraid of heights so she closes her eyes and lies down on the observation deck. She asks Raymie and Beverly to describe what they see. Raymie says she can see everything. She begins to describe things they have seen, including the candy corn jar on Mrs. Sylvester's desk and Bunny the dog. Beverly reminds them that she has renamed the dog Buddy.

Beverly picks up Louisiana and takes her to the edge of the deck, urging her to look at the view for herself. Louisiana opens her eyes and says they are very high. Beverly says Louisiana has nothing to fear because Beverly is holding onto her. Raymie takes Louisiana's hand, adding that she is holding on as well. The three girls stay there for awhile, just staring out.

Analysis

Beverly cries when Louisiana almost drowns, which is out of character for her. She is usually the strong, outspoken member of the group and her "terrifying" tears make an impression on Raymie because they are so out of character. When they reach the hospital, Beverly is still crying and chooses to remain outside. Her mother joins her there and it seems reasonable that they have a heart-to-heart talk. Beverly and her mother attend the pageant together. While there is not much focus on their relationship, the reader can assume that they are putting their lives back together. Beverly keeps the dog but refuses to call him Bunny, and she seems happy.

Raymie's need to tell Ruthie about her father leaving is a sign that she is not yet fully over her father's abandonment, but she is beginning to recover. Ruthie's attitude is meant to be humorous. She repeatedly calls Mr. Clarke a "skunk." She adds that there is no other word to describe what he has done and that there are other people who she also classifies as skunks. An interesting aspect of that scene is that Ruthie mentions it to Raymie's mother when she telephones her with news that Raymie is at the hospital, and the two women apparently talk about that situation for a moment. The show of



outside support may have been an important point in Raymie's mother's healing process.

Raymie has spent a lot of time hoping that her father would contact her. She planned to get her picture in the paper as the pageant winner, believing her father would feel the need to return home. However, when he actually does call her at the hospital, Raymie discovers that she has nothing to say to him. She compares the moments of silence on the phone to listening for the sound of the ocean inside a shell. That reaction surprises her, but she is so emotionally drained that she cannot even try to talk to her father. She goes right back to sleep and the entire phone call seems unreal when she wakes. However, she knows she did not dream it because of the other things that were real, including the comforting feel of Ruthie's hand on her back and the sight of Louisiana and Archie, both alive and well. This indicates that Raymie has undergone a change in attitude, realizing that she cannot make her father come home and that she no longer even wants to.

The scene at the top of the Belknap Tower is filled with imagery and symbolism. Raymie tells Louisiana that she can see everything from the tower's observation deck. She begins a list but it is obvious that she is making some of it up, such as the candy corn jar on Mrs. Sylvester's desk. This is symbolic of Raymie's new outlook on life, that she can see more clearly the things that are truly important and the things that do not really matter. Another example of the symbolism in this scene is seen in Beverly's decision to pick Louisiana up. She wants Louisiana to see the view for herself but knows Louisiana will have to feel safe in order to look. Beverly holds onto Louisiana, reassuring her, and Raymie also holds Louisiana's hand. The scene is clearly symbolic that Beverly and Raymie are physically stronger than Louisiana, and that they will do whatever they can to protect her so that she can see the world with them.

Discussion Question 1

Describe Raymie's actions as she rescues Louisiana.

Discussion Question 2

Describe Raymie's telephone call from her father. Why does she choose not to talk to him?

Discussion Question 3

What happens when the three girls climb the Belknap Tower?

Vocabulary

moody, creatures, mythical, glimmer, hissing, squeaky, complicated, soaking, purring, wonder, guided



Characters

Raymie Clarke

Raymie is a young girl who is struggling with the news that her father chose to leave. He ran away with a younger woman, leaving Raymie and her mother behind. Raymie believes that things will be fine for her family if she can only get her father to contact her. She decides that she will win a pageant, knowing the winner's picture will be in the newspaper. She believes that her father will see the paper and call her. Raymie holds onto that idea for only a short time before coming to realize that she cannot control her father and that she does not have anything to say to him after all.

Raymie meets two other little girls while taking baton lessons. Louisiana Elefante and Beverly Tapinski each have their own issues and quirks but the three soon become friends and are willing to do anything for each other. Raymie is devoted to Louisiana and Beverly, though she does not realize the depth of that devotion until Louisiana falls into a pond.

Raymie is able to remember lessons from her life saving class, including the need to stop and think in some situations and to act without thinking in others.

Raymie is an honest person who is loyal to her friends. Those friends include Mrs. Borkowski, an elderly woman in the neighborhood who dies soon after Raymie's father leaves. She thinks about Mrs. Borkowski often, imagining the woman's words of advice and always ready to apply them to her situation. As she accepts that Mrs. Borkowski is really gone, Raymie knows that she will miss her.

Louisiana Elefante

Louisiana Elefante is a young orphan who takes baton lessons in the hope that she will win the pageant. Money is the simple motivation for Louisiana's decision to enter the pageant. She lives with her grandmother and they are struggling financially.

Louisiana is a kind young girl who lives a very strange life. She and her grandmother steal food from a funeral reception, which is an indication of how desperate their situation really is. She also talks about an official who is looking for her, hinting that she will be taken from her grandmother if the official catches her. As the story progresses, however, it seems likely that no one is actually looking for her though.

Louisiana seems naïve in her belief that her cat, Archie, is still alive. She never hesitates in that belief and it seems that she is merely in denial until Archie shows up, giving credence to her belief. She seems to have a similar attitude about everything else as well. She is a trusting character who believes in the goodness of people, even though she has had a difficult life.



Louisiana is a determined character who believes that good things can happen to her, even though she is unaware of her own strengths. For example, she believes she needs to learn to twirl the baton even though she has a beautiful singing voice. She does eventually win the pageant with singing as her talent.

Beverly Tapinski

Beverly is a girl about the same age as Raymie. She has a similar situation in her family because her father has left the family and now lives in New York. Beverly is obviously angry about the situation but she hides that by pretending to be angry about other things.

Beverly knows a lot about social situations. She knows all about their baton coach, partly because Beverly's mother had the same coach. She views the world with a reality that is sad, considering her age. She believes that Louisiana's cat, Archie, is really dead. However, she is also devoted to her new friends, Louisiana and Raymie. Despite her full belief that Archie is dead, she goes along with Louisiana in search of her cat.

Over the course of the novel, Beverly becomes devoted to Louisiana and Raymie. She feels the need to protect Louisiana and is very frightened when Louisiana almost drowns. She picks Louisiana up, holding onto her for security, when the girls are at the top of the Belknap Tower.

As the novel comes to a close, it seems that Beverly and her mother come to a new level of understanding, and that her mother is willing to listen to Beverly's desire that she not participate in the pageant.

Mrs. Borkowski

Mrs. Borkowski is Raymie's elderly neighbor. She seems to ramble but Raymie takes her words to heart and greatly misses Mrs. Borkowski after her death. While Raymie is waiting in the hospital with Louisiana, she dreams about Mrs. Borkowski. In the dream, Mrs. Borkowski is leaving carrying a suitcase, but she releases Archie just before she is gone. Mrs. Borkowski is not a particularly likeable character except for Raymie's affection toward her.

Jim Clarke

Jim Clarke is Raymie's father who ran away with a younger woman before the novel opens. Raymie is desperate to find a way to get him to come home and initially believes that he will contact her if she wins the pageant. He does not appear in the novel except for the time of a brief telephone call, but his absence drives most of Raymie's thoughts as through the early part of the storyline.



Louisiana's Grandmother

Louisiana's grandmother is her sole guardian because Louisiana's parents are dead. Granny seems very eccentric and is obviously struggling financially. She has an old car that is probably not legal and she is taking extreme measures to feed them, including stealing food from a funeral.

Grandmother obviously worries about what would happen to Louisiana if she was unable to care for her. She asks Raymie to look after her if that occurs, which Raymie considers to be a big request. It seems the two are very much alone in the world, which might be by choice.

Mrs. Sylvester

Mrs. Sylvester is the secretary at Clarke Family Insurance, the company owned by Raymie's father. She is kind to Raymie and offers advice when Raymie decides to enter the pageant. She is also available to Raymie, Beverly, and Louisiana when they stop by the office.

Rhonda

Rhonda is Beverly's mother. She is a former baton-twirling champion, which is why she is insisting that Beverly take lessons. She is struggling emotionally during the early part of the book, probably because her husband has left them. She childishly argues with Beverly rather than taking the authoritative role of a parent. Her relationship with Beverly changes dramatically after the incident in which Louisiana almost drowns.

Alice Nebbley

Alice is a woman in the Golden Glen Nursing Home. She lies in her bed and screams, apparently all the time. She frightens Raymie during Raymie's first trip to the nursing home, prompting Raymie to drop her library book. Alice provides a deep look at Beverly's character. When Beverly is standing by Alice's bed, Alice screams that she wants someone to hold her hand. Raymie and Louisiana are frightened but Beverly holds Alice's hand, an indication that she feels empathy for the woman on a deep level that eclipses any fear she might feel.

Ruthie

Ruthie is a nurse at the hospital and takes charge of Raymie. She calls Raymie's father a "skunk" for running out on his family. She also takes control of the telephone conversation, telling Jim Clarke that Raymie needs to rest, reminding him that she saved a little girl's life, and hangs up before calling him a skunk again. She forms some

sort of attachment to the girls and attends the pageant. She is a strong, outspoken character.



Symbols and Symbolism

Raymie's Soul

Raymie's soul represents her innermost emotions, which swell and fade with her situation. The majority of these emotions are centered around the hope that things will work out alright in her life.

Archie

Archie is Louisiana's cat and he symbolizes fulfilled hope. Early in the story, he is missing and everyone except Louisiana believes he is dead. He shows up without explanation near the end of the novel.

Bunny/Buddy

The dog named Bunny represents second chances and friendship. He is in the shelter when Louisiana, Beverly, and Raymie break in, and is obviously in poor condition. Beverly adopts him and renames him, preferring to call him Buddy.

Baton Lessons

Baton lessons represent the best chance of winning the pageant, but only in the minds of Louisiana and Raymie. Beverly takes the lessons but only because she is forced to do so. All three girls drop the lessons and Louisiana wins the pageant with singing as her talent.

Swip Pond

This is the pond where Louisiana almost dies and it represents a new kind of acceptance for Raymie. Raymie's life changes dramatically after the incident. When her father does see her name in the newspaper and calls, she realizes that she has nothing to say to her father after all. Beverly and her mother come to a new level of understanding. Louisiana survives, which undoubtedly changes her outlook on life. The event also cements the three girls' friendship.

Edgar

Edgar the lifesaving dummy is symbolic of Raymie's ability to do something important. She uses several of the lessons from the lifesaving classes to get through the days after her father leaves but the most important is her ability to save Louisiana's life.



The Three Rancheros

The Three Rancheros represents the the problems each of the three girls face and their ability to take care of each other. Louisiana suggests that the three girls become the Three Rancheros in order to rescue each other. Though she has plans only to do something for Raymie and herself, their efforts reach each girl on a much deeper level than they anticipated.

Little Miss Central Florida Tire Pageant

This contest is symbolic of specific accomplishments for several characters. Raymie hopes to win it in order to get her father to come home. Louisiana hopes to win it because she desperately needs the prize money. Beverly's mother, Rhonda, pushes Beverly into the pageant, probably because she is reliving her own childhood.

Tuna

Louisiana and her grandmother eat a lot of tuna and they have to steal at least some of what they eat, which makes the cans of tuna symbolic of their desperation. They are struggling to meet their daily needs, which explains why Louisiana wants to win the pageant so much.

Florence Nightingale Book

Raymie has the book because the school librarian suggested she read it over the summer, and the book comes to symbolize the very best qualities in each of the three girls. Beverly and Raymie have the ability to stand by Louisiana, helping her even when Beverly feels there is no hope of finding the cat, and that makes them heroes in Louisiana's eyes. Raymie feels the same about Beverly.



Settings

The Belknap Tower

The tower symbolizes Beverly's hope that she will see her father again. She points it out to Raymie and says that it was a childish hope. Later, she says there is no reason to climb the tower now that she knows she will not see her father.

As the novel draws to a close, the girls climb the tower and that act represents the closure and acceptance they are beginning to feel. When Louisiana asks what Raymie can see, Raymie says she can now see everything, which is symbolic of her new outlook and understanding. The tower seems to be an ordinary tourist attraction.

Golden Glen Nursing Home

The Golden Glen Nursing Home represents Raymie's hope that she can do a good deed to put on the pageant application. The facility is near Raymie's house and Raymie's good deed winds up not including reading to anyone. The facility seems typical of nursing homes during the time with regard to appearance. The desperation of two of the residents – Isabelle and Alice – are meant to convey the hopelessness of the place.

Building 10

Beverly refers to this building at The Very Friendly Animal Center and believes the people there are taking care of Archie. The outside of the building is dilapidated and sad looking. The second room of the building is even worse and the girls are horrified by the image of so many empty cages, testaments of the animals that have been killed in the facility.

Clarke Family Insurance

The insurance office is described only in terms of the interior. Mrs. Sylvester is seated in the outer office and Jim Clarke, Raymie's father, has a private office. Mrs. Sylvester has a jar of candy corn on her desk, which becomes symbolic of her welcoming attitude.

Raymie's House

Raymie's House is not described in any real detail, other than some minor points that fit into the storyline. She has a room of her own and a window that opens at ground level, indicating the house is probably one story. There is a sunroom where Raymie's mother spends a lot of time in the days after Raymie's father leaves them.



Themes and Motifs

Friendship

Raymie, Beverly, and Louisiana seem unlikely friends, but they meet at a time each of them needs a friend and their bond is strong and immediate. Raymie gives this some thought as the three girls are walking through the Golden Glen Nursing Home, realizing that she has only known them a few days.

When Raymie begins baton lessons, she is at a critical point in her life. She desperately needs someone who will be her unconditional friend. Beverly and Louisiana each fit that role, and each of them also needs a friend. Beverly is in a similar situation though her father has been gone longer than Raymie's father. She needs someone to talk to and she opens up to Raymie.

Louisiana's situation is not at the same critical stage as Raymie's and Beverly's. It seems she and her grandmother have been holding on at the same level of poverty for awhile. But her need for a friend is evident when her grandmother tells Raymie that Louisiana already considers Raymie her best friend, just a few days after they met for the first time. Louisiana's grandmother also seems to be relieved that Louisiana has made friends and she goes so far as to confide her worries in Raymie and Beverly, and to ask them to take care of Louisiana if her grandmother is no longer there for her.

The Three Rancheros is symbolic of their friendship. Louisiana makes up the name for their group and Beverly seems to be indifferent or even sarcastic at times, but she always offers her support. At one point, Raymie agrees to go along with Louisiana's plan, just because Louisiana is her friend and Raymie knows Louisiana needs her to go along. Beverly believes that Archie the cat is dead, but she keeps going along with Louisiana as well, just because of their friendship.

All three girls were supposed to be in the pageant, but it is obvious that Louisiana needs the money. Raymie decides to drop out and she is happy when Louisiana wins. Beverly had planned to sabotage the pageant, but she decides not to because she knows Louisiana needs to win.

A powerful scene describing their friendship is seen in the final chapter of the novel. Louisiana, Beverly, and Raymie are on the observation deck of the Belknap Tower but Louisiana is afraid to look. She has her eyes closed and lies down on the deck because she cannot overcome her fear of heights on her own. Beverly picks her up and holds onto her, offering the security of her embrace as a means of reassuring Louisiana. Raymie holds Louisiana's hand, adding her security to the mix. Louisiana opens her eyes and the three girls look out for a long time.

This scene clearly defines their roles in the friendship. Louisiana is the weaker of the three, mainly because of her health but also because she is a gentler person. Beverly is



the strong protector who will pick Louisiana up whenever she needs help and Raymie will offer her support as well. But Louisiana is not insignificant in the friendship. She has an important role as well, as the one who helps the others, especially Beverly, hold onto whatever happiness comes to her. Beverly and Raymie realize this, as evidenced by the fact that they make a way for Louisiana to share their view rather than just telling her about it.

Abandonment

Several of the characters deal with abandonment issues that impact their lives on a very fundamental level. These issues focus mainly around a parent leaving, but include Louisiana as she deals with the fact that she abandoned her cat, Archie. Their individual efforts at coping are shaping each of them, though they learn lessons along the way.

The most prevalent example of this theme is seen as Raymie struggles to get her father, Jim, to come home, or to at least contact her. Raymie's father left with a young woman. The fact that Raymie and her mother know the woman's name and occupation indicate that Jim did not make a secret of leaving.

Raymie's feelings are terribly hurt over her father's decision to leave them. She believes that she can make him come home if she wins the pageant. She goes so far in that fantasy as to imagine Jim and his girlfriend, Lee Ann, sitting at the table together when he sees Raymie's picture in the paper, and that Lee Ann will be jealous of Raymie's success. That indicates that Raymie believes she is the key to bringing her father home.

Raymie talks about her father's abandonment with several people, including complete strangers. That is another indication of the depth of her hurt. Jim's leaving is literally the first thing on her mind most of the time. The important part of this theme from Raymie's view is her eventual acceptance. When her father finally does call her, she has nothing to say because she has had other experiences that eclipse her feelings about her father.

Beverly is another important example of this theme. As soon as Raymie talks about Jim leaving his family, Beverly says that she has seen it happen before. She describes a man carrying his shoes as he sneaks away, and that he leaves without saying anything. Raymie initially believes Beverly is talking about Jim, but Beverly later reveals that her own father has run away as well. Beverly copes with her abandonment issues in another way. Instead of trying to get her father to come home, she has become angry at everyone and everything. She argues with her mother and is openly defiant. There is, however, a more frightening aspect of Beverly's reaction. She talks about the criminal books she has read and that she is learning to break into a safe. She has already learned about picking locks. Her father is a police officer and Beverly seems to be trying to go as far afield of that as she can.

Louisiana is also an example of this theme and really has a greater reason to be angry. Her parents have died, leaving Louisiana an orphan living with an elderly grandmother



who is financially destitute. There is no information about how long Louisiana has been living with her grandmother and it may be that she has had more time to come to terms with the situation than Beverly and Raymie.

All three girls have become sensitive to abandonment. When Beverly says she will not return to baton lessons after only their second meeting, Raymie is upset. She feels that another person is walking out of her life, even though she and Beverly have not truly bonded at this point. Louisiana feels a deep level of guilt over leaving her cat, Archie. She believes that Archie is being cared for but feels that she should have found a way to keep him.

Sympathy/Empathy

Several characters exhibit sympathy and empathy throughout the book and these moments will reach readers on a fundamental level. The sympathetic acts are mainly seen when other characters reach out to the three girls. The girls' actions are often done out of empathy – a deep understanding of the pain others are experiencing. These acts reveal the true caring nature of Raymie, Louisiana, and Beverly, as well as some of the other characters.

Beverly, who tries to project the image of uncaring toughness, is one of the main examples of this theme. She believes that Louisiana's cat, Archie, is dead. She says so only once though she thinks about it several times. Despite her belief that Archie is dead, she agrees to go with Louisiana and Raymie to try to rescue Archie. She obviously does not believe that they can succeed, but she sees that Louisiana needs her and so she goes along because she is empathetic to Louisiana's pain.

Beverly is also empathetic when Raymie relates that Jim Clarke has left his family. Beverly only says that she knows that happens a lot and she describes a man who sneaks away, carrying his shoes and leaving without saying good-bye. She is probably describing being abandoned by her own father, but her words make it clear that she identifies with Raymie's situation.

Another instance of Beverly's empathy is seen when she is standing by Alice Nebbley's bed. Alice screams that she wants someone to hold her hand, which frightens Raymie. Beverly, however, unexpectedly reaches out and takes Alice's hand. Alice's reaction is total silence, which seems to rarely happen and indicates the depth of her appreciation for that act of kindness.

Another example of this theme is seen when Raymie tells Beverly and Louisiana the story of Clara, the woman who drowned in the lake near Ida Nee's house. She ends by saying that some people claim to hear Clara crying. Louisiana listens for a moment and says she can hear Clara crying. Beverly and Raymie believe that Louisiana is a little odd and that image should transfer to the reader. That makes Louisiana's statement about Clara seem unbelievable but then Raymie knows she can hear it as well. The fact



that Raymie hears it lends credence to Louisiana's claim but it also makes it clear that both girls are sympathetic to Clara's death.

Mrs. Sylvester's kindness toward Raymie is another example of this theme. She obviously cares for Raymie but she is also sympathetic, knowing that Raymie is having difficulty coping with her father's abandonment. Raymie needs that sympathy, evidenced by her need to talk to everyone about it. Ruthie, the nurse at the hospital, is ultimately sympathetic, saying that Raymie's father is a "skunk" for leaving his family. She repeatedly calls him a skunk, including during her conversation with Raymie's mother.

To a lesser degree, Rhonda seems to come to a point of sympathetic understanding toward her daughter, Beverly. Rhonda has pushed Beverly into entering the pageant as she has apparently pushed her into entering many other pageants. After Louisiana almost drowns, Rhonda and Beverly sit together for awhile, talking in a way they probably have not done before. Rhonda and Beverly are in the audience when Louisiana wins the pageant, indicating that they are finally communicating, mainly because Rhonda came to a point of considering Beverly's feelings.

Optimism and Reality

The girls are constantly in a battle between what they hope will happen and what will likely happen. Their age means they have a natural tendency toward optimism, and the hope that things will turn out the way they want. Beverly is the least optimistic of the group but even she has moments when she is not willing to face reality, instead looking for the most optimistic possible outcome.

The fate of Archie the cat is one major example of this theme. Louisiana says her grandmother left the cat at the Very Friendly Animal Center because they could not afford to feed it, and she talks about their promise to take good care of Archie. She fully believes that will be true but she still feels that she has abandoned Archie, the cat she looks at as a friend. Before her friendship with Raymie and Beverly, Archie was probably Louisiana's only friend.

When the three girls see the building where Louisiana's grandmother left Archie, it becomes clear to Beverly that the cat could not have survived being there. She tells Louisiana to face the reality that the cat is dead, but Louisiana refuses. Even when they break in and find all the empty cages, Louisiana remains insistent that Archie is alive. Her feelings are stronger than hope – she is certain. There is no explanation for how Archie survives. Louisiana says it is a miracle but the nurse, Ruthie, says that cats just do things like disappear and show back up.

Another example of this theme is seen as Beverly and Raymie come to terms with their fathers' absences. Raymie believes that she can get her father to come back if she wins the pageant and gets her name in the newspaper. She believes she has come to the realization that she he will not return, but she was apparently harboring some level of



hope up until the telephone call in the hospital. At the sound of his voice, Raymie gave up her unrealistic hope and faced the reality of the situation.

Beverly faced a similar turning point when Louisiana almost drowns. She admits to Raymie that she used to climb the Belknap Tower in the hope that she could see all the way to New York, and that she would be able to see her father. She then begins to hope that she can run away and find him in New York. After Louisiana almost drowns, Beverly seems to accept the reality of her situation, and her relationship with her mother apparently improves after that point.

There are some other examples of this theme, such as the imagery of Florence Nightingale as a savior. Louisiana makes up a story based on the picture on the front of Raymie's book, and in that story Florence Nightingale has magical qualities that heal the emotional wounds of people who hurt. It is clear that Louisiana knows the reality of all their situations, including the fact that she could wind up in an orphanage, but Louisiana's hope for happiness never wanes.

Affecting Others' Lives

People interact throughout the book, just as it happens in real life. Those actions often have unforeseen consequences, sometimes with negative outcomes and sometimes with positive.

Mrs. Borkowski's affected Raymie's life, though Raymie's mother does not understand why Raymie feels a connection to the older woman. Raymie feels very much alone when she is at Mrs. Borkowski's memorial service. She hears people talking, some about Mrs. Borkowski, but feels that none of them know her as well as Raymie did. Raymie thinks about the things she has learned from Mrs. Borkowski, including her theory about her soul becoming larger when she is experiencing positive emotions and smaller when she is experiencing negative emotions. Raymie cannot imagine that anyone else is hurting over Mrs. Borkowski's death in the same way that she is hurting, which is probably true.

However, Louisiana realizes that Raymie needs to talk about Mrs. Borkowski and she is the only person who invites her to do so. This makes the point that Mrs. Borkowski has made a big impact on Raymie's life, but also that Louisiana has made a positive impact by knowing exactly what Raymie needs from her friend at that moment.

Several people play a role in Raymie's actions when Louisiana almost drowns. Mrs. Borkowski was obviously an important person in Raymie's life and Raymie continues to think about her and dream about her in the days following Mrs. Borkowski's death. When it is clear that Louisiana is about to crash into Swip Pond, Raymie imagines Mrs. Borkowski's voice, urging her to run faster. Raymie might have become so afraid that she froze if she had not imagined Mrs. Borkowski. In that case, Mrs. Borkowski affects Raymie's life which has an impact on Louisiana's life.



Mr. Staphopoulos also affects Raymie's life. The lessons he taught her come to her aid whenever she is feeling worried. She uses his methods to take stock of her situation and to focus on what needs to be done. Her lessons also make it possible for her to react to Louisiana's situation and to save her from drowning.

The girls meet by chance, and Raymie and Beverly are at Ida Nee's for baton lessons because other people affected their decisions. Raymie tells Mrs. Sylvester she wants to win the pageant, and Mrs. Sylvester says that Raymie should learn to twirl the baton so she can perform during the pageant. Mrs. Sylvester has had an important role in Raymie's life up to this point, and Raymie accepts what she says. That is how Raymie winds up at Ida Nee's for baton lessons.

Naturally, a mother has an important affect on her daughter's life, and Rhonda is no exception with regard to Beverly's life. Rhonda insists that Beverly take baton lessons, though Beverly is already accomplished at the art and does not want to participate in the pageant. Rhonda's decision to force Beverly to take lessons affects Beverly, but it also affects Louisiana and Raymie. Without Rhonda's insistence, the three girls might not have met.



Styles

Point of View

The novel is written in third person but is limited to Raymie Clark's perspective. That limitation means the reader only knows what Raymie knows, which gives the author the opportunity to keep Raymie's final discovery a secret until Raymie learns it. She believes, throughout the first part of the novel, that her life will be fine if her father will just contact her. She believes she will be excited to talk to him, and the reader is led to believe that will be the case. When he does finally call, Raymie discovers that she has nothing to say to her father after all. That is the first hint the reader has that Raymie will not actually want to talk to him.

Raymie's perspective seems honest. She is truthful with her feelings, though she sometimes expresses them in unusual ways. For example, she says that her soul has become small when she experiences negative emotions such as sadness, and that her soul is full or big when she is happy or proud. The use of her soul as a means of communicating emotions continues throughout the novel.

The limited perspective means that the reader does not know the true thoughts and details of other characters' lives. Beverly seems to be angry and pushy until the reader learns that she is actually very sad because her father has also left them. Louisiana and her grandmother are constantly talking about running away from officials, hinting that the child services people are trying to take her away. The full details of that situation are never revealed but it begins to seem unlikely that they are actually in hiding. Keeping the reader in the dark about Louisiana's true situation gives the novel a level of mystery and drama that would not otherwise exist.

Language and Meaning

The overall tone of the novel is one of hope and friendship. The novel is divided into narrative and dialogue, and both are used to provide information and to move the storyline. The dialogue appears in traditional format with dialogue tags to keep the reader informed about the current speaker. The dialogue seems believable and appropriate to the time, place, and characters.

The reader who expects everything to work out perfectly for Raymie, Beverly, and Louisiana will not be disappointed, but young readers may feel that things could have worked out differently for the girls. Louisiana wins the competition, which means she and her grandmother have money to help solve their short-term problems but their long-term problems still exist. Beverly and her mother apparently come to some deeper understanding but her father does not return. Raymie comes to terms with her father's absence and learns that there are other important people in her life, including her new friends.



The author uses literary devices, including imagery, throughout the novel. When Louisiana and Raymie are in the auditorium at Mrs. Borkowski's funeral, the girls stir up a “galaxy” of dust. The choice of words creates a stronger image than if the author simply said they stirred up a lot of dust.

Structure

The novel is divided into 51 chapters. Each is titled by number only. Many of them are very brief, which means it sometimes takes several chapters for events to unfold. For example, it takes the first three chapters to introduce Raymie and her plan to get her father to come home. Chapter 3 is only eight paragraphs in length, less than two pages. Some of the other chapters span six or more pages.

The novel appears mainly in chronological order with a few pieces of history presented as conversations, facts, or memories. For example, the opening chapters reveal that Raymie's father has left as a means of explaining why she came up with the plan. The information is presented as facts about Raymie's life. She does not tell anyone about her plan and she does not consciously think through it at that moment, but she has given it thought prior to the opening pages of the novel. Another example is seen in Chapter 10 when Raymie remembers a teacher who taught them how to save a drowning dummy. That chapter becomes very important in a literal way when Louisiana almost dies after falling into a pond.

The first few chapters of the novel introduce Raymie, Beverly, and Louisiana, and provide brief looks into their lives. Raymie begins to learn more about the other girls as they get to know each other over the next few chapters. In Chapter 43, Raymie and the others learn that Archie is not inside the animal building, as they had hoped. In the next chapter, Louisiana falls into the pond. The remaining chapters of the novel are built around that event with Raymie discovering that she has what it takes to save someone and that she really does not need her father.



Quotes

The thought of that – that fact of it – that she, Raymie Clarke, was without a father, made a small, sharp pain shoot through Raymie's heart every time she considered it.”

-- Narrator (chapter 1 paragraph 32)

Importance: This is very early in the novel and gives the reader the information that Raymie's father is gone, that he chose to do so, and that Raymie is hurt by the situation.

Just that. 'Good-bye, Raymie.' Why did those words matter so much?”

-- Narrator/Mr. Staphopoulos (chapter 10 paragraph 18)

Importance: Mr. Staphopoulos said the words “Good-bye, Raymie” as he was leaving town for good. Raymie notes that he did not say anything else but the words had a powerful effect on her. This is one of many examples of Raymie's abandonment issues and how they affect her outlook, even on events that took place before her father left her.

Every day in Lifesaving 101, Mr. Staphopoulos had all the students stand on the dock and flex their toes and isolate their objectives. Mr. Staphopoulos believed that flexing your toes cleared your mind that once your mind was clear, it was easy to isolate your objectives and figure out what to do next.”

-- Narrator (chapter 13 paragraph 2)

Importance: Raymie uses the trick of flexing her toes often and it has become a coping mechanism when she is worried or stressed. The lessons from her class will come to her aid when Louisiana almost drowns.

But, listen, don't worry – we'll go and get your stupid library book from underneath the old lady's bed, because that's an easy thing to get back. That's no problem at all.”

-- Beverly (chapter 19 paragraph 53)

Importance: Beverly has just told Raymie that she should face that fact that her father is never coming home. That makes Beverly seem cold and unfeeling, but she follows those words by saying that she will help Raymie get her library book back, which is a sign that Beverly is a caring person. She will do that for Raymie because no one can do anything about Raymie's father.

She stepped on all the tiles because bad things happened all the time, no matter what color tile you stepped on.”

-- Narrator (chapter 29 paragraph 20)

Importance: Raymie is at Mrs. Borkowski's funeral service and has just discovered that Louisiana is present. Raymie is upset over her deep sense of loss and Louisiana's presence offers a level of comfort Raymie welcomes. Her realization that luck – such as



stepping on the white tiles would bring bad luck – does not really exist, which is one of many lessons Raymie learns over the course of the novel.

But Louisiana was her friend, and Louisiana needed to be protected, and the only thing Raymie could think to do to make things better right now was to be a good Ranchero. And so Raymie said, 'I'll go with you to the Very Friendly Animal Center, Louisiana.'
-- Narrator/Raymie (chapter 23 paragraph 24)

Importance: Beverly has just told Louisiana that she did not understand reality. Louisiana responded by yelling that her parents were dead, Raymie's and Beverly's fathers were gone, and that the county home would be a terrible place to live. While no one is actively pursuing Louisiana, the reality is that she is an orphan and is aware that she might wind up in an orphanage. Raymie's response indicates the depth of her friendship toward Louisiana, even though they have only known each other a short time.

Her father was not coming back. He was never coming back."
-- Narrator (chapter 37 paragraph 29)

Importance: Raymie is at home on the night Louisiana is visiting, and she is thinking about what her father might be doing at that moment. She imagines details, such as the smoke from her father's cigarette floating upward. It is an important moment of acceptance, which has occurred several times over the course of a few days.

She comes to them with her magical globe and makes them well. They don't worry anymore. And they don't wish for things that are gone."
-- Louisiana (chapter 38 paragraph 11)

Importance: Raymie questions those words, not believing they are actually part of the book, Louisiana's words affect Raymie deeply. Both girls are undoubtedly applying those words to their own lives and the things they have lost. The timing is important. Just hours before this conversation, Raymie decides that her father is never coming home and that she just wants to stop thinking about him.

If it had looked terrible in the daylight, the Very Friendly Animal Center looked even worse in the dark. The building seemed morose, and also slightly guilty, as if it had done something terrible and had hunkered itself down in the ground hoping that no one would notice."
-- Narrator (chapter 41 paragraph 1)

Importance: This example of personification is meant to give the reader a deeper understanding of what the building looks like, and to build the suspense over Archie's fate.

Raymie wrapped her arms tight around Louisiana. She kicked her feet and swam for the surface, and what Raymie thought as they rose together was that it was the easiest thing in the world to save somebody."
-- Narrator (chapter 46 paragraph 9)



Importance: Raymie is pulling Louisiana out of the pond. She is going through the motions instinctively, remembering her lessons from the lifesaving class, but she is also realizing that she has more power than she had believed.

Louisiana wasn't breathing. And Beverly was crying, which was almost more terrifying than Louisiana not breathing."

-- Narrator (chapter 47 paragraph 1)

Importance: Beverly has projected a hard persona in her effort not to show any weakness, but she is understandably shaken by their situation. Her tears make her more human and vulnerable, more like Louisiana and Raymie.

Don't worry,' said Beverly. 'I'm holding on to you.

-- Beverly (chapter 51 paragraph 26)

Importance: Beverly has literally picked Louisiana up and is holding her so that Louisiana feels secure enough to look at the view from the top of the Belknap Tower. Raymie takes Louisiana's hand, saying that she is holding on to her as well. This sets the scene for Beverly and Raymie to continue as Louisiana's protectors and for Louisiana to feel safe with them.